

Paul Verlaine

Further Selected Poems

Translated by A. S. Kline © 2018 All Rights Reserved.
This work may be freely reproduced, stored, and transmitted, electronically
or otherwise, for any non-commercial purpose.

Contents

To Don Quixote	4
Utter Nonsense.....	5
The Dead.....	7
Golden Verses.....	10
Sentimental Promenade	11
Classical Walpurgis Night	12
Anguish.....	14
In the Woods.....	15
Marine.....	16
Epilogue	17
It Will Be.....	21
Yesterday	22
With Every Grace and Nuance	23
Ecstasy	25
Double Vision.....	26
To Hamlet's Horatio	27
The Tavern.....	28
The Clown.....	29
Landscape	30
Prologue	31
Lame Sonnet	32
Boarders	33
On the Balcony	34
Spring.....	35
Tantalized.....	36
The Last Fête galante.....	37
Laeti et Errabunda.....	38

To Don Quixote

(Premier vers: À Don Quichotte)

O Don Quixote, old paladin, grand Bohemian,
In vain the vile, absurd crowd stood laughing:
Your life was a poem, your death a martyrdom,
And those windmills were no error, o my king!

Go on forever, armoured by your passion,
Mounted on that strange steed I adore.
Go, sublime gleaner! The law's omissions,
Prove more numerous, greater than before.

Hurrah! We sacred poets, ride in your train,
Our hair unbound, and circled with vervain.
Lead us on the charge towards high fantasy,

And soon, despite betrayal, endless treason,
We'll float the winged banner of Poesy
Above the hoary skull of foolish reason!

Utter Nonsense

(Premier vers: Fadaises)

Madame, deign to let my poor heart explain,
Here at your feet, all of its passion and pain.

I adore you as much as and more than Heaven above,
And nothing at all will ever extinguish this love.

Your eyes, so profound, filled with shadow,
Bring me joy if they shine, and if not, no.

When you pass on the path, I kiss the sand,
While you are holding my heart in your hand.

On her nest, alone, she cries, the turtledove,
Alas, I'm alone, and I cry like her, with love.

Dawn, with morning light revives the flowers,
And the sight of you eases the saddest hours.

You disappear, and all the flowering ceases,
As, far from you, the melancholy increases.

You appear, and the flowers and the verdure,
In the woods and meadows, change their colour.

If you wish, Madame, the well-beloved,
If beneath the green branches, you would

Walk with me, so arm in arm we went,
Heavens! What kisses then! What mad intent!

But no! Always a sour face you display.
And yet I burn, I'm withering away,

And desire tears me, tooth and claw,
For it is you I love, O, Madame la Mort!

The Dead

(Premier vers: Des Morts)

O funereal Cloître-Saint-Merri! The streets so sombre!
I can never tread those bleak pavements without pain,
Shivering at all the horrors that they conjure.

And your wall ever re-rendered, cleaned in vain,
O Maison Transnonain, infamous, cursed corner,
In my roused heart, monstrous, bleeds its pain.

Veterans of the July Revolution, a while later,
Thought it good to reveal their souls' candour
Undeterred by blame from their sated brothers.

Dupes, then? – Well, they raised the banner,
Dying for an effort betrayed and unfinished.
They died happy, the red flag their only honour.

A grotesque death; for the pale, astonished
Bourgeoisie, the victors dumb with surprise,
Knowing nothing of a cause so fiercely punished.

They were the young of France, who despise
All intrigue, every kind of despotism,
All the disillusioned acts of compromise.

They thought, for France, the cataclysm
Of a buttoned-up monarchy no better
Than the boot and spur of absolutism.

Their desire: universal rights, unfettered,
An 'indomitable and rebellious freedom',
The sun undimmed, tide at the flood forever,

The Republic, beautiful and fearsome,
Red not tricoloured. They grew cold
At the idea of 'constitutional' kingdoms...

And, among those veterans of July, enrolled,
Came two or three hundred youths though
Mere children, students rallying as of old,

Knowing the chimera for which they died,
Lacking all hope of victory, and so
Their bitter lips betrayed a painful pride;

Their eyes shining, with the calm glow
Of that ironic faith with which martyrs sigh,
As they fell to the bullets of the law, their foe.

