

**Rimbaud**

**Selected Poems**

A. S. Kline © 2002, 2008 All Rights Reserved

This work may be freely reproduced, stored, and transmitted, electronically or otherwise, for any non-commercial purpose.

## Contents

First Evening.....	6
Sensation.....	8
The Blacksmith.....	9
Sun and Flesh.....	17
Ophelia.....	23
Ballad of the Hanged.....	26
Romance.....	28
Eighteen Seventy.....	30
Rage of The Caesars.....	31
The Famous Victory of Saarbrucken.....	32
A Winter Dream.....	33
Evil.....	34
My Bohemia: A Fantasy.....	35
At The Green Inn.....	36
The Sly Girl.....	37
The Sleeper in the Valley.....	38
Evening Prayer.....	39
My Little Lovers.....	40
Poets at Seven Years.....	42
The Stolen Heart.....	45
The Parisian Orgy, or Paris Repeopled.....	46
Jeanne-Marie's Hands.....	49
The Sisters of Charity.....	52
First Communions.....	54
What One Says to the Poet on the Subject of Flowers.....	60
The Seekers of Lice.....	66
The Drunken Boat.....	67
Vowels.....	71
The Rooks.....	72
Memory.....	73
Teardrop.....	75
The Song of the Highest Tower.....	77
Eternity.....	80
O Seasons, O Chateaux.....	82

The Illuminations.....	84
After the Flood.....	84
Childhood.....	86
Tale .....	90
Parade.....	92
Antique.....	93
Being Beauteous .....	94
Vies .....	95
Departure.....	97
Royalty.....	98
To Reason .....	99
Drunken Morning .....	100
Sentences.....	101
Workers.....	103
The Bridges.....	104
City.....	105
Ruts .....	106
Cities .....	107
Vagabonds.....	109
Cities .....	110
Vigils.....	112
Mystic .....	114
Dawn .....	115
Flowers.....	116
Mundane Nocturne .....	117
Marine.....	118
Winter Feast.....	119
Anguish.....	120
Metropolitan.....	121
Barbarian.....	122
Promontory .....	123
Scenes .....	124
Historic Evening .....	125
Movement .....	126
Bottom.....	128
H.....	129
Prayer .....	130

Democracy .....	131
Fairy .....	132
War.....	133
Genie .....	134
Youth.....	136
Sale.....	139
A Season in Hell - Prologue .....	140
Bad Blood .....	141
Night in Hell .....	150
Ravings I – Foolish Virgin, The Infernal Spouse.....	153
Ravings II – Alchemy of the Word.....	158
The Impossible.....	168
Lightning.....	170
Morning.....	171
Farewell.....	172
Extract from the ‘Voyant’ Letter .....	174

## First Evening

*(Première Soirée)*

She was barely dressed though,  
And the great indiscreet trees  
Touched the glass with their leaves,  
In malice, quite close, quite close.

Sitting in my deep chair,  
Half-naked, hands clasped together,  
On the floor, little feet, so fine,  
So fine, shivered with pleasure.

I watched, the beeswax colour  
Of a truant ray of sun-glow  
Flit about her smile, and over  
Her breast – a fly on the rose.

– I kissed her delicate ankle.  
She gave an abrupt sweet giggle  
Chiming in clear trills,  
A pretty laugh of crystal.

Her little feet under her slip  
Sped away: ‘Will you desist!’  
Allowing that first bold act,  
Her laugh pretended to punish!

– Trembling under my lips,  
Poor things, I gently kissed her lids.  
– She threw her vapid head back.  
‘Oh! That’s worse, that is!’...

‘Sir, I’ve two words to say to you...’  
– I planted the rest on her breast  
In a kiss that made her laugh  
With a laugh of readiness....

– She was barely dressed though,  
And the great indiscreet trees  
Touched the glass with their leaves  
In malice, quite close, quite close.

*1870*

## Sensation

*(Sensation)*

Through the blue summer days, I shall travel all the ways,  
Pricked by the ears of maize, trampling the dew:  
A dreamer, I will gaze, as underfoot the coolness plays.  
I'll let the evening breeze drench my head anew.

I shall say – not a thing: I shall think – not a thing:  
But an infinite love will swell in my soul,  
And far off I shall go, a bohemian,  
Through Nature – as happy, as if I had a girl.

*March 1870*

## **The Blacksmith**

*(Le Forgeron)*

*Palais des Tuleries, about the 10th of August 1792*

His hand on a gigantic hammer, terrifying  
In size and drunkenness, vast-browed, laughing  
Like a bronze trumpet, his whole mouth displayed,  
Devouring the fat man, now, with his wild gaze,  
The Blacksmith spoke with Louis, with the king,  
The People there, all around him, cavorting,  
Trailing their dirty coats down gilded panels.  
But the dear king, belly upright, was pallid,  
Pale as the victim led to the guillotine,  
Submissive like a dog, cowed by the scene,  
Since that wide-shouldered forge-black soul  
Spoke of things past and other things so droll,  
He had him by the short hairs, just like that!

‘Now, Sir, you know how we’d sing tra-la-la,  
And drive the ox down other people’s furrows:  
The Canon spun paternosters in the shadows  
On rosaries bright with golden coins adorned,  
Some Lord, astride, passed blowing on his horn,  
One with the noose, another with whip-blows  
Lashed us on. – Dazed like the eyes of cows,  
Our eyes no longer wept; on and on we went,  
And when we’d ploughed a whole continent,  
When we had left behind in that black soil  
A little of our own flesh...to reward our toil:  
They’d set alight our hovels in the night;  
Our little ones made burnt cakes alright.

...Oh, I'm not complaining! All my follies,  
They're between us. I'll let you contradict.  
But, isn't it fine to see, in the month of June,  
The enormous hay-wains entering the barns?  
To smell the odour of burgeoning things,  
The orchards in fine rain, the oats reddening?  
To see wheat, wheat, ears filled with grain,  
To think it promises us good bread again?...  
Oh! You'd go to the forge, be more cheerful,  
Sing and hammer joyfully at the anvil,  
If you were sure to gain a little in the end –  
Being, in fact, a man – of what God intends!  
– But there it is, always the same old story!...

But now I know! I don't credit it any more,  
Owning two strong hands, a head, a hammer,  
That a man in a cloak, wearing a dagger  
Can say: go and sow my land, there, fellow;  
Or that another, if maybe war should follow,  
Can take my son like that, from where I'm living!  
– Suppose I were a man, and you a king,  
You'd say: I *will* it!... – What stupidity.  
You think your splendid barn pleases me,  
Your gilded servants, your thousand rogues,  
Your fancy bastards, peacocks in a row:  
Filling your nest with our daughters' odour,  
Warrants to the Bastille for us, moreover  
That we should say: fine: make the poor poorer!  
We'll give you our last *sous* to gild the Louvre!  
While you get drunk and enjoy the feast,  
– And they all laugh, riding our backs beneath!

No. Those puerilities were our fathers!  
The People is no one's whore now, three steps further  
And then, we razed your Bastille to the ground.  
That monster sweated blood from every mound,  
Was an abomination, that Bastille standing,  
With leprous walls its every story yielding,  
And, we forever held fast in its shadow!  
– Citizen! That was the past, its sorrow,  
That broke, and died, when we stormed the tower!  
We had something in our hearts like true ardour.  
We had clutched our children to our breast.  
And like chargers, snorting at the contest,  
We went, proud and strong, beating here inside...  
We marched in the sun – like this – heads high  
Into Paris! They greeted us in our ragged clothes.  
At last! We felt ourselves Men! We were sallow,  
Sire, drunk, and pallid with terrifying hopes:  
And there, in front of those black prison slopes,  
Waving our bugles and our sprigs of oak,  
Pikes in our fists; did we feel hatred, no!  
– We felt such strength we wanted to be gentle! ...

And since that day, we have proved elementals!  
A mass of workers sprang up in the street,  
And, cursed, are gone, a swelling crowd replete  
With ghostly shades, to haunt the rich man's gate.  
I, I run with them, and set informers straight:  
I scour Paris, dark-faced, wild, hammer on shoulder,  
Sweeping something droll out of every corner,  
And, if you smile at me, then I'll do for you!  
– Well, count on it: all this is going to cost you  
And your men in black, culling our requests  
To bat them about on their racquets all in jest,  
And whisper, the rascals, softly: “Oh, what sots!”  
To cook up laws, and stick up little pots,  
Filled with cute pink decrees, and sugar pills,  
Cutting us down to size, to amuse themselves,  
Then they hold their noses when we pass by,  
– Our kind representatives who hate the sty! –  
Fearful of nothing, nothing, but bayonets....  
That's fine. Enough of snuff and lorgnettes!  
We've had our fill, here, of those dull heads  
And bellies of gods. Ah! That's the bread  
You serve us, bourgeoisie, while we rage here,  
While we shatter the sceptre and the crozier!...'

He takes his arm, tears back the velvet curtain  
And shows the vast courtyards beneath them,  
Where the mob swarms, and seethes, where rise,  
Out of the frightful mob those storm-filled cries,  
Howling as bitches howl, or like the sea,  
With their knotted stakes, their pikes of steel,  
With the clamour of their market-halls and slums,  
A ragged mass of blood-stained caps, and drums:  
The Man, through the open window, shows all  
To the pale sweating king, reeling, about to fall,  
Sick at the sight of it!

‘Those are the Scum, Sire.  
Licking the walls, seething, rising higher:  
– But then they’ve not eaten, Sire, these beggars!  
I’m a blacksmith: my wife, madwoman, is there!  
She thinks she’ll get bread at the Tuileries!  
– They’ll have none of us in the bakeries.  
I’ve three youngsters. I’m scum, too – I know  
Old women weeping under their bonnets so  
Because they’ve taken a daughter or a son:  
One man was in the Bastille – oh, they’re scum –  
Another the galleys: both honest citizens.  
Freed, they’re treated like dogs, these men:  
Insulted! Then, they have something here  
That hurts them, see! It’s terrible, it’s clear  
They feel broken, feel themselves damned,  
There, screaming beneath you where you stand!  
Scum. – Down there girls, infamous, shriek,  
Because – well, you knew girls were weak –  
Gentlemen of the court – gave all you sought –  
You’d spit on their souls, as if they were naught!  
Now, your pretty ones are there. They’re scum.

