



An
Introduction
to French
Verse

colin john holcombe

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An Introduction
to French Verse
Volume Two

Notes and translations by
Colin John Holcombe
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PREFACE

I have tried to illustrate the range and variety of French verse with characteristic poems that translate into acceptable English poems. Many of the poems featured are well known, often in celebrated translations, but this may be the largest anthology in passable verse. Translation issues are discussed after the anthology section, and the book concludes with resources and references.

The ebook will display as French text and facing English translation on laptops and larger computer screens.

Biographical notes and the like are kept to a minimum because poets and poems are well covered in Internet articles.

The present volume is the second of three, and covers the late 18th century to early 20th century period. Volume 3 will cover the Modernist and Postmodernist periods of the twentieth century.

FRENCH VERSIFICATION

I have modified my notes introducing Volume One, making them more relevant to the poetry in this second volume.

The basic rules, expectations and principles are summarized in this introductory section, and then repeated at greater length in the translations that follow. Books and Internet sites giving further details are listed in the Resources section.

The French Language

France is justifiably proud of its literature, particularly that of the nineteenth century, which created the themes of Modernism that would soon gain a worldwide currency.

Pronunciation

French is a Romance language, familiar to us from our schooldays, but unlike English in many respects. Its vowels, semivowels and nasal consonants, distinctive and beautiful, often have no exact equivalent in English, and the syllables themselves, contrary to those in English or Latin, carry no *inherent* stress or weight. Thus, while English verse is based on various patterns of inherently stressed and unstressed syllables, French verse is not, being simply arranged in semantic groupings where the last syllable in that group is given an *imposed* stress, being immediately followed by a caesura or slight pause where

the reader half stops for breath. It's also important to note that, whereas contemporary French poetry is read as everyday speech – or largely so: see Volume Three for the details – traditional French verse most decidedly is not. Traditional verse is pronounced so as to maintain the requisite number of syllables, neither more nor less than expected of that particular stanza form. Whereas the English poet may vary this number a little from line to line for naturalness, variety or special effects, the French poet may not: the alexandrine, for example, always contains exactly twelve syllables. French lines often need their exact syllable count to be fully recognizable as verse.

The so-called neutral *e*, the final *e*, *es* and *ent* that are silent in everyday speech are often pronounced in verse. Thus *cette semaine*, pronounced as *sèt smèn* in everyday conversation, becomes *sè te se mèn*. The final *t* of the third person present tense ending of *-ent* is also sounded and carried forward when immediately followed by a vowel. Conversely, at line ends, the neutral *e* (as a final *e*, *es* or *ent*) is *not* sounded but simply serves to lengthen the preceding vowel a little. Such lines are termed feminine. Lines not so ending are termed masculine. Though they may sound almost the same, feminine lines do not rhyme with masculine, only with other feminine lines. Similarly, masculine lines only rhyme with other masculine lines,

Enjambment (i.e. the content running on, beyond the line ends, common in English blank verse) is generally avoided in French verse. In shape and semantic content, traditional French verse lines is securely end-stopped. French verse is therefore more formal and constrained than ours, and this needs to be understood for its poetry to be appreciated.

Rhyme is a match in sounds (phonemes) between words of different meaning, preferably different function as well (verb with noun, etc.) but has more complicated rules in French. We are happy with high/sky, etc., but the French dislike what they call *rime pauvre*. *Rime suffisante* requires two sounds or phonemes to match: vowel + consonant or consonant + vowel. *Rime riche* requires an additional phoneme match, generally consonant + vowel + consonant, but is sometimes taken to include assonance earlier in the line. And whereas the English detest rime riche, reserving it for comic effects, the French admire this extra correspondence — or did so before the Symbolists judged the feature too cloyingly ostentatious.

Phonetic Patterning

French verse may also be phonetically patterned, i.e. the very sounds of French words, vowels and consonants form patterns that are pleasing to the ear and add some semantic emphasis.

Part of this feature comes from the choice of words, how they are pronounced and what associated meanings are called up. We note the long vowels in Baudelaire's *Le Cygne* :

Andromaque, / je pense // à vous! / Ce petit / fleuve, 4 2 // 2 3 1
 Pauvre et triste / miroir // où jadis / resplendit 4 2 // 3 3
 L'immense / majesté // de vos douceurs / de veuve, 3 3 // 4 2
 Ce Simoïs / menteur // qui par / vos pleurs grandit, 3 2 // 2 4

Much, but not all, traditional French verse has similar features, and we cannot appreciate it properly if we don't hear these beauties – nor translate it adequately if our style of English verse is deficient in their equivalents. Patterning is often subtler in French than English, but exists all the same – or did until Modernism, and particularly Postmodernism, decreed the matter was of no interest, indeed unwanted in verse that should approximate to everyday speech. It is one reason (see Appendix) why I have not employed 'contemporary free verse' in these translations.

Stanza Forms

Internet sources will give the details, but the common stanza forms in this period are the sonnet, ode and alexandrine, plus the revivals from medieval verse: the ballade, rondeau, villanelle, etc. We can list their broad characteristics:

Alexandrine: hexameters rhymed aa bb, etc. and each constructed of a hemistich separated by a caesura.

Ballade: simple stanzas of six, eight or ten syllables rhymed abab or abba.

Rondeau: generally an octosyllabic poem of 10-15 lines arranged in three stanzas. Only two rhymes are employed but the opening words are employed twice at the end of the second and third stanzas.

Triolet: Lines of 8-10 syllables arranged as five tercets and a quatrain where lines repeat in a set order.

Sestina: six stanzas of six lines each, concluded by a final three-line envoi.

Sonnets: the French form generally employs the alexandrine.

Ode: Somewhat variable later and often written in the twelve-syllable alexandrine. Ronsard's are the most famous of early odes, and maintain the classical three-part structure.

Transition to Romanticism

Chénier's work, most of it published posthumously, marks the passage from Classicism to Romanticism. Its fresh, individual and warm expressions are entirely unlike the sensible but prosaic observations of Voltaire and his followers. Chénier was born to the French Consul in Istanbul and a Franco-Greek mother. At an early age, when his father became Consul General of France in Morocco, Chénier was sent to be educated in France, later studying classics in Paris. To Paris Chénier returned after military and a Grand Tour of Italy, applying himself to poetry in the neoclassic manner. Between 1787 and 1790, Chénier served as secretary to the French ambassador to Britain, but returned to France shortly after the outbreak of the Revolution.

André Chénier was not an aristocrat but his expressed sympathy for the royalist cause did place him in danger. He was arrested in a case of mistaken identity, imprisoned in the Luxembourg and then Saint-Lazare, and executed in the last days of Robespierre on a charge of conspiracy. Most of Chénier's works was published posthumously, and are remarkable for their rich Romanticism within a clear neoclassic outline. His *La Jeune Captive*, written in prison, expresses the thoughts of a fellow captive, the duchesse de Fleury, and the poignancy of such an unjust end has made Chénier a favourite subject of poets, painters and composers.

André Chénier (1762-1794) : O Délices d'Amour

O délices d'amour! et toi, molle paresse,
Vous aurez donc usé mon oisive jeunesse!
Les belles sont partout. Pour chercher les beaux-arts,
Des Alpes vainement j'ai franchi les remparts;

Rome d'amours en foule assiège mon asile,
Sage vieillesse, accours! Ô déesse tranquille,
De ma jeune saison éteins ces feux brûlants,
Sage vieillesse! Heureux qui, dès ses premiers ans,

A senti de son sang, dans ses veines stagnantes,
Couler d'un pas égal les ondes languissantes;
Dont les désirs jamais n'ont troublé la raison;
Pour qui les yeux n'ont point de suave poison;

Au sein de qui jamais une absente perdue
N'a laissé l'aiguillon d'une trop belle vue;
Qui, s'il regarde et loue un front si gracieux,
Ne le voit plus, sitôt qu'il n'est plus sous ses yeux!

Doux et cruels tyrans, brillantes héroïnes,
Femmes, de ma mémoire habitantes divines,
Fantômes enchanteurs, cessez de m'égarer.
O mon coeur! ô mes sens! laissez-moi respirer.

André Chénier : Delights of Love

Delights of love and you, soft indolence,
have quite worn out my idle innocence.
Such beauties press around: in vain were rights
of art for which I crossed the Alpine heights.

When Roman loves besiege my refuge here,
come, wise old age, be swift, let calm appear
to quench the passion of this youthful blaze.
Old age! How blest and wise from earliest days

is he who's felt his stagnant blood behave
in equal measure to the slowest wave;
that reason never mix with his desires
nor eyes have poisons in their sweetest fires;

nor ever parting has been found a cross,
the view too brilliant to have borne the loss.
Who, if he looks and praises some such face,
remembers it no more when out of grace.

Tyrants cruel and gentle, heroines,
divine inhabitants when memory begins
with soft enchantments leading me astray.
O heart and senses, let me breathe and stay

Laissez-moi dans la paix de l'ombre solitaire
Travailler à loisir quelque oeuvre noble et fière
Qui, sur l'amas des temps propre à se maintenir,
Me recommande aux yeux des âges à venir.

Mais, non! j'implore en vain un repos favorable;
Je t'appartiens, Amour, Amour inexorable!

1794

a lonely shadow, there to work in peace
at some high work demanding leisure's lease,
which then of time remains a proper sum
and so commends me through the years to come.

But no, I vainly beg for such contented rest;
by love implacable I'm held and blest.

André Chénier (1762-1794) : A Versailles

O Versaille, ô bois, ô portiques,
Marbres vivants, berceaux antiques,
Par les dieux et les rois Élysée embelli,
A ton aspect, dans ma pensée,
Comme sur l'herbe aride une fraîche rosée,
Coule un peu de calme et d'oubli.

Paris me semble un autre empire,
Dès que chez toi je vois sourire
Mes pénates secrets couronnés de rameaux,
D'où souvent les monts et les plaines
Vont dirigeant mes pas aux campagnes prochaines,
Sous de triples cintres d'ormeaux.

Les chars, les royales merveilles,
Des gardes les nocturnes veilles,
Tout a fui; des grandeurs tu n'es plus le séjour:
Mais le sommeil, la solitude,
Dieux jadis inconnus, et les arts, et l'étude,
Composent aujourd'hui ta cour.

Ah! malheureux! à ma jeunesse
Une oisive et morne paresse
Ne laisse plus goûter les studieux loisirs.
Mon âme, d'ennui consumée,
S'endort dans les langueurs. Louange et renommée
N'inquiètent plus mes désirs.

Chenier : To Versailles

Versailles: O groves, O porticoes,
where cots and living marbles rose
as paradise that gods and kings endow,
for so you seem and I recall,
as on dry grass the fresh sweet dew will fall,
you flow forgotten now.

Paris seems some other place
the once I see your smiling grace.
My secret household gods are crowned with bays,
and often mountains and the plains
will then direct my steps to new campaigns
beneath the elm trees' gaze.

All miracles in that regard
have gone as nightly change of guard.
All gone: the things of grandeur do not stay.
Here's only sleep and solitude,
where unknown gods and arts and study brood:
such is your court today.

How unfortunate my youth
should prove a slothful foe to truth.
No studious habits now my soul requires:
consume it then in boredom's name
and let it sleep beyond all praise or fame,
Or what were past desires.

5. L'abandon, l'obscurité, l'ombre,
Une paix taciturne et sombre,
Voilà tous mes souhaits: cache mes tristes jours,
Et nourris, s'il faut que je vive,
De mon pâle flambeau la clarté fugitive
Aux douces chimères d'amours.

L'âme n'est point encor flétrie,
La vie encor n'est point tarie,
Quand un regard nous trouble et le coeur et la voix
Qui cherche les pas d'une belle,
Qui peut ou s'égayer ou gémir auprès d'elle,
De ses jours peut porter le poids.

J'aime; je vis. Heureux rivage!
Tu conserves sa noble image,
Son nom, qu'à tes forêts j'ose apprendre le soir,
Quand, l'âme doucement émue,
J'y reviens méditer l'instant où je l'ai vue,
Et l'instant où je dois la voir.

Pour elle seule encore abonde
Cette source, jadis féconde,
Qui coulait de ma bouche en sons harmonieux.
Sur mes lèvres tes bosquets sombres
Forment pour elle encor ces poétiques nombres,

5. In shade and darkness all things cease,
a taciturn and gloomy peace.
Here's all I wish: to hide my saddening days,
to eat and go on living there,
my own pale torch to throw its short-lived flare
on love's chimeric ways.

My soul is not a withered flower
nor yet my life has lost its power.
A glance can trouble us in heart and voice
as can beauty's steps, whose sight
may darken days of moan or make them light:
but in those days rejoice.

I love: I live. What happy shore
but keeps that noble image more?
Your name, I learned as evening's forest dies,
in quiet movement of the soul,
and thence, in meditating on her whole,
she stepped before my eyes.

For her alone abounds the force
that issued from a fruitful source.
From my own mouth it moved against the odds
and sweetly flowed in darken groves.
Yet still for her that earlier music roves
in words of love and gods.

Ah! témoin des succès du crime,
Si l'homme juste et magnanime
Pouvait ouvrir son coeur à la félicité,
Versailles, tes routes fleuries,
Ton silence, fertile en belles rêveries,
N'auraient que joie et volupté.

10. Mais souvent tes vallons tranquilles,
Tes sommets verts, tes frais asiles,
Tout à coup à mes yeux s'enveloppent de deuil.
J'y vois errer l'ombre livide
D'un peuple d'innocents qu'un tribunal perfide
Précipite dans le cercueil.

1794

Ah! Witness this success in crime:
if man, sagacious, in his prime,
can find the bliss his open heart would bless:
Versailles, your flowering ways
could be the beautiful and dreaming days
of joy's voluptuousness.

10. Too often, though, these country seats
turn renegades of green retreats,
and suddenly the mourning eyes assume
the look of shadows, wrongly brought
on simple innocents a treacherous court
has plunged into the tomb.

André Chénier (1762-1794) : La jeune captive

L'épi naissant mûrit de la faux respecté ;
Sans crainte du pressoir, le pampre tout l'été
Boit les doux présents de l'aurore ;
Et moi, comme lui belle, et jeune comme lui,
Quoi que l'heure présente ait de trouble et d'ennui,
Je ne veux point mourir encore.

Qu'un stoïque aux yeux secs vole embrasser la mort,
Moi je pleure et j'espère ; au noir souffle du nord
Je plie et relève ma tête.
S'il est des jours amers, il en est de si doux !
Hélas ! quel miel jamais n'a laissé de dégoûts ?
Quelle mer n'a point de tempête ?

L'illusion féconde habite dans mon sein.
D'une prison sur moi les murs pèsent en vain,
J'ai les ailes de l'espérance ;
Échappée aux réseaux de l'oiseleur cruel,
Plus vive, plus heureuse, aux campagnes du ciel
Philomèle chante et s'élance.

Est-ce à moi de mourir ? Tranquille je m'endors,
Et tranquille je veille, et ma veille aux remords
Ni mon sommeil ne sont en proie.
Ma bienvenue au jour me rit dans tous les yeux ;
Sur des fronts abattus mon aspect dans ces lieux
Ranime presque de la joie.

André Chénier : The Young Captive

The ear of wheat will ripen nonetheless,
nor vine, all summer long, fear autumn's press:
they drink the sweetness of the dawn;
and I, no less in beauty and in youth,
whatever strife or boredom bring in truth
will not have death suborn.

Let the dry-eyed stoic seek his end.
I cry and hope: should north winds send
their darkness, I will bow my head.
To bitter days will sweetness ever haste,
and even honey leave an aftertaste,
what storms from seas are wholly fled?

Such fruitful dreams are in my breast.
I am by prison walls in vain oppressed.
I soar on wings of hope and may
escape the bird-entrapper's nets to fly
up to the happier, livelier fields of sky
though Philomel may flee away.

Mine to die? I'll quietly fall asleep
and quietly no remorse in waking keep.
Nor does such heavy sleep annoy
that I must welcome, laughing in my eyes,
On brows that have a sombre, downcast guise,
is everywhere new joy.

Mon beau voyage encore est si loin de sa fin !
Je pars, et des ormeaux qui bordent le chemin
J'ai passé les premiers à peine.
Au banquet de la vie à peine commencé,
Un instant seulement mes lèvres ont pressé
La coupe en mes mains encor pleine.

Je ne suis qu'au printemps, je veux voir la moisson ;
Et comme le soleil, de saison en saison,
Je veux achever mon année.
Brillante sur ma tige et l'honneur du jardin,
Je n'ai vu luire encor que les feux du matin :
Je veux achever ma journée.

Ô mort ! tu peux attendre ; éloigne, éloigne-toi ;
Va consoler les cœurs que la honte, l'effroi,
Le pâle désespoir dévore.
Pour moi Palès encore a des asiles verts,
Les Amours des baisers, les Muses des concerts ;
Je ne veux point mourir encore.

Ainsi, triste et captif, ma lyre toutefois
S'éveillait, écoutant ces plaintes, cette voix,
Ces vœux d'une jeune captive ;
Et secouant le faix de mes jours languissants,
Aux douces lois des vers je pliai les accents
De sa bouche aimable et naïve.

My fair path is far from having end!
I leave the shade that bordering elms will send.
I've barely passed the first of stands.
The banquet of my life is yet unblessed,
and on my lips has been but barely pressed:
the cup is full within my hands.

I want what spring or harvest shows,
and, like the sun that all its seasons knows,
I want the finished year to say,
though on my stem I won the garden's praise
I only saw the morning lights ablaze
and not the final span of day.

You, death, can wait for me: stand back instead,
or go, console the hearts of shame and dread,
where pale despair may dawn.
Palès still affords me each green thing,
where Love disports, and while the muses sing:
I'm not to death redrawn.

Though sad and captive she, my lyre awoke
to these complaints and, listening, spoke
the wants of this young captive here.
And, shaking off the weight of languid days,
to long, sweet laws of verse I bent the ways
the kind, fresh mouth appear

Ces chants, de ma prison témoins harmonieux,
Feron à quelque amant des loisirs studieux
Chercher quelle fut cette belle :
La grâce décorait son front et ses discours,
Et, comme elle, craindront de voir finir leurs jours
Ceux qui les passeront près d'elle.

1795

Harmonious songs that yet this prison place
may give the studious lover leisured grace
to see what beauty would prefer:
what upright looks and careful speech would send
to one like her who too would fear the end
in those close passing her.

Romanticism

Romanticism emphasizes many things, notably emotion over reason, the sensory experience before intellect, the imagination as a road to transcendental experience and spiritual truth, the human personality in all its inexplicable moods and depths, the genius or exceptional figure, the ethnic cultures, the occult, exotic, diseased or satanic paths to truth, and indeed worlds remote in time and space.

The early Romantics strove to understand the world through imagination, not reason, and they distrusted the world set out for them by Church and State. To these hate figures in the later nineteenth century poets added commerce and science, creating a split in outlook that pushed Romanticism into extreme positions — Symbolism, Surrealism, Dada, Modernism and Postmodernism. Some antagonism is a feature of most societies — Suffism versus Sharia in Islam, and Daoism versus Legalism in imperial China — but only western societies have created such elaborate and at times fantastic theories to protect the Romantic position. Can the world be understood by the imagination? Can poetry discover realms of significance beyond the conscious and rational? These themes continue even into contemporary French writing.

The Romantic Poets

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859), poet and novelist, was born in Douai, but had to travel with her mother to Guadeloupe in search of financial help from a distant relative when her father's business was ruined by the Revolution. In Guadeloupe her mother died of yellow fever, and, at 16, Marceline had to return to France and begin a stage career. Her marriage to the actor Prosper Lanchantin-Valmore in 1817

gave her some material security, and in 1819 she published her first poetry: *Élégies et Romances*. Her 1821 novel, *Veillées des Antilles*, was a contribution to the slave narratives of France.

Desbordes-Valmore performed as actress and singer in Douai, Rouen, Paris and Brussels. She retired from the stage in 1823 and later became friends with Balzac, for whom she became the inspiration for *La Cousine Bette*. Her *Élégies* inaugurated the Romantic period in France, and its dark themes echoed her troubled life.

Georges-Maurice de Guérin (1810-1839) was another poet who made an early contribution to Romanticism, here expressed as an overwhelming feeling for nature in some of her more pagan aspects. Maurice de Guérin was born at the château of Le Cayla in Andillac, and educated at a religious seminary in Toulouse. Guérin decided against a traditional religious life, however, and joined a radical Christian socialist society that came into conflict with the Holy See in 1833 and had to be disbanded. The young man moved to Paris, where he composed his two major works, *La Bacchante* and *Le Centaure*. In 1837 he became ill, partially recovered, agreed to an arranged marriage with Caroline de Gervain, but fell ill again and died of consumption at the young age of 28.

None of Guérin's works was published in his lifetime, but George Sand published a memorial in 1840, and Sainte-Beuve a fuller collection of his letters and poems in 1861.

Alphonse Marie Louis de Prat de Lamartine (1790–1869) was a French man of letters who also helped found the Second Republic. He was born in Mâcon, Burgundy, and spent his youth at the family estate. Lamartine was raised a Catholic,

but became a pantheist, writing *Jocelyn* and *La Chute d'un ange*, and then *Histoire des Girondins* in 1847.

Lamartine in fact began his literary life with a masterpiece, *Les Méditations Poétiques* (1820), where the famous *Le Lac* was dedicated to Julie Charles, the wife of a celebrated physician. Honours indeed came early. He was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour in 1825, elected to the *Académie française* in 1829, and made a member of the Chamber of Deputies in 1833. In 1835 he published the *Voyage en Orient*, on which, unfortunately, he lost his only daughter and thence confined himself to prose.

Lamartine was originally a monarchist but shifted to more democratic views, founding his own Social Party and indeed being briefly in charge of the government in the turbulent year of 1848. He was instrumental in creating the Second Republic of France, having met with Republican Deputies and journalists in the Hôtel de Ville to agree on the makeup of its provisional government. As a politician in the Second Republic, Lamartine helped to abolish slavery and the death penalty, but his moderate stance on such issues cost him followers, and in the presidential elections of 1848 he lost to Louis Napoléon Bonaparte. Lamartine retired to private life, continued publishing extensively on many subjects (history, criticism, personal confidences, literary conversations) but died in poverty.

The madman who reputedly 'thought himself Victor Hugo' (1802-1885) was poet, dramatist and novelist, led the Romantic rebellion in France and took a full if contentious part in its national life. Born the son of an army general, Hugo transferred to Paris when his parents separated. He started writing while attending lycée in Paris, and had his first collection of poems bring a royal pension from Louis XVIII.

Wider fame came with the play *Hernani* in 1830 and the novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* in 1831. He married Adèle Foucher in 1822 but the lyric poetry was inspired by various liaisons, particularly that with Juliette Drouet, the actress with whom Hugo shared a lasting ménage à trois. A man of towering vanity, and often criticised for his influence on lesser mortals, Hugo remains the greatest French writer of his century with a hold even today on the affections of his countrymen.

Victor Hugo's achievement was to vastly extend the range and authority of poetry. Those who speak French indifferently will find Hugo's work much easier to appreciate than Racine's, though there are certainly problems. A far-ranging imagery, that verges on the melodramatic in its attempt to put life into shadowy abstractions. Torrents of symbols in surging rhythms that can too often end in bombast. Visionary effusions that passed themselves off as intrinsic wisdom. None of these make the man or his poetry easy to accept today, but Hugo brought a new sense of the beauty of words, extended the lyrical resources of French verse, and invigorated the alexandrine with striking enjambments and placings of the caesura. The output was vast, and its diversity even more astonishing.

Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-69) is today remembered as a literary critic and historian of French literature but published volumes of his own poetry in a style similar to that of Vigny and Hugo, but rather flatter and less sonorous, indeed rather like that of Crabbe and Cowper, whom Sainte-Beuve 'discovered' in England. He first visited the country in 1828, and helped bring attention in France to English Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge.

In contrast stands Félix Arvers (1806-1850), a French poet and dramatist known only for the one poem: *Un secret*. Arvers

was born in Paris, trained for the law but at the age of 30 concentrated on the theatre. He was moderately successful, but none of his work attained the success of *Un Secret*, which was written for Marie, the daughter of writer Charles Nodier. The poem appears in a piece he wrote at the age of 25 entitled *Mes heures perdues* (My lost hours). This tribute to unrequited love was recited in the literary salons of the day and became a classic of French Romantic poetry after his death.

Alfred-Victor, count de Vigny, (1797-1863), as poet, dramatist and novelist was the most philosophical of the French Romantics. He was born into an aristocratic family and initially embarked on a military career. Shortly after the publication of his first collection of verse, and a growing reputation as a Romantic poet who combined grace with a strength and depth, Vigny gave up his military ambitions and turned also to novel writing. His *Cinq-Mars* of 1826 was the first important historical novel in French. He was romantically attached to Delphine Gay, famous for her looks and writing talent, but in 1825 married Lydia Bunbury, the daughter of a wealthy Englishman. Vigny's 1831-8 affair with actress Marie Dorval, and her association with George Sand, left him profoundly disillusioned. His mood grew more sombre in the poems and novels that followed, where Vigny sought a personal philosophy and political creed in the changing politics of the times.

In his dialogues, Vigny formulated theories about the fate of man, and defined the principles that he thought should govern human conduct. To give these ideas the finish they required, he turned again, between 1838 and his death, to poetry, slowly composing the 11 poems that were later collected under the title *Les Destinées* (1864). The early poems are pessimistic, but slowly change as Vigny grew more confident of

the imperishable nature of human spiritual powers. He gradually retired from Paris life to his country house but was elected to the Académie Française in 1845. His posthumous publications markedly enhanced his reputation: *Les Destinées* (Destinies: 1864), *Le Journal d'un poète* (Diary of a Poet: 1867), *Daphné* (Daphne: 1912), and *Mémoires inédits* (Unpublished Memoires: 1958)

Alfred de Musset, (1810-1857), dramatist and poet, came under the Romantic influence of Vigny and Hugo and, while still an adolescent, produced his *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie* (Stories of Spain and of Italy) in 1830. He also became a well-known dandy, scandalising Parisian society with his hectic sexual and alcoholic dissipations. After the failure of his play *La Nuit vénitienne* (Venetian Night: 1830) Musset would not allow his other plays to be performed but continued to publish historical tragedies.

Musset was an extraordinarily versatile poet, writing light satirical pieces and pieces of dazzling technical virtuosity, plus works of genuine eloquence. His 1833-1839 love affair with George Sand inspired some of his finest lyrics. Musset was rightly seen as a Romantic poet but was also aware of its latent silliness. He was elected to the *Académie Française* in 1852.

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859) :
Renoncement

Pardonnez-moi, Seigneur, mon visage attristé,
Vous qui l'aviez formé de sourire et de charmes ;
Mais sous le front joyeux vous aviez mis les larmes,
Et de vos dons, Seigneur, ce don seul m'est resté.

C'est le mois envié, c'est le meilleur peut-être :
Je n'ai plus à mourir à mes liens de fleurs ;
Ils vous sont tous rendus, cher auteur de mon être,
Et je n'ai plus à moi que le sel de mes pleurs.

Les fleurs sont pour l'enfant ; le sel est pour la femme ;
Faites-en l'innocence et trempez-y mes jours.
Seigneur ! quand tout ce sel aura lavé mon âme,
Vous me rendrez un coeur pour vous aimer toujours !

Tous mes étonnements sont finis sur la terre,
Tous mes adieux sont faits, l'âme est prête à jaillir,
Pour atteindre à ses fruits protégés de mystère
Que la pudique mort a seule osé cueillir,

O Sauveur ! soyez tendre au moins à d'autres mères,
Par amour pour la vôtre et par pitié pour nous !
Baptisez leurs enfants de nos larmes amères,
Et relevez les miens tombés à vos genoux !

Que mon nom ne soit rien qu'une ombre douce et vaine,
Qu'il ne cause jamais ni l'effroi ni la peine !
Qu'un indigent l'emporte après m'avoir parlé
Et le garde longtemps dans son coeur consolé !

1819

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore : Renunciation

O Lord, forgive me for my saddened face,
which You had formed of simple charm and smiles;
beneath my brow you put such tearful trials
that of your gifts remains but this poor grace.

It is the envied month; perhaps it's best
that I no longer die when springtime nears.
They all return to You, my self-professed
and all that's left in me is salt of tears.

Flowers are for the child, the woman salt;
may days of innocence be soaked in me
When salt, O Lord, has cleansed my soul of fault,
my heart returns to love You endlessly.

My astonishments are over on the earth,
my farewells made, my soul begins its flight,
the fruits of mystery are nothing worth,
it is on modest death I dare alight.

Be tender, Saviour, that a mother hears
Your love and pity for the last of these.
Baptize their children with our bitter tears
and mine now raise who've fallen to Your knees.

Let my name be only soft, vain shade
that never out of fear and pain be made.
that, having spoken to me, the poor are led
to keep it in their hearts, long comforted.

