

Baudelaire



29 More Poems

Translated by A. S. Kline

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To A Woman of Malabar

Your feet are as slender as hands, your hips, to
me,
wide enough for the sweetest white girl's envy:
to the wise artist your body is sweet and dear,
and your great velvet eyes black without peer.
In the hot blue lands where God gave you your
nature
your task is to light a pipe for your master,
to fill up the vessels with cool fragrance
and chase the mosquitoes away when they dance,
and when dawn sings in the plane-trees, afar,
fetch bananas and pineapples from the bazaar.
All day your bare feet go where they wish
as you hum old lost melodies under your breath,
and when evening's red cloak descends overhead
you lie down sweetly on a straw bed,
where humming birds fill your floating dreams,
as graceful and flowery as you it seems.

Happy child, why do you long to see France
our suffering, and over-crowded land,
and trusting your life to the sailors, your friends,
say a fond goodbye to your dear tamarinds?
Scantly dressed, in muslins, frail,
shivering under the snow and hail,
how you'd pine for your leisure, sweet and free,
body pinned in a corset's brutality,
if you'd to glean supper amongst our vile harms,
selling the scent of exotic charms,
sad pensive eyes searching our fog-bound sleaze,
for the lost ghosts of your coconut-trees!

Bertha's Eyes

You can scorn more illustrious eyes,
sweet eyes of my child, through which there
takes flight
something as good or as tender as night.
Turn to mine your charmed shadows, sweet
eyes!

Great eyes of a child, adorable secrets,
you resemble those grottoes of magic
where, behind the dark and lethargic,
shine vague treasures the world forgets.

My child has veiled eyes, profound and vast,
and shining like you, Night, immense, above!
Their fires are of Trust, mixed with thoughts of
Love,
that glitter in depths, voluptuous or chaste.

‘Je n’ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville,’

I’ve not forgotten, near to the town,
our white house, small but alone:
its Pomona of plaster, its Venus of old
hiding nude limbs in the meagre grove,
and the sun, superb, at evening, streaming,
behind the glass, where its sheaves were
bursting,
a huge eye in a curious heaven, present
to gaze at our meal, lengthy and silent,
spreading its beautiful candle glimmer
on the frugal cloth and the rough curtain.

‘La servante au grand coeur dont vous étiez jalouse,’

The great-hearted servant of whom you were
jealous,
sleeping her sleep in the humble grass,
shouldn't we take her a few flowers?
The dead, the poor dead, have griefs like ours,
and when October sighs, clipper of trees,
round their marble tombs, with its mournful
breeze,
they must find the living, ungratefully, wed,
snug in sleep, to the warmth of their bed,
while they, devoured by dark reflection,
without bedfellow, or sweet conversation,
old skeletons riddled with worms, deep frozen,
feel the winter snows trickling round them,
and the years flow by without kin or friend
to replace the wreaths at their railing's end.

If some night, when the logs whistle and flare,
seeing her sitting calm, in that chair,
if on a December night, cold and blue,
I might find her there placed in the room,
solemn, and come from her bed, eternal,
to guard the grown child with her eye, maternal,
what could I answer that pious spirit,
seeing tears under her hollow eyelid?

Landscape

In order to write my chaste verses I'll lie
like an astrologer near to the sky
and, by the bell-towers, listen in dream
to their solemn hymns on the air-stream.
Hands on chin, from my attic's height
I'll see the workshops of song and light,
the gutters, the belfries those masts of the city,
the vast skies that yield dreams of eternity

It is sweet to see stars being born in the blue,
through the mists, the lamps at the windows, too,
the rivers of smoke climbing the firmament,
and the moon pouring out her pale enchantment.
I'll see the springs, summers, autumns' glow,
and when winter brings the monotonous snow
I'll close all my doors and shutters tight
and build palaces of faery in the night.
Then I'll dream of blue-wet horizons,
weeping fountains of alabaster, gardens,
kisses, birdsong at morning or twilight,
all in the Idyll that is most childlike.
The mob that are beating in vain on the glass,
won't make me raise my head as they pass.

Since I'll be plunged deep in the thrill
of evoking the springtime through my own will,
raising the sun out of my own heart,
making sweet air from my burning thought.