Oh, all the Wretched, whose backs, in the fierce sun  
Burn, and yet they still work on and on,  
Feeling their heads burst with their exertion,  
Hats off, you bourgeoisie! Those are Men.  
We are the Workers, Sire! Workers! And then  
We're for the great new age, of knowledge, light,  
When Man will forge from morning to night,  
Pursuing great effects, chasing great causes,  
When he will tame things, slowly victorious,  
And like a horse, mount the mighty All!  
Oh! Splendour of the forges! And no more  
Evil, then! – What's unknown, its terror maybe  
We'll know! – Hammer in hand, let's sieve freely  
All that we know: then, Brothers, we'll go on!  
Sometimes we dream that dream's vast emotion  
Of the simple ardent life, where you revile  
All evil, working beneath the august smile,  
Of a woman you love with love's nobility:  
And all day long you labour on proudly,  
Hearing the clarion call of duty sounding!  
And you feel so happy; and nothing, nothing,  
Oh, above all, no-one makes you kneel!  
Over the fireplace, there, you'd have a rifle...

Oh! But the air is filled with the scent of battle.  
What did I say? I too am one of the rascals!  
And there are still sharks and informers.  
But we are free! With our moments of terror  
When we feel we are great, so great! Just now  
I was talking of peaceful work, of how...  
Look at that sky! – Too small for us, you see,  
If we feared the heat, we'd live on our knees!  
Look at that sky! – I'll return to the crowd,  
To the vast fearful mob who cry aloud  
And roll your cannon through the cobbles' sty;  
– Oh! We will wash them clean when we die!  
– And if, against our cries and our vengeance,  
The claws of old gilded kings, all over France,  
Urge on their regiments in full battle-dress,  
Well then, you lot? Shit to those dogs, no less!

– He shoulders his hammer once more.

The crowd

Feels soul-drunk close to that man, and now  
Through the great courtyard, all those rooms,  
Where Paris pants and the voices boom,  
A shudder shakes the immense populace.  
Then, with his broad hand, its grimy grace  
Gilded, while the pot-bellied king sweats,  
The Blacksmith set his red cap on that head!

## Sun and Flesh

*(Soleil et Chair)*

### I

The Sun, the hearth of life and tenderness,  
Pours burning love on the delighted earth,  
And when you rest in the valley you know,  
How nubile earth is, how it overflows;  
How, raised up by soul, its immense breast  
Is love, as God is, and, like woman, flesh,  
And big with sap and sunlight will enclose  
The mighty seething of all embryos!

All burgeons, and all rises!

– O Venus, O goddess!

I long for the ancient times of youthfulness,  
Animalistic fauns, lascivious satyrs,  
Gods, love-maddened, biting the bark of firs,  
Kissing the blond Nymph among water lilies!  
I long for the days when the green sap of trees,  
River-waters, red blood from the branches, ran,  
A whole universe, through the veins of mighty Pan!  
When the soil trembled, green, under his goat-feet;  
When, kissing bright Syrinx, soft his lips would meet,  
To sound beneath the sky the vast hymn of love;  
When, in the plain, he heard about him move  
A living Nature responding to his word;  
When the silent trees, cradling the singing bird,  
Earth, cradling man, and the whole blue Sea,  
And all creatures, loved, loved in that Deity!

I long for the age of mighty Cybele  
Who rode, they say, gigantically lovely,  
In her vast bronze chariot, through splendid cities;  
Her twin breasts pouring, through the immensities,  
Of an infinite existence, each purest ripple.  
Man sucked happily at her blessed nipple,  
Like a little infant, playing on her knee.  
– Strong, Man knew gentleness and chastity.

Misery! Now he says: all things I know,  
And goes about eyes shut and ears closed.  
– Cries: No more gods, no more! Man is king,  
Man is God! Love's our Faith, the noblest thing!  
Oh, if only man still drank there at your breast,  
Cybele, mother of gods, men, all the rest!  
If he had not forsaken deathless Astarte,  
Who rising, once, from the immense clarity  
Of blue waters, flesh-flower the wave perfumed,  
Showed her rosy navel where snowed the foam,  
Goddess with vast black conquering eyes, to move  
The nightingale to song, the heart to love!

## II

I believe in you, I believe! Oh, divine mother,  
Sea-borne Aphrodite! – Ah, the path is bitter  
Since another God yoked us to his cross. You,  
Flesh, Marble, Flower, Venus, I believe in you!  
– Yes, Man is ugly, sad under this vast sky,  
Wearing clothes, now his chastity's laid by,  
Since he's defiled his proud godlike head,  
Like an idol in the fire, has bowed instead  
His Olympian form to basest slaveries!  
Yes, as a pale skeleton, after his decease,  
He would live on, insulting primal beauty!  
– And the Idol in whom you praised virginity,  
In whom you made our clay divine, Woman,  
So as to light the impoverished soul of Man  
That he might arise, in love's immensity,  
From earthly prison to the day's pure beauty,  
No longer knows how to play the courtesan!  
– What a fine farce! And the world again  
Sniggers at the sweet and sacred name of Venus!

### III

If those times would but return, times lost to us!  
– For Man is finished! Man has played every part!  
In the light, tired of breaking idols, see him start  
To revive once more, free of all his deities,  
And scan the heavens, since he is heavenly!  
The Ideal, the invincible thought, eternal  
All; the god that lives in his fleshly thrall,  
Will rise, and mount, burn beneath his brow!  
And when he sounds the whole horizon now,  
Despising ancient yokes, free of trepidation,  
You will come bringing sacred Redemption!  
– Splendid, radiant, from depths of vast seas,  
You will arise, and grant Love's infinities  
With their eternal smile to the huge Universe!  
The World will vibrate like a vast lyre – it thirsts  
The World thirsts for love: you'll bring it bliss –  
In the trembling there of an enormous kiss!

#### IV

O splendour of the flesh! O ideal splendour!  
O love renewed, triumphant dawn aurora,  
Where, at their feet the Gods and Heroes,  
Callipyge the white and her little Eros,  
Drowned in the snow of rose-petals, press  
Women and flowers beneath their feet's caress!  
– O great Ariadne, drench the sand with tears  
As visibly, out there on the waves, appears  
Theseus' sail, flying white beneath the sun;  
O sweet virgin child, by a night undone,  
Silence! In his gold car strewn with black grapes,  
Lysios, wandering over Phrygian landscapes,  
Drawn by lascivious tigers, tawny panthers,  
Reddens the sombre moss by azure rivers.  
– Zeus, the Bull, like a child's keeps from harm  
Europa's naked body, who casts a white arm  
Over the God's tense neck, trembling the wave...  
Slowly he turns on her his dreamy gaze;  
She lets her pale flowerlike cheek rest, it lies  
Against Zeus' brow; her eyes close; she dies  
In a divine kiss, the waves, murmuring there,  
Adorning with golden foam her unbound hair.  
– Between the oleander and the gaudy lotus,  
The great dreaming Swan slides by, all amorous,  
Folding Leda in the whiteness of its wing;  
– And as Cypris passes, strange lovely thing,  
Arching the splendid curves of back and neck,  
Proudly displaying her large golden breasts  
And snowy belly embroidered with black moss,  
– Hercules, Tamer of Beasts, draws across  
His huge body his lion's skin, like a glory,  
Fronts the horizon, his brow sweet and deadly!

Vaguely lit now by the moon of summer,  
Erect and naked, dreaming in golden pallor,  
Streaked by her heavy wave of long blue hair,  
In the shadowy glade starred by the moss,  
The Dryad views the silent sky up there...  
– White Selene, allows her veil to pass,  
Fearfully, over lovely Endymion's feet,  
And throws him a pale beam, kiss discreet...  
– The Fountain weeps in slow ecstasy afar...  
It's the Nymph who dreams, an elbow on her vase,  
Of the fine young man her wave has touched.  
– A breeze of love through the night has washed,  
And, in the sacred wood, its terrifying arbours,  
Majestically erect, the sombre Marbles,  
The Gods, on whose brow the Bullfinch has birth,  
– The Gods listen to Man, and the infinite Earth!

*May 70*

## Ophelia

(*Ophélie*)

### I

On the calm black wave where the stars sleep  
White Ophelia, an immense lily, drifts by,  
Lying in her long veils, she floats the deep...  
– In far-off woods you hear the huntsman's cry.

For more than a thousand years, sad Ophelia  
White phantom, has sailed the long black flow.  
For more than a thousand years, her sweet folly  
Has murmured its song while night breezes blow.

The wind kisses her breasts and wreathes flare  
From her long veils rocked gently by the stream;  
Trembling willows weep on her shoulders there,  
The rushes lean over her brow's broad dream.

The ruffled water-lilies sigh all round her;  
At times, in a slumbering alder, her passage jars  
A nest, from which escapes a wing's slight stir;  
– A mysterious chant falls from the golden stars.

## II

O pale Ophelia! Lovely as the snow!  
Yes, you died, child, taken by the river!  
– It was the winds from Norway's peaks that blow  
That spoke to you softly of freedom the bitter;

Twining long tresses, it was the wind's whisper,  
To your dreaming spirit, brought strange rumours;  
It was your heart hearing the song of Nature  
In the boughs' moaning, and the night's tremors;

It was the voice of maddened seas, vast roaring,  
Shattering your child's breast, too tender, human;  
It was a pale fair lord, one April morning,  
Leaning against your knees, a poor madman!

Sky! Love! Freedom! What dreams, poor crazed one!  
You melted for him as snow does in the blaze;  
Your words were strangled by your grand vision  
– And fearful Infinity dazzled your blue gaze!

### III

– And the Poet tells how in the starlight pale  
The flowers you culled, by night, you come seeking,  
How he has seen on the stream, lying in her long veil,  
Like an immense lily, white Ophelia floating.

## **Ballad of the Hanged**

*(Bal des Pendus)*

One-armed friend, on the black gallows,  
Dance on, dance on, the paladins,  
The lean paladins of the devil,  
The skeleton Saladins.

Sire Beelzebub takes by the scruff of the neck  
His little black puppets that scowl at the sky,  
And, with a back-hand blow to the head,  
Makes them jig to an old carol, on high!

And the jostled puppets twine their thin arms:  
Like black organ-pipes, their breasts to the light  
That, once, gentle ladies pressed to their charms,  
Clasped without end in love's hideous delight.