Maurice de Guérin (1810-1839) : *de Glaucus* fragment

43. Nymphes, divinités dont le pouvoir conduit
Les racines des bois et le cours des fontaines,
Qui nourrissez les airs de fécondes haleines,
Et des sources que Pan entretient toujours pleines
Aux champs menez la vie à grands flots et sans bruit,
Comme la nuit répand le sommeil dans nos veines ;

Dieux des monts et des bois, dieux nommés ou cachés,
50. De qui le charme vient à tous lieux solitaires,
Et toi, dieu des bergers à ces lieux attachés,
Pan, qui dans les forêts m'entrouvris tes mystères :

Vous tous, dieux de ma vie et que j'ai tant aimés,
De vos bienfaits en moi réveillez la mémoire,
Pour m'ôter ce penchant et ravir la victoire
Aux perfides attraits dans la mer enfermés.

Comme un fruit suspendu dans l'ombre du feuillage,
Mon destin s'est formé dans l'épaisseur des bois.
J'ai grandi, recouvert d'une chaleur sauvage,
60. Et le vent qui rompait le tissu de l'ombrage
Me découvrit le ciel pour la première fois.

Les faveurs de nos dieux m'ont touché dès l'enfance ;
Mes plus jeunes regards ont aimé les forêts,
Et mes plus jeunes pas ont suivi le silence
Qui m'entraînait bien loin dans l'ombre et les secrets.

Maurice de Guérin : *from* Glaucus fragment

43. The nymphs and deities that thread their power
through roots of forests and the fountain's course,
who feed the airs with fruitful breaths, that source
of all things making Pan maintain his force
in noiseless waves that flow through fields and bower
as night, within our veins, will sleep enforce;

Gods of hills and woods, if named as such,
50. by grace of whom the lonely places please,
you, god of shepherds, who these haunts will touch,
Pan, who in the woods disclose your mysteries,

and all you gods of life I've loved so much,
whose benefits awoke the memory in me.
To take another path, delight in victory
to those great treacherous lures immured in sea.

Like fruit that hangs where shaded bowers meet,
my destiny was bound up with the woods
I grew up party to that savage heat
60. where winds broke through that deep retreat,
and dawning sky disclosed those neighborhoods.

From childhood on, the gods have favoured me,
with pristine eyes I've loved the forest scene,
with pristine steps have followed silently
where shadows and the secret ways have been.

Mais le jour où, du haut d'une cime perdue,
Je vis (ce fut pour moi comme un brillant réveil !)
Le monde parcouru par les feux du soleil,
Et les champs et les eaux couchés dans l'étendue,

70. L'étendue enivra mon esprit et mes yeux ;
Je voulus égaler mes regards à l'espace,
Et posséder sans borne, en égarant ma trace,
L'ouverture des champs avec celle des cieux.

Aux bergers appartient l'espace et la lumière,
En parcourant les monts ils épuisent le jour ;
Ils sont chers à la nuit, qui s'ouvre tout entière
À leurs pas inconnus, et laisse leur paupière
Ouvrte aux feux perdus dans leur profond séjour.

Je courus aux bergers, je reconnus leurs fêtes,
80. Je marchai, je goûtai le charme des troupeaux ;
Et, sur le haut des monts comme au sein des retraites,
Les dieux, qui m'attiraient dans leurs faveurs secrètes,
Dans des pièges divins prenaient mes sens nouveaux.

Dans les réduits secrets que le gazon recèle,
Un ver, du jour éteint recueillant les débris,
Lorsque tout s'obscurcit, devient une étincelle,
Et plein des traits perdus de la flamme éternelle,
Goûte encor le soleil dans l'ombre des abris.

1840

But the day when from the top of some lost peak
I saw, (my bright awakening there begun!)
the world negotiated by the fires of sun,
extended fields and waters there could speak.

70. The sight intoxicated mind and eyes;
I sought to match my vision to the space,
possess it whole, eliminating trace
of fields that open up as do the skies.

To shepherds must belong the space and light,
to travel mountains and exhaust the day,
when opening over all there is the night
on unknown footsteps, though the eyelid's bright
on firesides lost into their deepest stay.

I ran to shepherds, recognized their feasts,
80. I walked, attracted to the herd's events;
and on the top of mountains, in retreats
the gods have lured me into hidden sweets,
divine ensnarements took my new-made sense.

In smallest secret that the turf conceals
a worm encounters refuse of the day;
when all things darken, the merest spark reveals
the features of a flame long lost, conceals
88. no more the sunlight in that darkened stay.

Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) : L' Isolation

Souvent sur la montagne, à l'ombre du vieux chêne,
Au coucher du soleil, tristement je m'assieds ;
Je promène au hasard mes regards sur la plaine,
Dont le tableau changeant se déroule à mes pieds.

Ici, gronde le fleuve aux vagues écumantes ;
Il serpente, et s'enfonce en un lointain obscur ;
Là, le lac immobile étend ses eaux dormantes
Où l'étoile du soir se lève dans l'azur.

Au sommet de ces monts couronnés de bois sombres,
Le crépuscule encor jette un dernier rayon,
Et le char vapoureux de la reine des ombres
Monte, et blanchit déjà les bords de l'horizon.

Cependant, s'élançant de la flèche gothique,
Un son religieux se répand dans les airs,
Le voyageur s'arrête, et la cloche rustique
Aux derniers bruits du jour mêle de saints concerts.

Mais à ces doux tableaux mon âme indifférente
N'éprouve devant eux ni charme ni transports,
Je contemple la terre ainsi qu'une ombre errante :
Le soleil des vivants n'échauffe plus les morts.

De colline en colline en vain portant ma vue,
Du sud à l'aquilon, de l'aurore au couchant,
Je parcours tous les points de l'immense étendue,
Et je dis : « Nulle part le bonheur ne m'attend. »

Alphonse de Lamartine : Isolation

Often in the mountains, in an old oak's shade,
the sunset sees me sadly take my seat:
at random through the plain I find arrayed
a world of change unfolding at my feet.

Here the noisy, foaming waters fall
and wind into the blur as serpents do.
The lake is flat and still: no life at all
though evening's star is rising in the blue.

The mountain tops are rimmed with darkened woods,
and on them twilight casts its lingering ray.
Ascending evening's clouded sisterhoods
illuminate the climbing edge of day.

But from a gothic steeple comes the swell
of church-bells outward spreading through the air.
The traveller stops to hear how rustic bell
will mix the day's last sounds with holy prayer.

By such depictions my indifferent soul
is not to charm or inspiration led:
the earth I look on has a shadow role
where living sunshine cannot warm the dead.

From hill to hill I look: no sight enchants
from south to north, from dim to dawning light,
I range it seems an immeasurable expanse
that says 'No happiness awaits your sight.'

Que me font ces vallons, ces palais, ces chaumières,
Vains objets dont pour moi le charme est envolé ?
Fleuves, rochers, forêts, solitudes si chères,
Un seul être vous manque, et tout est dépeuplé.

Que le tour du soleil ou commence ou s'achève,
D'un oeil indifférent je le suis dans son cours ;
En un ciel sombre ou pur qu'il se couche ou se lève,
Qu'importe le soleil ? je n'attends rien des jours.

Quand je pourrais le suivre en sa vaste carrière,
Mes yeux verraient partout le vide et les déserts ;
Je ne désire rien de tout ce qu'il éclaire,
Je ne demande rien à l'immense univers.

Mais peut-être au-delà des bornes de sa sphère,
Lieux où le vrai soleil éclaire d'autres cieux,
Si je pouvais laisser ma dépouille à la terre,
Ce que j'ai tant rêvé paraîtrait à mes yeux !

Là, je m'enivrerais à la source où j'aspire ;
Là, je retrouverais et l'espoir et l'amour,
Et ce bien idéal que toute âme désire,
Et qui n'a pas de nom au terrestre séjour !

Que ne puis-je, porté sur le char de l'Aurore,
Vague objet de mes vœux, m'élancer jusqu'à toi !
Sur la terre d'exil pourquoi restè-je encore ?
Il n'est rien de commun entre la terre et moi.

What are these valleys, halls or huts to me
when all the charm they held has fled away?
The waters, rocks and solitudes must be
but as the very wastes of self convey.

The sun will rise or set accordingly,
indifferent, too, I gaze upon its path.
Sun's bright rise, dark's setting: one to me.
I look for nothing in their aftermath.

And could I follow him, that vast career
gives emptiness and deserts everywhere,
and I want nothing that the light could cheer,
or that the universe itself might share.

Perhaps, beyond the limits of its sphere,
the sun illuminates some other place,
and could I leave my earthly body here,
the things I've so much dreamt of show their face.

I'd find that source to which I would aspire,
where hope and love refreshed are mine to know,
that perfect good, which is the soul's desire,
but has no name on this poor earth below.

On the Dawn's bright chariot, what cannot I
accomplish of my wishes, brought thus close to you?
Why yet, in earth's hard exile, must I lie,
with nothing held in common by us two?

Quand la feuille des bois tombe dans la prairie,
Le vent du soir s'élève et l'arrache aux vallons ;
Et moi, je suis semblable à la feuille flétrie :
Emportez-moi comme elle, orageux aquilons !

Méditations poétiques 1820

When falls the forest leaf on meadow grass,
which valley's wind at evening scatters thence,
it's into that dry leaf I too would pass,
would but your stormy pinions bear me hence!

Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) : Le Lac

Ainsi, toujours poussés vers denouveaux rivages,
Dans la nuit éternelle emportés sans retour,
Ne pourrons-nous jamais sur l'océan des âges
Jeter l'ancre un seul jour ?

Ô lac ! l'année à peine a fini sa carrière,
Et près des flots chéris qu'elle devait revoir,
Regarde ! je viens seul m'asseoir sur cette pierre
Où tu la vis s'asseoir !

Tu mugissais ainsi sous ces roches profondes,
Ainsi tu te brisais sur leurs flancs déchirés,
Ainsi le vent jetait l'écume de tes ondes
Sur ses pieds adorés.

Un soir, t'en souvient-il ? nous voguions en silence ;
On n'entendait au loin, sur l'onde et sous les cieux,
Que le bruit des rameurs qui frappaient en cadence
Tes flots harmonieux.

Tout à coup des accents inconnus à la terre
Du rivage charmé frappèrent les échos ;
Le flot fut attentif, et la voix qui m'est chère
Laisa tomber ces mots :

Alphonse de Lamartine : The Lake

Conveyed unceasingly to unknown shores,
where everlasting night bears all away,
on those vast seas of time can we not pause,
at anchor for a day?

O lake! When barely now a year has flown,
beside the waves she would have seen again,
you find me sitting on this rock alone
where she was seated then.

You sighed beneath the steeply falling banks
where broken rocks the swirling waters meet,
and wind, that whipped to foam the water's flanks,
caressed her much loved feet.

One evening as we floated, distantly
to hear, beneath the sky, of waves around,
the cadence of the rowers rhythmically
assumed the waves' own sound.

Then, suddenly, in tones unknown to earth,
the charmed and echoing shoreline heard,
a voice most dear to me, the water's worth
of every falling word.

" Ô temps ! suspends ton vol, et vous, heures propices !
Suspendez votre cours :
Laissez-nous savourer les rapides délices
Des plus beaux de nos jours !

" Assez de malheureux ici-bas vous implorent,
Coulez, coulez pour eux ;
Prenez avec leurs jours les soins qui les dévorent ;
Oubliez les heureux.

" Mais je demande en vain quelques moments encore,
Le temps m'échappe et fuit ;
Je dis à cette nuit : Sois plus lente ; et l'aurore
Va dissiper la nuit.

" Aimons donc, aimons donc ! de l'heure fugitive,
Hâtons-nous, jouissons !
L'homme n'a point de port, le temps n'a point de rive ;
Il coule, et nous passons ! "

Temps jaloux, se peut-il que ces moments d'ivresse,
Où l'amour à longs flots nous verse le bonheur,
S'envolent loin de nous de la même vitesse
Que les jours de malheur ?

Eh quoi ! n'en pourrons-nous fixer au moins la trace ?
Quoi ! passés pour jamais ! quoi ! tout entiers perdus !
Ce temps qui les donna, ce temps qui les efface,
Ne nous les rendra plus !

'O Time: suspend your flight; propitious hours
forego your hastening ways.
Let's savour such delights as time allows
on this most blest of days.

'And don't enough unfortunates implore
time flow and flow for them;
and, with them, days devoured by care before:
forgo what they condemn.

'In vain I beg a few more moments still,
but time at once takes flight.
I tell the night be slow; that dawn light fill
and so dispell the night.

'Let's therefore love, most love the fleeting hour
as joy itself arrives.
Man has no port, nor time its end of power;
time flows; and so our lives!'

Such envied times when, drunk with happiness,
immersed in streams of love as in the past,
we had the days of our misfortune press
on equally as fast.

All's lost! All's gone! No trace is there to find:
the past is always under time's attack!
What time enables, time erases: mind
itself gives nothing back.

Éternité, néant, passé, sombres abîmes,
Que faites-vous des jours que vous engloutissez ?
Parlez : nous rendrez-vous ces extases sublimes
Que vous nous ravissez ?

Ô lac ! rochers muets ! grottes ! forêt obscure !
Vous, que le temps épargne ou qu'il peut rajeunir,
Gardez de cette nuit, gardez, belle nature,
Au moins le souvenir !

Qu'il soit dans ton repos, qu'il soit dans tes orages,
Beau lac, et dans l'aspect de tes rians coteaux,
Et dans ces noirs sapins, et dans ces rocs sauvages
Qui pendent sur tes eaux.

Qu'il soit dans le zéphyr qui frémit et qui passe,
Dans les bruits de tes bords par tes bords répétés,
Dans l'astre au front d'argent qui blanchit ta surface
De ses molles clartés.

Que le vent qui gémit, le roseau qui soupire,
Que les parfums légers de ton air embaumé,
Que tout ce qu'on entend, l'on voit ou l'on respire,
Tout dise: Ils ont aimé !

Méditations poétiques 1820

Eternity, and nothing, dark abyss:
what will you do with days that you devour?
Speak : will you return the utmost bliss
of some delighted hour?

O lake, mute rocks, the caves and sombre wood,
which time has spared or can restore to sight,
keep all in nature as true beauty should
the memories of this night.

Let there be peace or riotous tempests' shocks,
in lake's own looks or smiling hills around,
in thickets of dark firs, or hanging rocks
within the waters bound.

Allow that winds will make to tremble
the lake's own thinned-out edge, repeatedly,
that on your silvered face the stars assemble
in their soft clarity.

Let be the wind that moans, the reed that sighs,
in this embalming, lightly-scented air:
that all things seen, or breathed or heard, arise
from those once loving there !

Victor Hugo (1802-85) : Soleils Couchants

Le soleil s'est couché ce soir dans les nuées.
Demain viendra l'orage, et le soir, et la nuit ;
Puis l'aube, et ses clartés de vapeurs obstruées ;
Puis les nuits, puis les jours, pas du temps qui s'enfuit !

Tous ces jours passeront; ils passeront en foule
Sur la face des mers, sur la face des monts,
Sur les fleuves d'argent, sur les forêts où roule
Comme un hymne confus des morts que nous aimons.

Et la face des eaux, et le front des montagnes,
Ridés et non vieillis, et les bois toujours verts
S'iront rajeunissant ; le fleuve des campagnes
Prendra sans cesse aux monts le flot qu'il donne aux mers.

Mais moi, sous chaque jour courbant plus bas ma tête,
Je passe, et, refroidi sous ce soleil joyeux,
Je m'en irai bientôt, au milieu de la fête,
Sans que rien manque au monde, immense et radieux !

Les Feuilles d'automne 1831

Victor Hugo : Setting Suns

Into the clouds this evening set the sun.
Tomorrow: storm, and shade and night are spread.
Then dawn, bright threads of mists, and so are done
the nights and days till time itself has fled.

And all these days will pass, and pass in crowds,
across both seas and lofty mountain's head,
the rivers, silvered, and the forest shrouds:
a baffled hymn to our beloved dead.

The face of waters and the mountain's brow
that's wrinkled but unwithered, woods still green,
return their youth to them: as streams avow
a hill to sea their constant flowing scene.

But I, my head more bent by days' decree,
will go, and, cool beneath the joyful sun,
will leave at once and in the revelry
of this great world of radiance miss but none.

Victor Hugo (1802-85) : Demain, dès l'aube

Demain, dès l'aube, à l'heure où blanchit la campagne,
Je partirai. Vois-tu, je sais que tu m'attends.
J'irai par la forêt, j'irai par la montagne.
Je ne puis demeurer loin de toi plus longtemps.

Je marcherai les yeux fixés sur mes pensées,
Sans rien voir au dehors, sans entendre aucun bruit,
Seul, inconnu, le dos courbé, les mains croisées,
Triste, et le jour pour moi sera comme la nuit.

Je ne regarderai ni l'or du soir qui tombe,
Ni les voiles au loin descendant vers Harfleur,
Et quand j'arriverai, je mettrai sur ta tombe
Un bouquet de houx vert et de bruyère en fleur.

Les Contemplations 1856

Victor Hugo: Tomorrow at dawn

At dawn tomorrow, when the countryside grows white,
I'm on my way. Where you, I know, will wait for me.
I'll go on through the forest, under mountain's height:
so far from you I cannot live indefinitely.

And I will walk with eyes firm fastened on each thought,
blind to the world outside, deaf to the slightest sound,
alone, unknown, back bent, my crossed hands fraught
with sadness, that the day seem dark as night around.

I shall not see the gold, nor gathering evening gloom,
the dropping Harfleur sails as was that distant time,
but, on arriving there, will set upon your tomb
a bunch of holly, green but prinked with flowering thyme.

Victor Hugo (1802-85) : Adieux de l'hôtesse arabe

Puisque rien ne t'arrête en cet heureux pays,
Ni l'ombre du palmier, ni le jaune maïs,
Ni le repos, ni l'abondance,
Ni de voir à ta voix battre le jeune sein
De nos sœurs, dont, les soirs, le tournoyant essaim
Couronne un coteau de sa danse,
Adieu! Beau voyageur, hélas, adieu.

Oh ! que n'es-tu de ceux
Qui donnent pour limite à leurs pieds paresseux
Leur toit de branches ou de toiles !
Qui, rêveurs, sans en faire, écoutent les récits,
Et souhaitent, le soir, devant leur porte assis,
de s'en aller dans les étoiles !
Hélas, adieu! Adieu beau voyageur.

Si tu l'avais voulu, peut-être une de nous,
O jeune homme, eût aimé te servir à genoux
Dans nos huttes toujours ouvertes ;
Elle eût fait, en berçant ton sommeil de ses chants,
Pour chasser de ton front les moucherons méchants,
Un éventail de feuilles vertes.

Victor Hugo: Farewell of the Arab hostess

Since nothing holds you to this happy bourn,
not shade of palm tree nor the golden corn,
not ease, not riches, not the glance
at young breasts beating as they hear your voice
our sisters making evening throngs rejoice.
who crown a hillside with their dance.
Farewell our handsome stranger: alas, farewell.

Surely you're not one of those
whose lazy feet will only find repose,
beneath tree or tented bars,
you dreamers, who hear stories but make up none,
whose wishes, sat out at evening doorways, run
to mingling with the stars.
Alas, farewell: farewell you handsome traveler.

Perhaps, if wanted, one of us would please,
would yes, young man, have served you on her knees.
Our huts have open eaves,
and she'd have lulled you with her tuneful way,
and from your head have kept the gnats away
with verdant fan of leaves.

Si tu ne reviens pas, songe un peu quelquefois
Aux filles du désert, sœurs à la douce voix,
Qui dansent pieds nus sur la dune ;
O beau jeune homme blanc, bel oiseau passager,
Souviens-toi, car peut-être, ô rapide étranger,
Ton souvenir reste à plus d'une !
Hélas, adieu! Adieu! Bel étranger, hélas, adieu. Souviens-
toi.

1828

And if you don't come back, reflect at times, rejoice,
our desert sisters' songs retain their sweetest voice,
we who barefoot dance on sands.

O handsome young white man across the lapse
of time remembering, as a bird perhaps,
that loss of many strands.

Alas. Adieu, farewell, fine stranger— alas, remember us.

Victor Hugo (1802-85) : Boöz Endormi

Booz s'était couché de fatigue accablé ;
Il avait tout le jour travaillé dans son aire ;
Puis avait fait son lit à sa place ordinaire ;
Booz dormait auprès des boisseaux pleins de blé.

Ce vieillard possédait des champs de blés et d'orge ;
Il était, quoique riche, à la justice enclin ;
Il n'avait pas de fange en l'eau de son moulin ;
Il n'avait pas d'enfer dans le feu de sa forge.

Sa barbe était d'argent comme un ruisseau d'avril.
Sa gerbe n'était point avare ni haineuse ;
Quand il voyait passer quelque pauvre glaneuse :
- Laissez tomber exprès des épis, disait-il.

Cet homme marchait pur loin des sentiers obliques,
Vêtu de probité candide et de lin blanc ;
Et, toujours du côté des pauvres ruisselant,
Ses sacs de grains semblaient des fontaines publiques.

Booz était bon maître et fidèle parent ;
Il était généreux, quoiqu'il fût économe ;
Les femmes regardaient Booz plus qu'un jeune homme,
Car le jeune homme est beau, mais le vieillard est grand.

Le vieillard, qui revient vers la source première,
Entre aux jours éternels et sort des jours changeants ;
Et l'on voit de la flamme aux yeux des jeunes gens,
Mais dans l'oeil du vieillard on voit de la lumière

Victor Hugo : Boaz Sleeping

Overcome with weariness, he kept
the same rough quarters as he'd had before:
all day had seen him on the threshing floor
and now, by sacks of wheat, tired Boaz slept.

He possessed, this good old man, large fields of wheat,
and barley too: was just, and passing rich.
His mill ran cleanly, fairly; he didn't switch
a neighbour's castings from the furnace heat.

His beard was silvered as an April stream;
his sheaves lay broad and open as the day.
Leave this or that to gleaners he would say.
Thoughtful this old man: a kind regime.

Far from him was any crooked road.
He walked through guileless probity in white:
he backed the poor in dispute, and for their plight
from his own granaries the fountains flowed.

To labourers and family, though not in sight,
Boaz was faithful, generous, if cautious too.
Girls gazed more favourably than age has due,
for if youth has beauty, age has might.

The old return beyond the alteration
of days about them to the source of truth.
With fires of passion blaze the eyes in youth
but to the old there comes illumination.

Donc, Booz dans la nuit dormait parmi les siens ;
Près des meules, qu'on eût prises pour des décombres,
Les moissonneurs couchés faisaient des groupes sombres;
Et ceci se passait dans des temps très anciens.

Les tribus d'Israël avaient pour chef un juge ;
La terre, où l'homme errait sous la tente, inquiet
Des empreintes de pieds de géants qu'il voyait,
Était mouillée encore et molle du déluge.

* * *

Comme dormait Jacob, comme dormait Judith,
Booz, les yeux fermés, gisait sous la feuillée ;
Or, la porte du ciel s'étant entre-bâillée
Au-dessus de sa tête, un songe en descendit.

Et ce songe était tel, que Booz vit un chêne
Qui, sorti de son ventre, allait jusqu'au ciel bleu ;
Une race y montait comme une longue chaîne ;
Un roi chantait en bas, en haut mourait un dieu.

Et Booz murmurait avec la voix de l'âme :
" Comment se pourrait-il que de moi ceci vînt ?
Le chiffre de mes ans a passé quatre-vingt,
Et je n'ai pas de fils, et je n'ai plus de femme.

" Voilà longtemps que celle avec qui j'ai dormi,
O Seigneur ! a quitté ma couche pour la vôtre ;
Et nous sommes encor tout mêlés l'un à l'autre,
Elle à demi vivante et moi mort à demi.

So, Boaz slept that night among his own,
beside the millstones, rubble, darkened rows
of stretched-out harvesters whose heaps were those
of ancient custom, kept to, cast in stone.

From their days in tents, beyond the flood,
the tribes of Israel took as chief their law:
it guided and supported when they saw
still fresh the prints of giants on the mud.

* * *

As Jacob slept, so did Judith. Spread
out, with eyes fast shut, was Boaz. Far
above him, falling from a door ajar
in the heavens, a dream took up his head.

And in that dream he saw an oak tree climb
as from his loins into the very sky:
a chain of people, to whom below in time
a king would sing, aloft a god would die.

How can that be, within the inner house
of soul, the old man murmured, since the sum
of eighty years is come upon me, come
and gone: no sons are left me, or a spouse.

How long ago it seems the one I wed
has gone and left my couch for yours, Yehova:
but what she was, she is, as though carried over
by one half living still to one half dead.

Une race naîtrait de moi ! Comment le croire ?
Comment se pourrait-il que j'eusse des enfants ?
Quand on est jeune, on a des matins triomphants ;
Le jour sort de la nuit comme d'une victoire ;

Mais vieux, on tremble ainsi qu'à l'hiver le bouleau ;
Je suis veuf, je suis seul, et sur moi le soir tombe,
Et je courbe, ô mon Dieu ! mon âme vers la tombe,
Comme un boeuf ayant soif penche son front vers l'eau. "

Ainsi parlait Booz dans le rêve et l'extase,
Tournant vers Dieu ses yeux par le sommeil noyés ;
Le cèdre ne sent pas une rose à sa base,
Et lui ne sentait pas une femme à ses pieds.

* * *

Pendant qu'il sommeillait, Ruth, une moabite,
S'était couchée aux pieds de Booz, le sein nu,
Espérant on ne sait quel rayon inconnu,
Quand viendrait du réveil la lumière subite.

Booz ne savait point qu'une femme était là,
Et Ruth ne savait point ce que Dieu voulait d'elle.
Un frais parfum sortait des touffes d'asphodèle ;
Les souffles de la nuit flottaient sur Galgala.

L'ombre était nuptiale, auguste et solennelle ;
Les anges y volaient sans doute obscurément,
Car on voyait passer dans la nuit, par moment,
Quelque chose de bleu qui paraissait une aile.

A race from out my blood: how can that be?
As none of mine are with me through the day
how shall I glory with the dawn's first ray?
The day comes out of night like victory.

The old tremble as a tree in winter, think
at evening, soberly, on what has been.
To the tomb, continually, now I lean
as the ox does, heavily, down to drink.

So spoke old Boaz, turning, eyes betrayed
by sleep to God and to the fervent heat.
The cedar sees no roses in its shade,
nor he the woman stretched out at his feet.

* * *

As she slumbered, Ruth, a Moabite,
was still near Boaz with her breasts undone,
hoping, who can say, some half-begun
glance would open into morning light.

Boaz did not know that Ruth was there,
nor Ruth herself what God intended. Well
then came the perfume of the asphodel,
Galgala lay within the light wind's care.

The night was solemn, august and bridal. There flew
or not among the shadows hesitating
a host of angels in that hour of waiting,
a tempest as though of wings, a flash of blue.

La respiration de Booz qui dormait
Se mêlait au bruit sourd des ruisseaux sur la mousse.
On était dans le mois où la nature est douce,
Les collines ayant des lys sur leur sommet.

* * *

Ruth songeait et Booz dormait ; l'herbe était noire ;
Les grelots des troupeaux palpitaient vaguement ;
Une immense bonté tombait du firmament ;
C'était l'heure tranquille où les lions vont boire.

Tout reposait dans Ur et dans Jérimadeth ;
Les astres émaillaient le ciel profond et sombre ;
Le croissant fin et clair parmi ces fleurs de l'ombre
Brillait à l'occident, et Ruth se demandait,

Immobile, ouvrant l'oeil à moitié sous ses voiles,
Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été,
Avait, en s'en allant, négligemment jeté
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles.

La Légende des siècles 1888

The sound of Boaz breathing kept the hours:
the water trickled quietly through the moss:
Nature at her sweetest, when months emboss
the summits of the hills with lily flowers.

* * *

Ruth now pondered; Boaz slept. The clink
of sheep-bells carried: darkness innocent.
An immense blessing fell from the firmament.
It was the hour of quiet, when lions drink.

Rest in Ur and Jerimadeth. The flowers
of darkness had enamelled sombre rest.
A crescent, thin and clear, lit up the west
as Ruth, unmoving, wondered through the hours:

What god — her look half lifting through its bars —
what summer reaper out of times unknown,
in leaving her so carelessly had thrown
that golden sickle in the field of stars.

Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) : Mon âme
est ce lac même ...

Mon âme est ce lac même où le soleil qui penche,
Par un beau soir d'automne, envoie un feu mourant :
Le flot frissonne à peine, et pas une aile blanche,
Pas une rame au loin n'y joue en l'effleurant.

Tout dort, tout est tranquille, et le cristal limpide,
En se refroidissant à l'air glacé des nuits,
Sans écho, sans soupir, sans un pli qui le ride,
Semble un miroir tout fait pour les pâles ennuis.

Mais ne sentez-vous pas, Madame, à son silence,
A ses flots transparents de lui-même oubliés,
A sa calme étendue où rien ne se balance,
Le bonheur qu'il éprouve à se taire à vos pieds,

À réfléchir en paix de bien-aimé rivage,
A le peindre plus pur en ne s'y mêlant pas,
A ne rien perdre en soi de la divine image
De Celle dont sans bruit il recueille les pas ?

Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve : My soul is as this lake ...

My soul is in this lake on which the sun
this autumn evening lays a dying glow;
the water barely shivers, white wing none,
nor distant oar to break the water's flow.

All sleeps, is quiet, the crystal sky portrayed
with icy pageants as the night draws near:
without a sigh or echo, all is made
a mirror for our pallid troubles here.

But don't you feel, Madam, with tranquil ways
to which, transparently, it must retreat,
in this great calm around where nothing sways,
the bliss of being silent at your feet.

To think of this beloved shore, prefer
to not then meddle in its pure effects,
and so lose nothing of that One that's her
whose footsteps he most soundlessly collects.

Félix Arvers (1806-1850) : Sonnet

Mon âme a son secret, ma vie a son mystère,
Un amour éternel en un moment conçu :
Le mal est sans espoir, aussi j'ai dû le taire,
Et celle qui l'a fait n'en a jamais rien su.

Hélas ! j'aurai passé près d'elle inaperçu,
Toujours à ses côtés, et pourtant solitaire.
Et j'aurai jusqu'au bout fait mon temps sur la terre,
N'osant rien demander et n'ayant rien reçu.

Pour elle, quoique Dieu l'ait faite douce et tendre,
Elle suit son chemin, distraite et sans entendre
Ce murmure d'amour élevé sur ses pas.

À l'austère devoir, pieusement fidèle,
Elle dira, lisant ces vers tout remplis d'elle
" Quelle est donc cette femme ? " et ne comprendra pas.

Mes Heures Perdus 1833

Félix Arvers : Sonnet

My soul holds secrets, life its mystery,
eternal love was on the instant grown,
but uselessly, as such that cannot be:
to her, its inspiration, quite unknown.

So thus, in passing her, I'm unperceived,
to loneliness alone will closeness tend.
I'll do my time on earth, until the end
when he, who asked for nothing, that received.

God gave her tenderness, a grace she shows
as seeming careless on her path she goes;
to love's soft words her lifting steps attend.

Where austere duty and good faith concur,
she'll say, in reading verses filled with her,
'What woman's this?' And will not comprehend.

Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863) : *de Moïse*

... Et, debout devant Dieu, Moïse ayant pris place,
Dans le nuage obscur lui parlait face à face.

Il disait au Seigneur : " Ne finirai-je pas ?
Où voulez-vous encor que je porte mes pas ?
Je vivrai donc toujours puissant et solitaire ?
50. Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre !

Que vous ai-je donc fait pour être votre élu ?
J'ai conduit votre peuple où vous avez voulu.
Voilà que son pied touche à la terre promise.
De vous à lui qu'un autre accepte l'entremise,
Au coursier d'Israël qu'il attache le frein ;
Je lui lègue mon livre et la verge d'airain.

" Pourquoi vous fallut-il tarir mes espérances,
Ne pas me laisser homme avec mes ignorances,
Puisque du mont Horeb jusques au mont Nébo
60. Je n'ai pas pu trouver le lieu de mon tombeau ?
Hélas ! vous m'avez fait sage parmi les sages !
Mon doigt du peuple errant a guidé les passages
J'ai fait pleuvoir le feu sur la tête des rois ;
L'avenir à genoux adorera mes lois ;
Des tombes des humains j'ouvre la plus antique,
La 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.

De Vigny : *from* Moses

. . . Before God standing, Moses took his place,
the dark cloud talking to him, face to face.

And to the Lord he said, 'Once more be gone?
To where you'd have my steps be going on?
Alive and powerful, always I'm alone,
50. so let me now be sleeping as a stone.

What did I do to be your chosen one?
I've led your people as you would have done.
And see, his foot attains the promised land;
why not some intermediary command?
Let now the messenger of Israel pass:
I give to him my book and rod of brass.

'Why did you have to slowly weaken hopes
in this poor ignorant who barely copes?
From Horeb into Nebo Mounts I thought
60. that each would come to be the tomb I sought.
Alas ! You made me wise among the wise
to point out where our wandering passage lies.
To rain down fire on kings I had good cause,
the genuflecting future to admire my laws.
In that most ancient end I would rejoice;
death finds my voice a most prophetic voice.
How vast I am! The nations at my feet
know well my hand creates and can defeat.

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

... " Sitôt que votre souffle a rempli le berger,
Les hommes se sont dit : " Il nous est étranger " ;
Et leurs yeux se baissaient devant mes yeux de flamme,
Car ils venaient, hélas ! d'y voir plus que mon âme.
J'ai vu l'amour s'éteindre et l'amitié tarir ;
Les vierges se voilaient et craignaient de mourir.
M'enveloppant alors de la colonne noire,
J'ai marché devant tous, triste et seul dans ma gloire,
Et j'ai dit dans mon coeur : Que vouloir à présent ?
80. Pour dormir sur un sein mon front est trop pesant,
Ma main laisse l'effroi sur la main qu'elle touche,
L'orage est dans ma voix, l'éclair est sur ma bouche ;
Aussi, loin de m'aimer, voilà qu'ils tremblent tous,
Et, quand j'ouvre les bras, on tombe à mes genoux.

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

1826

'Alas, I'm powerful, Lord, but am alone,
70. and would on earth be sleeping with the stone.

'No sooner breath had filled Your messenger
than men would see a stranger, and demur.
Their gaze they lowered to my eyes of flame,
and in my soul they came to see their shame.
Their friendship ended and their love ran dry.
The virgins veiled themselves and feared to die.
As I had to a clouded column grown,
my glory walked before them, but alone.
What did I want? My heart said, still and deep,
80. to rest my head on breast and fall asleep.
My hand they touch yet seems the hand of death,
my voice a tempest, lightning on my breath.
And, far from loving me, it's fear decrees,
and, if I open arms, they find their knees.

'Lord, I've been too powerful, but alone,
and would on earth be sleeping with the stone.'

Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863) : Le Mont des Oliviers I

Alors il était nuit et Jésus marchait seul,
Vêtu de blanc ainsi qu'un mort de son linceul ;
Les disciples dormaient au pied de la colline.
Parmi les oliviers qu'un vent sinistre incline
Jésus marche à grands pas en frissonnant comme eux ;
Triste jusqu'à la mort; l'oeil sombre et ténébreux,
Le front baissé, croisant les deux bras sur sa robe
Comme un voleur de nuit cachant ce qu'il dérobe ;
Connaissant les rochers mieux qu'un sentier uni,
10. Il s'arrête en un lieu nommé Gethsémani :
Il se courbe, à genoux, le front contre la terre,
Puis regarde le ciel en appelant : Mon Père !

- Mais le ciel reste noir, et Dieu ne répond pas.
Il se lève étonné, marche encore à grands pas,
Froissant les oliviers qui tremblent. Froide et lente
Découle de sa tête une sueur sanglante.
Il recule, il descend, il crie avec effroi :
Ne pouviez-vous prier et veiller avec moi !
Mais un sommeil de mort accable les apôtres,
20. Pierre à la voix du maître est sourd comme les autres.

Le fils de l'homme alors remonte lentement.
Comme un pasteur d'Egypte il cherche au firmament
Si l'Ange ne luit pas au fond de quelque étoile.
Mais un nuage en deuil s'étend comme le voile
D'une veuve et ses plis entourent le désert.
Jésus, se rappelant ce qu'il avait souffert

Alfred de Vigny : Mount of Olives I

Then it was night and Jesus walked alone,
in shroud-like white by which the dead are known.
Beneath the hill, disciples slept
while, through the olive groves, an ill wind swept.
Jesus, shivering like them, strides on by,
sad unto death his dark and shadowed eye.
His head is bent, his covered arms conceal
as will a thief, in hiding what he steal.
Knowing better than a path these rocks,
10. it's at the place Gethsemane he stops,
He bends. With forehead pressed to earth he falls,
then, looking up to sky, his Father calls.

- The sky stays black, and there no God replies.
He gets up, walks about in fierce surprise
to brush past olive branches. Cold and red
with blood, the sweat flows slowly from his head.
He draws on back, descends, and howls his plight.
Could you not pray and watch with me tonight!
So fast the apostles sleep there's hardly breath,
20. and Peter to His master's voice is deaf.

The Son of Man then slowly climbs on by
and like the Egyptian pastor scans the sky,
as though an angel stood beneath each star.
A mourning cloud, a widow's veil, was far
extending folds across the desert floor.
Jesus, recalling then the griefs before,

Depuis trente-trois ans, devint homme, et la crainte
Serra son coeur mortel d'une invincible étreinte.
Il eut froid. Vainement il appela trois fois :
30. MON PÈRE ! - Le vent seul répondit à sa voix..
Il tomba sur le sable assis et, dans sa peine,
Eut sur le monde et l'homme une pensée humaine.
- Et la Terre trembla, sentant la pesanteur
Du Sauveur qui tombait aux pieds du créateur.

1843

long years to manhood, and what fear he felt,
invincibly, how hard in heart it dwelt,
He three times tried: the voice felt cold and thinned.
30. My Father! All that came back was the wind.
He fell then to the sand and, seated, heard
the human sorrowing in our thought and word.
And the earth trembled, sensing that great weight
of the Saviour falling at our maker's feet.

Alfred de Musset (1810-57) : Tristesse

J'ai perdu ma force et ma vie,
Et mes amis et ma gaieté;
J'ai perdu jusqu'à la fierté
Qui faisait croire à mon génie.

Quand j'ai connu la Vérité,
J'ai cru que c'était une amie ;
Quand je l'ai comprise et sentie,
J'en étais déjà dégoûté.

Et pourtant elle est éternelle,
Et ceux qui se sont passés d'elle
Ici-bas ont tout ignoré.

Dieu parle, il faut qu'on lui réponde.
Le seul bien qui me reste au monde
Est d'avoir quelquefois pleuré.

1814

Alfred de Musset : Sadness

In you I've lost my life and strength,
my friends and natural gaiety:
I lost my pride, and equally
my genius and confidence.

For when I sought and found the truth
I took the venture for a friend,
but then I understood its end:
already undeceived is youth.

And yet it is eternal when
those who have ignored her then
have left the thing they should accept.

God speaks and we must answer him:
the only good the world can't dim
are those full tears I've often wept.

Alfred de Musset (1810-57) : A Sainte-Beuve

Ami, tu l'as bien dit : en nous, tant que nous sommes,
Il existe souvent une certaine fleur
Qui s'en va dans la vie et s'effeuille du coeur.
« Il existe, en un mot, chez les trois quarts des hommes,
Un poète mort jeune à qui l'homme survit. »
Tu l'as bien dit, ami, mais tu l'as trop bien dit.

Tu ne prenais pas garde, en traçant ta pensée,
Que ta plume en faisait un vers harmonieux,
Et que tu blasphémais dans la langue des dieux.
Relis-toi, je te rends à ta Muse offensée ;
Et souviens-toi qu'en nous il existe souvent
Un poète endormi toujours jeune et vivant.

Alfred de Musset : A Sainte-Beuve

You said it well, my friend: as much as we exist,
there's frequently a certain flower that lives in us,
some part that ebbs away in life, or loses thus
or will while three in four of us such men persist.
The poet in us dies, the man survives that knell:
You said it well, my friend, you said it far too well.

But you weren't taking heed, or were wont to lose
your pen in more harmonious verse. Against the odds,
your words blasphemed, though in the language of the gods.
So read yourself again in your affronted Muse.
Remember, for us here, a life will often keep
a poet in us, young and living, but asleep.

Alfred de Musset (1810-57) : Sur une morte

Elle était belle, si la Nuit
Qui dort dans la sombre chapelle
Où Michel-Ange a fait son lit,
Immobile peut être belle.

Elle était bonne, s'il suffit
Qu'en passant la main s'ouvre et donne,
Sans que Dieu n'ait rien vu, rien dit,
Si l'or sans pitié fait l'aumône.

Elle pensait, si le vain bruit
D'une voix douce et cadencée,
Comme le ruisseau qui gémit
Peut faire croire à la pensée.

Elle priait, si deux beaux yeux,
Tantôt s'attachant à la terre,
Tantôt se levant vers les cieux,
Peuvent s'appeler la Prière.

Elle aurait souri, si la fleur
Qui ne s'est point épanouie
Pouvait s'ouvrir à la fraîcheur
Du vent qui passe et qui l'oublie.

Elle aurait pleuré si sa main,
Sur son coeur froidement posée,
Eût jamais, dans l'argile humain,
Senti la céleste rosée.

De Musset: On a Dead Woman

She was beautiful — if Night
that in the somber chapel sleeps,
had Michelangelo's delight
in stillness which its hard bed keeps.

And she was good — if it's enough
for hand of alms to have no aims,
and keep from God, or pitying love,
the gold its charity proclaims.

She thought — if so the aimless sound
of soft and rhythmic voice
that's like the waters moaning round
were true and thoughtful choice.

She prayed — if those two lovely eyes
now lowered to some earthly care,
now lifting to the heavenly skies,
could truthfully be called a Prayer.

She would have smiled if ever flower
unknown to sweetness it begets,
could feel the soft, refreshing power
of wind that passes and forgets.

She could have wept — if hand would stay,
which on the heart must coldly muse,
or even once the human clay
were watered by celestial dews.

Elle aurait aimé, si l'orgueil
Pareil à la lampe inutile
Qu'on allume près d'un cercueil,
N'eût veillé sur son coeur stérile.

Elle est morte, et n'a point vécu.
Elle faisait semblant de vivre.
De ses mains est tombé le livre,
Dans lequel elle n'a rien lu.

She would have loved so well, if pride
had not been like that useless lamp
we place to light the coffin's side
when barren stays the human stamp.

She's dead who hasn't felt life's call,
but only seemed so in her look.
When from her hands there fell the book
in which she was not read at all.

Alfred de Musset (1810-57) : Souvenir

J'espérais bien pleurer, mais je croyais souffrir
En osant te revoir, place à jamais sacrée,
O la plus chère tombe et la plus ignorée
Où dorme un souvenir !

Que redoutiez-vous donc de cette solitude,
Et pourquoi, mes amis, me preniez-vous la main,
Alors qu'une si douce et si vieille habitude
Me montrait ce chemin ?

Les voilà, ces coteaux, ces bruyères fleuries,
Et ces pas argentins sur le sable muet,
Ces sentiers amoureux, remplis de causeries,
Où son bras m'enlaçait.

Les voilà, ces sapins à la sombre verdure,
Cette gorge profonde aux nonchalants détours,
Ces sauvages amis, dont l'antique murmure
A bercé mes beaux jours.

5. Les voilà, ces buissons où toute ma jeunesse,
Comme un essaim d'oiseaux, chante au bruit de mes pas.
Lieux charmants, beau désert où passa ma maîtresse,
Ne m'attendiez-vous pas ?

Ah ! laissez-les couler, elles me sont bien chères,
Ces larmes que soulève un coeur encor blessé !
Ne les essuyez pas, laissez sur mes paupières
Ce voile du passé !

De Musset : Souvenir

Such my suffering I should more weep
than dare return to this dear spot again:
the sacred grave, the most ignored by men:
where can such recollections sleep?

What could you fear about this withdrawn place,
why seek, my friends, to take me by the hand?
A soft, habitual and familiar land
shows its fond trace.

Here, in the hills and flowering heaths around,
you took your silvered steps on silent sand:
old lovers' trails, by conversation bound,
and we two hand in hand.

I see again the dark green, sombre firs,
the shadowed gorge and casual winding ways:
with friendly giants it seems the whisper stirs
with far-off happy days.

5. Here are the bushes where my youth was spent
with birds and her small steps in harmony;
to charm the wilderness my mistress went:
would you not wait for me?

The tears are dear to me, so let them flow —
the wounded heart will find its peace at last —
do not remove them, have the eyelids throw
a veil on all things past.

Je ne viens point jeter un regret inutile
Dans l'écho de ces bois témoins de mon bonheur.
Fière est cette forêt dans sa beauté tranquille,
Et fier aussi mon coeur.

Que celui-là se livre à des plaintes amères,
Qui s'agenouille et prie au tombeau d'un ami.
Tout respire en ces lieux ; les fleurs des cimetières
Ne poussent point ici.

Voyez ! la lune monte à travers ces ombrages.
Ton regard tremble encor, belle reine des nuits ;
Mais du sombre horizon déjà tu te dégages,
Et tu t'épanouis.

10. Ainsi de cette terre, humide encor de pluie,
Sortent, sous tes rayons, tous les parfums du jour :
Aussi calme, aussi pur, de mon âme attendrie
Sort mon ancien amour.

Que sont-ils devenus, les chagrins de ma vie ?
Tout ce qui m'a fait vieux est bien loin maintenant ;
Et rien qu'en regardant cette vallée amie
Je redeviens enfant.

- - -

28. Oui, sans doute, tout meurt ; ce monde est un grand rêve,
Et le peu de bonheur qui nous vient en chemin,
Nous n'avons pas plus tôt ce roseau dans la main,
Que le vent nous l'enlève.

I'm not complaining uselessly aloud
at woods once witnessing my happiness.
There's pride of beauty in this forest: proud
my heart is to confess.

To hopeless grief go some, to bitter hours
there knelt and praying at a dear friend's tomb.
But all is breathing round; the graveyard flowers
are nowhere here in bloom.

Behold! The moon is rising through the shade;
what trembling beauty will the night queen bring!
But you, already through the dark parade
are yet a thriving thing.

10. And from the earth, still wet with rain, your rays
draw out the perfumes from the day. Because
of soul's calm purity and tender gaze
blooms still the love that was.

So what of life's old sorrows? Far away
is all that one time aged me in its pain,
and I, by looking at this valley, may
become a child again.

- - -

28. Yes, all things die; the world's a dream from old,
our little happiness is not to stay.
And life we take up is a reed to hold,
which winds will snatch away.

Oui, les premiers baisers, oui, les premiers serments
Que deux êtres mortels échangeaient sur terre,
Ce fut au pied d'un arbre effeuillé par les vents,
Sur un roc en poussière.

30. Ils prirent à témoin de leur joie éphémère
Un ciel toujours voilé qui change à tout moment,
Et des astres sans nom que leur propre lumière
Dévore incessamment.

* * *

35. Mes yeux ont contemplé des objets plus funèbres
Que Juliette morte au fond de son tombeau,
Plus affreux que le toast à l'ange des ténèbres
Porté par Roméo.

J'ai vu ma seule amie, à jamais la plus chère,
Devenue elle-même un sépulcre blanchi,
Une tombe vivante où flottait la poussière
De notre mort chéri,

De notre pauvre amour, que, dans la nuit profonde,
Nous avions sur nos coeurs si doucement bercé !
C'était plus qu'une vie, hélas ! c'était un monde
Qui s'était effacé !

Oui, jeune et belle encor, plus belle, osait-on dire,
Je l'ai vue, et ses yeux brillaient comme autrefois.
Ses lèvres s'entr'ouvraient, et c'était un sourire,
Et c'était une voix ;

True, those first kisses, earliest promises,
what these two mortals on the earth have sworn:
the wind picks up, and the stripped tree hisses,
to dust the rock is worn.

30. The witnesses to short-lived joy were night,
the veiled and ever-changing heavens. We see
unnumbered nameless stars whose own thin light
fades out unceasingly.

* * *

35. My eyes have looked on all dead things, have sunk
to seeing Juliet within the tomb;
and, worse, the potion death's dark angel drunk
with Romeo in that room.

I have seen my love, the single thing most dear
to me, become a whitened sepulcher,
a living tomb where only dust drew near
to quietly cherish her.

Our poor love, that in the deepest night,
and over both our hearts held gentle sway,
and more than life, it was a world that right
fading fell away.

Yes, young and beautiful and, dare one say,
I saw her with the shining eyes of then.
Her lips had parted; smiling, faraway
I heard that voice again.

Mais non plus cette voix, non plus ce doux langage,
Ces regards adorés dans les miens confondus ;
Mon coeur, encor plein d'elle, errait sur son visage,
Et ne la trouvait plus.

40. Et pourtant j'aurais pu marcher alors vers elle,
Entourer de mes bras ce sein vide et glacé,
Et j'aurais pu crier : " Qu'as-tu fait, infidèle,
Qu'as-tu fait du passé? "

Mais non : il me semblait qu'une femme inconnue
Avait pris par hasard cette voix et ces yeux ;
Et je laissai passer cette froide statue
En regardant les cieux.

* * *

44. Je ne veux rien savoir, ni si les champs fleurissent;
Ni ce qu'il adviendra du simulacre humain,
Ni si ces vastes cieux éclaireront demain
Ce qu'ils ensevelissent

45. Je me dis seulement : " À cette heure, en ce lieu,
Un jour, je fus aimé, j'aimais, elle était belle. "
J'enfouis ce trésor dans mon âme immortelle,
Et je l'emporte à Dieu !

No longer hers, not soft words as before;
but with the looks perhaps that thoughts allow.
My heart, still full of her, searched face the more,
but could not find her now.

40. I could have walked with her as she was then,
on something cold and empty fond arms cast,
have called her infidel, and asked again:
where have you put the past?

But no, it seemed an unknown woman had
by chance the self-same voice and eyes,
And so I left that form, remote and sad
as are the distant skies.

* * *

44. I do not doubt the fields go flowering on,
or what will come to us poor human kind,
that the skies tomorrow will be bright inclined
to those entombed and gone.

45. I'll only say: at this one hour and place,
I loved, in loveliness was loved in turn:
there is no greater treasure soul can earn
and bring to God's good grace.

The Parnassians

A cooler and more restrained approach came with the Parnassians, who urged an 'art for art's sake' approach to literature'. They prized artistic control, polish, elegance, and impassive objectivity. The movement spanned much of the second half of the century, beginning with Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) and terminating with Theodore de Banville (1823-91) and Sully Prudhomme. (1839-1907)

The Parnassian Poets

Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) turned out a prodigious amount of poetry, novels, short stories, literary and ballet criticism and journalism. He was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine, but lived most of his life in Paris. His travel in Spain produced some of his best work and he also visited Greece, which strengthened his belief in the classical world and the impersonal nature of art. Travel indeed became a distraction from the endless journalism he needed to support two mistresses, his three children and two sisters.

Gautier's novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) disregarded conventional morality and insisted on the sovereignty of the beautiful. He felt that art should be free from moral obligations, the aim of the artist being achieving perfection of form. Gautier knew the leading writers of the day – Gustave Flaubert, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, the Goncourt brothers, Banville, and Baudelaire – and his own work was the point of departure for the poetry of Théodore de Banville and Leconte de Lisle.

Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894) was the acknowledged leader of the Parnassians after 1865 and indeed the foremost poet in France after the ageing Hugo. He gave up law for literature at the Université de Rennes in 1837, was recalled by his family to Réunion, where he remained from 1843 to 1846, before returning to France to

work on *La Démocratie pacifique*, a daily journal that propagated the utopian theories of Charles Fourier. He later abandoned political action.

Leconte de Lisle reacted against the excesses of Romanticism, but his stress on impersonality and discipline was often exaggerated and provocatively expressed. Though the poetry was often overwhelmed by erudition and ornamentation, the shorter poems could be individual and compelling. His first volume of poetry was published in 1852, but he later rearranged the subsequent collections as *Poèmes antiques*, *Poèmes barbares*, and *Poèmes tragiques*. *Derniers poèmes* appeared in 1895.

José Maria de Heredia (1842-1905) was born in Cuba but educated in France, the country that claimed his 'heart and mind.' Heredia studied at the School of Paleography, made friends with Leconte de Lisle, and became in time a leading figure in the Parnassians. His 118 sonnets and some longer pieces were published as *Les Trophées* in 1893. He was elected to the French Academy in 1894, and became librarian of the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal* in 1901. His last work was an edition of the *Bucoliques* by poet André de Chénier.

Heredia's poems capture one fugitive moment of history, or some object of art, generally as one startling image. The verse is very finished, with a range of techniques, and often concludes a final haunting couplet.

Théodore de Banville (1823-1891) was a disciple of the Romantics, a leader of the Parnassians, and an influence on the Symbolists. Banville, the son of a captain in the French navy, was educated in a Paris lycée, but in the approved manner of poets, took little interest in his companions. He resolved on being a man of letters, secured the support of Vigny and others, and conscientiously turned a stream of poems, reviews, literary criticisms and dramatic pieces.

His first book of verse owed much to Victor Hugo, to whom it was dedicated, but his later (1872) *Petit Traité de poésie française* illustrates his interest in the technicalities of versification, where he became an acknowledged master. Rhyme he considered the single most important element in French verse, but joined with the poet and critic Charles Sainte-Beuve to revive an interest in the sonnet. Indeed, he experimented with forms that had had been neglected since the 16th century — e.g. ballade and rondeau — and his own work was noted for the technical virtuosity of delicate wit and fantasy.

René François Armand Sully-Prudhomme (1839-1907) first adopted a lyrical, rather sentimental style, but gradually adopted the restrained and impersonal style of the Parnassians. He was first employed as a clerk in a factory office, which he left in 1860 to study law. In 1865 he started publishing melancholy poems inspired by an unhappy love affair, of which *Le vase brisé* (The Broken Vase) was the best known, and remains so. Later pieces in a more Parnassian manner express his love for scientific and philosophic subjects, and include *La Justice* (Justice: 1878) and *Le Bonheur* (Happiness: 1888). Subsequently he turned his attention to essays on philosophical matters, notably aesthetics.

Prudhomme's health broke under the pressure of writing, and his last years were spent as a recluse at Châtenay. His gifts were nonetheless widely recognised. He was elected to the *Académie française* in 1881, given the *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur* in 1895, and won the first Nobel prize for literature in 1901.

Théophile Gautier (1811-72) : L'Art

Oui, l'oeuvre sort plus belle
D'une forme au travail
Rebelle,
Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.

Point de contraintes fausses !
Mais que pour marcher droit
Tu chausses,
Muse, un cothurne étroit.

Fi du rythme commode,
Comme un soulier trop grand,
Du mode
Que tout pied quitte et prend !

Statuaire, repousse
L'argile que pétrit
Le pouce
Quand flotte ailleurs l'esprit :

Lutte avec le carrare,
Avec le paros dur
Et rare,
Gardiens du contour pur ;

Théophile Gautier : Art

Yes, things beautiful persist
if hard work fashion them:
resist
thus onyx, verse and gem.

No needless fetters, Muse.
For steps correctly placed,
please chose
a buskin tightly laced.

In galumphing rhythm goes
the large boot of a lout;
it throws
a loose foot in and out.

Press as clear thoughts come:
sculptor, force in clay
no thumb
when mind is far away.

Carve Carrara stone,
or with hard Paros fight,
so hone
the contour strict and tight.

Emprunte à Syracuse
Son bronze où fermement
S'accuse
Le trait fier et charmant ;

D'une main délicate
Poursuis dans un filon
D'agate
Le profil d'Apollon.

Peintre, fuis l'aquarelle,
Et fixe la couleur
Trop frêle
Au four de l'émailleur.

Fais les sirènes bleues,
Tordant de cent façons
Leurs queues,
Les monstres des blasons ;

Dans son nimbe trilobe
La Vierge et son Jésus,
Le globe
Avec la croix dessus.

Tout passe. - L'art robuste
Seul a l'éternité.
Le buste
Survit à la cité.

Make Syracuse your choice
where bronze resists the state;
rejoice
in proud and charming trait.

Let the delicate be done;
on vein in agate trace
the sun-
god's profiled face.

Painter: flee the taint
of watercolour hues:
they're faint:
the hard enamel choose.

Draw blue sirens with
a hundred twisting tails:
then give
each heraldic scales.

With three-lobed nimbus show
the Virgin and the Child:
bestow
a cross on globe so styled.

All passes into dust
that art alone enthrall;
the bust
outlives the city's fall.

Et la médaille austère
Que trouve un laboureur
Sous terre
Révèle un empereur.

Les dieux eux-mêmes meurent,
Mais les vers souverains
Demeurent
Plus forts que les airains.

Sculpte, lime, cisèle ;
Que ton rêve flottant
Se scelle
Dans le bloc résistant !

Austere the medal's awe;
when uncouth labourer
will draw
from earth an emperor.

Though gods themselves may pass,
our sovereign verses last,
like brass
will yet outlive the past.

Chisel, carve and file
till floating dream imprint
a smile
on hard, resisting flint.

Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) : Cher ange, vous êtes
belle

Cher ange, vous êtes belle
A faire rêver d'amour,
Pour une seule étincelle
De votre vive prunelle,
Le poète tout un jour.

Air naïf de jeune fille,
Front uni, veines d'azur,
Douce haleine-de vanille,
Bouche rosée où scintille
Sur l'ivoire un rire pur ;

Pied svelte et cambré, main blanche,
Soyeuses boucles de jais,
Col de cygne qui se penche,
Flexible comme la branche
Qu'au soir caresse un vent frais ;

Vous avez, sur ma parole,
Tout ce qu'il faut pour charmer ;
Mais votre âme est si frivole,
Mais votre tête est si folle
Que l'on n'ose vous aimer.

Élégies, 1830

Théophile Gautier : How beautiful you are

How beautiful you are,
dear angel: surely we
will dream of love that you
can star as pupils do
in daily poetry.