The Sun

Through the streets where at windows of old
houses
the persian blinds hide secret luxuries,
when the cruel sun strikes with redoubled fury
on the roofs and fields, the meadows and city,
I go alone in my crazy sword-play
scenting a chance rhyme on every road-way,
stumbling on words and over the pavement
finding verses I often dreamed might be sent.

This nurturing father, anaemia's foe
stirs, in the fields, the worm and the rose,
makes our cares evaporate into the blue,
fills the hives and our brains with honey-dew.
It is he who gives youth to the old man, the
cripple,
makes them like young girls, happy and gentle,
and commands the crops to grow ripe in an hour
of the immortal heart, that so longs to flower.

When he shines on the town, a poet that sings,
he redeems the fate of the meanest things,
like a king he enters, no servants, alone,
all palaces, all hospitals where men moan.

Sorrows of the Moon

The moon dreams more languidly this evening:
like a sweet woman, in the pillows, at rest,
with her light hand, discretely stroking,
before she sleeps, the curve of her breast,

dying, she gives herself to deep trance,
and casts her eyes over snow-white bowers,
on the satined slope of a soft avalanche,
rising up into the blue, like flowers.

When she sometimes lets fall a furtive tear,
in her secret languor, on our world here,
a pious poet, enemy of sleep's art,

takes that pale tear in the hollow of his palm,
its rainbow glitter like an opal shard,
and far from the sun sets it in his heart.

Don Juan in Hell

When Don Juan went down to Hell's charms,
and paid Charon his obol's fare,
he, a sombre beggar with Antisthenes' glare,
gripped the oars with strong avenging arms.

Showing their sagging breasts through open
robes
the women writhed under the black firmament
and, like a crowd of sacred victims, broke
behind him into long incessant lament.

Sganarelle laughing demanded his score,
while Don Luis, with trembling hand,
showed the wandering dead, along the shore,
the insolent son who spurned his command.

By the treacherous spouse, who was her lover,
chaste, skinny Elvira shivered in mourning dress,
seeming to ask a last smile of him, where
there might shine his first vow's tenderness.

Gripping the helm cutting the black wave,
erect in armour, stood a giant of stone,
but the hero, leaning, quiet, on his sword-blade,
scornful of all things, gazed at the sea's foam.

On Tasso in Prison
(Eugène Delacroix's painting)

The poet in his cell, unkempt and sick,
who crushes underfoot a manuscript,
measures, with a gaze that horror has inflamed,
the stair of madness where his soul was maimed.

The intoxicating laughter that fills his prison
with the absurd and the strange, swamps his
reason.

Doubt surrounds him, and ridiculous fear,
hideous and multiform, circles near.

That genius pent up in a foul sty,
those spectres, those grimaces, the cries,
whirling, in a swarm, about his hair,

that dreamer, whom his lodging's terrors bare,
such are your emblems, Soul, singer of songs
obscure,
whom Reality suffocates behind four walls!

Femmes Damnées

Like pensive cattle, lying on the sands,
they turn their eyes towards the sea's far hills,
and, feet searching each other's, touching hands,
know sweet languor and the bitterest thrills.

Some, where the stream babbles, deep in the
woods,
their hearts enamoured of long intimacies,
go spelling out the loves of their own girlhoods,
and carving the green bark of young trees.

Others, like Sisters, walk, gravely and slow,
among the rocks, full of apparitions,
where Saint Anthony saw, like lava flows,
the bared crimson breasts of his temptations.

There are those, in the melting candle's glimmer,
who in mute hollows of caves still pagan,
call on you to relieve their groaning fever,
O Bacchus, to soothe the remorse of the
ancients!

And others, whose throats love scapularies,
who, hiding whips under their long vestment,
in the sombre groves of the night, solitaires,
blend the sweats of joy with the tears of torment.

O virgins, o demons, o monsters, o martyrs,
great spirits, despisers of reality,
now full of cries, now full of tears,
pious and lustful, seeking infinity,

you, whom my soul has pursued to your hell,
poor sisters, I adore you as much as I weep,
for your dismal sufferings, thirsts that swell,
and the vessels of love, where your great hearts
steep!

Beauty

O mortals, I am beautiful, like a stone dream,
and my breast, where each man has bruised his
soul,
is created to inspire in poets a goal
as eternal and mute as matter might seem.

An inscrutable Sphinx, I am throned in blue sky:
I unite the swan's white with a heart of snow:
I hate all movement that ruffles the flow,
and I never cry and I never smile.

