



ARTHUR RIMBAUD
19 POEMS

Vowels

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,
some day I will betray your burgeoning naissance;
A, a hairy corset of black glittering flies
gamboling around the void of a punishing stench,

gulfs of shadows; E, white of steam clouds, bivouacked tents,
the pikes of proud glaciers, pale kings, or Queen Anne's lace;
I, purples, blood from split lips, laughing with vengeance
or saturnine remorse, rouging a doll-like face;

U, circuits, changing tides on divine, green-flecked seas,
peace of dull animals on fertile pastures, peace
of a pensive, curled brow engrossed by Alchemy;

O, final trumpet, strange with solar key changes,
silences only spanned by Worlds and by Angels,
—O—the Omega—the violet beam from His Eyes!

Ophelia

I.

In that river where stars slumber on blackened waves
white Ophelia floats, a fine lily. Calming,
she floats quite slowly, enmeshed in her trailing veils...
—You hear, in the distant woods, the hunt resounding.

For a thousand years, the young, sad Ophelia
has flowed, a pale phantom, down the long black river;
yes, a thousand years, her bracing, pure mania
has hummed its dark fable of love's misadventure.

The wind kisses her breasts—it forms into a wreath
her great veils that, carefully, old waters endow;
stooping willows drop on her shoulders thick hot tears;
tall reeds slope over her dreaming, ennobled brow.

The bending *nénuphars* sigh around the maiden;
at times, she awakens—within a sleeping alder—
a nest from which emerges bright rustlings of wings.
—A mysterious song descends from the golden stars.

II.

Yes, you died, my child, borne off by the river's waves!
Oh, pale Ophelia! Beautiful as the snow!
—It was the storms that whistled from peaks in Norway
that plied you with liberty, its cold, bitter gall.

It was those gusts only, twisting your ranging hair,
that instilled a doubt into your highborn spirit;
it was your heart entranced by songs that Nature bore
in the pining of trees—orations of the night.

That crazed voice of the seas, that damning plebiscite,
battered your child's heart, too human, ill at ease;
it was that April morning when that fine pale knight
—really, a poor madman—sat, a mute, at your knees!

Paradise! Love! Freedom! What a dream, silly girl!
You fell into him like snow melts into a fire;
your amorous visions throttled all of your words
—an awesome infinity frightened your blue eyes!

III.

—Yes, the poet says that, beneath the stars' small rays,
you return every night to retrieve the blooms you sheared,
and that he saw there, entombed in her trailing veils,
white Ophelia floating, a fine white lily.

A Dream of Winter

TO... HER...

In winter, we will leave in a small pink caboose
strewn with soft blue cushions,
insanely comfortable, where nests of kisses roost
in corners like children.

You'll shut your eyes, afraid of the changeling glass:
the night shadows' faces
teeming, snarling, grotesque, an angry populace
of black wolves and Satans.

Then, on your quaking cheek, you will feel a light scratch,
a wee kiss, like a spider that's lost its hat,
will flit along your neck,

and you will shout, "Get it!" as you submit your head
—It will take seven weeks to snare that pesky brat
—Who prefers a long trek...

Nina's Replies

.....

HE: With your breast upon my breast,
right? we will run,
our nostrils taking in the breeze
in the cool sun

of the blue morning that bathes you
with daylight wine,
the woods quivering, bleeding, mute
with its desire.

On every green branch, droplets
and pale buds rest,
and you feel, in these things opened,
quivering flesh:

and you would drag your white gown through
alfalfa, while
making rose the blue that halos
your great black eyes;

in love with the country, insane
you will scatter
like bubbles floating in champagne
your mad laughter:

laughing at me—who, a bit buzzed,
leaps to catch you
just like this—by a trailing tress!
—I would consume

your tastes of raspberry and strawberry,
oh, flower-flesh!
laughing as the wind, like a thief,
nuzzles your breast,

at the wild rose that teases you
at its pleasure,
more, directing its laughter to
your dumb lover.

(Seventeen! you'll be delighted!
—the great pastures!
—the grand, amorous countryside!
—Psst... move closer...)