Hurrah! The bright dancers, whose bellies are gone!  
You can cut capers, both ends and the middle!  
Hop! Never mind if it's fighting, dance on!  
While Beelzebub, maddened, saws at his fiddle!

Oh the hard heels, no use here for a shoe!  
They've all nearly quitted their shirt of skin;  
The rest's no embarrassment, seen without sin.  
On each cranium, snow's set a white cap too:

A crow makes a plume for each cracked skull,  
A morsel of flesh clings to every lean chin:  
You'd call them, twisting in sombre battle,  
Stiff knights in cardboard armour, worn thin.

Hurrah! The wind sighs at the skeleton's ball!  
The black gibbet moans like an organ of steel!  
In answer, the wolves from the blue forests call:  
The horizon a hellish red sky must reveal...

Ho, shake these funereal braggarts, I say,  
Craftily telling with long broken fingers,  
A rosary of love on their pale vertebrae:  
You, the departed, we're not in the cloisters!

Oh, see in the midst of this *danse macabre*  
How a tall mad skeleton leaps to the sky  
Inspired by ardour, a bucking horse rather:  
Who, feeling the rope on his neck, by and by,

Clenches his knuckles on thighs with a crack,  
Uttering cries and satirical moans,  
And, then like a tumbler renews the attack,  
Skips back to the dance with a creaking of bones!

One-armed friend, on the black gallows,  
Dance on, dance on, the paladins,  
The lean paladins of the devil,  
The skeleton Saladins.

## Romance

*(Roman)*

### I

You're not serious, when you're seventeen.  
– One fine evening, tired of beers and lemonade,  
The noisy cafés with their dazzling gleam!  
– You walk the lime-trees' green on the Parade.

The lime-trees smell so fine on fine June evenings!  
The air's so sweet sometimes you close your eyes:  
The wind is full of sounds – the town's nearby –  
Blows the smell of beer, and the scent of vines...

### II

– Then you make out a little tiny tatter  
Of sombre azure framed by a twig of night,  
Pierced by a fatal star, it melts, after  
Soft tremblings, tiny and perfectly white...

June night! And Seventeen! – You get tipsy.  
The sap's champagne and blurs every feature...  
You wander: you feel a kiss on your lips  
That quivers there, like some tiny creature....

### III

Your mad heart goes Crusoeing the romances,  
– Where in the pale lamp's glare your eyes follow  
A young girl going by with sweet little glances  
Below the gloom of her father's stiffened collar...

And because she finds you immensely naïve  
As by, in her little ankle boots, she trips  
She turns away alertly with a quick shrug...  
– And *cavatinas* die away on your lips....

You're in love. Taken till the month of August.  
You're in love. –Your sonnets make her smile.  
All your friends have gone: you're in bad taste.  
– Then the adored, one evening, deigns to write!

That evening.... you return to the cafés gleam,  
You call out for beer or lemonade...  
– You're not serious, when you're seventeen  
And the lime-trees are green on the Parade.

*23 September 70*

## Eighteen Seventy

*(Morts de Quatre-Vingt-Douze)*

“ .....Frenchmen of '70, Bonapartists, Republicans,  
remember your forefathers of '92....”

*Paul de Cassagnac (Le Pays)*

You Dead of ninety-two and ninety-three,  
Who, pale from the great kiss of Liberty,  
Crushed, calm, beneath your wooden shoes  
That yoke that weighs on human brows and souls:

Men exalted, great in agony,  
You whose hearts raged with love, in misery,  
O soldiers that Death, noble Lover, has sown  
In all the old furrows, so they'll be reborn:

You whose blood washed every soiled grandeur,  
Dead of Valmy, Dead of Fleurus, Dead of Italy,  
O millions of Christs with eyes gentle and sombre:

We've let you fall asleep with the Republic,  
We, cowering under kings as if under blows.  
– They're telling tales of you so we'll remember!

*Done at Mazas, 3 September 1870*

## Rage of The Caesars

(Napoleon III after Sedan)

*(Rages Des Césars)*

The pale Man walks through the flowery scene,  
Dressed in black, a cigar between his teeth:  
The pale Man thinks of the flowers of the Tuileries  
And sometimes his fishlike-eye grows keen...

The Emperor's drunk with his twenty-year orgy!  
He said to himself: 'I'll snuff out Liberty  
As if it were a candle, and so delicately!'  
Liberty revives! He feels himself exhausted!

He's in prison. – Oh! What name is it that trembles  
On his mute lips? What relentless regret does he feel?  
No one will ever know. The Emperor's eye's dark.

He recalls the 'Accomplice', perhaps, in spectacles...  
Watching a thin wreath of smoke steal,  
As on those Saint-Cloud evenings, from his cigar.

*Note: This is Napoleon III, in 1870, imprisoned and ill, at  
Wilhelmshoehe in Prussia. Émile Ollivier, his Minister at the  
outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, who failed to oppose its  
declaration, is the 'Accomplice'.*

## **The Famous Victory of Saarbrücken**

*(L'Éclatante Victoire de Sarrebrück)*

*(Belgian print, brilliantly tinted,  
sold at Charleroi, 35 centimes)*

At centre, the Emperor, blue-yellow, in apotheosis,  
Gallops off, ramrod straight, on his fine gee-gee,  
Very happy – since everything he sees is rosy,  
Fierce as Zeus, and as gentle as a Daddy is:

The brave Infantrymen taking a nap, in vain,  
Under the gilded drums and scarlet cannon,  
Rise politely. One puts his tunic back on,  
And, turns to the Chief, stunned by the big name!

On the right, another, leaning on his rifle butt,  
Feeling the hair rise at the back of his neck,  
Shouts: ‘Vive L’Empereur!’ – his neighbour’s mute...

A shako rises, like a black sun... – In the midst  
The last, a simpleton in red and blue, lying on his gut  
Gets up, and, – showing his arse – asks: “On what?”

## A Winter Dream

*(Rêvé pour l'Hiver)*

*To ... Her*

In winter we'll travel in a little pink carriage  
With cushions of blue.  
We'll be fine. A nest of mad kisses waits  
In each corner too.

You'll shut your eyes, not to see, through the glass,  
Grimacing shadows of evening,  
Those snarling monsters, a crowd going past  
Of black wolves and black demons.

Then you'll feel your cheek tickled quite hard...  
A little kiss, like a maddened spider,  
Will run over your neck...

And you'll say: "Catch it!" bowing your head,  
– And we'll take our time finding that creature  
– Who travels so far...

*In the railway carriage, 7 October 70*

## Evil

(*Le Mal*)

While the red spittle of the grape-shot  
Whistles all day in the infinite blue sky:  
While the battalions, scarlet or green, fly,  
By the King who jeers, *en masse*, into the pot:

While the terrible stupidity grinds and crushes,  
And makes a smoking heap of a thousand men:  
– Poor Dead! In summer, among the rushes,  
In your joy, sacred Nature, who created them!...

– There's a God, who laughs at altar-cloths  
Of damask, incense, and great gold chalices:  
Who dozes to Hosannas for lullaby,

And wakes when mothers, gathered in their grief,  
Weeping under their old black bonnets, sigh  
And yield Him the coin knotted in their handkerchief.

## **My Bohemia: A Fantasy**

*(Ma Bohème: Fantaisie)*

I ran off, fists in my ragged seams:  
Even my overcoat was becoming Ideal:  
I went under the sky, Muse! I was yours:  
Oh! What miraculous loves I dreamed!

My only pair of pants was a big hole.  
– Tom Thumb the dreamer, sowing the roads there  
With rhymes. My inn the Sign of the Great Bear.  
– My stars in the sky rustling to and fro.

I heard them, squatting by the wayside,  
In September twilights, there I felt the dew  
Drip on my forehead, like a fierce coarse wine.

Where, rhyming into the fantastic dark,  
I plucked, like lyre strings, the elastics  
Of my tattered shoes, a foot pressed to my heart.

## **At The Green Inn**

*(Au Cabaret-Vert)*

For eight days, I'd ripped up my boots  
On the road stones. I'd made Charleroi.  
– At the Green Inn: I ordered bread  
Buttered, along with half-cold ham.

Happy, I stretched my legs out under the table,  
A green one: considering the naïve prints  
On the walls. – And it was charming,  
When the girl with big tits and lively eyes,

– That one, just a kiss wouldn't scare her! –  
Smiling, brought me slices of bread and butter,  
With lukewarm ham on a coloured platter,

Ham, white and pink, a fragrant garlic clove,  
– And filled a huge beer mug high, its foam  
Turned by a ray of late sunlight to gold.

## The Sly Girl

*(La Maline)*

In the brown dining-room, its perfumed air  
Full of the smell of wax and fruit, at ease  
I gathered a plate of who knows what Belgian  
Dish, and marvelled in my enormous chair.

Eating I listened to the clock – silent, happy.  
The kitchen door opened with a gust,  
– And the serving girl came in, who knows why,  
Shawl half-off, hair dressed cunningly.

And, touching her little finger tremblingly  
To her cheek, a pink and white velvet-peach,  
And making a childish pout with her lips,

She tidied the plates to put me at my ease:  
– Then, just like that – to get a kiss, for certain –  
Whispered: ‘Feel: It’s caught a cold, my cheek...’

*Charleroi, October 70*

## The Sleeper in the Valley

*(Le Dormeur du Val)*

It's a green hollow where a river sings  
Madly catching white tatters in the grass.  
Where the sun on the proud mountain rings:  
It's a little valley, foaming like light in a glass.

A conscript, open-mouthed, his bare head  
And bare neck bathed in the cool blue cress,  
Sleeps: stretched out, under the sky, on grass,  
Pale where the light rains down on his green bed.

Feet in the yellow flags, he sleeps. Smiling  
As a sick child might smile, he's dozing.  
Nature, rock him warmly: he is cold.

The scents no longer make his nostrils twitch:  
He sleeps in the sunlight, one hand on his chest,  
Tranquil. In his right side, there are two red holes.

## **Evening Prayer**

*(Oraison du Soir)*

I sit to life – an angel in a barber's chair,  
A finely fluted beer-mug grasped in my fist,  
A curve to its neck and belly, a pipe there  
In my teeth, air rank with impalpable mist.

Like warm excrement in an old dovecote,  
A thousand Dreams inside softly burn:  
At times my sad heart like sapwood floats  
Bloodied by the dark gold dripping urn.