The poets, in front of my poses, so grand
they seem borrowed from ancient tomb-covers,
will exhaust their days in studying a hand,

since I, to fascinate my docile lovers,
have pure mirrors that magnify everything's
beauty:
my eyes, my huge eyes, bright with eternity.

The Jewels

My sweetheart was naked, knowing my desire,
she wore only her tinkling jewellery,
whose splendour yields her the rich conquering
fire
of Moorish slave-girls in the days of their
beauty.

When, dancing, it gives out its sharp sound of
mockery,
that glistening world of metal and stone,
I am ravished by ecstasy, love like fury
those things where light mingles with sound.

So she lay there, let herself be loved,
and, from the tall bed, she smiled with delight
on my love deep and sweet as the sea is moved,
rising to her as toward a cliff's height.

Like a tamed tigress, her eyes fixed on me
with a vague dreamy air, she tried out her poses,
so wantonly and so innocently,
it gave a new charm to her metamorphoses:

and her arm and her leg, and her back and her
thigh,
shining like oil, undulating like a swan's,
passed in front of my calm, clairvoyant eye:
and her belly and breasts, those vine-clustered
ones,

thrust out, more seductively than Angels of evil,
to trouble the repose where my soul had its
throne,
and topple it from the crystal hill,
where it was seated, calm and alone.

I thought I saw Antiope's hips placed
on a youth's bust, with a new design's grace,
her pelvis accentuated so by her waist.
The rouge was superb on that wild, tawny face!

- And the lamp resigning itself to dying,
as only the fire in the hearth lit the chamber,
each time it gave out a flame in sighing,
it flooded with blood that skin of amber!

Beatrice

Through fields of ash, burnt, without verdure,
where I was complaining one day to Nature,
and slowly sharpened the knife of my thought,
as I wandered aimlessly, against my heart,
I saw descend, at noon, on my brow,
a storm-filled and a sinister cloud,
holding a vicious demonic horde,
resembling cruel, and curious dwarfs.
They gazing at me, considering me, as cool
as passers-by admiring a fool,
I heard them laughing and whispering in synch,
exchanging many a nudge and a wink:

‘ Let’s contemplate this caricature,
this Hamlet’s shadow, echoing his posture,
his indecisive looks, and wild hair.
It’s a shame to see that epicure there,
that pauper, that actor on holiday, that droll
fellow, because he can play a fine role,
trying to interest with his tears
the eagles, the grasshoppers, streams and
flowers,
and even proclaiming his public tirades
to us who invented those ancient parades?’

I might (since my pride, high as the mountains,
overtops clouds and the cries of demons)
simply have turned my regal head,
if I'd not seen, to that obscene crowd wed,
a crime that failed to make the sun rock,
the queen of my heart, with her matchless look,
laughing with them at my dark distress,
and now and then yielding a filthy caress.

Exotic Perfume

When, in Autumn, on a sultry evening,
eyes closed, I breathe your warm breasts'
odour,
I see the shore of bliss uncovered,
in the monotonous sun's fierce gleaming:

a languorous island where Nature has come,
bringing rare trees and luscious fruits:
the bodies of lean and vigorous brutes,
and women with eyes of astounding freedom.

Led by your odour to magic climes
I see a harbour, of masts, sails, lines,
worn down by the sea's waves still,

while the green tamarinds' perfume mounts,
circling in air, and filling my nostrils,
to blend, in my soul, with the sailors' chants.

A Phantom II: The Perfume

Reader, have you ever breathed deeply,
with slow savour and intoxicated sense,
a church's saturating grain of incense,
or the long-lasting musk in a sachet?

Profound magical spell where we
are drunk on the past restored in the present.
So lovers on an adored body scent
the exquisite flower of memory.

From her pliant and heavy hair,
living sachet, censer of the alcoves,
a fragrance, wild and savage, rose,

and from her clothes, velvet or muslin, there,
impregnated with her pure years,
emanated a perfume of furs.

Afternoon Song

Though your eyebrows surprise,
and give you an air of strangeness,
which isn't that of the angels,
witch with seductive eyes,

I adore my frivolous girl,
my terrible passion,
with the devotion
of a priest for his idol!

The forest and the desert
perfume your wild hair:
your head has an air
of the enigma, the secret.

Round your flesh, perfume sweet
swirls like a censer's cloud:
you bewitch like the twilight's shroud,
nymph of shadows and heat.