With your breast upon my breast,
our voices meshed,
patiently, we'd reach the forest,
the loud rushes,

then, like a little corpse—your heart
swooning—you would
tell me to lift you in my arms,
your eyes half-closed;

I would carry you down the lane,
trembling, in fear,
as a bird warbled its andante:
Au Noisetier...

I'd speak into your mouth, and press
as if to bed
your child-like body to my chest,
drunk with the blood

that flows blue under your white skin
with rosy tints,
speaking to you with that frank slang
—see!... *you* get it!

Our great woods would smell of honey
and the sun's orb
would dust the fine green and bronze dream
with flakes of gold.

In the evening?... We'd walk white paths
that meander
over, under, this way and that
like a slow herd.

Oh, the ripe orchards, blue grass, trees
bent with apples,
how you can smell, a mile away,
their hearty scents!

When the sky is half dark, we'd come
back to the town,
there'd be the smell of milking cows
floating around,

it would smell of the stables, full
of warm manure,
slow rhythms of breathing exhaled,
great backs that curve,

whitening under some far light;
see, over there,
a cow dunging as if with pride
as it steps forth!

—Grandmother's spectacles, and her
nose deep within
her dry missal; the jug of beer
circled with tin

foaming among the big-bowled pipes
proudly spewing,
the appalling, low hanging lips
which, still puffing

snatch ham from forks—it's not enough,
some more! some more!
the fire lighting up the bunks
and the cupboards,

the glistening, fat buttocks of
the big baby
who sticks his snout into the cups,
still on his knees,

tickled gently by a doggie,
growling nicely,
that licks the chubby cheeks of the
precious darling...

—Near the embers, an old woman,
black silhouette,
haughty, creepy, on her chair's edge,
quietly knits...

What sights we shall see, my bonbon,
in these hovels,
when the fire sheds its light upon
the gray windows!

And then, small, nestled in the cool
of dark lilacs,
can you see—a hidden window
smiles in the dark...

You will come, you will come, my love!
on this great lark!
you will come, no? yes? ... in spite of...

SHE: And blow off work?

Venus Anadyoméne

As if from a green tin coffin, the woman's head
rises, her hair piled with a thick, gooey pomade;
slowly, stupidly, it grows from an old bathtub
with bald patches only indifferently concealed.

Then, the neck—fat, gray—then, the giant shoulder blades
that jut out; then, curves and bulges of her small back;
then, the butt cheeks, spheroid, as if keen to escape
—the grease beneath the skin unfolds in rolling sheets.

The spine is a bit red; the whole show slightly reeks,
strangely awful. But one prizes, especially
things one only sees with a magnifying glass:

on the buttocks, two engraved words: CLARA VENUS,
and that whole body moves, extending its wide ass
—gorgeous! grotesque!—with an ulcer on the anus.

At the Cabaret-Vert

For eight lonely days I shredded my only boots
on pebbles on the roads. I entered Charleroi.
—At the Cabaret-Vert, I ordered simple toast,
a pat of butter, and ham that was barely warm.

I felt good. I stretched my legs under the long, green
table. I let my mind wander among the scenes
scrawled on the tapestries. This was solace. Serene.
Then, the girl with huge tits, eyes jumping like cocaine

—This one, I thought, is not quick to deny a kiss!—
giggling, carried to me on a cracked, colored dish
the lukewarm ham, butter, and bread not one day old,

ham pink and white, perfumed by sweetly acrid cloves
of garlic—and she filled my heavy mug with foam
which the late sun rays pierced, lit up with flames of gold.

My Bohemian Life (Fantasy)

And so I went, my fists stuffed in my torn pockets,
my coat so shredded it was simply an Idea;
I trod beneath the sky, Muse! your willing servant
and oh! what brilliant loves my cinema unreeled!

I wore my only slacks—enhanced by a big hole.
A tiny, drunk Tom Thumb, I sowed as I rambled
my opalescent rhymes. My inn was Big Dipper;
beneath the curving sky, stars—my chorus—rustled.