When I've drunk my dreams, carefully,  
Having downed thirty or forty jars, I stop,  
And gather myself, to ease my bitter need:

Gentle as the Lord of cedar and hyssops,  
I piss towards dark skies, high and heavenly,  
Approved of by the giant heliotropes.

## My Little Lovers

*(Mes Petites Amoureuses)*

A lachrymal tincture bathes  
The cabbage-green roofs:  
Under the tender tree that laves...  
Your rubber waterproofs

Whitened by peculiar moons  
With round staring eyes,  
Knock your knees together, too,  
My ugly guys!

We loved each other in those days  
Blue ugly one!  
We used to eat soft-boiled eggs,  
Chickweed, a ton!

One night, you anointed me poet,  
Blonde, and ugly:  
Come down here, and you'll get it,  
Across my knee;

I've puked up your brilliantine,  
Dark, ugly so and so;  
You cut off my mandolin  
While in full flow.

Pah! My dried salivas,  
You ginger ugliness,  
Still infect the furrows  
Of your round breast!

Oh my little lovers  
How I hate you!  
Plaster with painful blisters  
Your sad tits too!

Trample on my old vases  
Of sentiment;  
– Hop to it! Be ballerinas  
For one moment!...

They're out of joint your shoulders,  
Oh, my lovers!  
With a star on your back that smoulders  
Turn your tricks there.

And yet it's for those thick lips  
My rhymes I've proved!  
I'd like to shatter your hips  
For having loved!

Dull mass of fallen stars,  
Pile in the corners there!  
– You'll die into God, marred  
By ignoble care!

Under peculiar moons  
With round staring eyes,  
Knock your knees together, too,  
My ugly guys!

## Poets at Seven Years

*(Les Poètes de Sept Ans)*

And the mother, closing the work-book  
Went off, proud, satisfied, not seeing,  
In the blue eyes, under the lumpy brow,  
The soul of her child given over to loathing.

All day he sweated obedience: very  
Intelligent: yet dark habits, certain traits  
Seemed to show bitter hypocrisies at work!  
In the shadow of corridors with damp paper,  
He stuck out his tongue in passing, two fists  
In his groin, seeing specks under his shut lids.  
A doorway open to evening: by the light  
You'd see him, high up, groaning on the railing  
Under a void of light hung from the roof. In summer,  
Especially, vanquished, stupefied, stubborn,  
He'd shut himself in the toilet's coolness:  
He could think in peace there, sacrificing his nostrils.

When the small garden cleansed of the smell of day,  
Filled with light, behind the house, in winter,  
Lying at the foot of a wall, buried in clay  
Rubbing his dazzled eyes hard, for the visions,  
He listened to the scabbed espaliers creaking.  
Pity! His only companions were those children  
Bare-headed and puny, eyes sunk in their cheeks,  
Hiding thin fingers yellow and black with mud  
Under old clothes soiled with excrement,  
Who talked with the sweetness of the simple-minded!

And if his mother took fright, surprising him  
At his vile compassions: the child's deep  
Tenderness overcame her astonishment.  
All fine. She'd had the blue look, – that lies!

At seven he was making novels about life  
In the great desert, where ravished Freedom shines,  
Forests, suns, riverbanks, savannahs! – He used  
Illustrated weeklies where he saw, blushing,  
Smiling Italian girls, and Spanish women.  
When the daughter of next door workers came by,  
Eight years old – in Indian prints, brown-eyed,  
A little brute, and jumped him from behind,  
Shaking out her tresses, in a corner,  
And he was under her, he bit her buttocks,  
Since she never wore knickers:  
– And, bruised by her fists and heels,  
Carried the taste of her back to his room.

He feared the pallid December Sundays,  
When, hair slicked back, at a mahogany table,  
He read from a Bible with cabbage-green margins:  
Dreams oppressed him each night in the alcove.  
He didn't love God: rather those men in the dusk,  
Returning, black, in smocks, to the outer suburbs  
Where the town-crier, with a triple drum beat,  
Made the crowds laugh and murmur at the edicts.  
– He dreamed of the amorous prairies, where  
Luminous swells, pure odours, gold pubescences,  
Stirred in the calm there, and then took flight!

And above all how he savoured sombre things,  
When, in his bare room behind closed shutters,  
High, and blue, and pierced with acrid damp,  
He read his novel, mooned over endlessly,  
Full of drowned forests, leaden ochre skies,  
Flowers of flesh opening in star-filled woods,  
Dizziness, epilepsies, defeats, compassion!  
– While the street noises rumbled on below,  
Lying alone on pieces of unbleached canvas,  
With a violent presentiment of setting sail!

## **The Stolen Heart**

*(Le Coeur Volé)*

My sad heart leaks at the poop,  
My heart covered in filthy shag:  
They squirt it with jets of soup,  
My sad heart leaks at the poop:  
Under the jibes of that rough troop  
Drowned in laughter, see them rag,  
My sad heart leaks at the poop,  
My heart covered in filthy shag!

Ithyphallic and coarse, their jests  
They've corrupted it every way!  
On the wheelhouse their grotesques,  
Ithyphallic and coarse their jests.  
O waves, abracadabrantisque,  
Take my heart, wash all away!  
Ithyphallic and coarse their jests,  
They've corrupted it every way!

When they've finished chewing their plugs,  
What shall we do O stolen heart?  
Then Bacchic hiccups from ugly mugs:  
When they've finished chewing their plugs:  
My guts will heave, the filthy lugs,  
If it's swallowed outright, my heart:  
When they've finished chewing their plugs  
What shall we do O stolen heart?

*May 1871*

## The Parisian Orgy, or Paris Repeopled

*(L'Orgie Parisienne, ou Paris Se Repeuple)*

O Cowards, we're here! Platforms of light!  
The sun with fiery lungs has cleared, at last,  
Boulevards that Barbarians held for a night.  
Behold the sacred City, couched in the West!

On! We will prevent the return of fire,  
Here are the quays, the boulevards, and here  
The houses against an azure radiant sky,  
Starred by night when the bombs rose clear!

Hide the dead palaces with planks like ships!  
The setting sun, fearful, brightens your faces.  
See the red-headed troop, the wrigglers of hips:  
Haggard, you'll seem droll, if you act crazy!

Eating poultices, pack of bitches on heat,  
The cry of gilded houses calls to you. Steal!  
Eat! Here is the night of joy, its spasms deep,  
Descending on the street. O desolates, reel

With drink! When day intense and mindless,  
Comes strewing rustling luxuries around you,  
Would you dribble, motionless and soundless,  
Into your glass, eyes fixed on some white view?

Gulp, for the Queen, her arse that falls in folds!  
Listen out, for the work of stupid tearing  
Hiccups! Hear them leap in night's fiery gold:  
The old, the useless, lackeys, and fools panting!

O hearts of dirt, O you disgusting mouths,  
Work more vigorously, mouths of horror!  
Wine, for these ignoble torpors' drouths...  
Your bellies melt with shame, O Conquerors!

To superb nauseas let your nostrils gape!  
Steep your neck's tendons in foulest poison!  
Lowering crossed hands on your childish nape  
The Poet commands: 'O cowards, forgo reason!

Because it's the Woman's guts you're rifling,  
A further convulsion yet you fear from her,  
A cry, asphyxiating your infamous perching  
Over her breast, with its dreadful pressure.

Syphilitics, kings, mad puppets, ventriloquists,  
What can they matter then to Paris the whore,  
Your poisons or your rags, your minds or fists?  
She'll shake them off, those rotten snarling jaws!

And when you're down, whimpering on your bellies,  
Your flanks wrung, clamouring for your supper,  
The distraught courtesan, breasts ripe for sallies,  
Will clench her hard fists, far from your stupor!

When your feet danced with such intense anger,  
Paris! When you knew so many cuts of the knife,  
When you lay there, retaining in your eyes, clear,  
Some of the goodness of spring's tawny life,

O city almost dead, O city of dolour,  
Your face and breasts jutting towards the Future,  
Opening its thousand gates to your pallor,  
City whom the sombre Past would honour:

Body re-galvanised to endure vast pains,  
You drink dreadful life once more! You feel  
A flux of livid worms writhe through your veins,  
And icy fingers on your bright love congeal!

No matter. The worms, the worms' lividity  
Can no more obstruct your breath of Progress  
Than the Strix quench the eyes of Caryatides,  
Blue ledges, where the astral gold tears press.

Though it is frightful to see you so smothered;  
Though there was never formed of any city  
A fouler ulcer on the green face of Nature,  
The Poet still cries: 'Splendid is your Beauty!'

The tempest made of you supreme poetry;  
The immense stir of force quells your sighs;  
Your work seethes, death groans, chosen City!  
Hoard, in your heart, the fatal trumpet's cries.

The Poet will garner sobs of the Infamous,  
The Galleys' hatred, the clamour of the Cursed;  
And Woman will be scourged by his rays of love.  
His verses will leap high: Villains, your worst!

– Society, all is restored: – the orgiasts  
In the ancient brothels raise their ancient cries:  
And on the reddened walls the frenzied gas  
Flares sinisterly towards pale azure skies!

*May 1871*

## Jeanne-Marie's Hands

*(Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie)*

Jeanne-Marie has strong hands,  
Hers are dark, tanned by summer,  
Bloodless hands like a dead man's  
– Are they the hands of Juana?

Did they win their creamy-brown  
Sailing some voluptuous sea?  
Have they dipped in moons, found  
In waters of serenity?

Have they drunk of barbarous skies,  
Calmly on delightful knees?  
Have they rolled cigars, wise  
To trade in diamonds and rubies?

On burning feet of Madonnas  
Have they thrown gold flowery charms?  
The black blood of belladonnas  
Wakes and sleeps in their palms.

Hands that chase the Diptera  
With which the auroral blue  
Buzzes, there, towards the nectar?  
Hands that measure poison's brew?

Oh, what Dream has seized them  
In their pandiculations?  
A wild dream of Asias then,  
Of Kengawers or Zions?

– They sold no oranges these hands  
Nor tanned at the feet of deities:  
They washed no swaddling bands  
Of eyeless and weighty babies.

They're not the hands of cousins  
Nor the broad-browed working girls  
Brows that, drunk with tar, the sun  
In woods that stink of factories, burns.

They are benders of the spine,  
Hands that never work us evil,  
Stronger than machines in line,  
Than the horse more powerful!