Ah! The strongest potions made
can't match your idleness,
and you know the caress
that resurrects the dead.

Your hips are enamoured
of your back and your breasts,
and the cushions are ravished
with your poses, so languid.

Sometimes to appease
your rage, mysteriously,
you lavish, gravely
your bites and your kisses.

You tear me, my dark-haired one,
with a mocking smile's art,
and then cast on my heart
your gaze sweet as the moon.

Under your shoes so satiny,
your graceful silken feet,
I lay my genius, my wit,
my joy, and my destiny,

restorer of my health's sweetness,
you, all colour and light,
explosion of warmth, bright
in my Siberian darkness.

The Death of Lovers

We will have beds filled with light scent, and
couches deep as a tomb,
and strange flowers in the room,
blooming for us under skies so pleasant.

Vying to exhaust their last fires
our hearts will be two vast flares,
reflecting their double glares
in our two spirits, twin mirrors.

One evening of mystic blue and rose
we'll exchange a single brief glow
like a long sob, heavy with goodbye,

and later, opening the doors, the angel who came
faithful and joyful, will revive
the lustreless mirrors, and the lifeless flame.

To A Red-headed Beggar-girl

Pale girl with fiery hair,
whose tattered dress shows there
glimpses of your poverty
and your beauty,

a wretched poet, for me,
your young skinny body
with its freckled brownness
has its sweetness.

You wear, more stylishly
than a queen in story
wears her velvet shoe
your heavy two.

Instead of your dress, ripped, short,
may a fine robe of court
trail in long folds to greet
your slender feet:

in place of your torn hose
may daggers of gold,
down your legs, blaze
for the eyes of roués:

may ribbons loosely tied
unveil in your pride
your two lovely breasts, bright
as your eyes:

may your arms be coaxed too,
to sweetly undress you,
and with pert blows
discourage those

impish fingers, pearls that glow,
sonnets of master Belleau,
by your captive lovers,
endlessly offered.

The poets, in pursuit,
dedicating to you their fruit,
and gazing at your shoes, there
from beneath the stair:

many a page-boy's game,
many a famous name,
would spy, still hoping,
on your cool lodging!

You, in your bed, would count
more kisses than lilies no doubt,
and subject to your law
a Valois or more!

- Meanwhile you go seeking
any old scraps, cadging,
outside the back door
of some shabby store:

you go gazing, from afar,
at valueless beads that are
still, alas, so much more
than I can afford!

Go then, with no ornament,
perfume, pearl or diamond,
only your slender nudity,
O my beauty!

The Death of the Poor

It is Death, alas, persuades us to keep on living:
the goal of life and the only hope we have,
like an elixir, rousing, intoxicating, giving
the strength to march on towards the grave:

through the frost and snow and storm-wind, look
it's the vibrant light on our black horizon:
the fabulous inn, written of in the book,
where one can eat, and sleep and sit oneself
down:

it's an Angel, who holds in his magnetic beams,
sleep and the gift of ecstatic dreams,
who makes the bed where the poor and naked lie:

it's the glory of the Gods, the mystic granary,
it's the poor man's purse, his ancient country,
it's the doorway opening on an unknown sky!

Lover's Wine

Today Space is fine!
Like a horse mount this wine,
without bridle, spurs, bit,
for a heaven divine!

We, two angels they torture
with merciless fever,
will this mirage pursue
in the day's crystal blue!

Sweetly balanced, fly higher
through the whirlwind's wise air
in our mirrored desire,

my sister, swim there
without rest or respite
to my dream paradise!

The Solitary's Wine

A flirtatious woman's singular gaze
as she slithers towards you, like the white rays
the vibrant moon throws on the trembling sea
where she wishes to bathe her casual beauty,

the last heap of chips in the gambler's grasp,
skinny Adeline's licentious kiss,
a fragment of music's unnerving caress,
resembling a distant human gasp,

none of these equal, O profound bottle,
the powerful balm of your fecund vessel,
kept for the pious poet's thirsting heart:

you pour out youth, and hope, and life,
and the deepest poverty's treasure – pride,
filling us with triumph, and the Gods' divine art!

The Pipe

I am the pipe of an author:
from my complexion you can see,
like an Abyssinian girl's ebony,
that my owner's a heavy smoker.

When he's overcome by pain
I'm like the cottage chimney smoking,
where the evening supper's cooking,
for the ploughman home again.