I listened to them, crouched by country roads, alert,
those warm August nights, until dew mottled my face
like fortifying wine. And then, amidst milieus

of teeming blue shadows, I intoned my verses
strumming, as if a lyre, my withered shoelaces,
ribs of my wounded shoes! one foot beneath my heart.

Set to Music

The Station Square, Charleville

On this square carved into trivial plots of grass,
a square—manicured trees, flowers strictly to taste—
the wheezy bourgeois, stifled by incalescence,
drag each Thursday night their ridiculous envies.

—The military orchestra swings its shakos
to the *Waltz of the Fifes* inside the trimmed garden
—The Dandy struts his stuff, crowding out the front rows;
the notary dangles from his monogrammed fob.

Men of private means criticize all the false notes:
men from fat, swollen desks cart along their fat wives
near whom, like officious drivers of elephants,
women don flounces fluttering like endorsements.

On the green benches, cadres of retired grocers
tease lines in the sand with their knobby-headed canes;
they argue, gravely, the virtues of trade statutes,
take another pinch of tobacco—“Well, *I* say...”

Generously spreading his ass over a bench,
a bourgeois with shiny buttons, a Flemish paunch,
suckles an onnaing pipe, dangling from which are shreds
of hairy tobacco—he *swears* it’s contraband...

Sniggering along the grass are the great loafers;
and, growing amorous to the songs of trombones,
very naive, chewing on roses, young soldiers
coddle pink tykes to get in good with shy nannies.

—And I? I’m dressed like an impoverished student
and trail, under the chestnut trees, the spry girls;
they are quite aware—they turn to me, laughing,
their eyes full of things indiscreet—not wholly rare!

I do not say a word. I continue to gaze
at the flash of their white necks framed by stray locks.
I trace, under the blouse—translucent fineries—
beneath their shoulders, the curve of their divine backs.

Soon, I have unearthed the ankle boot, the stocking...
burning with fine fevers, I reconstruct the whole
figure...—They find me amusing—they speak quite low—
and my fierce desires seize upon their straying mouths.

Evil

While rifles emit their rose-red mists of grapeshot
whistling all day beneath the infinite blue sky,
dressed in scarlet and green, near a King who coolly mocks
their guts—entire troops disintegrate under fire.

While a terrible madness rages, and makes of boys,
a hundred thousand of them, a smoking trash heap
—You poor dead! in the grass, in summer, in your joy!
Nature! who venerates these boys—and deems them holy!

—There is a God. He laughs at the damask covers
on the altars, the incense, at the golden grails;
he takes a snooze while quaint lullabies Hosanna.

—Then he wakes, when the shy mothers come together
in anguish, slobbering under chintzy black veils.
—Each one shoves him pennies, tied up in a clean scarf!

The Stolen Heart

My sad heart dribbles on the deck,
my heart slick with tobacco spit.
As they spit streams of soup at it,
my sad heart dribbles on the deck.
Tossed by jeers of a rangy troop
who laugh and writhe—oh what a coup!—
my sad heart dribbles on the deck,
my heart slick with tobacco spit.

Ithyphallic and soldieresque,
their scoffing stuns and depraves it.
You see the walls: cartoons they sketch,
ithyphallic and soldieresque.
Oh abracadabraic waves,
restore my heart, let it be saved!
Ithyphallic and soldieresque,
their scoffing stuns and depraves it.

When they have used up all their chew,
my stolen heart—can I survive?
Their Bacchic belches start to rise,
when they have used up all their chew.
I'll have a belly ache and retch,
my heart dismissed, an excrement.
When they have used up all their chew,
my stolen heart—can I survive?

The Poet at Seven Years

And the mother, having shut the exercise book,
departed haughtily, though she dimly mistook
the blue eyes for duty, the brow for repentance
—for the young child’s soul seeped oily repugnance.

Supremely intelligent, for that long, dry day
he sweated obedience; yet, some darker strains
spasmed his cheek, advertising his hypocrisy!
In dimly-lit halls decked with mildewed drapery,
his two fists in his groin, his tongue stiff as a dart,
he’d squeeze his eyelids shut, airborne among the spots.
A portal showing onto evening: by the lamps
you would see him, upstairs, stumbling with his cramps,
in a gulf of light pouring from the roof. Summers,
especially, conquered, stupid, but yet stubborn
he would shut himself up in the foulest outhouse,
and sit there, tranquil, his nostrils enflamed—aroused.

