

# **Tristan Corbière**

## **Selected Poems from 'Les Amours Jaunes'**

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## Translator's Introduction

Tristan Corbière (1845-1875), christened Édouard Joachim Corbière, was born in Brittany, and lived most of his life there, dying of tuberculosis at the age of 29. His inclusion by Verlaine in *Les Poètes Maudits* drew attention to his sole collection of verse, *Les Amours Jaunes* (*The Yellow Loves, or Wry Loves*, 1873). He was acknowledged as a Symbolist poet of note, and recognised by the Surrealists as a precursor of the movement. This selection seeks to display his skill, wit, and the subtlety of emotion half-concealed behind his wry and caustic manner.

### Paris

Creole, Breton, bastard, lone,  
He too came there – the anthill  
Bazaar where nothing is of stone,  
Where the sun is toneless still.

– Courage; queue...an orderly  
Prods you in line – to the back!  
Fires extinguished, flame-free;  
Of buckets, full or not, no lack.

His virgin Muse, in poverty,  
Walked the streets, a young lady;  
They said: What is she selling?

– Nothing – She stood there, mindless,  
Not listening to the emptiness,  
Just watching the breeze passing...

Under the whip, there! – Pass today  
In a cab or black maria,  
Another pass, then another,  
Surpass yourself, and pass away...

No, being but a little thing,

Start by being grand, it's simple,  
Poor: scrape gold with a shovel,  
Obscure: a name, at least, to sing!...

Stick it on cafés in the streets,  
And teach it to the parakeets,  
Who'll whistle it or warble....

Music! – It's paradise,  
Mahomets, houris to entice,  
Gods pimp themselves, for a bauble.

**'J'aimais...'**

I loved... – oh, love's no more for sale!  
Buy just the same: from the heap go get  
Yourself a woman! – She did not fail,  
My love, to say: 'I'll not forget...'

...I had a lover, back there,  
Her pale shade haunts everything,  
Midst scented lilacs, everywhere...  
Perhaps She weeps... – Well then: sing

Nostalgia, for yourself, alone,  
Sleepless nights, with light unknown...  
Sad verses, sad at dawn!...

But now, whip up an orgy, here,  
Let those reddened eyes appear,  
Let your whorish airs be born!

**'Tu ris...'**

You're laughing – Good! – Be bitter,  
Make it a habit, jesting Mephisto.

Absinthe! For foaming lips is fitter,  
Say that it rises from your heart, and so...

Make of yourself your opus posthumous,  
Balls! – to love...love's a bore.  
Your scarred lungs breathe in miasmas  
Of glory – O brave conqueror!

Enough, is it not? Go! Forego  
Your purse – your last mistress so –  
Your revolver – your last friend...

Droll fellow, duels are at an end!  
...Or stay, and drink the last dregs down,  
Nobly served, with nary a frown.

### **Epitaph**

Except lovers we begin or end  
Who wish to begin at the end there  
Are so many things that end at the  
Beginning that the beginning  
Begins to end by being the end the end  
Will be that lovers and others  
Will end by beginning to end again in  
That beginning which will end in being  
Only the end returning which will begin  
By being equal to eternity which has neither  
End nor beginning and will end by being  
Equal also finally to the rotation of  
The earth where one will have ended by no  
Longer distinguishing where the end begins of where  
The beginning ends which is all of the end  
Of all beginning equal to all  
The beginning of all ending which is the  
Final beginning of the infinite poured out

By the indefinite – Equal an epitaph equal  
To a preface and vice versa

(WISDOM OF THE NATIONS)

**‘Il se tua...’**

He killed himself through ardour and idleness.  
If he lives on, it’s through neglectfulness;  
Leaving one sole regret: not being his mistress –

Not born with any end in view  
Ever driven by the wind anew,  
He was a harlequin ragout  
A mere adulterated stew

Of *who-knows-what* – who never knew  
Where gold lay – never owned a sou;  
Nerves without nerve, vigour without force,  
Momentum – on a random course;  
Soulful – and yet no violin;  
A lover – yet no stallion within;  
Of too many names a name to win.

Charioteer of the ideal – free of idea;  
Rhyme rich – and yet never rhymed.  
Never having been – yet a ‘returner’;  
Finding himself lost everywhere, ill-timed.

Always a poet, despite his verse;  
Artless without art – a reverse  
Philosopher – a passing curse.

Severely droll – yet never droll.  
An actor, ignorant of his role;  
A painter: on the accordion,

Musician: to the palette born.

A mind! – But mindless indeed  
Too crazy craziness to heed;  
His emblem the word ‘very’.  
His false verse alone sung truly.