Seething like the furnaces,  
Shaking off each shudder,  
Their flesh sings the Marseillaise  
But the Eleison never!

They'll grasp your necks, O evil  
Women, yours, they'll crush them,  
All your infamous hands, noble  
Women, white and carmine.

The glory of those hands of love  
Turns the heads of ewes!  
On their juicy phalanges  
The vast sun sets a ruby too.

A stain from the populace  
Browns them like ancient tits;  
The backs of those hands the place  
That each proud Rebel kissed!

They have paled, marvellous,  
In the hot sun filled with love,  
On the bronze of machine-guns  
Across insurgent Paris moved!

Ah, sometimes, about your wrists,  
O sacred Hands, there hung again,  
Where our never-sobered lips  
Trembled, Hands, a shining chain!

And there's a sudden Lurch too  
In our being, when, indeed,  
Angelic Hands, they'd blanch you,  
By making all your fingers bleed!

## The Sisters of Charity

*(Les Soeurs de Charité)*

That bright-eyed and brown-skinned youth,  
The fine twenty-year body that should go naked,  
That, brow circled with copper, under the moon,  
An unknown Persian Genie would have worshipped;

Impetuous with virginal sweetnesses,  
And dark, proud of his first obstinacies,  
Like tears of the summer night's distresses,  
That turn on beds of diamond, young seas;

The youth, faced with this world's ugliness,  
Shudders in his heart, wounded deeply,  
And, full of profound eternal emptiness,  
Begins to long for his sister of charity.

But, O Woman, heap of entrails, pitying, sweet,  
You are never the Sister of charity, never,  
Dark gaze, belly where rose shadows sleep,  
Splendidly formed breasts, slender fingers.

Blind un-awakened one, with eyes enormous,  
Our every embrace is merely a question:  
Bearer of breasts it's you who hang on us,  
We who nurse you, charming and grave passion.

Your hatreds, your dumb torpors, your weaknesses,  
And your brutalisation suffered long ago,  
You give back, O Night, like an excess,  
Un-malevolent, of blood, each month or so.

– When Woman, borne for an instant, taken on,  
Terrifies Love, life's call and song of action,  
The green Muse and burning Justice come  
To dismember him with their august obsession.

Ah! Endlessly thirsting for splendours and calms,  
Forsaken by both implacable Sisters, whimpering  
With tenderness for the science of soothing arms,  
He brings his blood-stained brow to Nature's flowering.

But, wounded, sacred studies, shadowy alchemy  
Are repugnant to the proud sombre scholar;  
He feels the atrocious advance of all that's solitary.  
So, still handsome, without disgust for the bier,

Let him, traversing all the nights of Truth,  
Credit vast ends, Dreams, immense Journey,  
And in his soul and sick limbs call on you,  
O mysterious Death, O sister of charity!

*June 1871.*

## First Communions

*(Les Premières Communions)*

Truly, they're stupid, these village churches  
Where fifteen ugly chicks soiling the pillars  
Listen, trilling out their divine responses,  
To a black freak whose boots stink of cellars:  
But the sun wakes now, through the branches,  
The irregular stained-glass's ancient colours.

The stone always smells of its earthly mother.  
You'll see masses of those earthy rocks  
In the rutting country that solemnly quivers,  
And bears, on ochrous paths, near heavy crops,  
Those burnt shrubs where the sloe turns bluer,  
Those black mulberries the hedge-roses top.

Once a century, they make the barns respectable  
With a wash of curdled milk and blue water:  
If grotesque mysteries are viewed as notable,  
Near to the straw-stuffed Saint or Madonna,  
Flies, that know every inn and every stable,  
Gorge on wax there, dotting the sunlit floor.

The child's duty above all's to home and family,  
Simple cares, honest toil that stupefies;  
They go, forgetting how their skin crawls freely  
Where the Priest of Christ's powerful finger lies.  
The Priest has a house shaded with hornbeam  
So he can loose these tanned brows to the light.

The first black suit, the finest pastries, there,  
Beneath the little Drummer or Napoleon  
Some plate where Josephs and Marthas stare,  
Sticking their tongues out with excess emotion,  
Joined, on the day of truth, by maps, a pair,  
Are the sole sweet mementoes of Devotion.

The girls always go to church, content forever  
To hear themselves called bitches by the sons,  
Who put on airs, after Mass or Sung Vespers,  
Those who are destined to grace the garrisons,  
In cafes taunt the important families, snicker,  
Dressed in new jackets, yelling frightful songs.

Meanwhile the Curé for the children's choosing  
Pictures; in his garden, and, when Vespers done,  
The air fills with the distant sound of dancing,  
He feels, despite all celestial inhibition,  
His calves beat time, his toes with joy wriggling;  
– Night steps, dark pirate, onto skies all golden.

## II

The Priest has noted among the catechists,  
Gathering from the Faubourgs and the Quarters,  
This little unknown girl, her eyes pale mist,  
Her sallow brow. Her parents humble porters:  
'On the great Day, seeing her among the Catechists,  
God will snow down blessings on this daughter.'

## III

On the eve of the great Day, the child feels ill.  
Better than in the tall Church's dismal murmuring,  
First a shudder comes – bed's not uninteresting – still,  
The supernatural shudder may return: 'I'm dying...'

And, like a theft of love from her stupid sisters,  
She sees, exhausted and hands on heart, there,  
Angels, Jesus, a Holy Virgin that glimmers;  
And calmly her whole soul swallows her conqueror.

Adonai! ... – In their Latin endings dressed,  
Skies shot with green bathe Brows of crimson,  
And, stained by pure blood from heavenly breasts,  
Across swirling suns, fall great snowy linens!

– For her present and future virginities  
She bites on the freshness of your Remission,  
But more so than sweetmeats or water-lilies,  
Your forgiveness is like ice, O Queen of Zion!

#### IV

Then the Virgin's no more than the virgin of the book.  
Mystical impulses are often thwarted...  
The hideous print and the old woodcut come,  
Poverty of images, bronze-sheathed by boredom.

Startled, her dream of chaste blueness,  
By vaguely indecent curiosities,  
Surprises itself among celestial tunics,  
Linen with which Christ veils his nudities.

She yearns, she yearns, still, soul in distress,  
Brow on the pillow racked by muffled sounds,  
To prolong the supreme flashes of tenderness,  
And dribbles – Darkness over house and grounds.

And the child can bear it no longer, she stirs,  
Arches her back, opens the blue bed-hangings,  
To draw the coolness of the room towards her,  
Beneath the sheet, to breasts' and belly's burning.

## V

Waking – at midnight – the window-panes were  
White. Past the blue sleep of moonlit hangings,  
The vision of Sunday candours captured her;  
She'd dreamed of red. Her nose was bleeding,

And, feeling quite chaste and full of weakness,  
Savouring love's return to a God once known,  
She thirsted for night when the heart may guess  
At soft skies where it worships and bows down;

For night, impalpable Virgin-Mother, that bathes  
All youthful emotion in its shadowy silences;  
Thirsted for deep night where the heart, blood-stained,  
Pours out without cries rebellion without witnesses.

And playing the Victim and the little bride,  
Her star saw her, a candle between her fingers,  
Descend to the courtyard where clothes dried,  
White spectre raising the roofs' black spectres.

## VI

She passed her holy night in the latrine,  
To the candle, from roof-holes, white air flowed,  
And full of purplish blackness a wild vine,  
Skirting the next-door yard hung down below.

The skylight made a heart of living brightness,  
In the yard where the low sky, with its red-gold,  
Plated the panes; cobbles, stinking with excess  
Wet filth, sulphured the sleep-dark wall-shadows.

## VII

Who'll speak of that languor, those unclean pities,  
And what hatred will fall on her, O you filthy  
Lunatics, whose divine work still warps destinies,  
When leprosy finally devours that sweet body?

## VIII

And when, having swallowed all her hysterias,  
She sees, in the melancholy born of happiness,  
Her lover dreaming of the white million Marys  
In the dawn of the night of love, her distress:

'Do you know I killed you? Took your mouth,  
Your heart, all that one has, all you possess;  
And I, I am ill: Oh, I wish that I were drowned  
With the Dead, drenched by nocturnal waters!

I was a child, and Christ has soiled my breath.  
Filled me with loathing, through and through!  
You kissed my hair thick as a fleece, and yes,  
I allowed it....Oh, there, it's all fine for you,

Men! Who don't see that the most loving woman  
Is, behind conscience full of ignoble terror,  
The most prostituted and the most saddened,  
That our every impulse towards You is error!

For my first Communion is long past.  
I have no power ever to know your kisses:  
And my heart and flesh, your flesh has clasped,  
Seethe with the rotten kisses of Jesus!'

## IX

Then, the desolate soul, and the soul that's putrid,  
Both will feel the stream of your maledictions.  
– They'll be at rest in your inviolate Hatred,  
Freed, for death's sake, from honest passions,

Christ! O Christ, the eternal thief of vigour,  
God who, for two millennia, bowed to your pallor,  
Nailed to the earth, in shame and mental horror,  
Or overwhelmed, the brows of women of sorrow.

*July 1871*

## What One Says to the Poet on the Subject of Flowers

*(To Monsieur Théodore de Banville)*

### I

Thus, ever, towards the azure night  
Where there quivers a topaz sea,  
Will function in your evening light  
The Lilies, those clysters of ecstasy!

In our own age of sago, as they must,  
Since all the Plants are workers first,  
The Lilies will drink a blue disgust,  
From your religious Prose, not verse!

– The Lily of Monsieur de Kerdrel  
The sonnet of eighteen thirty, the plant,  
That Lily, they bestow on ‘The Minstrel’  
With the carnation and the amaranth!

Lilies! Lilies! You see never a one!  
Yet in your Verses, like the Sinners’  
Sleeves, those of soft-footed women,  
Always those white flowers shiver!

Always, Dear, when you take a bathe,  
Your Shirt with yellow armpits rots  
Swells to the breeze of rising day,  
Above the soiled forget-me-nots!

Love, only, through your nets  
Smuggles Lilies – O unequal!  
And the Woodland Violets,  
The dark Nymphs’ sugary spittle!...

### II

O Poets, if you could but own  
To the red on the laurel's firm stem  
To the Roses, the Roses, blown,  
With a thousand octaves swollen!