When, cleansed of the day’s stench, the delicate garden
behind the house, snowing, the moon luminescent,
he’d muck in sties of clay piled against a white fence,
squeezing swampy eyes to ornament his visions.
He heard music in the twisting ivy—sixth sense!
And yet, what pity! He could only count as friends
those children who, eyes dripping with putrescence,
sallow, with tattered scarves, would hide their muddy hands
in thin rags reeking of diarrheal events.
They spoke with the smutty gentleness of morons!
And if she caught him in deeds of dark charity,
his mother, scandalized, would summarily receive
his blushing tenderness to assuage her surprise.
All’s good. Yes, she could inspire those blue eyes—that lie!

At seven years, he wrote novels brimming with scenes
in epic deserts where, exiled, shone Liberty!
Forests, suns, riverbanks and savannas! For aid,
he would scan the magazines where, as his pulse raced,
he’d ogle laughing girls, Spanish and Italian.

And when that silly flirt, daughter of the peasants
next door, when she—eight years old!—brown eyes,
in a ripped calico dress, leapt from a corner
mounting him like a horse and shaking her wild curls,
and he was under her, he nipped her derrière
—for the peasants’ daughter never donned her panties—
by her her knees, her heels, her claws, he was badly bruised.
He carried the taste of her flesh back to his room.

Little he loathed more than gray, December Sundays,
when, hair pomaded, on a stool of varnished teak,
he’d read from a Bible, its edges cabbage-green.
Dreams harassed him as he tossed in his bare den.
He didn’t love God; rather, the laborers, men
he saw each night, tanned, in jackets, lumbering home
to squalid squares with criers who, with thrice-rapped drums,
choked the crowd with edicts puked by elected fools.
He summoned erotic prairies, where shining swells
of natural perfumes lifted gold pubescences
to elevated heights, haloed by innocence.

Since, above all, he savored the contraband stuff,
within his rooms’ dry walls, his windows shuttered up,
soaring and blue, with a temper unseasonal,
he reviewed, yet again, his thick loose-leafed novel
scrawled with dense, ocherous skies and sweltering forests,
astral woods brimming with crisply opened flowers,
dizziness, explosions, riots, heroes’ marches!
And, as sounds filtered in from the nearby alleys,
he’d lie, alone, on miles of unfurled canvas—still
pure, unbleached—but violently announcing a sail!

What Is Said to the Poet Concerning Flowers

To M. Théodore de Banville

I.

Yes, always, toward the black azure
where seas of topazes shimmer,
able Lilies—those pessaries
of ecstasy!—will serve your night.

In our own epoch of sago
when Plants are dutiful workers,
the Lily will suck blue loathing
from out your religious Proses!

—Monsieur de Kerdrel's fleur-de-lys,
The Sonnet of 1830,
the Lily slipped to a Minstrel
with the amaranth and the pink!

Lilies! Lilies! Not one to pick!
But in your Verse, like the sleeves of
Women of Sin who step softly,
always, these white flowers shiver!

Each time, my Dear Sir, that you bathe,
your shirt with yellow armpits
swells in the morning breeze above
the appalling forget-me-nots!

Love lets nothing past your roadblocks
but Lilacs—oh, the fickleness!—
and the violets of the forest?
sugary spittle of black Nymphs!

II.

Oh Poets, if you had Roses,
Roses, Roses, spun round by wind,
red upon the stems of laurels,
swollen with your eight-line stanzas!

If BANVILLE would make them snow down,
blood-tinted and gadding about,
bruising the leer of the stranger
with his base interpretations!

About your forests and meadows,
oh somnolent photographers,
the Flora is just as diverse
as the corks of wine decanters!

Always those French vegetables,
fierce, phthisical, ridiculous,
where the bellies of basset hounds
wander in the twilight at peace.

And afterwards: the bad drawings
of blue Lotuses or Sunflowers,
pink engravings, subjects holy
for girls making First Communion!