A rare bird – yet valueless;  
Quite male ... yet *girlish* no less;  
Fit for all – good for nothing  
Bad well, good badly, marring.  
Prodigal, like to that son  
In scripture – yet a scripture-less one.  
Rash, oft, for fear of falling flat,  
Putting both feet in it, for all that.

A colourist, enraged – yet pale;  
Misunderstood – without fail,  
By himself; wept, sang tunelessly,  
– At fault, he acted faultlessly.

Neither *someone*, nor something,  
His natural attitude was *posing*;  
No poseur – but posing as *unique*;  
Too cynical, thus naïve and weak;  
Believing naught, so believing all,  
His taste forever on distaste did call.

Too raw – because too overcooked,  
Like any but himself, he looked.  
Ennui amused him, as well it might,  
Till it kept him awake at night.  
A saunterer at large – drifting,  
A shipwreck never quite occurring...

Too *Self-absorbed* for suffering,  
The drunk head reeling, the spirit dry,

Done for, yet incapable of ending,  
Waiting to live, yet doomed to die,  
Waiting for death, yet still living.

A heart without heart, his ill-tenure,  
But too successful – in its *failure*.

### **Chic Bohemia (Bohême de Chic)**

Don't offer me a throne!  
At home, I drolly simmer  
In my yellow sauce (alone)  
Of disdainful *chic*, as ever.

Let those polished boots  
Rain down from paradise,  
Umbrellas and dark suits...  
Barefoot laughters I devise!

– Epoque, dull, threadbare,  
Where each man makes a living.  
Where, a sword-less prig, a bare  
Good-for-nothing's nothing!

Papa – a louse, though honest – yet  
Left me a few sous,  
Such that I took on fresh debt,  
To fill his lousy shoes!

His coat, all pierced anew,  
Made lovely rags for me,  
That the sun shines through,  
The gaps are rays that flee,

Into my hat, the moonlight  
Shines, through holes everywhere,

Foolish virgin bright,  
A hundred-sous piece there!

– A Gentleman! ...with a queue:  
My ill-acquired name  
Vanishes, in a league or two;  
To hell with all that game!

My coat of arms – not prudish,  
To my rascally self's akin:  
– *A bend gules we flourish,*  
*On a pierced field of harlequin.*

Outside department stores,  
On reading – ‘All Loitering  
Forbidden!’ – I block the doors,  
Stiff as a dead man hanging.

And plant myself readily  
In today's choice dish,  
Like a knife set free  
In a plate of spinach.

I lift my leg, like this,  
At all that's limiting,  
Gallows, pavements, Swiss,  
Girl, Priapus or king.

When, lacking flute or tambour,  
Some sad servile lackey  
On the viol, bowls me over  
I feel proud then, I feel free! ...

And I let life rain down,  
Without wetting me, what's more;  
Waiting for the urge  
To stuff myself with straw.

I sleep beneath my bonnet,  
My bonnet of dark sky  
And the pale star shines on it,  
And glitters in my eye.

My Muse is blonde or grey...  
I love, with love unknown;  
She's everyone's, I say...  
Yet...I pummel her...I alone.

Mine my Flesh-creeper!  
Yours! Am I not fine,  
When my kiss rolls you over,  
Bareback, in this coat of mine! ...

I laugh like some mad thing,  
I sense the ache inside,  
When I feel your sweet flesh cling  
To my poor leprous hide!

*Jerusalem – October.*

### **Noble Lady (Gente Dame)**

My lady, there's none like you,  
For love, cloaked and bladed too,  
None like you!...  
For passion without obstacle,  
Mystery's grand spectacle,  
None like we two!...

Since the *Tour de Nesle's*,  
And the *Château de Presle's*  
Heady days,  
Where they slept in the Seine,

Those blades for their pains...  
– After their assays –

When you play *Frisette*,  
There's no finer grisette,  
No, none do I spy!...  
Nor a robber to touch,  
– A pure Rembrandt as such –  
The wild lad that is I!

Let him wait, dear Marquise,  
By the chapel where he's  
Flanked by the wall,  
For your dark-green coupé  
A bravo in the shade,  
Masked as for the ball.

– Charge! – Cruising, I armour  
My corsair's-fiacre,  
And onward we go...  
With the veil of a blind  
We can both hide behind,  
– To the wind let it flow!...

– The mournful quarter – a gallows' ladder,  
At the top there, shudder...  
Oh, what a step!  
To the *Sixth* – Ah, I know  
Tis to fall somewhat low!  
In many respects!

To the attic poetic,  
Where dwells the classic  
Spring, it appears,  
Adventuress come chase  
This catmeat, in haste:  
*Twenty years!*

Angel, come to the hutch  
– With your wretch: he's not much –  
Of the Gods up on high!  
Poor devil on a string,  
Ply him, with your wing.  
To the sky!