And all, as at Pharsalus and Thermopylae,
Sold their lives dearly, twice held at bay
The wrath of skilful generals they defied.

Then, as their strength slowly drained away,
With what rage that fine bourgeois militia,
Dry-eyed, killed the wounded where they lay!

In the sacred blood of the dead, where feet slither,
Paddled tardy saviours, with nasal voices, those
Of new Rome, a new King, the accomplice ever.

– Dead youths, who represent our ancient woes,
Alas we even envy, we your sons, we La France,
The grief that behind your humble hearses flowed.

Your death, despite the oaths of allegiance,
Was it not wept for, and admired, and after
Avenged, must your avengers then lack vengeance?

Those avengers lie in Clamart and Montmartre,
Or, under the Cayenne sun, die, maddened,
Or live on, poor, starving, far from others.

Oh, yes! We are envious of the calm stoic end
Those heroes made, especially how each one's
Eyes closed in an hour only a kind fate sends;

Eyes, that contemplating some far horizon,
Closed on profound visions of sublimity,
Free of cowardice, innocent of treason.

And never, never, saw what we must see.

Note: Rue du Cloître-Saint-Merri, alongside the Cloister of the Church of Saint-Merri, was the scene of fierce fighting during the Paris insurrection of June 1832. The house at 12 Rue Transnonain was the scene of a subsequent massacre in April 1834. The July Revolution of 1830 had overthrown Charles X and led to the reign of Louis-Philippe. The reference to Clamart and Montmartre is to noted Parisian cemeteries. Cayenne is the capital of French Guiana to which exiles were shipped. The quotation 'indomitable and rebellious freedom' is from Auguste Barbier's Poem L'Idole.

Golden Verses

(Premier vers: Vers dorés)

Art wishes neither tears nor compromise,
That's my poetic in as many words, won
From scorn, and a deep contempt for Man,
And war on dumb ennui and love's outcries.

I know one has to suffer to climb the height;
The slope is steep viewed from down below.
I know that, and I know that many a poet,
Has lungs too weak, or a waist too narrow.

They are also great, who despite all envy,
Having conquered life, fought bitter enmity,
And freed themselves of the toils of passion,

While the dreamer is vegetating like a tree,
Amidst a plaintive heap of troubled nations,
Meditate in their marble egoism, silently.

Sentimental Promenade

(Poèmes Saturniens: Un soir d'octobre)

The setting sun was shedding its last rays,
And the wind rocked the pale water-lilies;
The large water-lilies, among the reeds,
Gleamed with sadness on calm water.
I strayed, alone, walking, troubled,
Along the lake, among the willows,
Where the errant mist seemed some vast
Milk-white phantom, self-despairing,
Weeping, in the manner of water-birds
Remembering the thunder of wings,
Among the willows where I strayed alone,
Walking, troubled; while a dense veil
Of shadows came to drown the last rays
Of the setting sun in its pale waves,
And the water-lilies, among the reeds,
The large water-lilies on calm water.

Classical Walpurgis Night

(Poèmes Saturniens: Nuit du Walpurgis classique)

The Sabbath of the later Faust, not the other.
A harmonious Sabbath in the extreme, calming,
Harmonious. – Imagine a garden by Lenôtre,
Correct, ridiculous, and charming.

Circular walks, fountains in the centre,
Straight alleys; marble nymphs, sea-deities
In bronze, Venuses scattered here and there,
Bowling greens, quincunxes of trees.

Chestnuts; flowering plants in a mound;
Here dwarf-roses good taste has trimmed;
Farther, triangular yews, the moon, round,
On a summer evening, above, undimmed.

Midnight echoes, waking, among greenery,
A melancholy sound, hushed, slow and sweet,
A hunting-call, as hushed, sweet, melancholy,
As one with which Tannhauser might meet.

Veiled sounds of distant horns where tenderness
Sensually embraces the soul's fear with chords
Harmoniously dissonant in their drunkenness;
And where, at the sounds of the hunting calls,

Forms, profoundly white, suddenly interlace,
Diaphanous forms that the moonbeams make
Opalescent among the leaves' green shade
– A Watteau dreamed by Auguste Raffet! –

Interlace among the green shaded arbours,
With a languid gesture of profound despair,
Then around the bronzes, and the marble,
Very slowly dance, in wide circles, there.