If BANVILLE could make them snow,  
Blood-stained, whirling in gyrations,  
Blacking the eye of that stranger so,  
Who sees wicked interpretations!

In your forests, by your paths,  
O so placid photographers!  
Like the stoppers on carafes,  
The Flora's more or less diverse!

Always the vegetables, French,  
Absurd, consumptive, up for a fight,  
Bellies of basset hounds they drench,  
Peacefully passed in evening light;

Always, after fearful drawings  
Of blue Lotus or that Sunflower,  
Pink prints, subjects befitting  
Girls in communion's sweet hour!

The Asoka Ode agrees with the  
Loretto window stanza; showers  
Of bright butterflies, heavy, flutter,  
Dunging on the daisy flowers.

Old verdures, old braided ribbons!  
O vegetable biscuit bakes!  
Fantastic flowers of old Salons!  
– For cockchafers, not rattlesnakes,

Those vegetable dolls in tears  
Grandville would have mislaid  
In the margin, sucking colours  
From spiteful stars with eye-shades!

Yes, the drooling of your flutes  
Produces precious sugar!  
– Heaps of fried eggs in old boots,  
Lily, Lilac, Rose, Asoka!...

### III

O white Hunter, running through,  
Stocking-less, the Panic field,  
Shouldn't you, couldn't you  
Acquire a little botany?

You'd have succeed, I'm afraid,  
To russet Crickets, Spanish Fly,  
Rio golds to Rhine blue, Norway  
To Florida, in the blink of an eye:

But, Dear, art cannot, for us,  
– It's true – permit, it's wrong,  
To the astounding Eucalyptus,  
Boa-Constrictors, hexameter-long;

There...! As if Mahogany  
Served, even in our Guiana,  
Only the Capuchin monkey  
To ride the mad weight of liana!

– In short, a single Flower: is it,  
Lily or Rosemary, live or dead,  
Worth a spot of sea-gull's shit,  
Worth a candle drip, I said?

– And I mean what I say, mind!  
Even you, squatting there, in one  
Of those bamboo-huts – blind  
Shut, behind brown Persian curtain –

You'd scrawl about things floral  
Worthy of some wild Oise department!...  
– Poet, yet that's a rationale  
No less laughable than it's arrogant!

#### IV

Speak, not of pampas in the spring,  
Black with terrible rebellions,  
But of tobacco, cotton growing!  
Speak of exotic harvest seasons!

Speak, white brow that Phoebus tanned,  
Of how many dollars Pedro  
Velasquez of Havana earned;  
En-shit the Bay of Sorrento

Where in thousands rest the Swans;  
Let your stanzas undertake  
The draining of the mangrove swamps,  
Filled with hydras, water-snakes!

Your quatrains plunge in blood-wet groves  
Return, bringing Humanity  
Diverse offerings, sugars, cloves,  
Lozenges and rubber-trees!

Let us know if the yellowness  
Of snowy Peaks, near the Tropic,  
Is prolific insect's nests  
Or lichens microscopic!

Seek, O Hunter, our wish what's more,  
Diverse fragrant madders,  
That, for our Army, Nature  
Might cause to bloom in trousers!

Seek, beside the slumbering Glades,  
Flowers that look like muzzles, oh,  
Out of which drip gold pomades,  
On the dark hide of the buffalo!

Seek wild fields, where in the Blue  
Trembles the silver of pubescence,  
Calyxes of fiery eggs that brew  
Steeped in burning oily essence!

Seek the Thistle's cotton-bin,  
Whose downy wool ten asses  
With ember eyes toil to spin!  
Seek flowers which are chassis!

Yes, seek at the heart of black seams  
Nigh-on stone-like flowers – marvels! –  
That near their hard pale ovaries  
Bear soft gemmiferous tonsils!

Serve us, O Crammer, as you can,  
On a fine vermilion platter  
Stews of syrupy Lilies, plan  
To corrode our German silver!

V

Many will sing of Love sublime,  
The thief of sombre Indulgence:  
Not Renan, nor Murr the cat, I'm  
Sure, know Thyrsi, blue, immense!

You'll quicken, in our torpors,  
Hysterias, through your fragrances;  
Exalt us towards candours  
Purer than Marys' whitenesses...

Colonist! Trader! Medium!  
Your Rhyme, pink, white, will be  
A welling ray of sodium,  
A well-tapped dripping rubber-tree!

From your dark Poems – Juggler!  
Let dioptric white, green, red,  
Burst out like strange flowers,  
Electric butterflies instead!

See! It's the Century of hell!  
Telegraph poles will honour  
– A lyre, where steel songs swell,  
Your magnificent shoulder!

Rhyme us above all a version  
On the ills of potato blight!  
– And to aid the composition  
Of Poems of mysterious light

To be read from Tréguier  
To Paramaribo, don't forget  
To buy Tomes by Monsieur Figuiet,  
– Illustrated – from Monsieur Hachette!

*Alcide Bava*  
*A.R.*  
*14th July 1871*

## The Seekers of Lice

*(Les Chercheuses de Poux)*

When the child's brow, tormented by red,  
Implores the white crowd of half-seen dreams,  
Two charming sisters come close to his bed  
Slender-fingered, with silver nails it seems.

They sit the child down in front of the window,  
Wide open to where blue air bathes tangled flowers,  
And through his thick hair full of dewfall,  
Move their fine fingers, fearful, magical.

He hears the sighing of their cautious breath  
That flows with long roseate vegetal honeys,  
And is interrupted sometimes by a hiss,  
Saliva caught on the lips or desire to kiss.

He hears their dark lashes beating in perfumed  
Silence: and their fingers, electrified and sweet  
Amidst his grey indolence, make the deaths  
Of little lice crackle beneath their royal treat.

It's now the wine of Sloth in him rises, the sigh  
Of a child's harmonica that can bring delerium:  
Prompted by slow caresses, the child feels then  
An endlessly surging and dying desire to cry.

## The Drunken Boat

*(Le Bateau Ivre)*

As I floated down impassive Rivers,  
I felt myself no longer pulled by ropes:  
The Redskins took my hauliers for targets,  
And nailed them naked to their painted posts.

Carrying Flemish wheat or English cotton,  
I was indifferent to all my crews.  
The Rivers let me float down as I wished,  
When the victims and the sounds were through.

Into the furious breakers of the sea,  
Deaf as the ears of a child, last winter,  
I ran! And the Peninsulas sliding by me  
Never heard a more triumphant clamour.

The tempest blessed my sea-borne arousals.  
Lighter than a cork I danced those waves  
They call the eternal churners of victims,  
Ten nights, without regret for the lighted bays!

Sweeter than sour apples to the children  
The green ooze spurting through my hull's pine,  
Washed me of vomit and the blue of wine,  
Carried away my rudder and my anchor.

Then I bathed in the Poem of the Sea,  
Infused with stars, the milk-white spume blends,  
Grazing green azures: where ravished, bleached  
Flotsam, a drowned man in dream descends.

Where, staining the blue, sudden deliriums  
And slow tremors under the gleams of fire,  
Stronger than alcohol, vaster than our rhythms,  
Ferment the bitter reds of our desire!

I knew the skies split apart by lightning,  
Waterspouts, breakers, tides: I knew the night,  
The Dawn exalted like a crowd of doves,  
I saw what men think they've seen in the light!

I saw the low sun, stained with mystic terrors,  
Illuminate long violet coagulations,  
Like actors in a play, a play that's ancient,  
Waves rolling back their trembling of shutters!

I dreamt the green night of blinded snows,  
A kiss lifted slow to the eyes of seas,  
The circulation of unheard-of flows,  
Sung phosphorus's blue-yellow awakenings!

For months on end, I've followed the swell  
That batters at the reefs like terrified cattle,  
Not dreaming the Three Marys' shining feet  
Could muzzle with their force the Ocean's hell!

I've struck Floridas, you know, beyond belief,  
Where eyes of panthers in human skins,  
Merge with the flowers! Rainbow bridles, beneath  
the seas' horizon, stretched out to shadowy fins!

I've seen the great swamps boil, and the hiss  
Where a whole whale rots among the reeds!  
Downfalls of water among tranquilities,  
Distances showering into the abyss.

Nacrous waves, silver suns, glaciers, ember skies!  
Gaunt wrecks deep in the brown vacuities  
Where the giant eels riddled with parasites  
Fall, with dark perfumes, from the twisted trees!

I would have liked to show children dolphins  
Of the blue wave, the golden singing fish.  
– Flowering foams rocked me in my drift,  
At times unutterable winds gave me wings.

Sometimes, a martyr tired of poles and zones,  
The sea whose sobs made my roilings sweet  
Showed me its shadow flowers with yellow mouths  
And I rested like a woman on her knees...

Almost an isle, blowing across my sands, quarrels  
And droppings of pale-eyed clamorous gulls,  
And I scudded on while, over my frayed lines,  
Drowned men sank back in sleep beneath my hull!...

Now I, a boat lost in the hair of bays,  
Hurled by the hurricane through bird-less ether,  
I, whose carcass, sodden with salt-sea water,  
No Monitor or Hanseatic vessel could recover:

Freed, in smoke, risen from the violet fog,  
I, who pierced the red skies like a wall,  
Bearing the sweets that delight true poets,  
Lichens of sunlight, gobbets of azure:

Who ran, stained with electric moonlets,  
A crazed plank, accompanied by black sea-horses,  
When Julys were crushing with cudgel blows  
Skies of ultramarine in burning funnels:

I, who trembled to hear those agonies  
Of rutting Behemoths and dark Maelstroms,  
Eternal spinner of blue immobilities,  
I regret the ancient parapets of Europe!

I've seen archipelagos of stars! And isles  
Whose maddened skies open for the sailor:  
– Is it in depths of night you sleep, exiled,  
Million birds of gold, O future Vigour? –

But, truly, I've wept too much! The Dawns  
Are heartbreaking, each moon hell, each sun bitter:  
Fierce love has swallowed me in drunken torpors.  
O let my keel break! Tides draw me down!

If I want one pool in Europe, it's the cold  
Black pond where into the scented night  
A child squatting filled with sadness launches  
A boat as frail as a May butterfly.

Bathed in your languor, waves, I can no longer  
Cut across the wakes of cotton ships,  
Or sail against the pride of flags, ensigns,  
Or swim the dreadful gaze of prison ships.