Come, Dante's Beatrice,  
In your hand, like this,  
Take my brow.  
Or, a good girl, pass so,  
On the arm of your beau,  
O'er the bridge now.

Tomorrow, knight-lover, so manly,  
Return to me, *Bradamante*!  
Lily of the Valley, say ay!  
Fortune's scholar, taunting,  
Thus, towards evening,  
The watching-eye.

### **After the Rain (Après La Pluie)**

I like the little shower of rain  
That clears itself away again  
With a cloth, with holes of blue!  
I like love, and the breeze  
When it's skimming past with ease...  
Not agitated, too.

– A rayed umbrella in the sky  
Yourself you dry,  
O mighty sun! Open further...  
Soon the green umbrella's spied  
Open wide!

Of Spring, – Winter’s Summer –

Passion is the shower  
That passes in an hour!  
Yet the woman’s but a squall  
Squall of beauty, foolish pain,  
Or of rain...

Stormy squall – serene withal –

In a bright streak of mud  
She spreads her tail, a good  
Few feet of grand display –  
– Feather and tail – cocotte,  
Who paddles about a lot,  
A brief flash on the way!

– ‘Anne, or whoever you are, dear...

Or not so dear

To whose eye we give the eye...

Hmm...Zoe! Nadjedja! Jane!

Here I come strolling by again,

Lined with gold like the sky!

*English?* – Spanish anyone?

How about Bohemian?...

Raise high the covering

That hides the merchandise, no less,

O Marchioness

Of Pretence!... or Fretting!...

A monkey’s or an angel’s name?

Or a mixture of the same?...

Little name that owns eight lives?

Name that screeches or that sings:

A lover’s name, one with wings?...

Or that, sleeping rough, survives?

Will you with a love that's faithful,  
Nay, eternal!  
Adore us, for an eve ill-spent?  
For your little boots, those two  
That you ruin so, will you  
Tread my heart, the pavement, with intent?

Are you not Donna Sabine?  
Carabine?...  
Would you like the paradise, say,  
Of L'Odéon, – a foolish  
Exchange indeed all this! ...  
I've cash today.'

And here it comes, and soon,  
That same old tune:  
– 'You're mistaken... What mad folly!  
I'm an honest girl... away with you...'  
'– Don't be so stupid! – Who  
Do you think it is? – It's me! ...

... Won't you take something then  
Sprinkled again  
With what, who can tell me? ...  
Extract of pearls from gold  
Cups? ... You'd cut me! ... Hold,  
Mina, won't you have me?'

– 'Why not, it goes without saying!' –  
– 'O, then Fortune's smiling! ...  
I, above all the rest! ...  
Beauty, free with your lips!  
The breadth of your hips  
Would trouble a cook, at best!'

– 'But my name, it's Alouise...'  
'Heloise!

Would you, for the love of art,  
– Abelard before the fact –  
Allow me to enact,  
Awhile, your Abelard’s part?’

### **Chance and Good Fortune**

I take myself to the street, when Nature’s beautiful,  
To the passer-by, who with her conquering air,  
Would extract, with the tip of her parasol,  
A glance from my eye, or lay my poor heart bare.

I think myself content – not too much! – but one must live:  
To stave off hunger a bit, the beggar drinks like a sieve...

One fine day – what a business! – there I passed,  
In my cruising – Business!... – She came by at last  
– She, who? – the Passer-by! She, with the parasol!  
A proper butcher’s-lad, against her I tried to loll...

Brushed her...She viewed me softly, smiled loftily too,  
And...held out her hand, and...handed me a sou!

*(Rue des Martyrs)*

### **Insomnia**

Insomnia, impalpable creature!  
In your mind only does love feature?  
Coming, in rapture, to view thereby,  
Beneath your evil eye, the man biting  
His sheets and, in tedium, writhing! ...  
Beneath your black diamond eye.

Say why, during the void of night,

Like a rainy Sunday, dull and white,  
You come and lick us like a dog:  
Hope or Regret, that watches here,  
Beside our palpitating ear,  
Speaking low...though mute as a log.

Why to our arid throat offer  
A cup that's empty forever,  
Leaving the outstretched mouth instead,  
Of Tantalus, quaffer of chimeras  
The bitter lees of love philtres,  
Fresh dew, or molten lead! –

Insomnia, are you not beautiful?...  
Oh why, girl, of wantonness full,  
Grip us so tightly between your knees,  
Why moan against our taut lips so,  
And why disturb our slumber, though  
You won't sleep with us at ease?

Why, impure Lady-of-the-Night,  
This black cloth to mask your sight?...  
Your scheme of golden dreams to hide?...  
Are you not love in the void's arena,  
The breath of weary Messalina,  
As yet unsatisfied!