Fresh skin, ingénue,
bluish veins beneath:
may breath, unscented too,
from mouth of rosy hue
show ivory beneath.

Arched foot and hand are white;
dark glossy ringlets grace
a neck of swan's delight,
flexible and light
that's bent to wind's embrace.

All, upon my word,
a woman needs to charm.
Yet the heart has heard:
the mad are not preferred
when love will threaten harm.

Charles-Marie Leconte de Lisle (1818-94) : A un poète mort

Toi dont les yeux erraient, altérés de lumière,
De la couleur divine au contour immortel
Et de la chair vivante à la splendeur du ciel,
Dors en paix dans la nuit qui scelle ta paupière.

Voir, entendre, sentir ? Vent, fumée et poussière.
Aimer ? La coupe d'or ne contient que du fiel.
Comme un Dieu plein d'ennui qui déserte l'autel,
Rentre et disperse-toi dans l'immense matière.

Sur ton muet sépulcre et tes os consumés
Qu'un autre verse ou non les pleurs accoutumés,
Que ton siècle banal t'oublie ou te renomme ;

Moi, je t'envie, au fond du tombeau calme et noir,
D'être affranchi de vivre et de ne plus savoir
La honte de penser et l'horreur d'être un homme !

1895

Charles-Marie Leconte de Lisle : To a dead poet

You whose eyes have strayed, seduced by light,
from holy hue to shape that heaven engenders,
and from the living flesh to celestial splendors:
sleep, your eyelids sealed in peaceful night.

To see, hear, feel? Wind, smoke and dust.
To love? The golden cup holds only gall.
A god is bored, has left his shrine; you fall
into a wide dispersal of your self-disgust.

The sepulchre is mute, the burnt bones rot,
another sheds the usual tears or not;
banal, the centuries forget your span.

How much I envy your dark stillness there,
no more to strive for, or to be aware
of shame and horror that belongs to man!

Charles-Marie René Leconte de Lisle (1818-94) : Midi

Midi, Roi des étés, épandu sur la plaine,
Tombe en nappes d'argent des hauteurs du ciel bleu.
Tout se tait. L'air flamboie et brûle sans haleine ;
La Terre est assoupie en sa robe de feu.

L'étendue est immense, et les champs n'ont point d'ombre,
Et la source est tarie où buvaient les troupeaux ;
La lointaine forêt, dont la lisière est sombre,
Dort là-bas, immobile, en un pesant repos.

Seuls, les grands blés mûris, tels qu'une mer dorée,
Se déroulent au loin, dédaigneux du sommeil ;
Pacifiques enfants de la Terre sacrée,
Ils épuisent sans peur la coupe du Soleil.

Parfois, comme un soupir de leur âme brûlante,
Du sein des épis lourds qui murmurent entre eux,
Une ondulation majestueuse et lente
S'éveille, et va mourir à l'horizon poudreux.

Non loin, quelques boeufs blancs, couchés parmi les herbes,
Bavent avec lenteur sur leurs fanons épais,
Et suivent de leurs yeux languissants et superbes
Le songe intérieur qu'ils n'achèvent jamais.

Homme, si, le coeur plein de joie ou d'amertume,
Tu passais vers midi dans les champs radieux,
Fuis ! la Nature est vide et le Soleil consume :
Rien n'est vivant ici, rien n'est triste ou joyeux.

Charles-Marie René Leconte de Lisle : Noon

Noon, and summer's sovereignty throughout the plain
has sheets of silver falling from high folds of blue.
All is silent. The air burns. No breaths remain:
the whole earth clothed within one fiery hue.

An immense expanse of fields, now shadowless, no mark
of shade, no watering place for any ox or sheep.
In the distance looms a forest; its edge is dark;
here all is motionless beneath its heavy sleep.

Alone in walls of ripened wheat at every hand,
a golden sea unfolding that is never still.
So are the peaceful children of a sacred land
that fearlessly of sunlight drink their golden fill.

At times there come the sighs, from ardent souls that flow
between the heavy ears, each one a whispering on,
and an undulation, majestic, long and slow,
till all that's woken up dies at the powdery horizon.

In grass nearby, an odd white herd of oxen lies
munching at the grass. Down dewlaps the juices spill.
Only there is sadness in their superb and languid eyes
hinting at their inmost dreams that nothing can fulfill.

Man: whatever joy or pain the heart assumes
in passing through the fields here radiant with the noon,
beware! Flee! Nature is empty. The Sun consumes.
Nothing is alive, nothing a burden or a boon.

Mais si, désabusé des larmes et du rire,
Altéré de l'oubli de ce monde agité,
Tu veux, ne sachant plus pardonner ou maudire,
Goûter une suprême et morne volupté,

Viens ! Le Soleil te parle en paroles sublimes ;
Dans sa flamme implacable absorbe-toi sans fin ;
Et retourne à pas lents vers les cités infimes,
Le coeur trempé sept fois dans le Néant divin.

Poèmes Antiques 1852

But if, undone by laughter and the tears in them,
evading world's oblivion by its restlessness,
you wish, unable yet to pardon or condemn,
to taste a supreme and dreary voluptuousness,

then come ! The sun has its own high notions to impart.
Give yourself endlessly to the flames' close press.
Return with slow steps to the unimportant cities, heart
seven times soaked through with heavenly nothingness.

José-Maria de Heredia (1842-1905) : Soir de bataille

Le choc avait été très rude. Les tribuns
Et les centurions, ralliant les cohortes,
Humaient encor dans l'air où vib:raient leurs voix fortes
La chaleur du carnage et ses âcres parfums.

D'un oeil morne, comptant leurs compagnons défunts,
Les soldats regardaient, comme des feuilles mortes,
Au loin, tourbillonner les archers de Phraortes ;
Et la sueur coulait de leurs visages bruns.

C'est alors qu'apparut, tout hérissé de flèches,
Rouge du flux vermeil de ses blessures fraîches,
Sous la pourpre flottante et l'airain rutilant,

Au fracas des buccins qui sonnaient leur fanfare,
Superbe, maîtrisant son cheval qui s'effare,
Sur le ciel enflammé, l'Imperator sanglant.

Les_Trophées 1893

José-Maria de Heredia : Evening of Battle

The shock had been extreme. From these events
were the tribunes rallying the centurion rows,
vibrant the air still as raucous voices rose
above the bloodshed and the acrid scents.

Disconsolate they looked, companions sent
to earth like leaves, the whirling Phraates bows
drawn up, when bronzed and manly feature knows
what flood of sweat had marked each incident.

They saw the arrows' anger, deep abrasion
of the skin, its rubied laceration:
beneath the brass and purple spread the gore.

The trumpets called up an indomitable force.
Magnificent, wrestling with his frightened horse
against the sun, the bloodied Emperor.

José-Maria de Heredia (1842-1905) : La Sieste

Pas un seul bruit d'insecte ou d'abeille en maraude,
Tout dort sous les grands bois accablés de soleil
Où le feuillage épais tamise un jour pareil
Au velours sombre et doux des mousses d'émeraude.

Criblant le dôme obscur, Midi splendide y rôde
Et, sur mes cils mi-clos alanguis de sommeil,
De mille éclairs furtifs forme un réseau vermeil
Qui s'allonge et se croise à travers l'ombre chaude.

Vers la gaze de feu que trament les rayons,
Vole le frêle essaim des riches papillons
Qu'enivrent la lumière et le parfum des sèves ;

Alors mes doigts tremblants saisissent chaque fil,
Et dans les mailles d'or de ce filet subtil,
Chasseur harmonieux, j'emprisonne mes rêves.

Les_Trophées 1893

José-Maria de Heredia : The Siesta

No hum of insect, no marauding bee
in this long sleep beneath the sun-drenched woods.
The thick foliage looks in these rich neighbourhoods
as moss does: emerald dark and velvety.

About the dome, the splendid Noon will see,
in half-closed eyelids' languid sisterhoods,
a thousand flashes knit in interludes
as some warm, shadowy identity.

Across the fiery gauze of rays there lies
a frail but wealthy swarm of butterflies:
the light intoxicates; the sap steams.

With trembling fingers I will grasp all yet,
in golden meshes of this subtle net
hold, harmonious hunter, fast to dreams.

Théodore Faullain de Banville (1823-91) : XII Ballade de
Banville aux Enfants perdus

Je le sais bien que Cythère est en deuil !
Que son jardin, souffleté par l'orage,
Ô mes amis, n'est plus qu'un sombre écueil
Agonisant sous le soleil sauvage.
La solitude habite son rivage.
Qu'importe ! allons vers les pays fictifs !
Cherchons la plage où nos désirs oisifs
S'abreuveront dans le sacré mystère
Fait pour un chœur d'esprits contemplatifs :
Embarquons-nous pour la belle Cythère.

La grande mer sera notre cercueil ;
Nous servirons de proie au noir naufrage.
Le feu du ciel punira notre orgueil
Et l'aquilon nous garde son outrage.
Qu'importe ! allons vers le clair paysage !
Malgré la mer jalouse et les récifs,
Venez, partons comme des fugitifs,
Loin de ce monde au souffle délétère.
Nous dont les cœurs sont des ramiers plaintifs,
Embarquons-nous pour la belle Cythère.

Théodore Faullain de Banville : Ballade XII to the Lost Children

I know Cythera is in mourning's thrall
and that her garden has been stripped by storms,
but, O my friends, it is a dark pitfall
to suffer under sun's most savage norms,
a wild shore's loneliness in all its forms.
No matter that the fictive country there
has beach throw up what idle passions bear.
We'll drink as sacred mysteries allow,
and choirs of contemplative minds declare:
let's leave for beautiful Cythera now.

Unbounded seas may make our confined end,
and we are prey to shipwreck's dark design.
Let fire of heaven on our pride descend,
the harsh north wind stir up the angry brine.
What then? We'll find a landscape clear and fine.
Despite the jealous sea, despite the reefs,
let's leave this place behind as fugitives.
Far from this world, whose breath is stale and sour,
we have the hearts that earnest rowing gives:
let's leave for beautiful Cythera now.

Des serpents gris se traînent sur le seuil
Où souriait Cypris, la chère image
Aux tresses d'or, la vierge au doux accueil !
Mais les amours sur le plus haut cordage
Nous chantent l'hymne adoré du voyage.
Héros cachés dans ces corps maladifs,
Fuyons, partons sur nos légers esquifs,
Vers le divin bocage où la panthère
Pleure d'amour sous les rosiers lascifs :
Embarquons-nous pour la belle Cythère.

Envoi

Rassasions d'azur nos yeux pensifs !
Oiseaux chanteurs, dans la brise expansifs,
Ne souillons pas nos ailes sur la terre.
Volons, charmés, vers les Dieux primitifs !
Embarquons-nous pour la belle Cythère.

Grey snakes are hanging on the threshold there.
When Cypris smiles, the happy scene affords
a virgin greeting us with golden hair.
But loves here tangled with the topmost cords
intone their hymns as we go loving-wards,
and heroes in their sickly bodies hide.
Let's leave in our light skiff, let's flee as those
that gain the sacred grove where panthers vow
their cries of love beneath licentious rose:
let's leave for beautiful Cythera now.

Envoi

Let's have our thoughtful eyes absorb the blue!
We fill the swelling breeze as songbirds do.
Let's not defile our wings with why or how,
but go to where the ancient Gods speak true;
let's leave for beautiful Cythera now.

René-François Sully Prudhomme (1839-1907) : Le vase
brisé

Le vase où meurt cette verveine
D'un coup d'éventail fut fêlé ;
Le coup dut l'effleurer à peine :
Aucun bruit ne l'a révélé.

Mais la légère meurtrissure,
Mordant le cristal chaque jour,
D'une marche invisible et sure
En a fait lentement le tour.

Son eau fraîche a fui goutte à goutte,
Le suc des fleurs s'est épuisé ;
Personne encore ne s'en doute ;
N'y touchez pas, il est brisé.

Souvent aussi la main qu'on aime,
Effleurant le coeur, le meurtrit ;
Puis le coeur se fend de lui-même,
La fleur de son amour périt ;

Toujours intact aux yeux du monde,
Il sent croître et pleurer tout bas
Sa blessure fine et profonde ;
Il est brisé, n'y touchez pas.

Stances et poèmes 1865

René-François Sully Prudhomme : The Broken Vase

The vase wherein verbena dies
by fan was cracked, a feather's touch:
more half-way graze than otherwise;
nor did the sound amount to much.

Just the same, that slightest bruise
bit through the crystal every day,
invisibly, that walk will use
a stealthy silence for its way.

Fresh water leaked out, drop by drop,
when food for flowers it can't allot;
but none would note the flowering stop,
yet vase was broken: touch it not.

What heresies will hand commit,
attacking heart it cherishes;
when, by itself, the heart will split
and flower of love then perishes.

Intact will be the vase we see,
with grief and growth within its lot.
The wound runs deep: impeccably
the vase is broken: touch it not.

René-François Sully Prudhomme (1839-1907) :

L'automne

L'azur n'est plus égal comme un rideau sans pli.
La feuille, à tout moment, tressaille, vole et tombe ;
Au bois, dans les sentiers où le taillis surplombe,
Les taches de soleil, plus larges, ont pâli.

Mais l'oeuvre de la sève est partout accompli :
La grappe autour du cep se colore et se bombe,
Dans le verger la branche au poids des fruits succombe,
Et l'été meurt, content de son devoir rempli.

Dans l'été de ta vie enrichis-en l'automne ;
Ô mortel, sois docile à l'exemple que donne,
Depuis des milliers d'ans, la terre au genre humain ;

Vois : le front, lisse hier, n'est déjà plus sans rides,
Et les cheveux épais seront rares demain :
Fuis la honte et l'horreur de vieillir les mains vides.

Les vaines tendresses 1875

René-François Sully Prudhomme : Autumn

No longer is the curtain one unbroken blue;
the leaf at any moment drifts and falls
The sunny moment on the woodland pathway stalls,
and more the sunlight spreads: diffuse, a pallid hue.

The sap will not encounter still more work to do;
bruised with red are now the vineyard bowered shoots,
the orchard branch is bent beneath its heavy fruits
and summer dies, content all duty is attended to.

In the summer of your lives accept what autumn gives,
be sure, O mortal man, that this example lives
through long millennia, and for the human race.

See, the brow unwrinkled, not so always stays,
or yesterday's thick hair forever has its place;
flee shame and horror of the empty-handed ways.

Symbolism

Thus far, French poetry is largely intelligible. Styles and intellectual focus have changed, but the eternal commonplaces of poetry — love, friendship, meditations on death, etc. — are found just the same, if in a new setting. But now appear the deep streams of self-questioning that were to unite in Symbolism and its many tributaries. Symbolism was a complex movement that deliberately extended the evocative power of words to express the feelings, sensations and states of mind that lie beyond everyday awareness. The open-ended symbols created by Charles Baudelaire brought the invisible into being through the visible, and linked the invisible through other sensory perceptions, notably smell and sound. Mallarmé — the high priest of the French movement — theorized that symbols were of two types. One was created by the projection of inner feelings onto the world outside. The other existed as nascent words that slowly permeated the consciousness and expressed a state of mind initially unknown to their originator.

None of this came about without cultivation, and indeed dedication. Poets focused on the inner life. They explored strange cults and countries. They wrote in allusive, enigmatic, musical and ambiguous styles. Rimbaud deranged his senses and declared 'Je est un autre'. Von Hofmannstahl created his own language. Valéry retired from the world as a private secretary, before returning to a mastery of traditional French verse.

Eventually, of course, denied influence in the everyday world, poets turned inward, to private thoughts, associations and the unconscious. Like good Marxist intellectuals they policed the area they arrogated to themselves, and sought to correct and

purify the language that would evoke its powers. Syntax was rearranged by Mallarmé. Rhythm, rhyme and stanza patterning were loosened or rejected. Words were purged of past associations (Modernism), of non-visual associations (Imagism), of histories of usage (Futurism), of social restraint (Dadaism) and of practical purpose (Surrealism). By a sort of belated Romanticism, poetry was returned to the exploration of the inner lands of the irrational. Even Postmodernism, with its bric-a-brac of received media images and mundane language, ensures that gaps are left for the emerging unconscious to engage our interest.

Where Baudelaire felt life grievously, and developed a style to express that experience, Mallarmé started with words and turned them into beautiful creations that largely evaded the exterior world. What mattered was the coherence of that inner vision, and the sheer beauty of the verse.

Could the exterior world be evaded altogether, when poetry would refer to nothing but its own abstractions, and so aspire to music, the most creative of the arts? The doctrine came from Edgar Allan Poe, but was taken up most enthusiastically by French poets who strove for a *poésie pure* of unclouded lyric intensity. Ideas of the workaday world, its decencies, passions, or rationale, were unwanted, indeed were detrimental. Only two things counted. There was the language itself: the phonetic properties of words, their connotations, sounds, half-heard melodies, etymologies, etc. And there were symbols: the fire, heaven, ice, lilies, soul, etc. that each poet explored and developed. The symbols were not arbitrary, and were more discovered than created by the poet.

How discovered? There were many views, each spawning a line of poetic development. Some poets regarded symbols as

corresponding to an ultimate reality (Baudelaire) or to supernal beauty (Poe). That was the Neoplatonist tradition, which sees poetry as transcending the world of appearances and apprehending divine truth itself. Plato had used myths, images and symbols to express his ideas, and the Neoplatonists added a good deal of their own, from Roman Egypt and middle eastern mythology, alchemy and astrology. The result could be baffling to the uninitiated, but by using these symbols poets were tapping into what we now call archetypes, and emphasizing the metaphoric nature of language.

All this was far from apparent at the time, and many poets discounted a universe of pure forms existing as the primary heritage of mankind. Nonetheless, poetic language might still be the royal road to understanding, or the medium in which understanding revealed itself, for certainly the society around them provided no such help. The commercial world was crassly materialistic, for all its philanthropy and belief in progress. From such isolation, it was only a short step to the New Criticism doctrine, that a poem is an autonomous object complexly mediated by language, i.e. the poem may or may not refer to real things, but exists only in the form in which it presents itself.

Others were unwilling to grant this exclusive prestige to language. Each art form offered its own vision, as did the compelling power of love or religious experience. In the hermetic tradition, moreover, understanding could not be earned without effort and pain, so that a facile juggling with words would never answer as poetry. Even Wittgenstein believed that philosophy had to be undertaken with the whole being, and not as an intellectual pursuit. Poets faced an equally arduous apprenticeship. Openness to experience was

essential, and that experience extended beyond conventional beliefs and behaviour. Yeats and the Italian ermetismo movement were much exercised by magic, and indeed by all those abstruse aspects of learning hidden from the profane majority, an attitude that transferred itself to Modernism.

Mallarmé in particular developed an art of suggestion, what he called his 'fictions'. Rare words were introduced, syntactical intricacies, private associations and baffling images. Metonymy replaced metaphor as symbol, and was in turn replaced by single words, which opened in imagination to multiple levels of signification. Time was suspended, and the usual supports of plot and narrative removed. Even the implied poet faded away, and there were then only objects, enigmatically introduced but somehow made right and necessary by verse skill. Music indeed was the condition to which poetry aspired, and Verlaine and Valéry were among many who concentrated efforts to that end.

So appeared a dichotomy between the inner and outer lives. In actuality, poets led humdrum existences, but what they described was rich and often illicit: the festering beauties of courtesans and dance-hall entertainers; far away countries and their native peoples; a world-weariness that came with drugs, isolation, alcohol and bought sex. Much was mixed up in this movement — decadence, aestheticism, romanticism, and the occult — but its isms had a rational purpose, which were to greatly influence later poetry movements.

The vast majority of contemporaries saw the matter quite differently, however. Though impressed by the purity of style, and the originator's obvious integrity, they felt that Mallarmé's approach was wrong-headed: impressions, feelings and interest in poems refusing to close on a single meaning. *Le*

Cygne is one of the most celebrated poems in the French language, and is translated reasonably fully here. The rendering of *Toast funèbre* is only one possible reading of the poem, however, in a very different style, (verse effects in place of obscure phrases) though one where the reader, by comparing original to translation, can see how thought gave art its first prompting, these being then developed in whatever form seemed appropriate. Technique is therefore what most contemporaries learned from Symbolism: the exquisite musicality without the philosophy.

The Symbolist Poets

Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855) was a French Romantic poet whose work greatly influenced the Symbolists and Surrealists.

Nerval was brought up by relatives but in 1820 went to live with his father in Paris and attend the Collège de Charlemagne, where he became friendly with Théophile Gautier. He produced a notable translation of Goethe's *Faust*, fell in love with the actress Jenny Colon, was shattered by her death and travelled to the Levant, writing 1843-52 travelogue: *Voyage en Orient*. In his period of greatest creativity that followed, Nerval was institutionalized at least eight times but created prose and verse collages that mixed everyday observations with visions and fantasies that threatened his grip on sanity.

Les Chimères (The Chimeras: 1854) is a sonnet sequence of extraordinary complexity that also conveys the musical quality of his writing. Nerval's years of destitution and anguish ended in 1855 when he was found hanging from a lamppost in the rue de la Vieille Lanterne in Paris.

Charles-Pierre Baudelaire (1821-1867) was poet and literary critics whose collection *Les Fleurs du Mal* was probably the most influential book of poetry in the 19th century, introducing themes that became central to the whole Modernist movement. Baudelaire was the son of a middle-ranking civil servant who had some talent as a painter and poet, but unfortunately died when his son was only six. Baudelaire's mother then married Jacques Aupick, a career soldier who rose to the rank of general, served as ambassador to Spain and the Ottoman Empire, and ended a glittering career as a senator under the Second Empire. The young Baudelaire was educated at the *Collège Royal* and the prestigious *Lycée Louis-le-Grand*, showing promise but also a leaning to 'precocious depravity' and black moods of depression. Indiscipline brought about his expulsion, but the young man passed his *baccalauréat* and went on to become a nominal student of law at the Collège Saint-Louis, in fact spending more time in the Latin Quarter of Paris. To wean him away from dubious company, his stepfather sent Baudelaire on a journey to India, but the youth jumped ship at Réunion, returning to France in February 1841. Thereafter Baudelaire lived as a dandified man letters on his inheritance. which was half spent before his family restricted him to a small allowance. He may have taken part in the working-class uprising of June 1848 and in the resistance to the Bonapartist military coup of December 1851, but thereafter focussed his energies on literary production.

Baudelaire began translating the works of Edgar Allen Poe, for interest and income, and also studied the works of Joseph de Maistre, an anti-naturalist and anti-humanist thinker, though still considering himself an orthodox Catholic. He wrote poems to Apollonie Sabatier, a high-class courtesan, and in 1854 had a brief liaison with the actress Marie Daubrun. The *Revue des*

deux mondes punished 18 of his poems in June 1855, and in the ensuing notoriety allowed a full collection to appear in 1857, which fell afoul of the censor, occasioning a heavy fine. Six poems had to be withdrawn and though republished in Belgium in 1866 in the collection *Les Épaves* (Wreckage), the official ban was not removed until 1949. Thus appeared *Les Fleurs du mal*, then a byword for depravity and obscenity.

Baudelaire's last years saw some of his best poetry but were lived with his mother, darkened by a growing sense of failure and disillusion. From this period also date translations from de Quincey, critical essays on French poets and painters. In increasing ill health he moved to Belgium, but died from paralysis and aphasia in a Paris nursing home. So ended an outwardly unsuccessful life. Baudelaire's one book of poetry, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, was updated at times but not a commercial success, indeed was out of print at the time of the poet's death. The inspiration for his love poetry, Jeanne Duval, had not a good reputation, and was often openly unfaithful. Few could have predicted the subsequent reputation, or the importance of *Correspondances* (Correspondances) whose synesthesia underlies much of later Symbolist work.

Émile-Hortensius-Charles Cros (1842-1888) was an unlikely combination of inventor, scientist, poet and humorist. He was born into an equally gifted family that produced a grammarian, surgeon, artist and a pretender to the throne of Araucania and Patagonia. Cros himself began his studies in medicine but soon turned to scientific and literary work. He almost invented the phonograph and the colour photograph, but also found time to publish poetry in the short-lived *Renaissance littéraire et artistique*, whose fellow contributors included Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Verlaine.

The lyric poet Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) was first associated with the Parnassians but later with the Symbolists, or more generally, through his lifestyle, with the Decadents. He was born into comfortable circumstances as the son of an army officer, passed his *baccalauréat* with distinction, and became a clerk in an insurance company. His private life was something else: he frequented café life, mixed with new and upcoming poets and published in their literary reviews. His first collection *Poèmes saturniens* included pieces supposedly centred on his cousin Élisa, who married someone else and died in 1867. In June 1869 Verlaine fell in love with Mathilde Mauté, and the two were married the following August, but his homosexual inclinations, and notably an affair with Arthur Rimbaud, destroyed the marriage. Verlaine left his wife and infant son to wander northern France, Belgium and then London with Rimbaud, but famously quarrelled with his lover, wounding Rimbaud in Brussels in July 1873, for which he received a two-year prison sentence.

The second collection, *Romance sans parole* (Songs without words), which was published while Verlaine was behind bars, contains some of the most musical of poems in the French language. But Verlaine was never reconciled with Rimbaud, had to teach French and drawing in England for a while, before returning to France in 1877. *Sagesse* (Wisdom) dates from 1878, but though his literary gifts were slowly being recognised, in France and England, his social life began its long decline. He made an unsuccessful attempt at farming but soon relapsed into drink and debauchery. Several collections appeared in the years that followed but had little of real substance, growing recognition and lecture tours notwithstanding, and Verlaine's last years were spent in hospitals and friends' lodging houses.

Tristan Corbière (1845-1875) created an unsentimental literary persona useful to the young T.S. Eliot. He died young, of tuberculosis, and produced only the one collection of poems: *Les Amours jaunes* in 1873, not at the time well known but remarkable for a verse combining self-lacerating irony, slang and the rhythms of everyday speech.

Corbière was educated at the lycées of Saint-Brieuc and Nantes, and then settled in Roscoff, where, apart from three years in Paris, he spent the remainder of his life. Corbière did not belong to any literary school and was largely unknown until Paul Verlaine included him in *Les Poètes maudits* of 1884.

Germain Nouveau (1851-1920), wrote poems of a religious and erotic inspiration, though much had to be published posthumously, where it influenced the Surrealists in particular. Nouveau spent his childhood in Aix-en-Provence, moving to Paris in 1874, where he became enamoured of Rimbaud, and indeed lived with him in a trip to England. Nouveau subsequently travelled to Belgium and the Netherlands, met Verlaine and became a close friend. Nouveau contributed to various literary journals, taught in a Paris lycee but had to be hospitalised after a mental breakdown in 1891. Subsequently, Nouveau adopted a life of voluntary poverty. He travelled to Rome, made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostelo and returned to his village of birth in 1911, where he lived to his death in 1920.

As a young man, Jean Nicolas Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) wrote some of the most innovative poems in the language, greatly influencing the Symbolists and the Surrealists, before, in 1875, giving up literature altogether for life as an overseas trader and gun runner. He returned to France in 1891 with a tumour of the knee, which, despite amputation, deepened into

terminal bone cancer. Rimbaud died shortly afterwards in a Marseilles hospital. The man made arduous trips in little-travelled parts of Africa, often under great hardship, but it is for his Dionysian power of verse and the liberation of language that Rimbaud is studied and remembered.

Rimbaud was a difficult character throughout his short and troubled life. He grew up in Charleville in the Ardennes, the second son of an army captain who left family matters to his strong-willed wife. The boy was an infant prodigy, excelling at literary matters at school, but also impatient with provincial manners and hypocrisy. By 16, Rimbaud was pouring his adolescent longing for freedom into poems of astonishing directness and power, and in 1870 ran off to find that freedom in Paris. After a brief spell in prison, he wandered through northern France and Belgium, was brought back to Charleville, escaped again to the Paris Commune, and with the failure of the Commune was again obliged to return home.

Rimbaud nonetheless resolved on a literary life of his own devising. The senses had to be systematically rearranged, by an imposed martyrdom of fasting, pain, alcohol and drugs. The traditional forms that Rimbaud had mastered brilliantly were now to be broken and the hallucinatory visions made the controlling force. To demonstrate the method to Verlaine, Rimbaud composed his famous *Le Bateau ivre*, and then moved in with the couple, antagonising all but Verlaine with his arrogance, rudeness and obscenity. The subsequent homosexual scandal broke the marriage, though Rimbaud did return to Charleville in the forlorn hope that Verlaine could patch things up with his wife. In the tenuous poems written at this time, the *Derniers Vers* (Last Verses) Rimbaud seems to express his longing for spiritual regeneration in pared-down

verse forms that are almost abstract patterns of musical and symbolic allusiveness.

These were to be his last poems in any near-traditional verse form. His *Illuminations* were in an elliptical and esoteric prose where the dense rhythms and allusions would have to serve for meaning. In April 1873 Rimbaud embarked on his last major work, *Une Saison en enfer* (A Season in Hell), which seem to consider various aims in life before dismissing them in turn: cultivation of the mind, religious conversion, and others. The book's final section, *Adieu* (Goodbye), takes a nostalgic look at Rimbaud's past life and then moves on, declaring that the spiritual battle has been won.