The Ode of Asaka works well,
verse like a courtesan's window,
as butterflies, bright and heavy,
are dunging upon the Daisy.

Old perennials, old galloons!
Oh vegetable croqueted biscuits!
Arcane flowers of quaint old dens!
—For cockchafers, not pit vipers,

are those vegetable dolls sniveling
that Grandville scrawls on the edges
and, suckling them for colors,
the obnoxious stars with vizors!

Yes, your drooling from shepherd's pipes
creates some precious sugar coats!
—Pile of fried eggs in rheumy hats,
Lilies, Asokas and Roses!...

III.

Oh white Hunter, running barefoot
across the Pastures of panic,
couldn't you not, or ought you not,
know your botany a slight bit?

You would make succeed, I fear, the
Cantharides to russet Crickets,
the gold of Rios to Rhine's
blues—Floridas to Norways.

But, Sir, Art doth not consist now
—this is the truth—in permitting
the astounding Eucalyptus
a boa hexameters long!

You see, Mahogany serves as
something, within our Guyanas,
more than swing sets for monkeys in
deliria of lianas!

—In short, is a Flower, Lily
or Rosemary, dead or alive,
worth the ordure of one seabird?
Worth one wax tear of a candle?

—There, I have aired my opinions!
You, sitting over there, in a
Bamboo hut with the shutters closed
and brown Persian rugs for curtains,

even then you'd churn out blossoms
worthy of gaudy Oises!

—Poet! this is your aesthetic,
no less silly than arrogant!

IV.

Speak not of the springtime pampas
black with terrifying revolts,
but of tobacco and cotton
trees—speak of exotic harvests!

Say, white face tanned by Phoebus, how
much cash Pedro Velasquez
in Havana earned in a year;
—excrete on the sea of Sorrento

where Swans travel in the thousands!
Let your verses advocate for
the clearing of mangrove swamplands
that the wave and hydra devour!

Your quatrains plunge into bloody
thickets, then return, offering
to Humanity vast subjects:
white sugar, cough drops, and rubber!

Through You, let us know if the beige
on snowy peaks near the Tropics
are insects laying many eggs
or lichens submicroscopic!

Find, oh Hunter, we require it,
a few aromatic madders
that Nature, for our battalions,
causes to blossom as trousers!

Find, just outside the dozing Wood,
the flowers that look like muzzles
from which dribble golden pomades
onto the manes of buffaloes!

Find, in mad fields, where, on the Blue,
silvery pubescence trembles,
calyxes full of fiery eggs
that simmer in essential oils!

Find cottony Thistle fields whose
wool ten donkeys with burning eyes
endeavor to unknot and smooth!
Find the Blossoms that are armchairs!

Yes, in the heart of crevices,
find Flowers almost stones—stunning!—
that have diamantine tonsils
close to their hard blonde ovaries.

Serve us, oh Clown, this you can do,
on a splendid vermilion plate
syrupy Lilyesque ragouts
that rot our Alfénided spoons!

V.

Someone will speak about great Love,
thief of black Indulgences:
but not Renan, not the cat Murr,
have seen the huge Blue Thyrsuses!

Make playful in our languors, You,
hysterias with your odors;
exalt us toward the pure whiteness
more pure than that of the Marys...

Tradesman! Colonist! Medium!
your Rhyme, pink or white, will well up
like a glimmer of sodium,
like a rubber tree that's been tapped!

From your ink-black Poems—Juggler!—
through red, green and white dioptics,
allow all bizarre flowers to
burst, and electric butterflies!

You see! it is the Century
of hell! And the telegraph poles
will embellish—iron-voiced lyre—
your magnificent shoulder blades!

But most, rhyme us a rendition
of the last potato famine!
—And, toward the composition
of your mysterious Poems

that are to be read from Tréguier
to Paramaribo, go get
some Volumes by Monsieur Figuiet
—well illustrated!—at Hachette's!

ALCIDE BAVA.