Are you Hysteria, Insomnia ...  
Are you the barrel-organ rather,  
That plays the Elect's Hosanna instead?...  
Or are you the eternal plectrum  
That on the nerves of the damned will strum  
Condemned by a letter only they have read?

Insomnia, are you Buridan's ass –  
Or the path by which we pass  
To Hell? – Your kiss of fire and guile,

Leaves a cold taste of iron and rust,  
Oh! Set down in my hovel's dust,  
We'll sleep together a while.

### **The Poet's Pipe (La Pipe Au Poète)**

I'm the pipe of a poet, at least  
His wet-nurse: and I tame *the Beast*.

Whenever the one-eyed chimeras,  
Strike his brow, I smoke aright,  
And on his ceiling, in the night,  
He'll no longer see the spiders.

...There, I reveal a cloud-filled sky;  
Sea, desert and mirage he'll spy;  
– Amongst them his dead eye strays again ...

And, when a dense fog fills the air,  
He'll see familiar shadows there,  
And I'll feel him bite my stem.

– Another tempest his soul will free  
His shackles, his life, totally!  
...I feel myself dying. – He sleeps again –

Sleep: the *Beast* is calm; pursue  
Your dream until the end befall,  
My Poor Dreamer! ... the smoke is all  
– For all is vanished in smoke, it's true...

(*Paris, January*)

### **The Toad (Le Crapaud)**

A song in the airless night...  
Moon, a plate of metallic light,  
The spaces, a sombre green.

...A song: like a lively echo,  
Buried beneath the bank, below...  
–It's silent: but there, unseen...

– A toad! – Oh, why such terror,  
Near me, you steadfast soldier!  
See it: shorn poet, wingless forever,  
A nightingale in the mud... – Horror! –

...It sings – Horror! – Horror, why,  
Surely you see its light-filled eye, shining alone? ...  
No, it's gone, cold, under its stone.

.....

Farewell – that toad, there, is I.

### **Duel, with Camellias**

I saw the harsh sun beat against the glade,  
I saw two blades there gleaming in the sun,  
Two swords there shining, as if on parade,  
And the blackbirds watching them, as one.

A gentleman in white arranged his sleeve,  
He seemed to me a large camellia,  
A pink flower on the branch I did conceive,  
Pink as....and then a blade flashed nearer.

– I see red...ah yes, that's right: we kill by rote –  
...A white camellia – there – like His throat...  
A yellow one – here – crumpled, in the mud...

Love, dead, fallen from me, in an hour...  
– Mine, the open wound, the spring flower!  
Camellia, living, all dyed with blood.

*(Dies Veneris/Friday, 13th, \*\*\*)*

### **Flower of Art (Fleur d'Art)**

Yes – What jealous art in the story You offer!  
What dear trifles! – A bit of a sonnet,  
A heart engraved in your black manner.  
Penknife strokes, cut with a stylus, on it –

To the buttonhole you cut for it, proudly,  
My heart carries a small bouquet  
Of red 'everlastings' – it's still your way –  
It's blood in flower. A pretty memory.

Come, no tears to our memory today!  
– It's the fatal death of love that we view –  
Wisps of forget-me-not, an old sachet!

False woman, begone!... Let some ass bray you!  
If you were not false, ah, would you be true?...  
Love is a duel: – Touché! Thank you.

### **Poor Lad (Pauvre Garçon)**

*The savage Beast*

He who whistled, with such an elegant air,  
I saw that he was searching...so dull near me...  
And not finding...quite stupid the whole affair,  
This hero who couldn't see that he loved me.

I ricocheted from his heart (he watched it),  
Tempestuously...Really, he found it wearing?  
What worse instrument to play than a poet!...  
I've played one. Really – I – found it amusing.

Is he dead?... – Ah – he was a droll lad, you see,  
Would have taken the role far too seriously,  
Without telling me...at least. – Dead of what, exactly? ...

Might he have wasted away from poetry...  
Dead of consumption, *chic*, or inebriety,  
Or perhaps, after all: of nothing...  
Or simply Me.

### **Decline**

How fine this sap-filled Youth did seem!  
Avid for life, o joy! ... so gentle in his dream.  
How he bore his head, or laid it down gladly!  
Scenting the wind for love! ...enduring it sadly.

Oh, what a Nobody! ...rancour-less, today,  
He has seen Fortune, returning, smile his way;  
He'll smile no more than before, he knows  
What all that costs, and how it goes.

His Heart is weightier, says hello in prose,  
He's highly prized...this God is something, and it shows;  
No longer walks, hands in empty pockets, all alone.