Stéphane Mallarmé, (1842-1898) was a schoolteacher all his life, but also the author of some exquisitely-wrought but difficult poems on the nature of literary imagination. That he turned away from the harsh world of reality in search of another, inner world of security may be the result of an early life made unhappy by the deaths of his mother, his sister Maria, and then his father in 1863. He spent some time in London to improve his English, but the teaching life was not congenial and did not pay well. There were further career difficulties, but Mallarmé did achieve a steady recognition as a Symbolist poet, producing poems that captured the admiration of the avant garde, in the nineteenth century and today.

Mallarmé's is a poetry made difficult by subject matter and acute thinning of their language. Though there is nothing beyond everyday reality, this nothingness lies the essence of perfect forms, which are the poet's task to perceive and crystallise. In doing so, the poet is more than a descriptive versifier, becoming more a god who uses all the complex and subtle resources of the language.

Symbolism had followers across Europe and Russia, but particularly in the Belgian Émile Verhaeren (1855-1916) who wrote strongly in French across a wide range of interests. Verhaeren was educated at Brussels and Ghent, studied at Louvain, and joined the Brussels group creating the 1890s literary and cultural renaissance. His first collection of poems (*Les Flamandes*, 1883) created a sensation, and he followed these violently naturalistic pieces by a collection of short stories. These were followed by a flood of poems and plays, more than thirty collections, plus works of art criticism.

The themes of Verhaeren's fresh and direct language, which has both power and flexibility, are Flanders, the desire for progress, the brotherhood of man, the emancipation of the working class, and the tender, mature love for his wife. The poems also celebrate the painters of Flanders, the epic beauty of the industrial age and the pleasures of its common people.

Henri de Régnier (1864-1936), a member of the Normandy aristocracy, trained for the law but became a leading poet of the early French twentieth century. His first volume of poems, *Lendemains* (Tomorrows) appeared in 1885, and was followed by *Les Jeux rustiques et divins* (Games—Tough and Divine) in 1897, *Les Médailles d'argile* (Clay Medals) in 1900, and *La Sandale ailée* (The Winged Sandal) in 1906. He married a daughter of Heredia in 1906, and his style gradually became more conventional and formal.

Jules Laforgue (1860-1887) was born in Uruguay but died in Paris, young but the master of a free verse style and ironic self-mockery that was useful to early Modernists. Laforgue moved in 1866 to France, where he was educated and brought up by relatives, took an interest in the visual arts, becoming

secretary to Charles Ephrussi, an art collector and editor of the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. In 1881 he was appointed reader to the Empress Augusta in Berlin, where he remained five years. 1886 saw the marriage to the English woman, Leah Lee, in London, from which the couple moved to penury in Paris, where Laforgue died the following year of tuberculosis.

His verse, (*Les Complaintes* in 1885, *L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune* in 1886 and *Le Concile féerique* in 1886) was written in Germany, and expresses a boredom and loneliness in everyday existence. Inspired by Rimbaud and Corbière, Laforgue also created a looser verse that incorporated common speech and music hall expressions in natural speech patterns that even now seems surprisingly modern.

Paul Claudel (1868-1955) was born to a family of farmers and gentry in Villeneuve-sur-Fère, a village in the Champagne region of France. From quiet beginnings, he entered the diplomatic service in 1890 and enjoyed an outstanding career that took him from New York to China, back to Europe and then to south America. While also pursuing a literary career, he was made the French ambassador to Tokyo (1921), to Washington (1927), and to Brussels (1933).

Claudel is known for his poetry in a variety of forms, but above all for his poetic dramas, where the theatrical elements are fused in the Symbolist manner to evoke a unified mood of atmosphere and leitmotif. The early plays portray men of action, but Claudel underwent a religious crisis in 1900 and entered a Benedictine monastery. Not suited to the monastic life, Claudel then left France for a consular post in China. On ship he met a married Polish woman, with whom he shared an tempestuous affair for the next four years, one which threatened his diplomatic career and afterwards became a

major theme of the many deeply religious plays he wrote over the 1906-31 period. Claudel also developed the unrhymed prose poem that came to be known as the verset claudélien, a unique contribution to French prosody.

Paul Valéry was born at Sète, a small Mediterranean port where his father was a customs officer. He studied law at Montpellier but was more drawn to literature, meeting the Symbolist poets and occasionally contributing to their periodicals. After an unhappy love affair, Valéry gave up literature altogether in 1892, became a civil servant, married Mallarmé's daughter and until 1922 supported himself as a private secretary to the director of the French press association. In 1912, Gide persuaded him to revise some old work for publication, which led to the creation of *La jeune parc*, a five-year task that brought Valéry fame and reawakened the urge to write. More than poetry, it was the contents of his own mind that fascinated Valéry, and he eventually published *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci*, the result of his early morning meditations on the subject.

Paul Valéry (1871-1945) was the last of the great Symbolist poets. His important poems appeared in *La Jeune Parque* (The Young Fate: 1917), *Album de vers anciens 1890-1900* (Album of Old Verse: 1920) and *Charmes ou poèmes* (Charms and Poems: 1922). The last contained the famous *The Graveyard by the Sea*. Valéry also wrote many essays on literary, scientific and social issues.

Gérard de Nerval (180-55) : Delfica

La connais-tu, Dafné, cette ancienne romance,¹
Au pied du sycomore, ou sous les lauriers blancs,
Sous l'olivier, le myrte, ou les saules tremblants,
Cette chanson d'amour... qui toujours recommence !

Reconnais-tu le Temple, au péristyle immense,
Et les citrons amers où s'imprimaient tes dents ?
Et la grotte, fatale aux hôtes imprudents,
Où du dragon vaincu dort l'antique semence.

Ils reviendront ces dieux que tu pleures toujours !
Le temps va ramener l'ordre des anciens jours ;
La terre a tressailli d'un souffle prophétique...

Cependant la sibylle au visage latin
Est endormie encor sous l'arc de Constantin :
— Et rien n'a dérangé le sévère portique

Gérard de Nerval: *After Daphne*

Daphne, you know that ancient song of then
beneath the sycamore, the flowering bay
where olive, willow and the myrtle sway,
that song of love . . . that must then start again!

You know the temple's peristyle, the keep
of bitter lemons where the teeth-marks stay,
the fatal grotto that careless hosts betray,
where conquered dragon's seed is lost in sleep.

They will return, the god, where weeping stays
the order redolent of other days,
and earth, which trembles with prophetic breath . . .

Meanwhile the sibyl of a Latin mien,
once more surveils the Arch of Constantine
— that none disturb that frowning breadth.

Gérard de Nerval (1808-55) : El desdichado

Je suis le ténébreux, – le veuf, – l'inconsolé,
Le prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
Ma seule étoile est morte, – et mon luth constellé
Porte le soleil noir de la Mélancolie.

Dans la nuit du tombeau, toi qui m'as consolé,
Rends-moi le Pausilippe et la mer d'Italie,
La fleur qui plaisait tant à mon coeur désolé,
Et la treille où le pampre à la rose s'allie.

Suis-je Amour ou Phébus ? ... Lusignan ou Biron ?
Mon front est rouge encor du baiser de la reine ;
J'ai rêvé dans la grotte où nage la sirène...

Et j'ai deux fois vainqueur traversé l'Achéron ;
Modulant tout à tour sur la lyre d'Orphée
Les soupirs de la sainte et les cris de la fée.

Les Chimères 1854

Gérard de Nerval : The Disinherited One

I am the dark one – the widower, unconsolated,
the Prince of Aquitaine in his broken tower.
My one star is dead – and my starred lute's power
has Melancholy in its black sun's hold.

In the dark night's tomb, it is you consoles,
gives back Posilipo and the Italian sea,
the flower that so pleases my sorrowing plea,
the trellis where vine is woven in with rose.

Am I Eros or Apollo? Lusignan or Biron?
My forehead is rouged from the queen's soft whim;
the cave I dream of has the siren swim.

Twice victorious I have crossed Acheron,
modulating in turn on Orpheus lyres
the sighs of the saint and the fairy cries.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1967) : L'Albatros

Souvent, pour s'amuser, les hommes d'équipage
Prennent des albatros, vastes oiseaux des mers,
Qui suivent, indolents compagnons de voyage,
Le navire glissant sur les gouffres amers.

À peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches,
Que ces rois de l'azur, maladroits et honteux,
Laissent piteusement leurs grandes ailes blanches
Comme des avirons traîner à côté d'eux.

Ce voyageur ailé, comme il est gauche et veule!
Lui, naguère si beau, qu'il est comique et laid!
L'un agace son bec avec un brûle-gueule,
L'autre mime, en boitant, l'infirme qui volait!

Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;
Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.

Charles Baudelaire : Albatros

Often mariners for sport will snare
the wide-winged albatross that scours the deep,
companions of their voyages that fare
across the mordant chasms waters keep.

Once caught, the bird is promptly hauled on deck,
when sovereign of the blue needs look ashamed:
the white wings trailing seem a piteous wreck
as though its very oars were clipped or maimed.

The great winged traveler accepts its meek
but gauche or comical or clumsy fate.
A sailor with his pipe prods at the beak
while another, limping, mocks its crippled gait.

And so the Poet, who can rule the clouds,
at home with tempests and with arrows loosed,
becomes an exile here, by jeering crowds
has, by his bulk of wings, his walk reduced.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1967) : Harmonie du Soir

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir ;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir ;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir ;
Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu'on afflige ;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.

Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu'on afflige,
Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir !
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir ;
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige !
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor !

Les Fleurs du mal 1857

Charles Baudelaire : Harmony of the Evening

So comes the hour when, trembling on its stem,
each flower collapses into censor's fume;
revolving sounds and scents of evening bloom
as though a slow, unsettling waltz invited them.

Each flower collapses into censor's fume;
the violin quivers like an afflicted soul;
revolving sounds and scents of evening bloom:
and the sky is stretched out, sad and beautiful.

The violin quivers like an afflicted soul;
the tender heart that hates black nothingness.
The sky is stretched out, sad and beautiful.
The sun in chilling blood will evanesce . . .

The tender heart rejects black nothingness;
bright vestiges only is the past to be.
The sun in chilling blood will evanesce . . .
like a monstrosity stays your memory.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1967) : Spleen

Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle
Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis,
Et que de l'horizon embrassant tout le cercle
Il nous verse un jour noir plus triste que les nuits;

Quand la terre est changée en un cachot humide,
Où l'Espérance, comme une chauve-souris,
S'en va battant les murs de son aile timide
Et se cognant la tête à des plafonds pourris;

Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses traînées
D'une vaste prison imite les barreaux,
Et qu'un peuple muet d'infâmes araignées
Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux,

Des cloches tout à coup sautent avec furie
Et lancent vers le ciel un affreux hurlement,
Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie
Qui se mettent à geindre opiniâtrement.

Et de longs corbillards, sans tambours ni musique,
Défilent lentement dans mon âme; l'Espoir,
Vaincu, pleure, et l'Angoisse atroce, despotique,
Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir.

Les Fleurs du mal 1857

Charles Baudelaire : Spleen

When the whole sky presses downwards like a lid,
and mind complains, with endless boredom fights,
and the whole horizon is contained amid
a day poured out that's sadder than the nights.

With earth itself a damp confining place,
and hopes flit round like some tormented bat,
recoiling from walls where its frail wings trace
a fluttering confusion as to where it's at.

When the immense, spreading falls of rain
come to imitate thick prison bars,
and loathsome things like spiders fill our brain
with muzzy nets of tiny threads and spars.

And when in sudden fury clang the bells
that send a fearful howl into the sky,
all around are wandering spirits, spells
both brute and fatherless, that whine and sigh.

And so with neither drum nor dirge advance
long hearses through my soul, where hope must drag
itself dejectedly through tears to plant
on my cramped skull its black triumphant flag.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1967) : Le Balcon

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,
Ô toi, tous mes plaisirs! ô toi, tous mes devoirs!
Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs,
Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses!

Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon,
Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeurs roses.
Que ton sein m'était doux! que ton coeur m'était bon!
Nous avons dit souvent d'impérissables choses
Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon.

Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!
Que l'espace est profond! que le coeur est puissant!
En me penchant vers toi, reine des adorées,
Je croyais respirer le parfum de ton sang.
Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!

La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison,
Et mes yeux dans le noir devinaient tes prunelles,
Et je buvais ton souffle, ô douceur! ô poison!
Et tes pieds s'endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles.
La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison

Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses,
Et revis mon passé blotti dans tes genoux.
Car à quoi bon chercher tes beautés langoureuses
Ailleurs qu'en ton cher corps et qu'en ton coeur si doux?
Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses!

Charles Baudelaire: The Balcony

Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses,
O you, of all my pleasures! You of all my duties!
You will remember the magnificence of caresses,
the sweet peace of fireside, in the evenings' beauties:
mother of memories, mistress of mistresses!

In those evenings illuminated by the coal fire's light,
out on the balcony, pink in the misty sunset's wings:
how good then felt your breast, your heart so good and right.
And we have said, often and surely, imperishable things
in those evenings illuminated by the coal fire's light.

How warmly beautiful in the evenings would set the sun,
what depths through which the heart would powerfully flood.
And leaning toward you, my adored and most cherished one,
I thought my breathing took in your rich scent of blood.
How warmly beautiful in the evenings would set the sun,

The night, growing darker, wrapped partition round
so my eyes could only guess at where your pupils were.
I drank in your breath where sweet poisons could be found.
Your feet, asleep in my hands, would barely stir.
The night, growing darker, wrapped partition round.

Of such happy moments I have the evoker's art;
and in your lap are pasts reborn; I press up tight.
Why look for other beauty to play its languorous part
beyond a heart so sweet and body's dear delight?
Of such happy moments I have the evoker's art.

Ces serments, ces parfums, ces baisers infinis,
Renaîtront-ils d'un gouffre interdit à nos sondes,
Comme montent au ciel les soleils rajeunis
Après s'être lavés au fond des mers profondes?
— Ô serments! ô parfums! ô baisers infinis!

Les Fleurs du mal 1857

Be these vows, perfumes, and kisses infinite,
and born anew in those great deeps where senses fail.
As sun rejuvenated has the heavens lit:
let us be washed in depths where rebirths prevail.
O vows! O perfumes! O kisses that are infinite!

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1967) : Correspondances

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laisser parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,
Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

Les Fleurs du mal 1857

Charles Baudelaire : Correspondences

Nature's a temple, where living columns rise
to sometimes let a muffled word escape;
so may one passing that wood of symbols wake
to find they look at him with sympathetic eyes.

The long, accompanying echoes also bond
him to a fathomless and shadowed unity,
as vast as night, but with a clarity
where colours, sounds and perfumes correspond.

There are smells as fresh as children's skin,
soft-wood as oboes, greens that prairies see,
— and others rich, triumphant in corrupting sin.

But each expands, or can, quite infinitely,
like incense, amber, musk and benzoin, whence
come rhapsodies of mind and outward sense.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1967) : Le Voyage
À Maxime Du Camp

I

Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.
Ah ! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes !
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit !

Un matin nous partons, le cerveau plein de flamme,
Le cœur gros de rancune et de désirs amers,
Et nous allons, suivant le rythme de la lame,
Berçant notre infini sur le fini des mers :

Les uns, joyeux de fuir une patrie infâme ;
D'autres, l'horreur de leurs berceaux, et quelques-uns,
Astrologues noyés dans les yeux d'une femme,
La Circé tyrannique aux dangereux parfums.

Pour n'être pas changés en bêtes, ils s'enivrent
D'espace et de lumière et de cieux embrasés ;
La glace qui les mord, les soleils qui les cuivrent,
Effacent lentement la marque des baisers.

Mais les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent
Pour partir ; cœurs légers, semblables aux ballons,
De leur fatalité jamais ils ne s'écartent,
Et sans savoir pourquoi, disent toujours : Allons !

Ceux-là, dont les désirs ont la forme des nues,
Et qui rêvent, ainsi qu'un conscrit le canon,
De vastes voluptés, changeantes, inconnues,
Et dont l'esprit humain n'a jamais su le nom !

Charles Baudelaire : The Voyage
To Maxime Du Camp

I

The child enamoured of his maps and stamps
has universe enough for appetite,
but those vast lands beneath the blaze of lamps
are stale and petty in remembered light.

We leave one morning with a fevered mind,
our hearts weighed down with bile and enmity,
but following rhythms of the waves we find
infinities are lulled to finite sea.

Some joy to leave their native skies,
some fear their birthplace, some events
foretold by drownings in a woman's eyes,
or Circe's tyrannous and dangerous scents.

Escaping that bewitchment, men embrace
new light, new heavenly latitudes arrayed
in fire, where sun and icy winds efface
the wounds that incandescent kisses made.

The truest travellers are those that sail
for travel's sake, undeviating, gone
on destinies as light balloons prevail
that find no answer in their floating on.

But those with lusts as vague as cumulous,
which raw recruits suppose is cannon flame,
will dream of vast unknowns, voluptuous
and changing, which the spirit cannot name.

II

Nous imitons, horreur ! la toupie et la boule
Dans leur valse et leurs bonds ; même dans nos sommeils
La Curiosité nous tourmente et nous roule,
Comme un Ange cruel qui fouette des soleils.

Singulière fortune où le but se déplace,
Et, n'étant nulle part, peut être n'importe où !
Où l'Homme, dont jamais l'espérance n'est lasse,
Pour trouver le repos court toujours comme un fou !

Notre âme est un trois-mâts cherchant son Icarie ;
Une voix retentit sur le pont : « Ouvre l'œil ! »
Une voix de la hune, ardente et folle, crie :
« Amour... gloire... bonheur ! » Enfer ! c'est un écueil !

Chaque îlot signalé par l'homme de vigie
Est un Eldorado promis par le Destin ;
L'Imagination qui dresse son orgie
Ne trouve qu'un récif aux clartés du matin.

Ô le pauvre amoureux des pays chimériques !
Faut-il le mettre aux fers, le jeter à la mer,
Ce matelot ivrogne, inventeur d'Amériques
Dont le mirage rend le gouffre plus amer ?

Tel le vieux vagabond, piétinant dans la boue,
Rêve, le nez en l'air, de brillants paradis ;
Son œil ensorcelé découvre une Capoue
Partout où la chandelle illumine un taudis.

II

We imitate — oh, horror! — balls and tops,
from which the need to know is never gone:
in dreams they waltz and bind, as never stops
the sun, by cruel angels driven on.

A destiny that's wholly ours, a goal
that has no final anywhere for those
who, like poor foolish Man, the hopeful soul,
go running everywhere for their repose.

Our hearts are like a fine three-master, sent
on orders from the bridge: look sharp ahead.
On love and glory, happiness we're bent —
until the lookout shouts: Hell! Rocks instead!

The watch that sees an island hove in view
makes destined Eldorado his belief.
Imagination riots through the crew
till morning brings them shipwreck on the reef.

Must lover of the far and tropic strands,
be thrown in irons, or tossed into the sea?
For sailor, drunk, inventing new-found lands,
a bitter abyss is reality.

The vagabond who shuffles through the mud
will have the scent of paradises loom:
with bright Capuas will conceptions flood
as light illuminates a slum-town room.

III

Étonnants voyageurs ! quelles nobles histoires
Nous lisons dans vos yeux profonds comme les mers !
Montrez-nous les écrins de vos riches mémoires,
Ces bijoux merveilleux, faits d'astres et d'éthers.

Nous voulons voyager sans vapeur et sans voile !
Faites, pour égayer l'ennui de nos prisons,
Passer sur nos esprits, tendus comme une toile,
Vos souvenirs avec leurs cadres d'horizons.

Dites, qu'avez-vous vu ?

IV

« Nous avons vu des astres
Et des flots ; nous avons vu des sables aussi ;
Et, malgré bien des chocs et d'imprévus désastres,
Nous nous sommes souvent ennuyés, comme ici.

La gloire du soleil sur la mer violette,
La gloire des cités dans le soleil couchant,
Allumaient dans nos coeurs une ardeur inquiète
De plonger dans un ciel au reflet alléchant.

Les plus riches cités, les plus beaux paysages,
Jamais ne contenaient l'attrait mystérieux
De ceux que le hasard fait avec les nuages.
Et toujours le désir nous rendait soucieux !

III

Enraptured travellers, what noble stories
we read in eyes as deep as ocean reaches.
So show us memories in all their glories,
those chests of jewels composed of stars and ethers.

We wish to break the boredom of our jail
to cross without the help of wind or steam,
that, with our spirits stretched out like a sail,
the wide horizons are what memories seem.

So say: what have you seen?

IV

The stars we've seen,
the waves, the desert sands, yet all, despite
the shocks and unforeseen mishaps, has been
too often boring as our current plight.

The sunset's glory on empurpled sea,
the city's brilliance as the sun goes down
awake such longing in the heart that we
are drawn to drink reflections in and drown.

Not fabled lands or cities packed with crowds
of pilgrims, ever set our hearts on fire
as can those solemn mysteries of clouds
where chance so anxiously evokes desire.

- La jouissance ajoute au désir de la force.
Désir, vieil arbre à qui le plaisir sert d'engrais,
Cependant que grossit et durcit ton écorce,
Tes branches veulent voir le soleil de plus près !
- Grandiras-tu toujours, grand arbre plus vivace
Que le cyprès ? – Pourtant nous avons, avec soin,
Cueilli quelques croquis pour votre album vorace,
Frères qui trouvez beau tout ce qui vient de loin !

Nous avons salué des idoles à trompe ;
Des trônes constellés de bijoux lumineux ;
Des palais ouvragés dont la féerique pompe
Serait pour vos banquiers un rêve ruineux ;

Des costumes qui sont pour les yeux une ivresse ;
Des femmes dont les dents et les ongles sont teints,
Et des jongleurs savants que le serpent caresse. »

V

Et puis, et puis encore ?

VI

« Ô cerveaux enfantins !

Pour ne pas oublier la chose capitale,
Nous avons vu partout, et sans l'avoir cherché,
Du haut jusques en bas de l'échelle fatale,
Le spectacle ennuyeux de l'immortel péché :

La femme, esclave vile, orgueilleuse et stupide,
Sans rire s'adorant et s'aimant sans dégoût ;

Our gross enjoyment only adds to sin,
lust fertilizes pleasures never done.
The old tree thickens up its bark-like skin,
and has its branches strive to reach the sun.

Will you grow then tree, and suffer no defection
from what tall cypresses most lordly are?
We've culled some pictures for your vast collection,
brothers who'd worship beauty from afar.

We've bowed to monstrous idols, made salaam
to thrones bejewelled with every lustrous gem.
The palaces we've wrought with unreal charm
would ruin bankers just to dream of them.

Our eyes have sunk in such flamboyant dresses,
dyed women's teeth and nails, the lurid kind,
and snakes a clever mountebank caresses

V

And then, what then?

VI

O trivial, childish mind.

You've missed the most important thing, to see —
though most unsought for, this gross world we're in:
from ladder's foot to top, and fatally —
the boring spectacle of age-old sin.

Proud woman, admiring what vile nature gave,
is slave without amusement or disgust.

L'homme, tyran goulu, paillard, dur et cupide,
Esclave de l'esclave et ruisseau dans l'égout ;

Le bourreau qui jouit, le martyr qui sanglote ;
La fête qu'assaisonne et parfume le sang ;
Le poison du pouvoir énervant le despote,
Et le peuple amoureux du fouet abrutissant ;

Plusieurs religions semblables à la nôtre,
Toutes escaladant le ciel ; la Sainteté,
Comme en un lit de plume un délicat se vautre,
Dans les clous et le crin cherchant la volupté ;

L'Humanité bavarde, ivre de son génie,
Et, folle maintenant comme elle était jadis,
Criant à Dieu, dans sa furibonde agonie :
« Ô mon semblable, ô mon maître, je te maudis ! »

Et les moins sots, hardis amants de la Démence,
Fuyant le grand troupeau parqué par le Destin,
Et se réfugiant dans l'opium immense !
– Tel est du globe entier l'éternel bulletin. »

VII

Amer savoir, celui qu'on tire du voyage !
Le monde, monotone et petit, aujourd'hui,
Hier, demain, toujours, nous fait voir notre image :
Une oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui !

Faut-il partir ? rester ? Si tu peux rester, reste ;
Pars, s'il le faut. L'un court, et l'autre se tapit

Man the avaricious tyrant, grasping slave
of slave, and running gutter of her lust.

Excited hangman, sobbing martyr: those
who find in blood's thick perfume nothing odd,
the despots whom their poisoned powers depose,
and peoples brutalized, who kiss the rod.

The many faiths like ours, serenely wed
with sins to heaven, where sanctity entails —
as will voluptuary of a feather bed —
a love of hair shirt and the scourge of nails.

Our much admired humanity that's shod
with faults that from the first misled its days.
Throughout its agony it screams to God:
'My Lord, my likeness, how I hate your ways!'

The bold and not so foolishly insane
who flee the bounds that destiny calls wealth,
or hide in opium's immense domain:
so stands the world's eternal bill of health!

VII

What bitter knowledge we must bring away.
The world is small, monotonous, and what we see
is always us, tomorrow as today:
green horror lost in sands of ennui.

So must we leave? Or stay? If that can be,
remain. If not, then hide or fast be gone

Pour tromper l'ennemi vigilant et funeste,
Le Temps ! Il est, hélas ! des coureurs sans répit,

Comme le Juif errant et comme les apôtres,
À qui rien ne suffit, ni wagon ni vaisseau,
Pour fuir ce rétiaire infâme : il en est d'autres
Qui savent le tuer sans quitter leur berceau.

Lorsque enfin il mettra le pied sur notre échine,
Nous pourrons espérer et crier : En avant !
De même qu'autrefois nous partions pour la Chine,
Les yeux fixés au large et les cheveux au vent,

Nous nous embarquerons sur la mer des Ténèbres
Avec le cœur joyeux d'un jeune passager.
Entendez-vous ces voix, charmantes et funèbres,
Qui chantent : « Par ici ! vous qui voulez manger

Le Lotus parfumé ! c'est ici qu'on vendange
Les fruits miraculeux dont votre cœur a faim ;
Venez vous enivrer de la douceur étrange
De cette après-midi qui n'a jamais de fin ! »

À l'accent familier nous devinons le spectre ;
Nos Pylades là-bas tendent leurs bras vers nous.
« Pour rafraîchir ton cœur nage vers ton Électre ! »
Dit celle dont jadis nous baisions les genoux.

if you'd escape that watchful enemy:
Time gives no rest to those still roving on.

So go apostles and the wandering Jew.
No ship or coach can help them. None on earth
escapes that fearsome net, though some have, too,
acquired the skill to kill the thing at birth.

But if at last it overburden days,
we still can cry: Set sail! and onward fare,
as did the travellers to China gaze
on distance, with the sea-wind through their hair.

Embarked upon that sea of Darkness, heart
as fresh as some young passenger's, you hear
the voices, sad and beautiful, impart
a longing to be ever drawing near

the perfumed lotus fruit. For here it grows,
the one you hunger for. Come, eat and swoon
into a strange, sweet drunkenness that knows
no end to this perpetual afternoon.

In that familiar voice we note the Spectre,
the arms of Pylades stretch out to please.
'Swim out, refresh the heart in your Electra',
cries she, for whom we've one-time kissed her knees.

VIII

Ô Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps ! levons l'ancre !
Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort ! Appareillons !
Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,
Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons !

Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte !
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe ?
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau !

Les Fleurs du Mal 1857

VIII

Weigh anchor, Death, old captain! Let there sink
the lands of ennui far out of sight!
Though the sea and sky be black as ink,
the hearts that you know well are filled with light.

Pour on the poisons that give hope as well.
From fire that purges thought we'd plunge on through
the abysses that may be Heaven or Hell,
but in the Unknown's depths we'll find the new!

Charles Cros (1842-88) : Phantasma

J'ai rêvé l'archipel parfumé, montagneux,
Perdu dans une mer inconnue et profonde
Où le naufrage nous a jetés tous les deux
Oubliés loin des lois qui régissent le monde.

Sur le sable étendue en l'or de tes cheveux,
Des cheveux qui te font comme une tombe blonde,
Je te ranime au son nouveau de mes aveux
Que ne répéteront ni la plage ni l'onde.

C'est un rêve. Ton âme est un oiseau qui fuit
Vers les horizons clairs de rubis, d'émeraudes,
Et mon âme abattue est un oiseau de nuit.

Pour te soumettre, proie exquise, à mon ennui
Et pour te dompter, blanche, en mes étreintes chaudes,
Tous les pays sont trop habités aujourd'hui.

Charles Cros : Phantasm

I dreamed an upland, scented archipelago,
in the unknown lost, in a deep sea hurled.
A shipwreck, which the two of us will know
is far from laws that govern this poor world.

On the sand stretched out your golden hair
will make a tomb, a grave and blonde retreat,
I call you back to life again with prayer
that neither beach nor sea waves will repeat.

It is a dream. Your soul a bird that flees
to jewelled green and ruby levelled space,
my soul a night owl, sad at seeing these.