## Vowels

*(Voyelles)*

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels  
Someday I'll talk about your secret birth-cries,  
A, black velvet jacket of brilliant flies  
That buzz around the stench of the cruel,

Gulfs of shadow: E, candour of mists, of tents,  
Lances of proud glaciers, white kings, shivers of parsley:  
I, purples, bloody salivas, smiles of the lonely  
With lips of anger or drunk with penitence:

U, waves, divine shudders of viridian seas,  
Peace of pastures, cattle-filled, peace of furrows  
Formed on broad studious brows by alchemy:

O, supreme Clarion, full of strange stridencies,  
Silences crossed by worlds and by Angels:  
O, the Omega, violet ray of her Eyes!

## The Rooks

*(Les Corbeaux)*

Lord, when the fields are cold,  
When, in the abject hamlets,  
The long angelus is silent...  
On nature, deflowered, old,  
Falling from the open sky  
Let the lovely rooks sweep by.

Strange army with your stern calls,  
Cold winds attack your nests!  
You, along the yellowed river-edge,  
Over the roads' with old crosses, fall,  
Over the wayside ditches, and the alleys,  
Disperse yourselves, then rally!

In thousands, over the fields of France,  
Where sleep the dead of yesteryear,  
Wheel, then, in the wintry air,  
So each traveller, at a glance  
Remembers! Be the call to duty,  
O our black funereal beauty!

But, saints of heaven, at the oak's top,  
Mast lost in the charm of fading day,  
Leave the little warblers of May  
For those imprisoned in the copse,  
In depths from which one cannot flee,  
Who defeat, without a future, see.

## Memory

(*Dernier Vers: Mémoire*)

### I

Clear water: stinging like the child's salt tears,  
Whiteness of women's bodies attacking the sun:  
Silk, *en masse* and pure lily, *Oriflammes*  
Under walls a Maid defended without fear:

Dancing of angels: – No...the gold current slid  
Moving its dark arms, tired, cool above all, and green.  
She, sombre, having the blue Heavens for canopy,  
Summoned, as curtains, the arch and the hill's shade.

### II

Ah the moist surface holds such limpid bubbles!  
Water of pale deep gold covers the made beds:  
Little girls' green and faded dresses  
Were willows, from which the bridle-less birds fled.

Purer than gold, a yellow eyelid and warm,  
Marsh marigold – your married faith, O Bride! –  
At stroke of noon, from its dull mirror, jealous  
Of the dear rose-coloured Sphere: grey heat in the sky.

### III

Madame stands too stiffly in the nearby field,  
Where the threads of toil snow down: the parasol  
In her fingers: crushing cow-parsley: it's too proud:  
The children are reading on the flowery green:

A red morocco book! Alas, the man, He, like  
A thousand white angels parting on the road,  
Vanishes behind the mountain! She, quite cold,  
And black, runs on! Following the man's flight!

### IV

Regret for the firm young arms of pure grass!  
Gold of April moons in the heart of the sacred bed!  
Joy of the riverside boat-yards, abandoned to fate,  
To the August evenings that made rot germinate!

How she weeps at present under the rampart!  
The breath of the poplars up high's the only breeze.  
Then the unreflecting surface, without source, grey:  
An old man, dredging, toils in his motionless barge.

### V

Toy of this eye of sad water, I cannot reach,  
O motionless boat! O arms too short! Not one  
Or the other flower: not the yellow that begs me:  
Nor the blue, the friend in the water, its colour ashen.

Ah! The willow pollen a wing troubles!  
The rose of the reeds long since eaten up!  
My boat, stuck fast: and its deep anchor buried  
In this boundless eye of water – in what mud?

## Teardrop

(*Larme*)

1. (From: *Dernier Vers 1872*)

Far from the village girls, cattle, birds,  
I drank, kneeling down in the heather  
Surrounded by tender copses of hazel,  
In the green warm mist of afternoon.

What could I have drunk from that young Oise,  
Elms without voices, turf without flowers,  
Shut sky? Or sip from the gourd of the vine?  
Some liquor of gold that causes pale sweats.

Like that I'd have made a poor inn-sign.  
Then storms altered the sky till evening.  
Black landscapes, poles, lakes, colonnades  
under the blueness of night, rail-stations.

Wood's water was lost in virgin sand.  
The wind, out of heaven, iced the ponds...  
But, like fishers for gold or shells, to think  
That I didn't take the trouble to drink!

2. (From: *Une Saison en Enfer* 1873)

Far from the village girls, cattle, birds,  
On my knees, what was I drinking there,  
Surrounded by tender copses of hazel,  
In the green warm mist of afternoon?

What could I have drunk from that young Oise -  
Elms without voices, turf without flowers,  
shut sky - from these yellow gourds, far from my  
dear hut? Some gold liquor that causes sweats.

I made a dubious inn-sign. - A storm  
Came to hunt the sky. At evening  
Wood's water was lost in virgin sand.  
The wind, of God, iced the ponds:

Weeping, I saw gold – and could not drink!

## The Song of the Highest Tower

(*Chanson de la Plus Haute Tour*)

1. (From: *Fetes de la Patience*)

Idle Youth  
By all things enslaved  
Through sensitivity  
I've wasted my days.  
Ah! Let the moment come  
When hearts love as one.

I told myself: wait  
And let no one see:  
And without the promise  
Of true ecstasy.  
Let nothing delay  
This hiding away.

I've been patient so long  
I've forgotten even  
The terror and suffering  
Flown up to heaven,  
A sick thirst again  
Darkens my veins.

So the meadow  
Freed by neglect,  
Flowered, overgrown  
With weeds and incense,  
To the buzzing nearby  
Of a hundred foul flies.

Ah! Thousand widowhoods  
Of a soul so poor  
It bears only the image  
Of our Lady before!  
Does one then pray  
To the Virgin today?

Idle Youth  
By all things enslaved  
Through sensitivity  
I've wasted my days.  
Ah! Let the moment come  
When hearts love as one.

2. (From: *Une Saison en Enfer*)

Let it come, let it come  
The day when hearts love as one.

I've been patient so long  
I've forgotten even  
The terror and suffering  
Flown up to heaven,  
A sick thirst again  
Darkens my veins.

Let it come, let it come  
The day when hearts love as one.

So the meadow  
Freed by neglect,  
Flowered, overgrown  
With weeds and incense,  
To the buzz nearby  
Of foul flies.

Let it come, let it come  
The day when hearts love as one.

## Eternity

(*L'Éternité*)

1. (From: *Fetes de la Patience*)

It's found we see.  
What? – Eternity.  
It's the sun, free  
To flow with the sea.

Soul on watch  
Let whispers confess  
Of the empty night  
Of the day's excess.

From the mortal weal  
From the common urge  
Here you diverge  
To fly as you feel.

Since from you alone,  
Embers of satin,  
Duty breathes down  
With no 'at last' spoken.

There's nothing of hope,  
No entreaty here.  
Science and patience,  
Torture is real.

It's found we see.  
What? – Eternity.  
It's the sun, free  
To flow with the sea.

2. (From: *Une Saison en Enfer*)

It's found we see!  
What? – Eternity.  
It's the sun, mingled  
    With the sea.

My immortal soul  
Keep your vow  
Despite empty night  
And the day's glow.

So you'll diverge  
From the mortal weal  
From the common urge,  
And fly as you feel...

– No hope, never,  
No entreaty here.  
Science and patience,  
Torture is real.

No more tomorrow,  
Embers of satin,  
Your own ardour  
The only duty.

It's found we see.  
– What? – Eternity.  
It's the sun, mingled  
    With the sea.

## O Seasons, O Chateaux

(*Ô saisons, Ô châteaux*)

1. (From: *Fetes de la Patience*)

O seasons, O chateaux,  
Where is the flawless soul?

O seasons, O chateaux,

The magic study I pursued,  
Of happiness, none can elude.

O may it live, each time  
The Gallic cock makes rhyme.

Nothing else I desire,  
It's possessed my life entire.

That charm! It's taken heart and soul  
Scattered all my effort so.

Where's the sense in what I say?  
It makes the whole thing fly away!

O seasons, O chateaux!

**O Seasons, O Chateaux**

(*Ô saisons, Ô châteaux*)

2. (From: *Une Saison en Enfer*)

O seasons, O chateaux!  
Where is the flawless soul?

The magic study I pursued,  
Of happiness, none can elude.

A health to it, each time  
The Gallic cock makes rhyme.

Ah! There's nothing I desire,  
It's possessed my life entire.

That charm has taken heart and soul  
Scattered all my efforts so.

O seasons, O chateaux!

The hour of its flight, alas!  
Will be the hour I pass.

O seasons, O chateaux!

## **The Illuminations**

### **After the Flood**

*(Illuminations I: Après le Déluge)*

As soon as the idea of the Flood was finished, a hare halted in the clover and the trembling flower bells, and said its prayer to the rainbow through the spider's web.

Oh! The precious stones that hid, – the flowers that gazed around them.

In the soiled main street stalls were set, they hauled the boats down to the sea rising in layers as in the old prints.

Blood flowed, at Blue-beard's house – in the abattoirs in the circuses where God's promise whitened the windows. Blood and milk flowed.

The beavers built. The coffee cups steamed in the bars.

In the big greenhouse that was still streaming, the children in mourning looked at the marvellous pictures.

A door banged, and, on the village-green, the child waved his arms, understood by the cocks and weathervanes of bell-towers everywhere, under the bursting shower.

Madame \*\*\* installed a piano in the Alps. The Mass and first communions were celebrated at the hundred thousand altars of the cathedral.

Caravans departed. And the Hotel Splendide was built in the chaos of ice and polar night.

Since then, the Moon's heard jackals howling among the deserts of thyme – and pastoral poems in wooden shoes grumbling in the orchard. Then, in the burgeoning violet forest, Eucharis told me it was spring.

Rise, pond: – Foam, roll over the bridge and under the trees: –  
black drapes and organs – thunder and lightning rise and roll: –  
Waters and sadness rise and raise the Floods again.

Because since they abated – oh, the precious stones burying  
themselves and the opened flowers! – It's wearisome! And the  
Queen, the Sorceress who lights her fire in the pot of earth, will  
never tell us what she knows, and what we are ignorant of.