In his glory, which he bears in funeral dress,  
You'll recognise him, done, banal, and famous, no less....  
You'll recognise him, then, that unknown.

### **Farewell at Eve (Bonsoir)**

Then you'll come, with your mad chattering,  
To tap into this glittering mirror scattering  
Its gold gleam, gash in a yellow star; light-less,  
You'll see a jewel in this tinsel brightness.

You'll come to this man, to his frail reflection  
Heatless – But when he burnt, a feverish sun,  
You felt nothing you who – past midday –  
Fall upon what he's left, this falling ray.

He knows you no more, You, Shade lost to the eye,  
You, whom he set there in his empty sky,  
When a God! ... All that – not needed as before –

Believe – though he lacks the mirage's allure,  
Weep – though he lacks the tear's plangent chord.  
His songs... – were another's; he owns them no more.

### **Litany**

No...my heart feels you there, Child,  
Who sleep, and leave me reconciled  
To my night, so long still, laid flat  
On the paving stones, like a dead rat...

– Sleep on. The cradling litany,  
Serenade, that sounds eternally,  
Rests on your lips, like this,  
Like the breath of a soft kiss:

'Heavenly lily! Gleaming star!  
Tower of Ivory! Veil-less shrine afar!  
Vesper, O, love's Aurora!

Ah! I know the responses, mystical,

To the canticle of canticles,  
One chants...to the Devil, Senora!

### **Elixir of Love**

You desire me not in dream,  
In nightmare you'll have my heart!  
You're flayed alive, it would seem,  
– For me...for the love of art.

– Open: I'll pass by swiftly,  
Nights, summers, soon rehearsed...  
Yet cursed is my music, truly,  
For eternity accursed!

I'll deafen the recluses,  
Wear down, with pious blows,  
The Nine and the other Muses...  
They're better for it, heaven knows!

My one-eyed roles I'll repeat  
– And all my blind ones too...  
The droll ones come complete  
With a pretty good *view*:

Kneeling, proud Cavalier,  
On foot, with my rapier,  
I kiss the dust, tis there  
The prints of Your shoe appear!

I come, a pilgrim, most austere,  
Capucin and Troubadour,  
Rehearsing my rosary here,  
On the viola d'amour.

– Bachelor of Salamanca,  
Simplest, and least of any,

I never lack for treasure:  
– Best wishes! and not a penny! –

Vile Gypsy vagabond,  
Mender of pot and pans,  
I click the castanets loudly,  
And tickle up the hams.

In a half-mask, stealthily,  
I, a wolfish marauder,  
Go offering up my nobility...  
– Pure Don-Juan-of-the-Commander –

My mistress can discover  
Me, midst the lost dogs, at ease:  
Abelard's not my master,  
No more is Alcibiades!

### **Hunting (Vénerie)**

O Venus, in your Venery,  
Hound and hunter too,  
Kennel-boy, stable-lad, that's me,  
I've known the Baying and Halloo!...

Let Diana too smile on me here! ...  
At the horn, the cry, the calling,  
I make ground, I turn the deer,  
For as they say: *the beast is stirring*...

– A doe's print: Here, in view,  
A bell-rope in the street,  
– Antlers: on the door too;  
Then hanging about: in defeat!...

O Fawn, whom I, baying, sought,

– I'm tired, relieve me again.  
O Beast! are you but a wild 'sow' then:  
.....

Far less savage than you thought!

### **Vendetta**

You want nothing of my soul,  
That I yield, my strength inhuman:  
My Dear, you'll grant me it whole!...  
Without rancour – I'm a woman! –

You want nothing of my skin,  
You're poisonous as a Jesuit:  
Take care!... I am a Jesuit  
As Jesuitical as sin,

As a toad, bland as a flea,  
My companion that goes with me,  
True, but – let it not displease you –  
It's you I would prefer, You!

– I am still, My Very Dearest,  
A Serpent like that Serpent  
Cold, gliding, poison rampant,  
That gave your Mother such unrest...

And you are not worth, Dear Folly,  
Much more than her, I believe...  
Are you yet worth my song, my Eve?...  
Are you worth but myself to me!...

### **Hours (Heures)**

Alms for the brigand in the chase!  
Cursed be the assassin's hand!  
Blade against blade for the swordsman!  
My soul it lacks the state of grace.

I'm the madman of Pamplona,  
I fear the moon's bright laughter  
The traitress with her black cloak...  
Horror! Lost in candle-smoke

A rattle there sounds noisily...  
The evil hour it summons me.  
The midnight death-knell leaves a trace...a trace.

I've counted fourteen hours and more...  
The hour's a tear. – You wept before,  
My heart!... Sing now! ... – Count not apace!