– These agitated spectres, are they thoughts
Of the drunken poet, his regrets, remorse,
These agitated spectres, in cadence, fraught;
Or simply the dead whirling on their course?

Is it your remorse then, dreamer, that incites
This horror, your regret, your thought – all
Those spectres an irresistible vertigo invites,
Or just the dead themselves at their mad ball?

No matter! They whirl on, feverish phantoms,
Dancing a round, a vast and dismal twitching,
Like a ray of sunlight's whirling dust and atoms;
And then evaporate, in an instant, fleeing.

Pale and humid, where dawn extinguishes
The hunting calls, one by one, merely leaving
No more than a garden – merely – by Lenôtre,
Correct, ridiculous, and charming.

Anguish

(Poèmes Saturniens: Anguish)

Nature, nothing in you stirs me, not the fields
That nurture, nor the ruby-red echo of Sicilian
Pastoral; nor the pomp and ceremony of dawn,
Nor the mournful solemnity that sunset yields.

I mock at Art, Mankind too, at music's cry,
Verse, Greek temples, the towering spires
Of cathedrals in empty sky straining higher,
And see the good and bad with the same eye.

I've no belief in God, I renounce, forego
All thought, and as for the old, pale
Flawed Irony, Love – none of that show.

Weary of living, scared of dying; a tale
Of a lost brig, toy of the ebb and flow,
My soul for dreadful shipwreck sets sail.

In the Woods

(Poèmes Saturniens: Dans les bois)

Others –the innocent perhaps or the weary –
Find, among trees, only a languorous charm,
Fresh breezes, warm perfumes! They are happy!
Others – dreamers – are seized with alarm.

Happy! I, who am nervous, made anxious
By relentless, vague, yet terrifying remorse,
Trembling like a coward among the gorse,
Fear ambush, or the dead, rising among us.

Those great branches are restless as the sea.
Where black silence falls in blacker shades,
All those mournful, those sinister glades,
Stir horrors, trivial yet profound, in me.

On summer evenings, above all: dissolving
Sunsets fading, tinting the blue-grey mists
With blood and fire; as far-off bells insist
Like a plaintive cry, distantly approaching.

The wind is hot and heavy. Tremors trace
And retrace, ever stronger, the ever darker
Depths of the tall oak-trees, tormentors,
Dissipating, like miasmas, through space.

Night comes. The owl flies. It is the hour
Where we think of those old wives tales...
In the thickets, there, there – the heart quails –
Assassins, breathing low, conspire together!

Marine

(Poèmes Saturniens: Marine)

The sonorous Ocean
Shakes, under the eye
Of the moon in the sky,
And repeats the motion.

While a lightning-flash,
Brutal and sinister,
Splits clouds of bistre
In a long bright zig-zag,

And every wave bounds,
Convulsively leaps
Down all the reefs,
Flows, ebbs, shines and sounds,

And, high over the sea,
Where the hurricanes wander,
There roars the thunder,
Formidably.

Epilogue

(Poèmes Saturniens: Épilogue)

I

The sun, less ardent, shines in a clearer sky,
Swayed by the autumnal, cradling breezes,
The garden's roses sway from side to side,
The surrounding air yields sisterly kisses.

Nature for a time relinquishes her throne
Of splendour, irony, and serenity.
Mild, she descends, majestic and alone,
Towards Man, her rebellious perversity.

With her mantle, starred beyond the storms,
She deigns to wipe the dampness that starts
From our brows; her eternal soul, immortal form,
Calm and strengthen our weak, eager hearts.

The fresh swaying of the oak-tree boughs,
The wide horizon full of vague song,
All, as the joyous birds and clouds move on,
All, today, consoles and frees – Think now.

II

So, it is done. The text is closed. Dear Ideas
That traversed my grey sky on wings of fire,
Whose breeze caressed my brow, disappear,
Return now to that blue Infinity. Fly higher!

And you, chiming verse, sonorous Rhyme,
And you, singing Rhythms, and you, loving
Remembrances, you Dreams, one last time,
You Images that evoke my anxious longings.

We must part. Till more propitious hours,
When Art, our master, reunites us, adieu,
Fair companions, sweet accomplices of ours!
You may return now to that infinite blue.