The Sitters

With blackened cysts, pock-marked, and eyes tugged at by green
bags, swollen fingers clenched around skeletal thighs,
their haughty pates mottled by thin, delicate strands
like ivy lifting blooms of lepers toward the sky;

for hours, orgasming in epileptic amours
with their chairs, their bones grafted to the varnished forms,
their legs entwined like snakes around stripped, withered trunks,
sinning, day and night, in rank, Edenic coverts.

Feeling the hot sun make burlap of their skin, these
men insisting they will never abort their seats;
or, with eyes to casement windows, bemoaning snows,
trembling—sportively—like electrocuted toads.

And the seats are good to them: the dung brown caning
droops to the eely shape of their anemic hinds;
the souls of ancient suns rise, illuminating
within their hairs' weaves a virile fermentation.

And these seated men, knees in teeth, green pianists,
their ten fingers hammering, like a tambourine,
the breaking straw—pulse of a sad barcarole!—bliss
marring their faces as they rock, in love, again.

Oh, don't make them stand up! Fuck! What a shipwreck!
but lo, they get up... growling like scolded cats, stiff
as paper skeletons; as their tender blades flex,
their pants balloon around their Olympian limbs.

And you can hear them tock, tock, tocking their bald heads
against the dark walls, stamp, stamping their mangled toes;
their jacket buttons: starved pupils of animals
leering, skulking, down the wet, salty corridors.

Suddenly, they have that magic hand—that murders.
Returning, their eyes sift the air for black toxins

feigning the pleading eye of a flea-gored bitch, so
you sweat. You are squeezed down execrable funnels.

Relieved, rethroned, their wrists ringed again by stained cuffs,
they pause, they ponder, ask: who called for exercise?
and again, from mornings to nights, their tonsils bunched
in miniature chins, they squint for fratricides.

And when a stately sleep finally slams their eyes,
they screen pornographic dreams: seductive chairs...
—pregnant chairs! bureaus pumping out new, chubby stools!
proud, macho, of the generations that they've sired.

Flowers of ink spit out their pollen in commas,
and comfort them... the rows of drooping calyxes,
flights of dragonflies through files of gladiolas
—and the barbed ears of corn arouse their penises.

The Seekers of Lice

When the child's forehead, cursed with furies, red blisters,
pines for a forgetful swarm of pathetic dreams,
there steps to his bed two rangy, highborn sisters
—silver nails extended from refined, slender limbs.

They fix the child in a chair before a window
showing on the blue air that bathes fecund meadows;
they drive, through hair matted with sweat and morning dew,
their charming, delicate fingers, cruel as new snow.

He hears their sibilance, their halting song, their breath
thick with honey odor, vegetable, roseate,
broken here and there by their spittle's sucked hisses,
their plays for kisses thwarted, stillborn, celibate.

He hears black eyelashes flutter in the perfumed
silence; their electric fingers craft paradise,
a half-drunk indolence, while through the humid room
crackle the royal nails crushing the little lice.

But then: the wine of Sloth rises in him; the sigh
of a harmonica bruises the azure sky.
The tympanic flows of their fingers catalyze,
surging, dying, surging in him—the need to cry.

Evening Prayer

Seated, I thrive—cherubic, as if in the grip
of a barber, fist curled around a fluted mug,
my neck and hypogastrium arched, Gambier pipe
in my jaw—the air thick with impalpable smoke!

Like the fresh droppings in a rickety birdhouse,
a Thousand Dreams coddle me, warm with their promise;
often, the spirit courses like virgin sapwood
bloodied by the young, cloudy gold of its seepage.

Then, when I have imbibed—impeccably—my dreams,
having downed thirty or forty mugs, I come to
and collect myself—to relieve the bitter need!

Courtly, a high Lord of the cedar and hyssop,
I piss toward somber skies, very lofty, far off,
that sun-whore bloom approving—the heliotrope!

Sonnet: To an Asshole

In dark shadows, wrinkled, like a crevassed violet,
it breathes contentedly, silly among the reeds,
still moist with the love it most recently received,
white buttocks coursing from their inclines to its edge.

Filaments straggle like hot wet weepings of milk
which the cruel wind banishes to a life of flight
over small plots of marl that, reddish, in their height,
confuse and distract them—they fall like battered silk.