### **Song in If (Chanson en Si)**

If I were a noble Falcon, free,  
I'd soar around your balcony...  
– A bull: I'd charge towards your door...  
A vampire: drink your blood galore,  
I'd drink you!

A jailor: I'd let you stroll,  
A rat: I'd make a little hole,  
If I were a trade-wind today  
I'd wet you with dew, I say...  
I'd wet you!

If I were the Grand Confessor  
I'd scourge you, O My Sister!  
For a second penance, too  
I'd tell you what I think of you,  
I'd tell you...

If I were an Apostle, moreover,  
I'd say: 'Grant one another,  
To alleviate your hungers,  
A kiss: the bread of lovers'  
If it were true! ...

Were I of a Mendicant Order,  
I'd beg for the Son and Father,  
I'd beg your little heart, further,  
For Holy Church their Mother...  
I'd beg for two!

If I were a rich Madonna,  
From my niche, I'd throw  
A glance and a sous below,  
For the hymn last sung, in honour...  
I'd throw a sous!

If I were an old beadle,  
I'd display a candle...  
With a splash of holy water,  
I'd douse it, vespers over...  
And dousing due!

If I were a hanged-man, stiff,  
To heaven all rendered... If! ...  
I'd climb after the rope,  
Anchor of grace and hope,  
I'd climb anew!

If I were a woman, ah Beauty  
I'd have you be my Dove, truly...  
The gallants at the door  
Could top themselves, what's more...  
I'd have you...

Child, were I the Duenna, there,  
Rocinante, who combs your hair,  
Senora, if I were You, you see...  
I would open it to poor Me,  
– I would open to You! –

### **Doors and Windows (Portes et Fenêtres)**

Blood and Guitar! – Answer a man!  
You hear?... A curse be on your head!  
None has left me, Barbarian,  
As long here, waking the dead.

Nor in such a state of purgatory!...  
My footsteps you hear not, nor see,  
Your eyes are closed, the night is dark:  
Any sign you made...I'd not mark.

I've paved your street in Hell, alone,  
All the damned are troubled so...  
Too incomparable Unknown!  
If you're not there...let me know!

I'm all out of damned tirades,  
I've only damned myself, it's true,  
By drumming out my serenades...  
– All that remains is damning You!

### **Letting-Go (Laisser-Courre)**

*Music by Isaac  
Laquedem (the Wandering  
Jew)*

I left to the gallows-tree,  
After all the hangings,  
The guts of my progeny,  
The lean, forbidden, pickings;  
The quills there to the geese,  
To the foxes the tail beneath...

To the Devil his tail too,  
And his horns, I fear,  
To the sky its patch of blue,  
And the Planet – here –  
And everywhere: to no-matter-where,  
In pawn, in the desert there.

I left the rest in Spain  
And my castle at that,  
Elsewhere, on the plain,  
My head and my fine hat,  
I left my shoes complete  
Sirens, at your feet!

I left midst everyone  
Amidst the curly rigs  
Of bald, brunette, blonde girls  
And redheads...my wigs.  
My sword to knights failed of success,  
To cuckolds my fair mistress.

To the doors the curtain,  
The curtain to the doorman,  
The bud to the flower that grows,  
And to the rosebush the rose,  
To the bailiffs the furniture  
All the debts to the creditors...

To my veins my poet's vein,  
My bookshelf to the sun,

My drawn sword in its sheath again,  
My lizard sleeping, dumb.  
My loves I've left, as dowers,  
To the ovens and the towers...

And then my coat of mail,  
To the artichokes of iron  
On the highest rail  
Of the Infernal Garden.  
And to each rag, within,  
A fragment of my skin.

The contents of my nose  
I've left, everything,  
To the worms, in verse, in prose...  
Limits to the limiting...  
To the card-games I bring,  
The trumps, and every king.

I left all the police  
Captives in liberty,  
I left to La Palice  
The patent verity...  
Left fate to run at will  
And all that's running still.

I left Hope aging  
In her second infancy,  
Slowly yielding,  
Toothless Virgin, to folly.  
I left the Gods, forever,  
I left the worse and better.

I left great calm indeed,  
To those who were not,  
To foolish claws, decreed  
All the property I got;

To the poets, faith and health...  
Then, I'm left to myself.

In time, without a guide,  
Living largely served me badly,  
Sent me high and wide...  
At the end there's – nothing – sadly,  
...Left to say, blasé, passé,  
Nothing leaves me naught today.

### **Uncourageous (Décourageux)**

A true poet he: lacking a song, more or less.  
Dead, he loved the light, disdained to whimper.  
A painter, he loved his art – forgot to be a painter...  
He saw too much – and seeing is a blindness.

A dreamer: deep down he lived his dream.  
Without ever bursting the balloon, I mean,  
Without *baring his soul*, seeking himself within.