For you provided us with a calling,
And the young stallion, our pleasure,
Panicked as he is, after his first outing,
Now requires a little shade and leisure.

– For you, O Poesy, you've supplied
The solitary star, the unique passion,
You alone our companion and guide,
Our parent: and we so wary of Inspiration!

III

Ah! Inspiration, superb and sovereign
Egeria, eyes filled with that deep glow,
The Angel of the old gilded paintings,
The helpful Genius, the swift Erato,

Muse, with voice doubtless full of power,
Since she only strikes the finest brains,
Like dandelions enamelling the lanes,
Raising a whole garden of fresh flowers:

Doves, Holy Spirits, blessed Delirium,
Opportune Troubles, Ecstasies unseen,
Gabriel's lute, and Apollo's plectrum,
Oh, Inspiration! Precious at sixteen!

What we demand of ourselves, we faithless
Poets Supreme, who yet venerate the gods,
Whose heads no circling rays of light caress,
Whose steps no Beatrice leads heavenwards,

Who chisel words with an iron blade,
Who coldly fashion moving rhymes,
Not swooning, nor watching evening fade,
In harmonious groups, beneath the limes,

What we demand, in the lamp's clear light,
Is Science conquered, and sleep tamed,
Brow in hand, like Faust, in the night;
Is Obstinacy, and the Will reclaimed!

The sacred Will, eternal and absolute,
Gripping its prey, as a condor, on high,
Grips a buffalo's steaming flanks and, mute,
Carries its trophy to the golden sky!

What we demand, is toil without respite,
Incredible effort, a combat without peer,
And the bitter night of torment, the night
Where the Work, slowly, like a sun, appears!

Leave the Inspired, those hearts a glow ignites,
To abandon their being to the breezes so,
Poor souls! Art does not fade into the night;
Is she marble, the Venus de Milo, or no?

Let us sculpt, with the chisel of Thought,
Beauty's virgin block of uncut Parian,
And, beneath our eager hands, let some
Pure statue in her starry robes be wrought.

So that, reflecting grey and rosy rays,
A new Memnon, the calm masterpiece,
Dawn of Posterity, daughter of sad days,
Might proclaim our name to all futurity.

It Will Be

(La Bonne Chanson: Ce sera)

So it will be, on a bright summer's day;
A vast sun, accomplice to all my joy,
Amidst the satin and silk you employ,
Will exalt your beauty, in every way;

The sky all blue, like a billowing tent,
Will shiver its long folds sumptuously,
Over our happy brows, paled we see
By all the emotions of joyous intent.

And as evening comes, the soft air dances,
Caressing your veil, as it gently plays,
While the stars, their peaceful glances,
Smile on us, with benevolent rays.

Yesterday

(La Bonne Chanson: Hier, on parlait)

Yesterday, we talked of this and that,
My eyes seeking yours under your hat.

And your gaze was seeking after mine,
While we chattered away all the time.

Beneath the banality of each dull phrase,
After your thought, it seems, my love strays;

And when you spoke, distracted by design,
I gave ear to your secret: and you to mine.

For the voice, as well as the eyes, of She
Who makes you joyous or sad, you see,

Despite a morose or a smiling display,
Brings the inner self to the light of day.

Intoxicated, you saw me thus depart.
Is it a vain hope caresses my heart?

Sweet and false companion, vain or no?
Oh! No! Is it, or not? Is it, or isn't it, so?

With Every Grace and Nuance

(La Bonne Chanson: Toute grâce et toutes nuances)

With every grace and nuance
Of sixteen's sweet brightness,
She's the candour of innocence
And childish lightness.

Her eyes, the eyes of an angel, though,
Know, without thought that is,
How to waken the strange glow
Of an immaterial kiss.

And her hand, far too slight
Even to hold a humming-bird as yet,
Captive without hope of flight,
Has captured the heart in secret.

Intelligence comes to her soul
In aid of that soul's nobility,
She's as pure as she's spiritual:
What she said, was necessary

And if foolish things amuse,
Provoke laughter without pity,
She might, being the Muse,
Prove lenient towards amity.

Towards love – who knows?
Perhaps towards a poet lovingly
Beseeching under her window:
Such boldness! A prize worthy

Of a poem whether bad or good!
But one, sincerely, witnessing
With no false note or platitude,
To the sweet pain felt in loving.