I give you boredom, my exquisite prey,
where you are tamed and white in my embrace:
all lands are too much occupied today.

Paul Verlaine (1844-96) : Chanson d'automne

Les sanglots longs
Des violons
De l'automne
Blessent mon cœur

D'une langueur
Monotone.
Tout suffocant
Et blême, quand
Sonne l'heure,
Je me souviens
Des jours anciens
Et je pleure

Et je m'en vais
Au vent mauvais
Qui m'emporte
Deçà, delà,
Pareil à la
Feuille morte.

Poèmes saturniens (1867)

Verlaine: Autumn Song

Inconsolable winds
are violins,
and autumn's part
brings pain to the heart.

Made monotonous
and languorous,
suffocating, pale
halting and stale,
slowly hours creep,
gather and fall.
So I recall
past days and weep.

Tossed this way
and that as winds may,
one with the grief.
Hither and yon,
carried and gone:
dead the leaf.

Paul Verlaine (1844-96) : Le ciel est, par dessus le toit

Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit,
Si bleu, si calme !
Un arbre, par-dessus le toit,
Berce sa palme.

La cloche, dans le ciel qu'on voit,
Doucement tinte.
Un oiseau sur l'arbre qu'on voit
Chante sa plainte.

Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, la vie est là,
Simple et tranquille.
Cette paisible rumeur-là
Vient de la ville.

– Qu'as-tu fait, ô toi que voilà
Pleurant sans cesse,
Dis, qu'as-tu fait, toi que voilà,
De ta jeunesse ?

Sagesse 1881

Paul Verlaine: The sky is here above the roof

The sky is here above the roof,
so blue, so soft.

A palm here, above the roof,
is swaying aloft.

A clock tower in the sky we see
chimes low and faint.

A bird that's calling from a tree
echoes its plaint.

My God, my God, how life is here
calm and sweet.

How murmuring the sounds we hear
far from the street.

What have you done, you who are known
weeping each day?

What have you done, you who've thrown
your youth away?

Paul Verlaine (1844-96) : Il pleure dans mon cœur

Il pleure dans mon cœur
Comme il pleut sur la ville ;
Quelle est cette langueur
Qui pénètre mon cœur ?

Ô bruit doux de la pluie
Par terre et sur les toits !
Pour un cœur qui s'ennuie,
Ô le chant de la pluie !

Il pleure sans raison
Dans ce cœur qui s'écoeure.
Quoi ! nulle trahison ?...
Ce deuil est sans raison.

C'est bien la pire peine
De ne savoir pourquoi
Sans amour et sans haine
Mon cœur a tant de peine !

Romances sans paroles 1874

Paul Verlaine : It rains in my heart

It rains in my heart
as it rains on the town.
How can languor impart
such depth to the heart?

Soft pattering is rain
on the earth and roofs!
For the tired heart again
is this aching refrain.

How it falls for no reason
in hearts saddened the same.
What! No treason,
for the mourning no reason?

Far worse will start
in not knowing why:
not love, nor hate impart
such hurt to the heart.

Paul Verlaine (1844-96) : Dans l'interminable

Dans l'interminable
Ennui de la plaine
La neige incertaine
Luit comme du sable.

Le ciel est de cuivre
Sans lueur aucune
On croirait voir vivre
Et mourir la lune.

Comme des nuées
Flottent gris les chênes
Des forêts prochaines
Parmi les buées.

Le ciel est de cuivre
Sans lueur aucune
On croirait voir vivre
Et mourir la lune.

Corneille poussive
Et vous, les loups maigres,
Par ces bises aigres
Quoi donc vous arrive ?

Dans l'interminable
Ennui de la plaine
La neige incertaine
Luit comme du sable.

Romances sans paroles 1874

Paul Verlaine : In the interminable

In the interminable
ennui of the plain:
the faint snow is able
to glint in each grain.

Dull copper the sky,
unbroken the swoon;
life is seen by the eye
as death of the moon.

Like clouds in their midst
is each wavering oak;
the near woods soak
up and fade into mists

Dull copper the sky,
unbroken the swoon;
life is seen by the eye
as death of the moon..

Crows croak, wolves too
are hunger-thinned:
in the cold north wind
what happens to you?

In the interminable
ennui of the plain:
the faint snow is able
to glint in each grain.

Paul Verlaine (1844-96) : Verlaine : Clair de lune

Votre âme est un paysage choisi
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques
Jouant du luth et dansant et quasi
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.

Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune,
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,

Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.

Fêtes galantes 1869

Paul Verlaine : Moonlight

Your soul's a choice landscape where there go,
in masques and bergamasques, charmed companies
playing at the lute and dancing, as though
sad under their guise of fripperies.

All sing in a minor key, though still believing
in a timely life, an all-conquering love,
but also happiness may be self-deceiving:
their song mingles with the moonlight above.

Beautiful is the moonlight, but so sad and still.
Birds dream in the trees, and, rising below,
sobbing with ecstasy, the tall jets spill
out from marbles as fountains of waters flow.

Tristan Corbière (1845-75) : Pierrot pendu

I

La femme est une pilule
Que tu ne sais plus dorer
Ta lyre, outil ridicule

II

C'est fini la comédie,
À la Morgue les Amours!
Arrêtons sur la my-die
La patraque de nos jours.

III

À la maîtresse chérie
De ton chanvre laisse un bout,
Elle fut la galerie
Qui l'admira malgré tout.

IV

Va, ça lui portera veine
-Ce dernier noeud de licol
Pour toucher dans la quinzaine
Un vrai monsieur en faux-col.

V

Qu'elle corne, la corneuse:
C'est aussi pur mais le soir
Qu'elle râle, la râleuse
Et qu'elle trotte au trottoir.

Tristan Corbière : Pierrot Strung Up

I

A woman is rough medicine;
a pill you do not get to gild,
a useless lyre you cannot mean.

II

That comedy has got the boot,
in the morgue lies every love
No, no, stop the turkey shoot,
the ailing days say that's enough.

III

To your latest bit of fluff
leave some talisman to bless:
The gallery will find it tough,
but she'll admire him nonetheless.

IV

Come on now; it'll do him good,
and have the knot be firmly meant,
a fortnight is the likelihood
a collar makes a proper gent.

V

Let the strumpet blare away
play virgin: comes the evening light
all her grumbles come to stay
and she may walk the streets at night.

Tristan Corbière (1845-75): Le Crapaud

Un chant dans une nuit sans air...

– La lune plaque en métal clair

Les découpures du vert sombre.

... Un chant ; comme un écho, tout vif

Enterré, là, sous le massif...

– Ça se tait : Viens, c'est là, dans l'ombre...

– Un crapaud ! – Pourquoi cette peur,

Près de moi, ton soldat fidèle !

Vois-le, poète tondu, sans aile,

Rossignol de la boue... – Horreur ! –

... Il chante. – Horreur !! – Horreur pourquoi ?

Vois-tu pas son œil de lumière...

Non : il s'en va, froid, sous sa pierre.

.....

Bonsoir – ce crapaud-là c'est moi.

Les Amours jaunes 1873

Tristan Corbière : The Toad

A night song, an airless scene . . .
the moon a plate of metal sheen
the cut-out patches of dark green.

A song echoed, thickly fated,
in the bushes suffocated,
in shadow come, gone, seen.
A toad! Whence comes this fear,

faithful soldier, next to me?
Wingless shaven poet: see
you bird of mud . . . how horror's near.

It sings. — Horror!! — What's to be
within its gleaming eye alone?
No, it's off, cold, beneath the stone.

.....

Goodnight, you toad, then: that's me.

Germain Nouveau (1851-1920) : Fin d'automne

C'est le soir au jardin du Luxembourg ; les portes
Vont se fermer ; le jour qui meurt à l'horizon
Semble un dernier adieu de la douce saison ;
Le pied foule un tapis mourant de feuilles mortes.

La nuit lente descend ; on entend s'apaiser
Des passants attardés les pas et les murmures ;
Les groupes, sur leur socle, au milieu des ramures,
Pour conjurer le froid échangent un baiser.

Car voici que l'Hiver s'avance, triste et sombre !
Vous allez être seuls, ô pauvres marbres nus!
Les amoureux discrets, à vous tous bien connus,
Ne viendront de longtemps s'abriter à votre ombre.

Un brouillard gris et fin s'estompe dans les airs ;
Le mystère se fait dans les mornes allées
Que hanteront bientôt les bises désolées ;
Les moineaux sont partis et les bancs sont déserts.

Oh ! le triste retour des saisons enrhumées !
Déjà sur votre épaule un frisson vient courir ;
Déjà le cœur se serre et, comme pour s'ouvrir,
Aspire au chaud parfum des chambres bien fermées.,

Germain Nouveau : Autumn's End

In the Gardens of the Luxembourg
the evening gate is closing; the day declines
to a last glimmering horizon, and foot finds
farewells in leaves that felt its dying floor.

And slowly night descends, through the place
are litanies of kisses, footsteps and whisperings
and statues on the plinths in cold lingerings
exchange, against the chill, a short embrace.

Comes winter, dejected and dark. Alone
you'll be, poor naked marbles, as you, discreet
lovers, will be so also when you meet
among the shadowed, sheltering marble stone.

A thin grey fog fades out into the air;
mysteries fill the alleyways, and gone
all thought of kisses, all sparrows fled, and on
the garden benches now there's no one there.

Oh, what nostalgias the seasonal cold assumes,
in our very shoulders the chill runs through:
the heart tightens, but seeming opens to
the warmth and scent of closely shuttered rooms.

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) : Ma bohème

Je m'en allais, les poings dans mes poches crevées ;
Mon paletot aussi devenait idéal ;
J'allais sous le ciel, Muse ! et j'étais ton féal ;
Oh ! là ! là ! que d'amours splendides j'ai rêvées !

Mon unique culotte avait un large trou.
– Petit-Poucet rêveur, j'égrenais dans ma course
Des rimes. Mon auberge était à la Grande-Ourse.
– Mes étoiles au ciel avaient un doux frou-frou

Et je les écoutais, assis au bord des routes,
Ces bons soirs de septembre où je sentais des gouttes
De rosée à mon front, comme un vin de vigueur ;

Où, rimant au milieu des ombres fantastiques,
Comme des lyres, je tirais les élastiques
De mes souliers blessés, un pied près de mon cœur !

Cahier de Douai 1870

Arthur Rimbaud : My Bohemia

Fists thrust in tattered pockets, off I went,
although the jacket made me better dressed.
beneath the sky my ideal muse was blessed,
my là là lust a dreamt-on sacrament.

My only trousers sported an enormous hole,
in dreams was Thumbelina wont to roam
Great Bear constellation made my home:
the stars above now took a frou-frou stroll.

And I was listening to them, by roadside sat
and felt September's balmy dewdrops matt
my eyebrows as invigorating wine.

Then rhyming with these dark fantastic things
I pulled at lyres, which, like elastic strings,
brought rough boots up towards the heart's design.

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) : Le Dormeur du Val

C'est un trou de verdure où chante une rivière,
Accrochant follement aux herbes des haillons
D'argent ; où le soleil, de la montagne fière,
Luit : c'est un petit val qui mousse de rayons.

Un soldat jeune, bouche ouverte, tête nue,
Et la nuque baignant dans le frais cresson bleu,
Dort ; il est étendu dans l'herbe, sous la nue,
Pâle dans son lit vert où la lumière pleut.

Les pieds dans les glaïeuls, il dort. Souriant comme
Sourirait un enfant malade, il fait un somme :
Nature, berce-le chaudement : il a froid.

Les parfums ne font pas frissonner sa narine ;
Il dort dans le soleil, la main sur sa poitrine,
Tranquille. Il a deux trous rouges au côté droit.

Cahier de Douai 1870

Arthur Rimbaud : The Sleeper in the Valley

A grassy hollow where a river sings
and madly tugs at scraps of water-weeds.
The mountain's lordly fall of sunlight flings
its shortened valley's length of silver beads.

A soldier: young, mouth open, head is bare,
neck cradled by the cool blue watercress;
he sleeps on grass, beneath the cloud's good care:
pale drops of sunlight on his green bed press.

The feet are where the water-lilies. Smile
of one contented. Sick child naps awhile.
Nature, wrap him warmly: he is cold.

Perfumes do not bring his nose to rest:
he sleeps out in the sun, his hand on chest.
his right side, quiet now, by two shots holed.

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91) : Mémoire

I

L'eau claire ; comme le sel des larmes d'enfance,
l'assaut au soleil des blancheurs des corps de femmes ;
la soie, en foule et de lys pur, des oriflammes
sous les murs dont quelque pucelle eut la défense ;

l'ébat des anges ; — Non... le courant d'or en marche,
meut ses bras, noirs, et lourds, et frais surtout, d'herbe.
Elle sombre, avant le Ciel bleu pour ciel-de-lit, appelle
pour rideaux l'ombre de la colline et de l'arche.

II

Eh ! l'humide carreau tend ses bouillons limpides !
L'eau meuble d'or pâle et sans fond les couches prêtes.
Les robes vertes et déteintes des fillettes
font les saules, d'où sautent les oiseaux sans brides.

Plus pure qu'un louis, jaune et chaude paupière,
le souci d'eau — ta foi conjugale, ô l'Épouse ! —
au midi prompt, de son terne miroir, jalouse
au ciel gris de chaleur la Sphère rose et chère.

Arthur Rimbaud: *After Memory*

I

Clear water, like the salt of childhood tears:
the white of women's bodies opened in the sun,
and lilies, beneath walls or the silk of oriflamme,
won with the valour of a maid pure in her years.

The frolic of angels in their moving blaze of gold,
imponderable arms sparkling with the coolness of the
grass,
having the blues of heaven as the sky's bed to pass
under the canopy of shade into the arch and hill's fold.

II

The stones, under the water, extend as in a clear broth,
and depths, freckled in prepared beds of pale gold,
and frocks of girls are there, faded, green as mould,
and willows, and unhampered birds, in the day's cloth.

Round as the eyelid, with the warmth of a gold louis,
jets the marsh marigold, fresh in its wedding vows.
The mirror at prompt noon, jealous of the day's drowse
tarnishes into a sphere, heat-flecked but dear to us.

III

Madame se tient trop debout dans la prairie
prochaine où neigent les fils du travail ; l'ombrelle
aux doigts ; foulant l'ombelle ; trop fière pour elle
des enfants lisant dans la verdure fleurie

leur livre de maroquin rouge ! Hélas, Lui, comme
mille anges blancs qui se séparent sur la route,
s'éloigne par-delà la montagne ! Elle, toute
froide, et noire, court ! après le départ de l'homme !

IV

Regret des bras épais et jeunes d'herbe pure !
Or des lunes d'avril au cœur du saint lit ! Joie
des chantiers riverains à l'abandon, en proie
aux soirs d'août qui faisaient germer ces pourritures !

Qu'elle pleure à présent sous les remparts ! l'haleine
des peupliers d'en haut est pour la seule brise.
Puis, c'est la nappe, sans reflets, sans source, grise :
un vieux, dragueur, dans sa barque immobile, peine.

III

Too upright is Madam in the meadow's prairie scene.
The sons of toil are in the cotton-fields, settled as white cloud.
In her fingers she twirls her parasol, tramples it, too
proud
to watch her children reading in the flowering green,

Their books in red morocco. Of what they think or dream
as on all paths a thousand angels flare upon the day —
of hopes lost in high mountains, she cannot follow; her
way
is glistening dark and cold, as is the shadowed stream.

IV

Regret of arms in grass that's thick and celibate
as beds of saints on golden moonlit April nights,
and the tear-wet joy falling on abandoned river sites,
and the rotting evenings in August that these germinate.

Under walls let her weep now: the winds possess
only the high poplars, tremulously blown.
Underneath in lead, unglinting, weighed in stone,
an old dredger labours, the small boat motionless.

V

Jouet de cet oeil d'eau morne, je n'y puis prendre,
ô canot immobile ! oh ! bras trop courts ! ni l'une
ni l'autre fleur : ni la jaune qui m'importune,
là ; ni la bleue, amie à l'eau couleur de cendre.

Ah ! la poudre des saules qu'une aile secoue !
Les roses des roseaux dès longtemps dévorées !
Mon canot, toujours fixe ; et sa chaîne tirée
au fond de cet œil d'eau sans bords, — à quelle boue ?

L'Ermitage 1892

V

Flotsam, plaything of these waters that nothing hinders,
in my boarding of this still boat, O arms too short!
Not this flower or that, which is yellow, however sought,
or the blue, intimate with water that is grey as cinders.

Ah, for the powder of the willows, the plume of blood
in wings, roses from the reeds devoured in time's jaws!
The boat does not move although the chain draws
on through a waterlogged eye, without banks, to mud!

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) : Le bateau ivre

Comme je descendais des Fleuves impassibles,
Je ne me sentis plus guidé par les haleurs :
Des Peaux-Rouges criards les avaient pris pour cibles,
Les ayant cloués nus aux poteaux de couleurs.

J'étais insoucieux de tous les équipages,
Porteur de blés flamands ou de cotons anglais.
Quand avec mes haleurs ont fini ces tapages,
Les Fleuves m'ont laissé descendre où je voulais.

Dans les clapotements furieux des marées,
Moi, l'autre hiver, plus sourd que les cerveaux d'enfants,
Je courus ! Et les Péninsules démarrées
N'ont pas subi tohu-bohus plus triomphants.

La tempête a béni mes éveils maritimes.
Plus léger qu'un bouchon j'ai dansé sur les flots
Qu'on appelle rouleurs éternels de victimes,
Dix nuits, sans regretter l'oeil niais des falots !

Plus douce qu'aux enfants la chair des pommes sures,
L'eau verte pénétra ma coque de sapin
Et des taches de vins bleus et des vomissures
Me lava, dispersant gouvernail et grappin.

Et dès lors, je me suis baigné dans le Poème
De la Mer, infusé d'astres, et lactescent,
Dévorant les azurs verts ; où, flottaison blême
Et ravie, un noyé pensif parfois descend ;

Arthur Rimbaud : *After The Drunken Boat*

Down impassive Streams I floated on,
aware no longer of the haulers' roles,
the whooping Redskins targeted, they'd gone
to nail them naked onto coloured poles.

It was all the same to me, the crews
that carried Flemish wheat or English twill.
Of such fuss my haulers had scant use;
the rivers left me drifting on at will.

And in those furious tidal pulls, with me
last winter, deafer than are children's brains,
I ran and loose Peninsulas would see
how most triumphant noise or chaos gains.

And then to storm's awakening I was bred,
as cork on waves I bobbed, that man delights
in calling the eternal rollers of the dead.
Ten nights, nor missed the stupid harbour lights.

5. Sweeter than sour apples children eat,
green water got into my pinewood shell:
blue stains of wine and vomit meet,
washed clean of rudder and the hook as well.

Since then I bathed in Ocean's Rhymes,
infused with stars, was luminescent,
devoured the green azures, have betimes
been flotsam, where a drowning man is sent.

Où, teignant tout à coup les bleuités, délires
Et rythmes lents sous les rutillements du jour,
Plus fortes que l'alcool, plus vastes que nos lyres,
Fermentent les rousseurs amères de l'amour !

Je sais les cieux crevant en éclairs, et les trombes
Et les ressacs et les courants : je sais le soir,
L'Aube exaltée ainsi qu'un peuple de colombes,
Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir !

J'ai vu le soleil bas, taché d'horreurs mystiques,
Illuminant de longs figements violets,
Pareils à des acteurs de drames très antiques
Les flots roulant au loin leurs frissons de volets !

10. J'ai rêvé la nuit verte aux neiges éblouies,
Baisers montant aux yeux des mers avec lenteurs,
La circulation des sèves inouïes,
Et l'éveil jaune et bleu des phosphores chanteurs !

J'ai suivi, des mois pleins, pareille aux vacheries
Hystériques, la houle à l'assaut des récifs,
Sans songer que les pieds lumineux des Maries
Pussent forcer le mufle aux Océans poussifs !

J'ai heurté, savez-vous, d'incroyables Florides
Mêlant aux fleurs des yeux de panthères à peaux
D'hommes ! Des arcs-en-ciel tendus comme des brides
Sous l'horizon des mers, à de glauques troupeaux !

Where, suddenly we're dyed by bruised desires
slow rhythms of the twinkling day above,
stronger than alcohol, more gross than lyres,
ferment the bitter freckles of our love!

A sky of lightning flash and waterspout;
in surf and currents, knowing evenings thaw,
to high exalted dawn with doves about,
have sometimes seen what man but thought he saw.

I saw the low sun stained with mystic dread
Illuminating frozen purple wings
what actors in their ancient dramas read,
the waves display their violet quiverings!

10. Green nights I dreamt of, dazzled snows
of kisses slowing rising in the sea for us,
with circulation of the unseen sap there goes
the sung awakening of bright phosphorus.

Full months I followed like the cows their pen,
hysterical, the swell about the reefs,
not dreaming the luminous feet of Marys then
could force the muzzle of the Sea's beliefs.

I bumped into the far-fetched Floridas where,
there flowered the eyes of men in panthers' skin;
the rainbows stretched as bridles in the air:
what dull horizons held the herds within.

J'ai vu fermenter les marais énormes, nasses
Où pourrit dans les joncs tout un Léviathan !
Des écroulements d'eaux au milieu des bonaces,
Et les lointains vers les gouffres cataractant !

Glaciers, soleils d'argent, flots nacreux, cieux de braises !
Échouages hideux au fond des golfes bruns
Où les serpents géants dévorés des punaises
Choient, des arbres tordus, avec de noirs parfums !

J'aurais voulu montrer aux enfants ces dorades
Du flot bleu, ces poissons d'or, ces poissons chantants.
- Des écumes de fleurs ont bercé mes dérades
Et d'ineffables vents m'ont ailé par instants.

Parfois, martyr lassé des pôles et des zones,
La mer dont le sanglot faisait mon roulis doux
Montait vers moi ses fleurs d'ombre aux ventouses jaunes
Et je restais, ainsi qu'une femme à genoux...

Presque île, ballottant sur mes bords les querelles
Et les fientes d'oiseaux clabaudeurs aux yeux blonds.
Et je voguais, lorsqu'à travers mes liens frêles
Des noyés descendaient dormir, à reculons !

Or moi, bateau perdu sous les cheveux des anses,
Jeté par l'ouragan dans l'éther sans oiseau,
Moi dont les Monitors et les voiliers des Hanses
N'auraient pas repêché la carcasse ivre d'eau ;

I have seen vast seething marshes, traps
a whole Leviathan rots in the reeds,
the water collapsing as the calms elapse
and cataracts that far-off distance feeds.

Glaciers, white suns, pearly waves, hot sky,
hideous strandings deep in dusky wells,
Giant snakes consumed by bedbugs try
with crooked trees to give off blackish smells.

15. Children I'd have shown aquatic things:
singing golden fish, an azure den,
the foam of flowers born in wanderings,
the ineffable winds that winged me now and then.

Sometimes a martyr tired of poles and zones,
and rolling gently in those sobbing seas,
came shadow flowers the yellow sucker owns,
and there I stayed, a woman on her knees.

An island almost, on a quarrel's edge,
with droppings blonde-eyed, babbling seabirds keep,
while I was sailing through that slender pledge
drowned people there were dropping back to sleep.

Not I, or ship beneath the foliated coves,
hurled by hurricane to birdless air,
for all that Hanseatic shipping roves,
retrieved the water-sodden carcass there.

Libre, fumant, monté de brumes violettes,
Moi qui trouais le ciel rougeoyant comme un mur
Qui porte, confiture exquise aux bons poètes,
Des lichens de soleil et des morves d'azur ;

Qui courais, taché de lunules électriques,
Planche folle, escorté des hippocampes noirs,
Quand les juillets faisaient crouler à coups de triques
Les cieux ultramarins aux ardents entonnoirs ;

Moi qui tremblais, sentant geindre à cinquante lieues
Le rut des Béhémots et les Maelstroms épais,
Fileur éternel des immobilités bleues,
Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens parapets !

J'ai vu des archipels sidéraux ! et des îles
Dont les cieux délirants sont ouverts au vogueur :
– Est-ce en ces nuits sans fonds que tu dors et t'exiles,
Million d'oiseaux d'or, ô future Vigueur ?

Mais, vrai, j'ai trop pleuré ! Les Aubes sont navrantes.
Toute lune est atroce et tout soleil amer :
L'âcre amour m'a gonflé de torpeurs enivrantes.
Ô que ma quille éclate ! Ô que j'aille à la mer !

Si je désire une eau d'Europe, c'est la flache
Noire et froide où vers le crépuscule embaumé
Un enfant accroupi plein de tristesse, lâche
Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai.

Free, smoking, risen from the purple mist,
I pierced the glowing wall of skies that bear
exquisite sweetmeats that the poets list
as sunny lichens and blue mucous share.

Running with electric fingernail,
a plank escorted by the black seahorses
where under cudgel blows the Julys quail
before the funnels with their azure courses.

I who trembled, fifty leagues to go,
at rut of Behemoths and maelstrom sets,
eternal spinner of the blue adagio
I yearn for Europe's ancient parapets.

I've seen the starry archipelagos;
the skies' islands open to the mariner,
unfathomable nights that sleeping knows,
the million golden birds that life confers.

But I have wept too much. Distressing dawns,
cruel moon, where every sun may be
like love distended into torpid yawns:
Let keel split, and drop me in the sea.

I long for European waters, staunch
of thick black puddle, scented evening sky
that has a child crouching, full of sadness, launch
a boat as frail as Maytime butterfly.

Je ne puis plus, baigné de vos langueurs, ô lames,
Enlever leur sillage aux porteurs de cotons,
Ni traverser l'orgueil des drapeaux et des flammes,
Ni nager sous les yeux horribles des pontons.

1871

No longer can I bathe in languors, waves
nor in the wake of carried cotton bulks,
nor cross the pride of flags and pennant staves,
beneath the wretched eyes of prison hulks.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) : Le Cygne

Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui
Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre
Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre
Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui !

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie
Par l'espace infligée à l'oiseau qui le nie,
Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris.

Fantôme qu'à ce lieu son pur éclat assigne,
Il s'immobilise au songe froid de mépris
Que vêt parmi l'exil inutile le Cygne.

Stéphane Mallarmé: The Swan

The virgin, vivacious and the fine new day.
Will a blow for us from its drunk wing break,
in hauntings forgotten beneath this frosted lake,
the clear ice-falls of flights not yet fled away?

In past magnificence of thoughts today
the swan remembers its freedom, but cannot make
a song from regions surrounding, but only take
on the sterile, dull glint of the winter's stay.

Out in white agony the whole neck lies
in a space inflicted that the bird denies.
Cold and immobile in its feathered being,
not in horror of earth but to brightness gone,
as a dream wrapped in scorn, and a phantom, seeing
how ineffectual is exile for the Swan.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) : Toast funèbre

Ô de notre bonheur, toi, le fatal emblème !
Salut de la démente et libation blême,
Ne crois pas qu'au magique espoir du corridor
J'offre ma coupe vide où souffre un monstre d'or !
Ton apparition ne va pas me suffire :
Car je t'ai mis, moi-même, en un lieu de porphyre.
Le rite est pour les mains d'éteindre le flambeau
Contre le fer épais des portes du tombeau :
Et l'on ignore mal, élu pour notre fête
10. Très-simple de chanter l'absence du poète,

Que ce beau monument l'enferme tout entier :
Si ce n'est que la gloire ardente du métier,
Jusqu'à l'heure dernière et vile de la cendre ,
Par le carreau qu'allume un soir fier d'y descendre
Retourne vers les feux du pur soleil mortel !
Magnifique, total et solitaire, tel
Tremble de s'exhaler le faux orgueil des hommes.
Cette foule hagarde ! elle annonce : Nous sommes
La triste opacité de nos spectres futurs !
20. Mais le blason des deuils épars sur de vains murs,

J'ai méprisé l'horreur lucide d'une larme,
Quand , sourd même à mon vers sacré qui ne l'alarme ,
Quelqu'un de ces passants, fier, aveugle et muet,
Hôte de son linceul vague, se transmuait
En le vierge héros de l'attente posthume.

Stéphane Mallarmé: *After* Funeral Libation

Our happiness is you, on this ill occasion
that we must greet with madness and libation.
Think not I toast what path of hope receives;
the cup is void; the gilded monster grieves.
Your apparition will not serve for me,
whose own self set you into porphyry.
This rite requires that hands put out the torch
against the iron walls of tomb and porch,
exchange the chosen words of simple cheer
10. although the poet be no longer here.

Let this monument enclose the whole
of you, except that craft eludes control,
till that dread hour, that is, when all is past,
or through the pane will darken evening's cast
till sun revive again. In you this fall,
so full and solitary, will be no call
on revelations due to mortal men,
that haggard, trembling crowd that sees again
the sad opacities of shades that fade
20. from blaze on empty walls that mornings made.

I scorned the lucid horror of a tear
when consecrated verse he does not fear,
the one who, passing blind and mute and proud,
became a guest in his own mindless shroud
and thence a hero to that expectation.