I entwine his soul, and soothe it,
in the blue and swirling veil,
that floats from my mouth, pale

rings of powerful balm around it,
that charm his heart, and bless
his spirit freed from weariness.

The Ransom

Man, with which to pay his ransom,
has two fields of deep rich earth,
which he must dig and bring to birth,
with the iron blade of reason.

To obtain the smallest rose,
to garner a few ears of wheat,
he must wet them without cease,
with briny tears from his grey brow.

One is Art: Love is the other.
- To render his propitiation,
on the day of conflagration,
when the last strict reckoning's here,

full of crops' and flowers' displays
he will have to show his barns,
with those colours and those forms
that gain the Angels' praise.

Clouded Sky

One would say your gaze was a misted screen:
your strange eyes (are they blue, grey or green?)
changeable, tender, dreamy, cruel, and again
echoing the indolence and pallor of heaven.

You bring me those blank days, mild and hazy,
that melt bewitched hearts into weeping,
when twisted, stirred by some unknown hurt,
our over-stretched nerves mock the numbed
spirit.

Often you resemble the loveliest horizons
lit by the suns of foggy seasons....
how splendid you are, a dew-wet country,
inflamed by the rays of a misted sky!

O dangerous woman, o seductive glow,
will I someday adore your frost and snow,
and learn to draw, from implacable winter
sharp-edged as steel or ice, new pleasure?

The Living Torch

They go before me, those Eyes full of light
that some wise Angel has magnetised,
those divine brothers, my brothers, go, bright,
flashing their diamond fires in my eyes.

Leading my steps on Beauty's way,
saving me from snares, from grievous crime,
they are my servants and I am their slave:
all my being obeys that living flame.

Charmed Eyes, you shine with the mystic glow
of candles lighted in broad day, the sun
reddens, fails to quench, their eerie flow:

they celebrate Death: you sing the Resurrection:
you sing the resurrection of my soul,
Stars whose fires no sun can ever cool!

Spleen

I'm like the king of a rain-soaked country,
rich but impotent, young in senility,
who despises his tutors' servile features,
as bored with his dogs as with other creatures.
Nothing enlivens him, hunting or falconry,
or his people dying beside the balcony.
His favourite fool's most grotesque antic
won't calm this brow so cruelly sick:
his fleur-de-lys bed has become a tomb,
his ladies, who give all princes room,
can't invent new dresses so totally wanton
as to raise a smile from this young skeleton.
The alchemist, making him gold, has never
banished from his being the corrupted matter,
or in baths of blood that the Romans gave,
that men of power recall near the grave,
been able to warm that living cadaver,
where instead of blood, runs Lethe's water.

Far Away from Here

This is the sanctuary
where the prettified young lady,
calm, and always ready,

fans her breasts, aglow,
elbow on the pillow,
hears the fountain's flow:

it's the room of Dorothea.
- The breeze and water distantly
sing their song, mingled here
with sobs to soothe the spoiled child's fear.

From tip to toe, most thoroughly,
her delicate surfaces appear,
oiled with sweet perfumery.
- the flowers nearby swoon gracefully.

The Void

Pascal had his Void that went with him day and night.

- Alas! It's all Abyss, - action, longing, dream, the Word! And I feel Panic's storm-wind stream through my hair, and make it stand upright.

Above, below, around, the desert, the deep, the silence, the fearful compelling spaces... With his knowing hand, in my dark, God traces a multi-formed nightmare without release.

I fear sleep as one fears a deep hole, full of vague terror. Where to, who knows? I see only infinity at every window,

and my spirit haunted by vertigo's stress envies the stillness of Nothingness.

- Ah! Never to escape from Being and Number!

The Moon, Offended

Oh moon our fathers worshipped, their love
discreet,
from the blue country's heights where the bright
seraglio,
the stars in their sweet dress, go treading after
you,
my ancient Cynthia, lamp of my retreat,

do you see the lovers, in their bed's happiness
showing in sleep their mouths' cool enamels,
the poet bruising his forehead on his troubles,
or the vipers coupling under the dry grass?

Under your yellow cloak, with clandestine
pacing,
do you pass as before, from twilight to morning,
to kiss Endymion's faded grace?

- 'I see your mother, Child of this impoverished
century,
who, over her mirror, bends a time-worn face,
and powders the breast that fed you, skilfully.'

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