Ecstasy

(Romance sans paroles: C'est l'extase langoureuse)

It is languorous ecstasy,
It is amorous fatigue,
It is all the wood's frisson,
Embraced by the breeze,
It is, among grey leaves,
The slightest choral song.

O the murmur, fragile, new!
It babbles and whispers too,
Resembling that sweet sigh
The grass, swaying, breathes...
Or say, where water heaves,
The chirr: pebbles rolling by.

The soul which so laments,
In drowsy discontent,
Is ours, surely, there?
Mine, say, and yours,
From which humbly pours
The soft chant in evening air.

Double Vision

(Romance sans paroles: Je devine, à travers un murmure)

I divine, from a murmur,
The subtle contour of ancient whispers,
And in harmonious glimmers,
Pale love, a dawning future!

So my delirious heart and soul,
Are no more than a double vision,
In which every lyre's frissons,
Quiver, alas, in a murky glow!

O to die of that death alone,
Let them swing by, past hours and new,
That dear love that frightens you!
O to die of that swinging!

To Hamlet's Horatio

(Jadis et naguère: À Horatio)

My friend, life is no longer lutes and feathers,
Creditors, and hilarious duels over nothing,
Those cabarets, pipes, those hats and things,
Or that banal gaiety we scarcely weathered.

Here it comes, my tender friend, doomed
Breaker of pots, mad at the least dice-throw,
Terror of gambling dens, my sweet Horatio,
Speaker of curses to fill a hundred volumes.

Here it comes, among the mists of Elsinore;
Something far less pleasant, on my honour,
Than Ophelia, the kind child, spell-bound.

It is the ghost, the imperious ghost! His brow
Is furrowed, eyes gleam, footsteps resound,
And no way to put him off until tomorrow.

The Tavern

(Jadis et naguère: L'auberge)

White walls, red roof, the airiest of taverns,
By the broad dusty road's hot incline,
The cheerful inn, Happiness is its sign.
Cheap wine, soft bread, and no concerns.

Here they smoke, they sleep, they sing.
The host an old soldier, the hostess, at her ease,
Washes and combs ten rosy kids with fleas,
Speaking of love and joy, conceding nothing!

The place, its beams darkened by the ages,
Welcomes you, with a cabbage-soup perfume,
To striking images of Knights and Mages.

Do you hear the cooking-pot accompany
The clock with its pulsing, while the room
Opens its window onto distant country?

The Clown

(Jadis et naguère: Le clown)

Adieu, Bobèche! Paillasse! Farewell, Gilles!
Give way, you old buffoons, to the perfect jester.
Yield! For very grave, discreet, and proud here
The agile clown, the master of all's revealed.

Suppler than Harlequin, braver than Achilles,
It's truly him, in his armour of white satin,
Eyes empty, clear as one-way mirrors, within
His mask of clay, revealing no histories.

They shine blue amidst the ointment and cream.
While the head and chest, most elegantly, seem
To sway on a paradoxical arch the legs complete.

Then he smiles. The crowd, ugly, dull, that sits
Round that holy stinking rascal on iambic feet,
Acclaims the sinister character that hates it.

*Note: Bobèche was a famous French clown of the early nineteenth century.
Paillasse and Gilles are stock characters of the Commedia dell'Arte.*

Landscape

(Jadis et naguère: Paysage)

Towards Saint-Denis it's foul stupid country.
And yet it's there my friend accompanied me.
We were in a rotten mood and quarrelling.
A dull summer sun was gently spreading
Its rays over the dried up plain, like toast.

It was not long after the Siege; and almost
Half the 'country houses' were still standing,
The rest rising again, as if one were hoisting
Stage-scenery, new shells cased in pilasters,
Writing all round: Memories of Disasters.

Prologue

(Jadis et naguère: Prologue)

Away, vile troop, go hump!
Off with you, my lost children!
You were due your freedom:
The Chimera offers its rump.

Go, cling to its back instead,
As a flight of dreams swarm,
From a patient in the warm
Flowery vagaries of his bed.

My cool hand, I confess,
Feeble but, finally free
Of fever, throbbing with less
Than divine mystery,

My hand blesses you, oh
Little flies of my black suns,
And my white nights. Now go,
Quick my despairing ones,

My heart disowns from today,
Little hopes, joys and sorrows;
Go search for other prey,
'*aegri somnia*', tomorrow!