Vaste gouffre apporté dans l'amas de la brume
Par l'irascible vent des mots qu'il n'a pas dits.
Le néant à cet Homme aboli de jadis :
« Souvenir d'horizons, qu'est-ce, ô toi, que la Terre ? »

30. Hurle ce songe ; et voix dont la clarté s'altère,
L'espace a pour jouet le cri : « Je ne sais pas ! »
Le Maître, par un œil profond, a, sur ses pas,
Apaisé de l'éden l'inquiète merveille
Dont le frisson final, dans sa voix seule, éveille,

Pour la rose et le lis, le mystère d'un nom.
Est-il, de ce destin, rien qui demeure ? Non.
Ô vous tous ! oubliez une croyance sombre.
Le splendide génie éternel n'a pas d'ombre.

Moi, de votre désir soucieux, je veux voir,
40. À qui s'évanouit, hier, dans le devoir
Idéal que nous font les jardins de cet astre,
Survivre pour l'honneur du tranquille désastre
Une agitation solennelle par l'air
De paroles, pourpre ivre et grand calice clair,
Que, pluie et diamant, le regard diaphane
Resté-là sur ces fleurs dont nulle ne se fane,
Isole parmi l'heure et le rayon du jour !

What vastnesses are in that mist's deception,
what angry winds, what words he did not say,
what nothingness, to one not here today.
'Recall its bounds: what is this world to you?'

30. The dream then falls away, its howling too,
to artifacts of space we cannot know.
But the Master, looking deep, will go
across the restless calming Eden and make
the all who clearly hear him come awake.

So Rose and Lily have a secret name,
but can of destiny they stay the same?
I ask you all forget that gloomy creed:
eternal genius has no ghost to heed.

Me, moved by your desire, I'd wish to pay
40. respects to one who left us yesterday,
in flowers the star requires of us, to cast the
survival as a mark of quiet disaster.
A solemn perturbation of the air
in words, drunk scarlet, with a chalice there
that is of gaze and rain and diamond made.
Such are the flowers that do not fade;
detach yourself from time and light of day.

C'est de nos vrais bosquets déjà tout le séjour,
Où le poète pur a pour geste humble et large
50. De l'interdire au rêve, ennemi de sa charge :
Afin que le matin de son repos altier,
Quand la mort ancienne est comme pour Gautier
De n'ouvrir pas les yeux sacrés et de se taire.
Surgisse, de l'allée ornement tributaire.
Le sépulcre solide où gît tout ce qui nuit,
Et l'avare silence et la massive nuit.

Already in these groves the truth will stay,
where the poet's gesturing humility
50. forbids him draw on dreams, the enemy.
So, on the morning of his lofty stay,
an ancient death was promised Gautier.
He should not open eyes or mouth, but rise
a tributary ornament, a guise
holding in the sepulcher of all harm, despite
the miserly silence and the massive night.

Émile Verhaeren, (1855-1916) : le Moulin

Le moulin tourne au fond du soir, très lentement,
Sur un ciel de tristesse et de mélancolie,
Il tourne et tourne, et sa voile, couleur de lie,
Est triste et faible et lourde et lasse infiniment.

Depuis l'aube, ses bras, comme des bras de plainte,
Se sont tendus et sont tombés ; et les voici
Qui retombent encor, là-bas, dans l'air noirci
Et le silence entier de la nature éteinte.

Un jour souffrant d'hiver sur les hameaux s'endort,
Les nuages sont las de leurs voyages sombres,
Et le long des taillis qui ramassent leurs ombres,
Les ornières s'en vont vers un horizon mort.

Autour d'un vieil étang, quelques huttes de hêtre
Très misérablement sont assises en rond ;
Une lampe de cuivre éclaire leur plafond
Et glisse une lueur aux coins de leur fenêtre.

Et dans la plaine immense, au bord du flot dormeur,
Ces torpides maisons, sous le ciel bas, regardent,
Avec les yeux fendus de leurs vitres hagardes,
Le vieux moulin qui tourne et, las, qui tourne et meurt.

1883-96

Émile Verhaeren, (1855-1916) : The Mill

Very slowly in the depths of evening, the sail
moves past a sky of sadness and of melancholy.
It turns and turns, to hold the faintest sort of plea;
the sails are coloured as are dregs, thin-washed and pale.

Since dawn the arms have turned but nonetheless will fail;
they strain to rise and hold, but then how wearily
on through the gloomy fog they fall, repeatedly,
all nature is extinct, is silent, of no avail.

On the hamlets falls the suffering winter's day,
the clouds are weary of their unvarying gloomy course.
The coppices collect their shadows, the ruts enforce
how surroundings to the level dead horizon stay.

Past the rim of soil, most wretchedly there falls
a ring of beechwood huts. From copper lamp
suspended from the ceiling the flickering candles stamp
a patina of fire on windowpane and walls.

On that vast plain and the sleeping emptiness they lie,
impoverished hovels, out beneath the idle sky:
the eyes look outward from the tattered panes; nearby
the old mill turns and in that turning looks to die.

Émile Verhaeren, (1855-1916) : Les Horloges

La nuit, dans le silence en noir de nos demeures,
Béquilles et bâtons, qui se cognent, là-bas ;
Montant et dévalant les escaliers des heures,
Les horloges, avec leurs pas ;

Émaux naïfs derrière un verre, emblèmes
Et fleurs d'antan, chiffres et camaïeux,
Lunes des corridors vides et blêmes
Les horloges, avec leurs yeux ;

Sons morts, notes de plomb, marteaux et limes,
Boutique en bois de mots sournois
Et le babil des secondes minimales,
Les horloges, avec leurs voix ;

Gaînes de chêne et bornes d'ombre,
Cercueils scellés dans le mur froid,
Vieux os du temps que grignotte le nombre,
Les horloges et leur effroi ;

Les horloges
Volontaires et vigilantes,
Pareilles aux vieilles servantes
Boitant de leurs sabots ou glissant sur leurs bas,
Les horloges que j'interroge
Serrent ma peur en leur compas.

1895

Emile Verhaeren : The Clocks

Hemmed in, silent in some home of ours,
hearing the crutches and sticks, and troubled effects,
going up and down the ladders of hours
are the clocks with their steps.

The emblems, enamels naïve behind the glass,
odd flowers, shades and figures in their old world guise.
In empty corridors the pale moons pass,
and clocks with their eyes.

Dead sounds, notes of lead, hammer and break,
the artful words in the hammering shops.
The babble the miniscule seconds make
in the tongues of clocks.

Sheaths of oak and milestones of shade,
coffins enclosed in the chilly nooks,
the old bones of time that numbers abrade,
and the terrible clocks.

The clocks,
widely alert
like a piece of old skirt,
sliding on stockings, clopping about,
Of clocks I take stock:
they have fear in their clout.

Henri de Regnier (1864-1936) : La Voix

Je ne veux de personne auprès de ma tristesse
Ni même ton cher pas et ton visage aimé,
Ni ta main indolente et qui d'un doigt caresse
Le ruban paresseux et le livre fermé.

Laissez-moi. Que ma porte aujourd'hui reste close ;
N'ouvrez pas ma fenêtre au vent frais du matin ;
Mon cœur est aujourd'hui misérable et morose
Et tout me paraît sombre et tout me semble vain.

Ma tristesse me vient de plus loin que moi-même,
Elle m'est étrangère et ne m'appartient pas,
Et tout homme, qu'il chante ou qu'il rie ou qu'il aime,
À son heure l'entend qui lui parle tout bas,

Et quelque chose alors se remue et s'éveille,
S'agite, se répand et se lamente en lui,
À cette sourde voix qui lui dit à l'oreille,
Que la fleur de la vie est cendre dans son fruit.

Mercure de France 1906

Henri de Regnier : The Voice

I want no one near me in my sad assessing,
no, not even your dear step and cherished look,
nor hand that's indolent, and the touch caressing
the ribbon that is laid there and the closed book.

Leave me alone. Let today's door stay closed;
don't open the window to the fresh morning air.
In its gloom today my heart is indisposed.
All the world seems sombre and does not care.

The sadness comes from further than myself.
Something strange that hardly belong to me;
to every man belongs some inner wealth
heard each hour laughing or singing half silently.

Something that awakens, becomes slowly clear,
spreading inside by some saddening route.
Almost deaf is the voice that says in his ear
that the flower of life has ash for fruit.

Jules Laforge (1860-87) : Pierrots (On a des principes)

Elle disait, de son air vain fondamental :
Je t'aime pour toi seul! -oh ! Là, là, grêle histoire;
Oui, comme l'art ! Du calme, ô salaire illusoire
Du capitaliste l'Idéal !

Elle faisait: J'attends, me voici, je sais pas
Le regard pris de ces larges candeurs des lunes ;
-Oh ! Là, là, ce n'est pas peut-être pour des prunes,
Qu'on a fait ses classes ici-bas ?

Mais voici qu'un beau soir, infortunée à point,
Elle meurt ! -Oh ! Là, là ; bon, changement de thème !
On sait que tu dois ressusciter le troisième
Jour, sinon en personne, du moins

Dans l'odeur, les verdure, les eaux des beaux mois !
Et tu iras, levant encor bien plus de dupes
Vers le Zaïmph de la Joconde, vers la Jupe !
Il se pourra même que j'en sois.

Jules Laforge : Clowns (One has principles)

She said — as you would a vain concoction —
'It's you alone I love!' — Oh come now, that's some claim;
Yes, like art! Please, can we have calm and not a name
for some capitalist option !

She whispered: I'm waiting, here I am, I don't know.
Her gaze took on the ample candour of the moon,
Come, come. Was it all for nothing, that past boon
of taking classes down below?

But here, on one fine evening, she's unluckily deceased.
Yes, dying! Oh come, that's quite some change of tune:
We know you'll rise the third day from the tomb,
if not in person, then at least

in odours, greenery, streams of pleasant months,
and that you'll go on picking up more fools:
it is the Mona Lisa's veil, the skirt that rules:
and I may even be one of those poor chumps.

Jules Laforge (1860-87) : Je ne suis qu'un viveur lunaire...

Je ne suis qu'un viveur lunaire
Qui fait des ronds dans les bassins,
Et cela, sans autre dessein
Que devenir un légendaire.

Retroussant d'un air de défi
Mes manches de mandarin pâle,
J'arrondis ma bouche et - j'exhale
Des conseils doux de Crucifix.

Ah ! oui, devenir légendaire,
Au seuil des siècles charlatans !
Mais où sont les Lunes d'antan ?
Et que Dieu n'est-il à refaire ?

Locutions des Pierrots

Jules Laforge : I'm just a luary . . .

I'm a lifer luminary
who circles round the pools
no other purpose schools
him than become a legendary.

One who defiantly commits
to rolling up pale mandarin sleeves:
I round my mouth and — that leaves
advice soft-couched from crucifix.

Become, yes, legendary again,
charlatans of centuries it nears!
Where are the Moons of other years?
What has not God to do again?

Paul Claudel (1868-1955) Décembre

Balayant la contrée et ce vallon feuillu, ta main, gagnant les terres couleur de pourpre et de tan que tes yeux là-bas découvrent, s'arrête avec eux sur ce riche brocart. Tout est coi et enveloppé ; nul vert blessant, rien de jeune et rien de neuf ne forfait à la construction et au chant de ces tons pleins et sourds. Une sombre nuée occupe tout le ciel, dont remplissant de vapeur les crans irréguliers de la montagne, on dirait qu'il s'attache à l'horizon comme par des mortaises. De la paume caresse ces larges ornements que brochent les touffes de pins noirs sur l'hyacinthe des plaines, des doigts vérifie ces détails enfoncés dans la trame et la brume de ce jour hivernal, un rang d'arbres, un village. L'heure est certainement arrêtée ; comme un théâtre vide qu'emplit la mélancolie, le paysage clos semble prêter attention à une voix si grêle que je ne la saurais ouïr.

Ces après-midi de décembre sont douces.

Rien encore n'y parle du tourmentant avenir. Et le passé n'est pas si peu mort qu'il souffre que rien lui survive. De tant d'herbe et d'une si grande moisson, nulle chose ne demeure que de la paille parsemée et une bourre flétrie ; une eau froide mortifie la terre retournée. Tout est fini. Entre une année et l'autre, c'est ici la pause et la suspension. La pensée, délivrée de son travail, se recueille dans une taciturne allégresse, et, méditant de nouvelles entreprises, elle goûte, comme la terre, son sabbat.

Connaissance de L'Est 1900

Paul Claudel : December

Sweeping the country and this leafy valley, your hand, gaining the purple and bronzed lands that your eyes discern, pauses with them on this rich brocade. All is quiet and muffled; no hurtful green, nothing young and nothing new clashes with the assembly and singing of these full and muted tones. A dark cloud occupies the whole sky, filling the irregular notches of the mountain with vapour, seemingly attached to the horizon as though inserted there. With the palm of your hand caress these broad ornaments so that the tufts of black pines fasten on the hyacinth of the plains; with fingers check these details embedded in the weft and the mist of this winter day: a row of trees, a village. The hour has certainly stopped; like an empty theatre steeped in melancholy, the enclosed landscape seems to pay attention to a voice so thin that I would not be able to hear it.

These December afternoons are gentle.

Nothing yet speaks about the tormenting future. And the past is not so partially dead as to allow anything to survive it. From so much grass and so great a harvest, nothing remains but scattered straw and a withered tuft; cold water mortifies the ploughed earth. All is finished. Between one year and the next, here is the pause and the suspension. Thought, delivered from its work, collects itself in a taciturn joy, and, meditating on new undertakings, savours, as does the earth, its Sabbath day.

Paul Claudel (1868-1955) : Dissolution

Et je suis de nouveau reporté sur la mer indifférente et liquide. Quand je serai mort, on ne me fera plus souffrir. Quand je serai enterré entre mon père et ma mère, on ne me fera plus souffrir. On ne se rira plus de ce cœur trop aimant. Dans l'intérieur de la terre se dissoudra le sacrement de mon corps, mais mon âme, pareille au cri le plus perçant, reposera dans le sein d'Abraham.

Maintenant tout est dissous, et d'un œil appesanti je cherche en vain autour de moi et le pays habituel à la route ferme sous mon pas et ce visage cruel. Le ciel n'est plus que de la brume et l'espace de l'eau. Tu le vois, tout est dissous et je chercherais en vain autour de moi trait ou forme. Rien, pour horizon, que la cessation de la couleur la plus foncée. La matière de tout est rassemblée en une seule eau, pareille à celle de ces larmes que je sens qui coulent sur ma joue. Sa voix, pareille à celle du sommeil quand il souffle de ce qu'il y a de plus sourd à l'espoir en nous. J'aurais beau chercher, je ne trouve plus rien hors de moi, ni ce pays qui fut mon séjour, ni ce visage beaucoup aimé.

Connaissance de l'Est 1905

Paul Claudel : Dissolution

And again I am carried back on the indifferent and liquid sea. When I'm dead I shall no more be made to suffer. When I am buried between my father and my mother, I shall no longer be made to suffer. No one will laugh at this all too loving heart. The sacrament of my body will dissolve into the fastness of the earth, but my soul, like the most piercing cry, will rest in the bosom of Abraham. But for the present, all is dissolved, and with an eye made heavy I look vainly around me and the familiar country, with the road firm under my step and that cruel face. The sky is nothing but mist and this space of water. As you see, everything is dissolved and vainly I look for a surrounding trait or a form. Nothing for horizon but a softening of the darkest colour. All matter is gathered into this solitary water, as are those of tears I feel flowing down my cheek. Its voice, like that of sleep when it breathes from what is most deaf to hope in us. I could well have searched further, but can no longer find anything beyond myself, neither this country where I lived nor that much-loved face.

Paul Valéry (1871-1945) : *de La Jeune Parque*

222.écoute... N'attends plus... La renaissante année
À tout mon sang prédit de secrets mouvements :
Le gel cède à regret ses derniers diamants...

Demain, sur un soupir des Bontés constellées,
Le printemps vient briser les fontaines scellées :
L'étonnant printemps rit, viole... On ne sait d'où
Venu ? Mais la candeur ruisselle à mots si doux
Qu'une tendresse prend la terre à ses entrailles...

230. Les arbres regonflés et recouverts d'écailles
Chargés de tant de bras et de trop d'horizons,
Meuvent sur le soleil leurs tonnantes toisons,
Montent dans l'air amer avec toutes leurs ailes
De feuilles par milliers qu'ils se sentent nouvelles...

N'entends-tu pas frémir ces noms aériens,
Ô Sourde !... Et dans l'espace accablé de liens,
Vibrant de bois vivace infléchi par la cime,
Pour et contre les dieux ramer l'arbre unanime,
La flottante forêt de qui les rudes troncs
240. Portent pieusement à leurs fantasques fronts,
Aux déchirants départs des archipels superbes,
Un fleuve tendre, ô mort, et caché sous les herbes ?
Quelle résisterait, mortelle, à ces remous ?
Quelle mortelle ?

Moi si pure, mes genoux
Pressentent les terreurs de genoux sans défense...
L'air me brise. L'oiseau perce de cris d'enfance
Inouïs...l'ombre même où se serre mon cœur,
Et roses ! mon soupir vous soulève, vainqueur
249. Hélas ! des bras si doux qui ferment la corbeille...

1917

Paul Valéry : *from La Jeune Parque*

222. Listen . . . Wait no longer . . . The year reborn
to all my blood predicts its secret motions:
remorsefully the ice yields its last devotions.
Tomorrow, sighing with a constellated caress,
spring releases fountains from a sealed duress.
Bewildering spring laughs, violates . . . None know whence
it comes, but candor of words brings a soft sense.
So that a tenderness seizes in its entrails . . .

230. The trees fill out again, covered with scales:
encumbered with arms and too many distances
of clouds occluding the sun in those instances
of rising into the bitter air on all their wings
of leaves in their thousands that newness brings . . .
Do you not hear the soft rustling of names,
O Deaf One! In the space of branching claims
vibrating with living wood to its very end,
the tree's soul rows in and not as the gods send.

The forest floating around where the rough stunts
240. piously carry before them their capricious fronts
so to the parting of splendid archipelagos,
a tender river, O death, beneath where grass grows.
What mortal, say, could resist these vortices?
What mortal?

And I pure, on my knees
sense the terrors, as on my bent knee,
the air breaks, bird cry pierces infancy
unheard, the shadow where the heart contracts,
and roses! My heart lifts you up and exacts

249. a fealty of soft arms that close about the basket.

Paul Valéry (1871-1945) : Hélène

Azur ! c'est moi... Je viens des grottes de la mort
Entendre l'onde se rompre aux degrés sonores,
Et je revois les galères dans les aurores
Ressusciter de l'ombre au fil des rames d'or.

Mes solitaires mains appellent les monarques
Dont la barbe de sel amusait mes doigts purs ;
Je pleurais. Ils chantaient leurs triomphes obscurs
Et les golfes enfuis aux poupes de leurs barques.

J'entends les conques profondes et les clairons
Militaires rythmer le vol des avirons ;
Le chant clair des rameurs enchaînés le tumulte,

Et les Dieux, à la proue héroïque exaltés
Dans leur sourire antique et que l'écume insulte,
Tendent vers moi leurs bras indulgents et sculptés.

Paul Valéry : Helen

It is I, O Azure come from death's grottos below,
hearing the waves crumple on the sonorous shore,
seeing again the galleys in the dawns once more,
reshaping the shadowy oars in their gold-lit glow.

In solitary caresses my fingers call up kings
with whose salty beards I made pleasurable cause.
I wept. They sang of their implacable wars:
more sternward fled the bays that each boat brings.

I hear the bugles, how the deep conches call,
the military rhythms of the oars that rise and fall.
Enchained over the tumult the rowers' song exults.

On proud, heroic prows the Gods bestride the sea,
and, with an antique smile that frothing sea insults,
hold out their indulgent and sculpted arms to me.

Paul Valéry (1871-1945) : Le Cimetière marin

Ce toit tranquille, où marchent des colombes,
Entre les pins palpite, entre les tombes ;
Midi le juste y compose de feux
La mer, la mer, toujours recommencée !
Ô récompense après une pensée
Qu'un long regard sur le calme des dieux !

Quel pur travail de fins éclairs consume
Maint diamant d'imperceptible écume,
Et quelle paix semble se concevoir !
Quand sur l'abîme un soleil se repose,
Ouvrages purs d'une éternelle cause,
Le Temps scintille et le Songe est savoir.

Stable trésor, temple simple à Minerve,
Masse de calme, et visible réserve,
Eau sourcilleuse, Œil qui gardes en toi
Tant de sommeil sous un voile de flamme,
Ô mon silence !... Édifice dans l'âme,
Mais comble d'or aux mille tuiles, Toit !

Temple du Temps, qu'un seul soupir résume,
À ce point pur je monte et m'accoutume,
Tout entouré de mon regard marin ;
Et comme aux dieux mon offrande suprême,
La scintillation sereine sème
Sur l'altitude un dédain souverain.

Paul Valéry : Cemetery by the Sea

The walk of doves this tranquil roof assumes
palpitates through pines trees and the tombs.
Imperturbable midday, of fire
and sea, the sea beginning each occasion
to bring such riches in from contemplation:
great settlements of calm the gods inspire.

What a pure work of fine lightning consumes
itself in these imperceptible diamond fumes.
Peace seems self-conceived. Settling as though
into an abyss of emptiness the sun pours
out its artistry on an eternal cause.
Time's an instant, and Dreaming is to know.

That temple to Minerva's intelligence,
water's calmness, shows such reticence.
Proud-lidded depths and the Eye's reproof
that wells up from sleep beneath the flame.
And the silence, that makes my soul the same
under the myriad gold waves that slope this Roof.

Temple of Time, parsed to a single sigh.
To this accustomed and pure instant I
climb now with the sea around me, born
of this look, making supreme oblations,
but seeing in its peaceful scintillations
the sea sow on my altitudes such sovereign scorn.

Comme le fruit se fond en jouissance,
Comme en délice il change son absence
Dans une bouche où sa forme se meurt,
Je hume ici ma future fumée,
Et le ciel chante à l'âme consumée
Le changement des rives en rumeur.

Beau ciel, vrai ciel, regarde-moi qui change !
Après tant d'orgueil, après tant d'étrange
Oisiveté, mais pleine de pouvoir,
Je m'abandonne à ce brillant espace,
Sur les maisons des morts mon ombre passe
Qui m'apprivoise à son frêle mouvoir.

L'âme exposée aux torches du solstice,
Je te soutiens, admirable justice
De la lumière aux armes sans pitié !
Je te rends pure à ta place première :
Regarde-toi !... Mais rendre la lumière
Suppose d'ombre une morne moitié.

Ô pour moi seul, à moi seul, en moi-même,
Après d'un cœur, aux sources du poème,
Entre le vide et l'événement pur,
J'attends l'écho de ma grandeur interne,
Amère, sombre, et sonore citerne,
Sonnant dans l'âme un creux toujours futur !

As the fruit's taste is moulded into pleasure,
and delight loses itself in its own measure
of absence in mouths where it is no more,
so I sense myself in the emanations
in a sky singing the soul's cremations,
dissolving in surf on that murmurous shore.

Look, beautiful heaven, true heaven, how I change,
after so much pride, so much strange
idleness, but even here, in my potency,
immolating myself in this bright space,
across the houses of the dead a trace
passes to plunge me into the shadowy.

Giving my soul to the sea's flare at solstice,
and therefore into that admirable justice
whose burning weapons are not by pity stayed,
I take on your purity, extending that bright
reflection of yourself, but the light
supposes my half still as a gloomy shade.

Ever for me, to and in myself alone:
out of that rapture is the poetry grown.
Between the emptiness and pure event,
I await the echo of that internal power,
that sonorous and dark, bitter reservoir
of nothingness ringing, to which the soul is bent.

Sais-tu, fausse captive des feuillages,
Golfe mangeur de ces maigres grillages,
Sur mes yeux clos, secrets éblouissants,
Quel corps me traîne à sa fin paresseuse,
Quel front l'attire à cette terre osseuse ?
Une étincelle y pense à mes absents.

Fermé, sacré, plein d'un feu sans matière,
Fragment terrestre offert à la lumière,
Ce lieu me plaît, dominé de flambeaux,
Composé d'or, de pierre et d'arbres sombres,
Où tant de marbre est tremblant sur tant d'ombres ;
La mer fidèle y dort sur mes tombeaux !

Chienne splendide, écarte l'idolâtre !
Quand, solitaire au sourire de pâtre,
Je pais longtemps, moutons mystérieux,
Le blanc troupeau de mes tranquilles tombes,
Éloignes-en les prudentes colombes,
Les songes vains, les anges curieux !

Ici venu, l'avenir est paresse.
L'insecte net gratte la sécheresse ;
Tout est brûlé, défait, reçu dans l'air
À je ne sais quelle sévère essence...
La vie est vaste, étant ivre d'absence,
Et l'amertume est douce, et l'esprit clair.

Can you, feigned prisoner of this foliage, know
the boughs dissolving in this water's glow?
Around that dazzled secret, eyes are closed.
What body leads me to so loose an end
or forehead to the earth where bones are penned,
all these dead by the flickering light composed?

Earth's speck that's sacred, full of fire despite
being so insubstantial, and is offered light.
This place, occasioned by torches, pleases me.
The gold and stone and sombre trees assume
a mass of marble trembling in the gloom,
and on my tombs, and faithful, sleeps the sea.

Keep off the idolaters, let sea meanwhile
reflect the solitary of a sheepish smile,
that I may pasture here my mysteries:
white-cluster round me, undisturbed, the graves,
and let the doves be prudent in safe conclaves,
the daydreams vain as angel deities.

Here future is idleness. In the soil about
the brittle insect scratches at the drought.
All summer in this desiccating wind
abstracts, I do not know how, to essences.
And life is vast, drunk on absences,
and bitterness is sweet, and the mind thinned.

Les morts cachés sont bien dans cette terre
Qui les réchauffe et sèche leur mystère.
Midi là-haut, Midi sans mouvement
En soi se pense et convient à soi-même...
Tête complète et parfait diadème,
Je suis en toi le secret changement.

Tu n'as que moi pour contenir tes craintes !
Mes repentirs, mes doutes, mes contraintes
Sont le défaut de ton grand diamant...
Mais dans leur nuit toute lourde de marbres,
Un peuple vague aux racines des arbres
A pris déjà ton parti lentement.

Ils ont fondu dans une absence épaisse,
L'argile rouge a bu la blanche espèce,
Le don de vivre a passé dans les fleurs !
Où sont des morts les phrases familières,
L'art personnel, les âmes singulières ?
La larve file où se formaient des pleurs.

Les cris aigus des filles chatouillées,
Les yeux, les dents, les paupières mouillées,
Le sein charmant qui joue avec le feu,
Le sang qui brille aux lèvres qui se rendent,
Les derniers dons, les doigts qui les défendent,
Tout va sous terre et rentre dans le jeu !

The dead are hidden well in this warm earth
where mysteries resunnd give up their worth.
All the noon up there, unchanging blue:
the midday thinks and only suits itself,
and all around a head of brilliant wealth
I am the change, the secret change in you.

Only me you have to hold your faints,
my penitence and doubts, and my constraints
are broken facets in your crystal flare.
Where, under the marble, all night wait,
lost among tree roots in their wandering state,
a people already, who emerge to air.

Into a thickness otherways they melt,
an absent whiteness in the red clay's welt.
The gift of life is fled to flowers, the years
of frank familiarity in speech,
individual graciousness, the souls in each:
and larvae spin their silk where there were tears.

Girls' shrieks, love's teasings in their eyes,
and teeth and eyelids moistened with their sighs,
the charming breast that bares and bids delay,
the blood that wets the lips that whisper yes,
the fingers fending off that feigned distress:
the earth resorbs them and returns to play.

Et vous, grande âme, espérez-vous un songe
Qui n'aura plus ces couleurs de mensonge
Qu'aux yeux de chair l'onde et l'or font ici ?
Chanterez-vous quand serez vaporeuse ?
Allez ! Tout fuit ! Ma présence est poreuse,
La sainte impatience meurt aussi !

Maigre immortalité noire et dorée,
Consolatrice affreusement laurée,
Qui de la mort fait un sein maternel,
Le beau mensonge et la pieuse ruse !
Qui ne connaît, et qui ne les refuse,
Ce crâne vide et ce rire éternel !

Pères profonds, têtes inhabitées,
Qui sous le poids de tant de pelletées,
Êtes la terre et confondez nos pas,
Le vrai rongeur, le ver irréfutable
N'est point pour vous qui dormez sous la table,
Il vit de vie, il ne me quitte pas !

Amour, peut-être, ou de moi-même haine ?
Sa dent secrète est de moi si prochaine
Que tous les noms lui peuvent convenir !
Qu'importe ! Il voit, il veut, il songe, il touche !
Ma chair lui plaît, et jusque sur ma couche,
À ce vivant je vis d'appartenir !

And you, great soul, who hope to find some dream
beneath colours that only lie and seem,
some sight the wave and gold will give in shades
of permanence although the flesh expires —
for self is porous and the world retires,
and the thirst for sainthood even fades.

How thin that immortality in gold
and black, the hideous laurels that we fold,
consoling death at some maternal breast.
A trick that's beautiful: a pious lie.
Who does not know that, or could still deny
the emptied skull goes laughing to its rest?