Like some romantic hero – loved the brunette,  
Without seeing her blondness...adored the moon, and yet  
He never loved – lacking the time for sin.

Indefatigable seeker: down here where we row,  
He gazed from his lofty height at those below,  
Wearied by pity for those so good at rowing...

Miner of thoughts: he touched his pallid brow,  
To scratch at a pimple, or whatever was now  
Troubling his mind – while achieving nothing –

– He cried: 'Yes, the Muse is sterile, the daughter  
Of love, of idleness, of prostitution;  
The family? Don't speak, in this quarter;  
Of what stallions cover in reproduction!

Oh, all you wastrels, mere masons of thought!  
All you her caprice has touched as a lover,  
– Vanity, vanity – the mad night over,  
You show, *as charged*, round-eyed, to the untaught!

She brushed you aside, like kittens they drown,  
You clung to her web, or clung to her wing,  
Proud of the bit of goose feather you found,  
Or those bristles to scrape with, like anything!’

He cried out: ‘O Ocean, naïve! O little florets,  
Are we not fine without painters, or poets!...  
What the house-painter paints! What the blind may sing!  
What the house-painter sings, scraping his palette,  
What the blind man paints with his clarinet,  
– Is that art? ...’ To the Beast Sublime he yet  
Held fast, vain pride and virginity drowning.

(*Mediterranean*)

### **Vesuvius and Co**

Pompeii Station – Vesuvius is that you, I find,  
Who brought delight to a child in Brittany?  
– In those days when faith transported mountains, easily –  
On that fine lampshade of an aunt of mine?

You stood there, black, on a transparent ground,  
The lamp shone forth the fires of your crater.  
It was, they say, my grandmother’s confessor  
Who brought you from Rome, all safe and sound...

I saw you, larger, at the Opéra-Comique,  
In a drama you created, *The Last Days  
Of Pompeii* – Fires burning to music all that week,  
They’d reduced your role, to a petty oven’s blaze.

Then we met again, before the fireplace, you'll agree,  
In Marseille on leave, sans music, flames to view:  
Blue on a pink ground, your Mediterranean Sea  
Hanging there, all pink on a field of blue.

O Mountain, it was you who often came to me!  
I return the visit, willingly, to your country.  
You're the Real Vesuvius – a hundred-francs-*worth* too.  
.....  
Yet the smaller ones I saw seemed much more like you.

*Pompeii, April*

### **Evil Landscape (Paysage Mauvais)**

Sands of ancient bones – the moaning tide  
Of death-knells; breaking sound on sound, the light  
Of pallid marshes where the moon will glide  
Devouring great worms, passing through the night.

– Calm amidst the plague where the fever  
Simmers...the will o the wisp, accursed, lingers.  
– Putrid grass where the hare's, forever,  
A cowardly sorceress who slips your fingers...

The pale Washerwoman spreads around  
The dead's dirty linen, on the ground,  
In the *sunset of the wolves*... – The toads,

Little songsters, and wholly melancholy,  
Poisoning, with the colic in their belly,  
The fungi, their stools, chant their odes.

*(Marais de Guérande – April)*

### **Still Life (Nature Morte)**

A funereal *Angelus*, of cuckoos no less,  
All in a moment, in the early darkness,  
Takes the old cuckoo-clock by surprise,

Likewise, the barn-owl, sentinel by night,  
In its stuffed carcass, in the candlelight,  
That flames out, bright, across its eyes.

– Listen to the owl, now, holding its breath...  
A creaking of wood: as the *barrow of Death*  
Down the curving road will follow...

While, in its joyous flight, the crow  
Rounds the roof, that will show  
The departed, off tomorrow.

*(Brittany – April)*

### **The Lighthouse (Le Phare)**

Phoebus, in a bad mood, couches.  
Upright on the reef;  
Lights up, tall, one-eyed, the reaches  
Winking like a thief.

Priapus of the hurricane,  
Upright, there – all in vain  
The waves go licking, foaming.  
– His wick as yet still burning.

He rears his mast, and laughs with rage,  
Hard as a block,  
A proud candle-butt, and savage,  
Planted on a rock!

On his hoary head, in vain,  
Cloud to and fro, in its course,  
Rises up, descends again  
Like a leaping horse...

To the shipwreck he holds a light.  
As if in a dream,  
The wind blows with all its might,  
The storm bursts, breakers teem.

Rumble, vibrate, like an elephant's trunk,  
– The diapason rising so,  
From Aeolus' cave – it might well be sunk,  
But bend for a moment – no –

Does he know the Musset ballad? In the mist,  
He's a 'yellowed spire' to the eye,  
For the pale moon to insist  
On dotting his capital I.