In my dreams, my mouth was poised above its abyss;
my soul, envious of physical coitus,
usurped it for sobs—a bottle for tear-tincture.

An aromatic olive—or seductive flute—
chute down which currents of heavenly praline shoot—
a feminine Canaan—bedewed by sharp moisture!

QUATRAINS BY VERLAINE, TERCETS BY RIMBAUD

A Good Thought in the Morning

At four o'clock on a summer morning,
the Sleep of love lingers over
the arbors, still; the dawn dissolves
 night's festive odors.

But below, at the building site beneath
a sun of the Hesperides,
carpenters in their shirtsleeves teem,
 already astir.

Within their desert of lichen, tranquil,
they prop up the costly panels.
The city's esteemed will laugh there
 under false azures.

Ah! for these charming Laborers, subjects
of a Babylonian king,
Venus! leave your Lovers a sec,
 souls already ringed.

 Oh Queen of Shepherds!
 bring these Men their strong fruit liquors
 so that their strength find quietude
as they wait for the bath in the sea of noon!

The Young Couple

The room opens to the turquoise blue sky...
but there's no room! just boxes and hutches!
Birthwort ranges over the walls outside
where goblins gather and vibrate their gums.

This must be, one thinks, the intrigue of genies,
this crazy expense, this futile disorder!
—Is it the African fairy who breeds
blackberries and hairnets in the corners?

Foul-humored godmothers in skirts of light
enter, in waves, the cupboards—where they stay!
The couple is out—interest is slight.
They're not serious. Much to do remains.

And the bridegroom has that wind that cheats him
when he's not in, like now—and all the time!
Water sprites, with a mischievous intent,
often fuss with the spheres of the bedroom.

At night—belovéd, oh!—the honeymoon
will gather up all their smiles and install
in the sky thousands of bright copper bands!
Then, they will have to face the crafty rat...

And if no pale will-o'-the-wisps can storm
like a cloud of grapeshot after vespers
—Oh holy white Spirits of Bethlehem,
promise to charm the blue of their windows!

Memory

I.

A clear water; like the salt of the tears of children,
the whiteness of women's bodies assaults the sun;
a flock of silk banners, pure lilies gathered on
the heights of castles that a maid once safeguarded;

the frolics of angels; no... a golden current
flows, swinging—arms black, thick, quite cold—with grasses. It
sinks, before a canopy of blue Sky, entreats
the shadows of the hill and arches for curtains.

II.

Ah! the humid glass plane extends its trails of broth!
Water fills tidy beds with pale, bottomless gold.
Garments, long faded and green, of innocent girls
are willows from which flocks of gossipy birds bound.

Purer than a gold coin, a warm, yellow eyelid,
a marsh marigold—oh, Spouse! in faithful marriage!—
jealous, at each high noon, a secret war wages
with the fabled rose Sphere, dead in the sky's gray heat.

III.

Straight as a board, Madame keeps watch in the pasture
where snowy tendrils of labor fall; parasol
in hand; trampling the crops of umbel; too proud for
her, children reading books hidden in deep verdure,

—books bound with Moroccan leather! And behold: HE,
like a thousand white angels parting upon the road,
runs off into the mountains! So that leaves SHE—cold
and sullen. —But she bolts—after the fleeing beast!

IV.

Longing for the stiff young arms of the pure wild grass!
Gold of April moons, crux of a saintly berth! Joy,
of abandoned, creaking boatyards, a prey to ploys
of hot, August nights—nurseries for rotting mass.

Now, let her sob beneath the ramparts. Blown vapors
of the poplars above provide the only breeze.
Later, there is the sheen—gray, mirrorless, sere:
an old man in a still boat, a Dredger, who toils.

V.

Toy of this sad lake's eye, this *I* cannot retrieve
—oh, immobile barque! oh, the arms too short!—neither
this nor the other bloom: yellow one that needles
me, there! or the blue friendly one in darkened lees.

Ah! the powder of willows set loose by loud wings!
Roses of the reeds ingested before my time!
And my barque still mired; and its chain stuck, still entwined
in what mud in this deep eye of rain, unending?



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