The ancestors, the uninhabited heads
lost under the shovel, where the earth spreads
in footsteps more than living may discern:
Not for you is the irrefutable worm:
those drunk under the table of life affirm
that life is food, as I too in my turn.

Are they loves, perhaps, or hates?
The tooth is intimate with me and waits
despite whatever name I fabricate.
It will see, want, think, touch, keep,
in daylight's consciousness or in my sleep,
repeating life will hold me to this state.

Zénon ! Cruel Zénon ! Zénon d'Élée !
M'as-tu percé de cette flèche ailée
Qui vibre, vole, et qui ne vole pas !
Le son m'enfante et la flèche me tue !
Ah ! le soleil... Quelle ombre de tortue
Pour l'âme, Achille immobile à grands pas !

Non, non !... Debout ! Dans l'ère successive !
Brisez, mon corps, cette forme pensive !
Buvez, mon sein, la naissance du vent !
Une fraîcheur, de la mer exhalée,
Me rend mon âme... Ô puissance salée !
Courons à l'onde en rejaillir vivant !

Oui ! Grande mer de délires douée,
Peau de panthère et chlamyde trouée
De mille et mille idoles du soleil,
Hydre absolue, ivre de ta chair bleue,
Qui te remords l'étincelante queue
Dans un tumulte au silence pareil,

Le vent se lève !... Il faut tenter de vivre !
L'air immense ouvre et referme mon livre,
La vague en poudre ose jaillir des rocs !
Envolez-vous, pages tout éblouies !
Rompez, vagues ! Rompez d'eaux réjouies
Ce toit tranquille où picoraient des focs !

Charmes 1922

Zeno, Zeno of Elea, cruel lies
your arrow pierces with, how fast it flies,
vibrating in the air but cannot move.
The sound gives birth to me, the arrow kills;
the sun the shadow of the speeding tortoise fills
as soul a swift Achilles cannot prove.

But no, I stand within the future's court
and break my body out of inward thought.
Drink, my breast, the birthing wind, and sing
of heightened freshness in that bursting sea:
a saltiness will salve the soul in me,
and waves return me as some living thing.

Sea, what great delirium we're in
with torn off chlamys and with panther skin.
The thousand thousand idols in the sun
drink the Hydra of your flesh, where the blue
tail returns the effective remorse in you
as silent commotion settling into one.

The wind rises. We must try to live. Look:
an immensity of air opens and shuts my book.
Waves shatter on the rocks. Break, with bright
glitterings with my pages flown away,
and rejoice, waves, falling into spray —
on this calm roof with sails of pecked at light.

Paul Valéry (1871-1945): Au Platane
A André Fontainas

Tu penches, grand Platane, et te proposes nu,
Blanc comme un jeune Scythe,
Mais ta candeur est prise, et ton pied retenu
Par la force du site.

Ombre retentissante en qui le même azur
Qui t'emporte, s'apaise,
La noire mère astreint ce pied natal et pur
A qui la fange pèse.

De ton front voyageur les vents ne veulent pas ;
La terre tendre et sombre,
O Platane, jamais ne laissera d'un pas
S'émerveiller ton ombre !

Ce front n'aura d'accès qu'aux degrés lumineux
Où la sève l'exalte ;
Tu peux grandir, candeur, mais non rompre les nœuds
De l'éternelle halte !

Pressens autour de toi d'autres vivants liés
Par l'hydre vénérable ;
Tes pareils sont nombreux, des pins aux peupliers,
De l'yeuse à l'érable,

Qui, par les morts saisis, les pieds échevelés
Dans la confuse cendre,
Sentent les fuir les fleurs, et leurs spermés ailés
Le cours léger descendre.

Paul Valery: *After To the Plane Tree*
for André Fontainas

You lean, great plane tree and offer your nakedness
as will a young Scythian in white,
But your foot is held and your openness will press
on the strength of the site.

But the scintillating shadow and the self-same blue
which sheafs you grow calm.
The dark mother stares at the root and what it will do
that the loam keeps from harm.

It's the sway of your top branches the winds reject.
The earth dark and soft.
Let, O plane tree, never your shadows inspect
your step from aloft.

Your forehead has but access to the luminous afterthoughts
that the sap exalts.
Openly you can grow up but not break the knots
that eternity halts.

All around you sense the lives of others bound
as the hydra of old.
the many such, from poplar to pine tree found,
from ilex to maple told.

All are by death held tight: round their feet is thrown
dust's chaotic gown.
The flowers escape them but the light-winged seeds are sown
that lightly float down.

Le tremble pur, le charme, et ce hêtre formé
De quatre jeunes femmes,
Ne cessent point de battre un ciel toujours fermé,
Vêtus en vain de rames.

Ils vivent séparés, ils pleurent confondus
Dans une seule absence,
Et leurs membres d'argent sont vainement fendus
A leur douce naissance.

Quand l'âme lentement qu'ils expirent le soir
Vers l'Aphrodite monte,
La vierge doit dans l'ombre, en silence, s'asseoir,
Toute chaude de honte.

Elle se sent surprendre, et pâle, appartenir
A ce tendre présage
Qu'une présente chair tourne vers l'avenir
Par un jeune visage...

Mais toi, de bras plus purs que les bras animaux,
Toi qui dans l'or les plonges,
Toi qui formes au jour le fantôme des maux
Que le sommeil fait songes,

Haute profusion de feuilles, trouble fier
Quand l'âpre tramontane
Sonne, au comble de l'or, l'azur du jeune hiver
Sur tes harpes, Platane,

The simple aspen, the hornbeam and the sturdy beech
that four young women make,
that beat without ceasing but cannot heaven reach
whatever the oars they take.

They weep together though of each together bereft
in absence from the earth.
Without purpose it is that silvery limbs are cleft
of each at tender birth.

When the soul expires into the evening air
to perfect womanhood,
let virgin youth sit silently, as shadows flare,
indeed as hot shame should.

Surprised she is, and pale: the future brooks
no hint of forward grace;
The present living flesh to the future looks
through a youthful face

But you with arms more pure than any animal,
who poured them into gold,
who daily make the evil phantoms credible
that dreams in sleeping told.

That loftiness of leaves, that fiery cloudiness
on that mountain terrain,
the gold and azure in which young winters dress,
and sound of your harps, O plane.

Ose gémir !... Il faut, ô souple chair du bois,
Te tordre, te détordre,
Te plaindre sans te rompre, et rendre aux vents la voix
Qu'ils cherchent en désordre !

Flagelle-toi !... Parais l'impatient martyr
Qui soi-même s'écorche,
Et dispute à la flamme impuissante à partir
Ses retours vers la torche !

Afin que l'hymne monte aux oiseaux qui naîtront,
Et que le pur de l'âme
Fasse frémir d'espoir les feuillages d'un tronc
Qui rêve de la flamme,

Je t'ai choisi, puissant personnage d'un parc,
Ivre de ton tangage,
Puisque le ciel t'exerce, et te presse, ô grand arc,
De lui rendre un langage !

O qu'amoureusement des Dryades rival,
Le seul poète puisse
Flatter ton corps poli comme il fait du Cheval
L'ambitieuse cuisse !...

— Non, dit l'Arbre. Il dit : Non ! par l'étincellement
De sa tête superbe,
Que la tempête traite universellement
Comme elle fait une herbe !

1943

Dare to moan as you must, O wooden flesh of choice,
twist yourself who will hoard her:
Complain without breaking, give winds back their voice,
and embrace disorder.

Flog yourself!... You the impatient martyr
who punishes itself,
dispute with the powerless flame after
returning the flame's wealth!

So that a hymn may rise in the birds with a trope
the pure soul may claim,
surrounding the rich foliage of the trunk with hope
that dreams of the flame.

I have chosen you, who are a rich entity of trees,
drunk with your attitude.
Since heaven exercise and promises, a great bow sees
what tongue is renewed.

O loving rival of the Dryades with a course
that only poets try
to flatter your polished body as the horse
delights in its groomed thigh.

— No, says the tree, no electricity
from that fine head will pass,
though the storm round will universally
lay it quiet as grass

The Individualists

Some poets resist categorisation, or even the themes and styles of the time, remaining stubbornly themselves.

Francis Jammes (1868-1938) produced simple poems on rustic themes that had nothing in common with the contemporary Symbolism. He was in fact rescued from his quiet civil service life by the literary giants of the day, later mixing with them on equal terms, but, even in the twentieth century when famous, he preferred a quiet country life in the Pyrenees to Paris celebrity. Jammes was never elected to the *Académie française*, and in fact failed his *baccalauréat*, receiving a zero in French.

Jammes was nonetheless an accomplished man of letters. Besides several collections of poems, all on rustic themes though growing more austere after his conversion to Catholicism, Jammes produced a memoir, novels and short stories.

The second individualist was much more cosmopolitan, indeed exotic Saint-John Perse (1887-1975: born Marie-René-Auguste-Aléxis Saint-Léger Léger in Guadeloupe) had an exceptionally brilliant diplomatic career but also produced a large body of poetry in a distinctly personal style. Perse was successively consul at Shanghai and diplomatic secretary in Peking, returning to France in 1921 and climbing rapidly to the rank of ambassador. He was dismissed by the Vichy government in 1940 and then worked in the USA, not returning to France until 1957.

Perse's first work *Éloges* (*Éloges, and Other Poems*: 1911) looks back on the magic world of childhood, but *Anabase* (*Anabasis*: 1924), set in an imagined central Asian kingdom of the steppes, employs a liturgical metre and exotic diction. The later poems are more celebratory but sometimes personal to their author — *Exile* (*Exile, and Other Poems*: 1942), *Vents* (*Winds*: 1942), *Amers* (*Seamarks*: 1957), *Chronique* (*Chronical*: 1960), and *Oiseaux* (*Birds*: 1962).

The Individualists

Francis Jammes (1868-1938) : Clara d'Ellébeuse

J'aime dans le temps Clara d'Ellébeuse,
l'écolière des anciens pensionnats,
qui allait, les soirs chauds, sous les tilleuls
lire les magazines d'autrefois.

Je n'aime qu'elle, et je sens sur mon coeur
la lumière bleue de sa gorge blanche.
Où est-elle? Où était donc ce bonheur?
Dans sa chambre claire il entrainait des branches.

Elle n'est peut-être pas encore morte
– ou peut-être que nous l'étions tous deux.
La grande cour avait des feuilles mortes
dans le vent froid des fins d'Étés très vieux.

Te souviens-tu de ces plumes de paon,
dans un grand vase, auprès de coquillages?
On apprenait qu'on avait fait naufrage,
on appelait Terre-Neuve: le Banc.

Viens, viens, ma chère Clara d'Ellébeuse:
aimons-nous encore si tu existes.
Le vieux jardin a de vieilles tulipes.
Viens toute nue, ô Clara d'Ellébeuse.

Francis Jammes : Clara d'Ellébeuse

Down the years it's Clara d'Ellébeuse
I love, who went to old-time boarding schools
and came, warm evenings, under linden trees
to read her magazines of other days.

It's her alone I love and on my heart
I feel the blue light of her throat in flame.
Where is she? Or happiness's part
when into her bright room the branches came?

Perhaps it may be that she is not dead
— or else the both of us have long been so.
The cold wind's leaves across the yard have spread,
brought in by summers' endings years ago.

Do you remember those great peacock feathers
and that tall vase, with seashells heaped around?
How once we learned of shipwrecks and of weathers
on Newfoundland's Great Bank, its fishing ground?

Come, my precious Clara d'Ellébeuse,
together let us love if you exist.
Old gardens have old tulips in their midst.
O come quite naked, Clara d'Ellébeuse.

Francis Jammes (1868-1938) : Une Prière Pour Aller Au Paradis Avec Les Ânes

Lorsqu'il faudra aller vers vous, ô mon Dieu, faites que ce soit par un jour où la campagne en fête poudroiera. Je désire, ainsi que je fis ici-bas, choisir un chemin pour aller, comme il me plaira,

au Paradis, où sont en plein jour les étoiles.
Je prendrai mon bâton et sur la grande route j'irai, et je dirai aux ânes, mes amis :
Je suis Francis Jammes et je vais au Paradis,

car il n'y a pas d'enfer au pays du Bon Dieu.
Je leur dirai : " Venez, doux amis du ciel bleu, pauvres bêtes chéries qui, d'un brusque mouvement d'oreille, chassez les mouches plates, les coups et les abeilles."

Que je Vous apparaisse au milieu de ces bêtes que j'aime tant parce qu'elles baissent la tête doucement, et s'arrêtent en joignant leurs petits pieds d'une façon bien douce et qui vous fait pitié.

J'arriverai suivi de leurs milliers d'oreilles,
suivi de ceux qui portent au flanc des corbeilles,
de ceux traînant des voitures de saltimbanques
ou des voitures de plumeaux et de fer-blanc,

de ceux qui ont au dos des bidons bossués,
des ânesses pleines comme des outres, aux pas cassés,
de ceux à qui l'on met de petits pantalons
à cause des plaies bleues et suintantes que Font

Francis Jammes : A Prayer To Go To Heaven With The Donkeys

When I must go to you, O Lord, it shall
it be on some dusty country festival,
and I would have it as it's here below,
on whatever path I please to go.

In Paradise, with stars abroad at day,
I'll take my walking stick and choose my way.
I'll tell the donkeys, also. I, my friends,
am Francis Jammes and go to Heaven's ends.

And in the Lord's good lands there's never Hell.
So come, good friends that in the blue sky dwell,
dear darling creatures, you whose long ears twitch
to ward off circling flies and bees and midge.

So let me be with these poor beasts instead
that unobtrusively will droop the head
and rest with little feet not far apart,
whereby they gently touch you at the heart.

So I'll arrive as with a thousand tags,
the ears of those who carry pannier bags,
who haul the bulky carts of acrobats
or heaps of tinsplate, dusters, and kitchen mats.

Where heaps of battered cans make bumpy rides
for donkeys with jittering steps besides,
poor animals decked out with large plus fours
protecting them from blue and crusty sores,

les mouches entêtées qui s'y groupent en ronds.
Mon Dieu, faites qu'avec ces ânes je Vous vienne.
Faites que, dans la paix, des anges nous conduisent
vers des ruisseaux touffus où tremblent des cerise

lisses comme la chair qui rit des jeunes filles,
et faites que, penché dans ce séjour des âmes,
sur vos divines eaux, je sois pareil aux ânes
qui mireront leur humble et douce pauvreté
à la limpidité de l'amour éternel

round which the circling flies make much ado.
With these donkeys, Lord, let me come to you
where angels lead in peace to leafy streams
where cherry trees hold out their trembling dreams

of girls there laughing with unruffled cheeks.
In this haven of souls may it be I who seeks
divine refreshment, as these donkeys be
mirroring a sweet and humble poverty
which is the clearness of eternal love.

Saint-John Perse (1887-1975) : Pour Fêter une Enfance II

Et les servantes de ma mère, grandes filles luisantes... Et
nos paupières fabuleuses... Ô

clartés ! ô faveurs !

Appelant toute chose, je récitai qu'elle était grande,
appelant toute bête, qu'elle était belle et bonne.

Ô mes plus grandes

fleurs voraces, parmi la feuille rouge, à dévorer tous mes
plus beaux

insectes verts ! Les bouquets au jardin sentaient le
cimetière de famille. Et une très petite sœur était morte :
j'avais eu, qui sent bon, son cercueil d'acajou entre les
glaces de trois chambres. Et il ne fallait pas tuer l'oiseau-
mouche d'un caillou... Mais la terre se courbait dans nos
jeux comme fait la servante,

celle qui a droit à une chaise si l'on se tient dans la
maison.

... Végétales ferveurs, ô clartés ô faveurs !...

Et puis ces mouches, cette sorte de mouches, vers le
dernier étage du jardin, qui étaient comme si la lumière
eût chanté !

Saint-John Perse : To Celebrate a Childhood II

And my mother's maids, large shining girls... And our
fabulous eyelids... O

brightness! o favors!

Calling each thing, I recited that it was great, calling each
beast, that it was beautiful and good.

O my tallest

voracious flowers, among the red leafage, ready to devour
all my most beautiful

green insects! The clustered flowers in the garden smelled
like a family cemetery. And a very little sister had died: I
had had, with its fragrance, her mahogany coffin between
the mirrors of three rooms. And it was not needed to kill
the hummingbird with a pebble... But the earth bowed in
our games as the maid does,

the one who has the right to a chair if we stay indoors.

... Vegetable fervours, o brightness, o favours!...

And then these flies, this kind of flies, towards the top
floor of the garden, which were as if the light had sung!

...Je me souviens du sel, je me souviens du sel que la nourrice jaune dut essuyer à l'angle de mes yeux.

Le sorcier noir sentenciant à l'office : « Le monde est comme une pirogue, qui, tournant et tournant, ne sait plus si le vent voulait rire ou pleurer... »

Et aussitôt mes yeux tâchaient à peindre

un monde balancé entre des eaux brillantes, connaissent le mât lisse des fûts, la hune sous les feuilles, et les guis et les vergues, les haubans de liane,

où trop longues, les fleurs

s'achevaient en des cris de perruches.

Éloges 1911

...I remember the salt, I remember the salt that the yellow nurse had to wipe at the corner of my eyes.

The black sorcerer officiated at the service: "The world is like a ship, which, turning and turning, no longer knows whether the wind wanted to laugh or cry... »

And immediately my eyes tried to picture

a world balanced between brilliant waters, knew the smooth mast of the barrels, the foretop under the leaves, and the mistletoes and the yardarms, the stays of liana,

where too long, the flowers

ended in the cries of parakeets.

Saint-John Perse (1887-1975) : Anabase

Sur trois grandes saisons m'établissant avec honneur,
j'augure bien du sol où j'ai fondé ma loi.

Les armes au matin sont belles et la mer. A nos chevaux
livrée la terre sans amandes

nous vaut ce ciel incorruptible. Et le soleil n'est point
nommé, mais sa puissance est parmi nous

et la mer au matin est comme une présomption de
l'esprit.

Puissance, tu chantais sur nos routes nocturnes !... Aux
ides pures du matin que savons-nous du songe, notre
aînesse ?

Pour une année encore parmi vous ! Maître du grain,
maître du sel, et la chose publique sur de justes
balances !

Je ne hélèrai point les gens d'une autre rive. Je ne tracerai
point de grands

quartiers de villes sur les pentes avec le sucre des coraux.
Mais j'ai dessein de vivre parmi vous.

Au seuil des tentes toute gloire ! ma force parmi vous ! et
l'idée pure comme un sel tient ses assises dans le jour.

Anabase 1924

Saint-John Perse: Anabasis

Establishing myself over three great seasons with honour,
I augur well for the soil wherein is founded my law.

The weapons in the morning are beautiful and the sea. To
our horse is given the land without almonds

this incorruptible heaven has worth to us. And the sun is
not named, but its power is amongst us

and the sea in the morning is like a presumption of the
spirit.

Power, you sang on our nocturnal roads!... To the pure
ideas of the morning, what do we know about the dream,
our firstborn?

For another year among you! Master of the grain, master
of the Salt, and the public commodity on fair scales!

I will not hail people from another shore. I will not draw
any of the great

neighbourhoods of cities on the slopes with the sugar of
corals. But I have a purpose to live among you.

On the threshold of the tents all glory! my strength among
you! and the pure idea as a salt holds its foundations in
the day.

TRANSLATION MATTERS

Fidelity

I have explained my reasons for employing traditional verse in the relevant section of Volume One, and must now say something about the translations from the less rational poets — Nerval, Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Valéry — where word for word renderings are not generally successful.

Clearly, much depends on what the translator hopes to achieve. Some, particularly in scholarly works, aim for a scrupulously word for word rendering. The focus is on the semantic content, what the original actually says, and not the poetry, though even here the driest scholar will understand that the aesthetic elements are not accessory but an integral part of the meaning. These elements — stanza forms, word choice and rhyme schemes — were not later decoration, of course, pasted on afterwards, but were active in the very poem's creation. They encouraged, enabled and shaped each stage of the writing. To an ideal translator, the fusion of scholar and poet, the elements will disclose their functions as the translation proceeds, explaining why something was written in some way and not otherwise. Poets feel these things in their bones and expect to find their traces in moving from line to line through the rendering, to the extent that the English versification allows.

But what's effective in one language may be less so in another. Occasionally, and only occasionally, the most literal rendering serves best. Thus Mallarmé's celebrated opening line from *Brise de mer* (La chair est triste, hélas ! et j'ai lu tous les livres: The flesh is sad, alas! – and I've read all the books.) remains poetry when simply transliterated, but the subsequent

lines unfortunately do not: 'faithful' translations of the whole poem tend to be disappointing.

Is that fidelity worth pursuing? Most certainly, or the rendering will be the translator's poem on a theme of the original, which no one wants. But fidelity to the prose sense is only one requirement, and can be overdone. Some translators indeed feel that the more faithful be the rendering the closer to poetry will be the result be, which leaves translators who are also poets in their own right shaking their heads. This amazing view still prevails in Chinese poetry translation, where every word is sacrosanct and can't be omitted or altered. If the character strictly means dark green it cannot be rendered as gloomy, dusky, blackest green, etc. without charges of linguistic imperialism. But poets in my experience are rather cavalier here. If changing a word in a line would result in a better poem, most, I'm sorry to tell the purists, would make the change in an instant: they are creating a poem, not divining imperishable truths. Unfortunately, every word of the original was chosen for a host of reasons, and every word of the translation has similar obligations in this regard, which a dictionary look-up rarely satisfies.

Corbière and Laforgue

Some problems are simply solved. How do we represent the poetry of Corbière and La Laforgue? It is often termed 'free verse', which is perhaps incorrect, but it's certainly freer at times and more attuned to the everyday speaking voice. Here is the opening of Laforgue's *Pierrots (On a des principes)*, first with the silent 'e' counting as a syllable:

Elle disait, de son air vain fondamental : 4 3 / 1 4

Je t'aime pour toi seul! -oh ! Là, là, grêle histoire; 3 3 / 3 4

Oui, comme l'art ! Du calme, ô salaire illusoire 1 3 2 / 3 3
Du capitaliste l'Idéal ! : 1 5 / 3

and then staying silent, i.e. read as speech rather than
conventional poetry :

Elle disait, de son air vain fondamental : 3 3 / 1 4
Je t'aime pour toi seul! -oh ! Là, là, grêle histoire; 2 3 / 3 3
Oui, comme l'art ! Du calme, ô salaire illusoire 1 3 2 / 3 3
Du capitaliste l'Idéal ! : 1 4 / 3

Clearly, the metre is irregular on both approaches, though the
piece is strictly rhymed. I suggest we keep the irregularity and
the rhymes:

She said — without an air of vain concoction —
'It's you alone I love!' — Oh come now, that's some claim;
Yes, like art! Please, can we have calm and not a name
of some capitalist option!

Symbolist Obscurity

Other problems are much more difficult. What do we make of
Germain Nouveau's *Mendiants*, the first four stanzas of which
are:

Pendant qu'hésite encor ton pas sur la prairie,
Le pays s'est de ciel houleux enveloppé.
Tu cèdes, l'oeil levé vers la nuagerie,
A ce doux midi blême et plein d'osier coupé.

Nous avons tant suivi le mur de mousse grise
Qu'à la fin, à nos flancs qu'une douleur emplit,
Non moins bon que ton sein, tiède comme l'église,

Ce fossé s'est ouvert aussi sûr que le lit.

Dédoublement sans fin d'un typique fantôme,
Que l'or de ta prunelle était peuplé de rois !
Est-ce moi qui riais à travers ce royaume ?
Je tenais le martyr, ayant les bras en croix.

Le fleuve au loin, le ciel en deuil, l'eau de tes lèvres,
Immense trilogie amère aux coeurs noyés.
Un goût m'est revenu de nos plus forts genièvres,
Lorsque ta joue a lui, près des yeux dévoyés !

I *think* the 'full of cut osiers' (plein d'osier coupé) is a reference to the silvery grey underside of willow leaves, but find the other references simply baffling. The best I can do is:

Still hesitating with the meadowlands,
the fields are wrapped about with stormy eaves.
You give in, look up to see the cloudy bands
this soft pale noon that's thick with willow leaves.

In following the grey-mossed walls, our search
will end when flanks are filled with painful dread.
No less your breast, slight-heated as a church,
but safe the ditch that opens like a bed.

An endless doubling of the usual ghost:
how the pupil of your eye was thronged with kings.
Me, was it laughing, through that regal host,
playing the martyr, arms tight-crossed as wings?

Far river, mournful sky, wet lips of hers,
a vast bitter trilogy where the heart dies.

The taste came back of pungent junipers,
when your cheek has him close to misguided eyes.

Since we're restricting coverage to poems whose translation makes an acceptable English poem, we can simply select a more straightforward poem by Germain Nouveau. But that is not always the case for the big names of French Symbolism. If we insist on a faithful, word-for-word translation of a major, non-rational Symbolist poem, the result will not generally be poetry, but the scholar's crib, immensely useful to those who don't speak the language, but not what we read for pleasure. We can of course emphasise the scholarly approach, and explain that aesthetics comes second, but it's still not translation in the full sense of the word.

Another approach is to turn the matter on its head and claim the prose-based pedestrian verse is today's new poetry, one more direct, honest and appropriate to the current age. In this way have Ezra Pound's Chinese translations — often pleasingly idiomatic but also rather fragmentary and melodically deficient — become a template for American modern verse. A dense wall of theoretical considerations has grown up to defend the practice, but the suspicion will remain that today's poets simply haven't learned their craft, and — worse — having lost the ear for proper verse, do not feel any need to write with the older and fuller considerations in mind.

Poems are generally translated for their larger meaning, but that in Symbolist work becomes problematic, when poets travelled beyond the remit of poetry as once conceived. Valéry became more absorbed in the processes of writing than in the final product, magnificent though that often was. Rimbaud deranged his senses to create a startling poetry without verse, or what most would call verse. His work rose with intense

feelings from childhood memories into a sort of muscular lyricism, which was uncompromisingly direct. It was certainly powerful, but one without literary precedents or descendants, since nothing like it has been written before or since. Genius is the only explanation, but genius that relied on drugs and alcohol. 'Then I would explain my magic sophistries with the hallucination of words,' said their author. Words were the only truth, as the academic Hegel had insisted, but not words of some tidy philosophical system. The irrational gave access to a larger and more liberated world, and from this belief developed Dadaism and Surrealism, both crucial to twentieth century French poetry.

What to do then with poems that have no obvious, rational meaning? It's always possible to do a literal, word for word transliteration, which is safe but produces a bric-a-brac of images devoid of overall meaning and generally of poetry too. But often the poetry in the original French can still be sensed in a vague and loose way, and that remains the starting point for translators, being where they start on difficult passages, teasing out the possibilities and replacing generalities with exact renderings wherever possible. Some poets remain inscrutable throughout — Nerval, Mallarmé and the later Valéry — but others have put their working on the page, so to speak. It is not difficult to capture the originating sensations in Valéry's *Cemetery by the Sea*, for example, whose second stanza:

Quel pur travail de fins éclairs consume
Maint diamant d'imperceptible écume,
Et quelle paix semble se concevoir !
Quand sur l'abîme un soleil se repose,
Ouvrages purs d'une éternelle cause,
Le Temps scintille et le Songe est savoir.

I have rendered thus:

What a pure work of fine lightning consumes
itself in these imperceptible diamond fumes.
Peace seems self-conceived. Settling as though
into an abyss of emptiness the sun pours
out its artistry on an eternal cause.
Time's an instant, and Dreaming is to know.

In turn we see how the sun's hazy glitter off the sea is
absorbed by the sea's movements as we shift our vantage
point. The peace of the cemetery is how we suppose it; the
natural scene is anything but peaceful. We look down into 'an
abyss of emptiness' on which the sun works its artistry as from
time immemorial. Our observations are but a moment in time,
as dreaming the matter tells us. And so on. But Valéry's later
La Platane is much more difficult. What can we do with:

Ombre retentissante en qui le même azur
Qui t'emporte, s'apaise,
La noire mère astreint ce pied natal et pur
A qui la fange pèse.

I have hazarded:

But the scintillating shadow and the self-same blue
which sheafs you grow calm.
The dark mother stares at the root and what it will do,
which the loam keeps from harm.

Where the rhymes are strongly controlling the sense, as they
are, I fear, in the important original. Here we are more
duplicating the approach than rendering the text accurately,

arguing that a translation is also a *recreation of process* in another language. Poems that had no single meaning interested English-speaking poets of the late twentieth century, of course, but such recreations are also a dangerous approach to translation, apt to make the rendering more the translator's poem in the manner of Lowell's *Imitations*. Unfortunately, it is often an approach needed with Symbolist work when the original does not make sufficient sense. I have kept such poems to a minimum in this anthology, generally marking translations as *After*, but they cannot be entirely excluded. French poetry was to become even more problematic in the twentieth century, but discussion is probably best deferred to Volume Three of this anthology.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Sources for the poems, notes, and interpretation of Old French texts, can be readily found online, but the following are especially useful:

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