...There, upright, stands the vestal  
– He's the fire-lighter –  
Virgin and martyr (sex male),  
He's also the snuffer –

Like a lizard in brandy  
Closed in a jar,  
His life corkscrews slowly,  
In this lantern, afar.

A philosopher or a poet?...  
– He knows naught of his role in the game –  
Simply foolish, a lunatic?...  
– It's all one and the same –

Ask him if he cherishes his  
Utter solitariness,

– If he speaks, he’ll answer: he lives like this...  
Out of habit, he will confess.

(*The Triagoz lighthouse, May*)

### **The End (La Fin)**

‘*O so many sailors, so many captains  
Etc.*’ (V. Hugo, *Oceano Nox*)

So, all those mariners – sailors, captains  
Forever submerged in their vast Ocean...  
Lost, carelessly, to the far distance  
Are dead – as their departing motion.

So be it! It’s their role; they died with their boots on!  
Flask hiding the living heart, sou’wester on...  
Dead...Give thanks: Death’s a poor sailor;  
Let her sleep with you: she’s a fine partner...  
So, let’s go: Unyielding! Snatched from the rigging!  
Or lost in a squall, an unforgiving....

Squall...is it Death, that sail, at last,  
Beating low in the waves! ... *Floundering*, rather...  
A blow from the leaden sea, and the tall mast  
Beating the waves flat...*sinking* rather.

Sinking – Sound the word. Your *death* so pale,  
And nothing grand aboard, in the heavy gale...  
Nothing grand ahead for the bitter grimace  
Of the struggling sailor – Onward then, give way!  
Old fleshless phantom, Death, as if in play,  
Changes – the Sea’s her face!...

Drowned? – Ah! On then! Freshwater are the drowned.  
Sunk! Body and cargo! To the cabin boy, downed,  
Defiance in the eyes, a curse on his lips!

Spitting a chewed quid out with the sea's wine,  
Drinking, without aversion, his vast *cup of brine*.  
How they've drunk their death in sips –

No cemetery rats, no six-foot-deep:  
To the sharks they go! A sailor's soul  
Into no coarse potato-bed shall seep,  
It breathes-in every tide, where waters roll.

See the swell rise on the horizon;  
It appears like some amorous pose  
Of a loose woman half-drunk with passion...  
There, they are! – The swell has its hollows –

Listen, listen to that tormented grind!  
It's their anniversary! Returning often!  
Poets, keep to yourself those songs of the blind,  
– These: their *De profundis* the wind blows them.

...Let them roll endlessly in virgin spaces!...  
Let them roll naked, green, without covers  
To pine-wood boxes, nails, candles, faces,  
– Let them roll there, those upstart *landlubbers*!

### **Posthumous Sonnet (Sonnet Posthume)**

Sleep: This bed is yours... You'll seek ours no longer.  
– Who sleeps, dines – Your teeth will eat grass away.  
Sleep: you'll be well-loved – Love is always the Other.  
Sleep: the most-loved is always the furthest away...

Sleep: We'll call you the beautiful star-gatherer!  
Rider of rays! ...When deep shadows fall, now,  
At eve, the ceiling's angel, the slender spider,  
– Hope – will spin its web on your vacant brow.

Muzzler of the veil! A kiss beneath the veil, that too  
Awaits you...who knows where: close your eyes to see.  
Smile: under the pall, the highest honour attends you.

They break your nose with a blow of the censer, free  
The sweet fumes! .... for the flowering face, on view,  
From the sexton with his snuffer, an expert he.

### **Rondel**

It's darkness, child, the thief of lightning!  
There are no more nights, no more days;  
Sleep now...while you await the coming  
Of those who cried: Never! Who cried: Always!

Do you hear a sound there? Lightly it strays:  
Oh! The soft footfall! – Love's wings are beating...  
It's darkness, child, the thief of lightning!

Do you hear their voices? ...Deaf the dark bays.  
Sleep; your flowers scarcely weighing.  
They'll come not, your friends the Bears' bright rays,  
Their gems at your young ladies hurling...  
It's darkness, child, the thief of lightning!

### **A Little Death to Raise a Smile (Petit Mort Pour Rire)**

Fly swiftly, slight painter of comets!  
Grass in the wind will be your hair,  
And from your gaping eyes will flare  
Will-o'-the wisps, that sad minds inhabit...

The flowers of the tomb, called Amourettes,  
Will grant form to your earthly laughter,  
And forget-me-nots, the flowers of oubliettes.

Weigh not heavily: poets' coffins, as we see,  
 Are light burdens for the undertakers,  
 Empty viol cases for the music-makers...  
 They'll think you dead – the bourgeoisie –  
 Slight painter of comets, fly swiftly!

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