Note: 'aegri somnia', Latin for 'sick dreams'.

Lame Sonnet

(Jadis et naguère: Sonnet boiteux)

Ah! Truly, it's sad. Ah! Truly it's ended badly.
We're not allowed to be so unlucky, these days.
Ah! Truly it's too like some poor creature, sadly
Dying, the flow of blood ebbing under its gaze.

O what a Biblical city! London smokes and cries.
The gas flames and swims, and the signs glare.
And the houses, diminished terribly to the eye,
A tribunal of old women, terrify with their stare.

All the dreadful past, leaps, cheeps, meows and squeaks,
With its calls of 'Indeed', 'All right', and 'Ho!'
In the pink and yellow soiled fogs of Soho,

No truly it's a martyrdom without hope,
No truly, it's finished badly, truly it's sad,
Oh, the fire of heaven on this Biblical city!

Note: The final breakdown in the rhyming scheme is intentional.

Boarders

(Parallèlement: Pensionnaires)

One fifteen, the other sixteen, sleeping
Both in the same room, quietly.
All through a heavy September evening,
Strawberry blushes, blue eyes, frailties.

Each abandoning, to feel at ease,
The amber-scented thin nightdress,
The youngest stretches and arches,
And her sister kisses her, hands on breasts,

Then falls to her knees, and fiercely
Plunges her mouth, tumultuously, madly,
Into blonde hair, as grey shadows linger;

All the while, the younger dreams nonsense,
Lists promised dances on her sweet fingers,
And, blushing, smiles in all innocence.

On the Balcony

(Parallèlement: Sur le balcon)

Both were watching the flight of swallows:
One pale, hair jet-black, the other blonde,
Rosy, their light robes of old gold wound,
Like vague clouds, about them in billows.

And both, as languidly as the asphodels,
With a full moon, lethargically, rising,
Savoured the deep emotions of evening,
And the sad contentment of the faithful,

So, with moist arms embracing supple
Waists, a strange pair, pitying other couples,
So the two girls on the balcony; dreamers.

In the rich, sombre depths of their retreat,
Emphatic as a throne in some melodrama,
The odorous bed looms, shadowy, indiscreet.

Spring

(Parallèlement: Printemps)

The young red-head, tender,
Stirred by such youthfulness,
Spoke to the blonde, the younger,
These words, softly expressed,

‘Sap mounts, the flower blows,
Your innocence is a bower,
So let my fingers wander,
In the moss where the rosebud glows;

Let me, in the shining grass,
Drink those drops of dew,
Which wet the flower, as I pass,

So that the pleasure, renewed,
Illuminates your candid brow
As dawn lights the azure now.’

Tantalized

(Parallèlement: Tantalized)

The room, where I am, overlooks the station,
At night (all mine are white) the commotion
Of engines being stoked, trains repositioning,
A real nest of echoing noises, reverberating,
Under skies of blackened glass and cast iron.
You'd not conceive how birdlike, a full choir;
These efforts, one might say, birds make, to fly
Towards those impending violets of the sky,
That the break of dawn scarcely lights, again.
O, the wagons that will hurtle down the plain!

The Last Fête galante

(Parallèlement: La Dernière Fête galante)

Let's depart, the time has come,
Kind sirs, and ladies so discreet.
And then, like epithalamiums,
Our pleasures were too sweet.

No regret, remorse, no real disaster!
It's frightening how we keep
Company with the sheep,
Enribboned by some vile poetaster.

We were a little too ridiculous
With all our touch-me-not airs and graces.
A moment's breath, the love-god grants us.
He's right! And he's a god of youthful faces.

Let's depart, I say, for the new tomorrow.
Let our hearts, which bleated relentlessly,
Now, proclaim, while howling endlessly:
We're leaving now for Sodom and Gomorrah!

Laeti et Errabunda

(Parallèlement: Laeti et Errabunda)

The voyaging was intrepid
(As now, inertia weighs!)
By steamer, through the rapids.
(What's that the sluggish say?)

We were going – you remember,
Traveller, how we went? –
Flying lightly through the subtle air,
Two blithe phantoms, our intent!

For passion satisfied, utterly,
Beyond the wildest measure;
Our heads filled with frivolity,
Senses reassured by pleasure.

All, our youth, our amity,
And our hearts, oh, released
From women seized by pity,
And from every prejudice.

Leaving the dread of being lost,
And our scruples, to holy men,
For when the line is crossed
Artists know no limit then.

Among other culpable excesses,
I think we drank all drinks going,
From France's greatest vintages
To the chanciest stout and gin,

Going by way of brandy,
Both formidable and able
To send souls to heaven, happy,
And bodies, under the table.

Landscapes and cities posed
Before our tireless eyes;
While our curiosity disposed
Of atlases, of every size.

Mountains, rivers, marble and bronze,
The golden sunsets, magical dawns,
Belgium, daughter of tall belfries,
And dear England, the mother of trees.

The sea, both sweet and terrible,
Embroidered our romance no less,
It had no power to trouble
The soul – ah, but what of the flesh?

The romance of living, we two as one,
Better than model husband and wife,
Each pouring out the whole sum,
The strong and true emotions of life.

Envy with its basilisk eye,
Scorning our wish to share,
On public censure we dined,
And supped on identical fare.

Poverty also had its place,
At times, in our mutuality:
We replied with a brave face,
Potatoes, and jocularity.

Scandalous without knowing why,
(Perhaps it appeared too fine?)
We gave out never a sigh,
Like flag-bearers marching in time,

Silent with pride in our liberty,
More free than the freest in the world,
Deaf to loud words of enmity,
Untouched by the mockery hurled.

We had left, without emotion,
All impediments behind,
He various foolish notions,
I, a certain woman, in mind

Foolish, and proving worse...
Then suddenly, disempowered,
We, Imperial Marshals cursed,
Fell, like brigands of the Loire,

Though fallen voluntarily!
It was a leave of absence,
Speaking militarily,
That parting, in a sense,

A leave of absence at last,
And after so many campaigns!
Might you have forgiven the past?
I've barely seen those women again,

But enough, to suffer, and sigh:
Ah, what heart is weak as mine!
Yet better to suffer than die
Of a slow terminal decline.

They say you're dead – you! Devil
Take those hawkers of news,
Who beat on my door, repeating that evil
Irremediable word, whenever they choose!

I'll not believe it. You, dead,
A god among demi-gods even!
Those who say it are mad,
Dead, you, my radiant sin,

All of our past still burning
In my mind, and in my veins;
You still shining, blazing;
My fervour, kindling again.

Dead, all your triumph unheard,
That goes echoing without end,
Never vanishing from the air,
Shaking my heart, dear friend!

What, the miraculous poem,
The universal philosophy,
My Bohemia, my true home,
Dead? Come! You live in me!

*Note: Laeti et Errabunda, Latin for Happy and Wandering.
See Baudelaire's poem Moesta et Errabunda, Mournful and Wandering.*

Index of First Lines

O Don Quixote, old paladin, grand Bohemian,	4
Madame, deign to let my poor heart explain,	5
O funereal Cloître-Saint-Merri! The streets so sombre!.....	7
Art wishes neither tears nor compromise,	10
The setting sun was shedding its last rays,	11
The Sabbath of the later Faust, not the other.	12
Nature, nothing in you stirs me, not the fields.....	14
Others –the innocent perhaps or the weary –.....	15
The sonorous Ocean.....	16
The sun, less ardent, shines in a clearer sky,	17
So it will be, on a bright summer’s day;	21
Yesterday, we talked of this and that,.....	22
With every grace and nuance.....	23
It is languorous ecstasy,	25
I divine, from a murmur,.....	26
My friend, life is no longer lutes and feathers,	27
White walls, red roof, the airiest of taverns,.....	28
Adieu, Bobèche! Paillasse! Farewell, Gilles!	29
Towards Saint-Denis it’s foul stupid country.	30
Away, vile troop, go hump!	31
Ah! Truly, it’s sad. Ah! Truly it’s ended badly.	32
One fifteen, the other sixteen, sleeping.....	33
Both were watching the flight of swallows:	34
The young red-head, tender,	35
The room, where I am, overlooks the station,	36
Let’s depart, the time has come,	37
The voyaging was intrepid.....	38