## **Childhood**

*(Illuminations II: Enfance)*

### I

That idol without ancestors or court, black-eyed and yellow-haired, nobler than legend, Mexican and Flemish: his land insolent azure and green, skirts beaches named by the waves, free of vessels, with names ferociously Greek, Slav, Celtic.

At the edge of the forest – flowers of dream chime; burst, flare – the girl with orange lips, knees crossed in the clear flood that rises from the meadows, nudity shadowed, traversed and clothed by rainbows; flowers, the sea.

Ladies who stroll on terraces by the sea: many a girl-child and giantess, superb blacks in the verdigris moss, jewels arrayed on the rich soil of groves and the little thawed-out gardens – young mothers and elder sisters with looks full of pilgrimage, Sultanas, princesses with tyrannical costumes, little foreign girls and gently unhappy people.

What tedium, the hour of the ‘beloved body’ and ‘dear heart’!

## II

It's she, the little dead girl, behind the roses. – The young mother, deceased, descends the steps. – The cousin's carriage squeaks over the sand. – The little brother – (he's in India!) there, in front of the sunset, in the meadow of carnations. The old ones buried upright in the ramparts overgrown with wallflowers.

The swarm of golden leaves surrounds the General's house. They are in the south. – You follow the red road to reach the empty inn. The chateau's for sale: the shutters are loose. – The priest will have carried off the key to the church. – Around the park the keepers' cottages are untenanted. The fences are so high you can see nothing but rustling treetops. Besides, there's nothing there to be seen.

The meadows rise to hamlets without cockerels, without anvils. The sluice gate is raised. O the crosses and windmills of the wild, the isles and the stacks.

Magic flowers buzzed. The slopes cradled him. Creatures of fabulous elegance circled round. Clouds gathered over the open sea made of an eternity of warm tears.

### III

There's a bird in the woods, its song makes you stop and blush.

There's a clock that never chimes.

There's a hollow with a nest of white creatures.

There's a cathedral that descends, and a lake that rises.

There's a little carriage abandoned in the copse, or running down the lane, beribboned.

There's a troupe of little players in costume, glimpsed on the road through the edge of the woods.

There's someone, at last, when you're hungry and thirsty, who drives you away.

### IV

I'm the saint, praying on the terrace – as the peaceful beasts graze down to the sea of Palestine.

I'm the scholar in the dark armchair. Branches and rain fling themselves at the library casement.

I'm the traveller on the high road through the stunted woods: the roar of the sluices drowns out my steps. I watch for hours the melancholy golden wash of the sunset.

I might well be the child left on the jetty washed to the open sea, the little farm-boy following the lane whose crest touches the sky.

The paths are rough. The little hills are covered with broom. The air is motionless. How far away the birds and the fountains are! That can only be the world's end ahead.

## V

Let them rent me this tomb at the last, whitewashed, with the lines  
of cement in relief – very deep underground.

I lean on the table, the lamp lights brightly those magazines  
I'm a fool to re-read, those books without interest.

At a vast distance above my subterranean room houses  
root, fogs gather. The mud is red or black. Monstrous city, night  
without end!

Lower down there are sewers. At the sides only the  
thickness of the globe. Perhaps gulfs of azure, wells of fire  
Perhaps on these levels moons and comets, seas and fables meet.

In hours of bitterness I imagine balls of sapphire, of metal. I  
am master of silence. Why should a semblance of skylight pale in  
the corner of the vault?

## Tale

*(Illuminations III: Conte)*

A Prince was vexed at only ever having given himself to the perfection of ordinary generousities. He foresaw astonishing revolutions of love, and suspected his wives of capacity for more than that complaisance enhanced by luxury and sky. He wished to view the truth, the hour of desire and essential gratification. Whether it was an aberration of piety or not he wished it. He possessed quite enough earthly power at least.

Every woman who had known him was assassinated. What havoc in the garden of beauty! Beneath the blade, they blessed him. He demanded no fresh ones. – The women reappeared.

He killed all who followed him, after the hunt or the drinking bout. – All followed him.

He amused himself cutting the throats of rare creatures. He set fire to palaces. He rushed on people and slashed them to pieces. – The masses, the golden roofs, the beautiful beasts still existed.

Can one find ecstasy in destruction, rejuvenate oneself through cruelty? The people gave not a murmur. No one offered to support his views.

One evening he was galloping proudly. A Genie appeared, of ineffable even shameful beauty. From his face and bearing issued the promise of a multiple complex love, an unspeakable even unendurable happiness! The Prince and the Genie annihilated each other probably through innate power. How could they have helped dying of it? So, as one, they died.

Yet the Prince passed away in his palace, at the customary age. The Prince was the Genie. The Genie was the Prince.

The subtlest music falls short of our desire.

## Parade

*(Illuminations IV: Parade)*

Sturdy enough jesters. Several have exploited your worlds. Devoid of need, in no hurry to make play of their brilliant faculties or their knowledge of your conscience. How ripe they are! Eyes dazed like the summer night, red and black, tricolours, steel pricked with golden stars; features deformed, leaden, pallid, on fire; hoarse-throated frolickers! A cruel swagger of faded finery! – Some are young – how do they view Cherubino? – endowed with frightening voices and dangerous resources. They're sent out soliciting in city streets, decked out in disgusting luxury.

Oh the most violent Paradise of a maddened grimace! Way beyond your Fakirs and other theatrical buffooneries. In improvised costumes of nightmarish taste they play romances, tragedies of bandits and demigods, spiritual as the tales and religions never were. Chinese, Hottentots, bohemians, fools, hyenas, Molochs, old madnesses, sinister demons, mingling popular homely turns with bestial poses and caresses. They're ready for new pieces and 'sweet' little songs. Master jugglers, they transform people and places and reveal magnetic stagecraft. Eyes inflamed, blood sings, bones thicken, tears and trickles of rouge stream down. Their raillery and their terror lasts a moment, or months entire.

I alone hold the key to this savage parade.

## Antique

*(Illuminations V: Antique)*

Graceful son of Pan! Round your brow crowned with flowers and berries your eyes, precious spheres, move. Stained with brown lees, your cheeks are hollow. Your eye-teeth gleam. Your breast is a cithara, chords chime in your pale arms. Your pulse beats in that belly where a double sex sleeps. Walk, at night, gently moving that thigh, that other thigh and that left leg.

## **Being Beauteous**

*(Illuminations VI: Being Beauteous)*

Against the snowfall, a tall Being of Beauty. Whistling of death and the circling of faint music make this adored body rise, expand and quiver like a spectre; wounds of scarlet and black burst from superb flesh. The colours proper to life deepen, dance and detach themselves around this Vision in the making. Shudders rise and groan and the frenetic flavour of these effects fills with that mortal whistling and raucous music that the world, far behind, hurls at our mother of beauty – she recoils, she rears. Oh, our bones are clothed with a new amorous body! Oh, the ashen face; the escutcheon of horsehair, the crystal arms! The cannon I must assault through the melee of trees and the weightless air!

## Vies

*(Illuminations VII: Lives)*

### I

Oh the enormous avenues of the holy land, the terraces of the temple! What has become of the Brahmin who explained the Proverbs to me? I can even see the old women still, of that time and place! I remember hours of silver and light by the rivers, my companion's hand on my shoulder, our caresses as we stood on the spice-filled plains. – A flock of scarlet pigeons thunders round my thoughts. – Exiled here, I had a place to stage the theatrical masterpieces of every literature. I could show you unknown riches. I mark the history of treasures you discovered. I see what follows! My wisdom is as despised as the chaos. What is my nothingness, compared with the stupor that awaits you?

## II

I am an inventor more worthy than all who precede me; a musician, even, who has found something like the key of love. At present, a gentleman of a harsh country under a sober sky, I try to be moved by the memory of my beggarly childhood, of my apprenticeship and arrival in clogs, my polemics, my five or six widowhoods, and a few binges when my strong head prevented me rising to my comrades' diapason. I can't regret my old part in divine gaiety: the sober air of this harsh country feeds the depths of my atrocious scepticism. But since this scepticism can never now be put to use, and anyway I'm dedicated to fresh anxiety – I expect to become an extremely spiteful madman.

## III

In an attic where I was imprisoned when I was twelve, I knew the world, I illustrated the human comedy. In a cellar I learnt history. At some nocturnal feast in a Northern city I encountered all the women of the old masters. In an ancient alley in Paris, I was taught the classical sciences. In a magnificent place surrounded by all the Orient I completed my immense work and spent my illustrious retirement. I stirred my blood. My duty has ceased. There's no need to think of it even. I really am from beyond the grave, and free of duties.

## Departure

*(Illuminations VIII: Départ)*

Enough seen. The vision was encountered under all skies.

Enough had. Sounds of cities, evening, and in the light, and always.

Enough known. The decisions of life. – O Sounds and Visions!  
Departure into new affection and noise!

## Royalty

*(Illuminations IX: Royauté)*

One fine day, among a very gentle people, a superb man and woman cried out in the public square: 'Friends, I want her to be queen!' 'I want to be queen!' She laughed and trembled. He talked to his friends of revelation, of trials undergone. They swooned against each other.

Indeed, they were kings the whole morning, while carmine hangings festooned the houses, and all afternoon, as they advanced towards the gardens of palm-trees.

## **To Reason**

*(Illuminations X: À Une Raison)*

A tap of your finger on the drum looses all sounds and begins the fresh harmony.

One step of yours is the rising of new men and their forward march.

Your face turns away: new love! Your face turns back – the new love!

‘Change our fate, eliminate the plagues, beginning with Time’ these children sing to you. ‘Breed, no matter where, the substance of our fortunes and wishes,’ they beg.

Arrival from forever, you who’ll depart everywhere.

## Drunken Morning

*(Illuminations XI: Matinée d'Ivresse)*

O my Good! O my *Beauty*! Atrocious fanfare in which I never falter! Enchanted easel! Hurrah for the unknown work and for the marvellous body, for the first time! It began in the laughter of children, it will finish so. This poison will linger in all our veins even when, the fanfare returning, we are delivered again to the old disharmony. Oh, we now so worthy of such tortures, let us fervently grasp this superhuman promise made to our created bodies and souls: this promise, this madness! Elegance, science, violence! They've promised the tree of good and evil will be buried in darkness, the tyrannical virtues will be deported, so we can bring here our love so pure. It began with certain disgusts and it ends – we being unable to seize this eternity all at once – it ends with a riot of perfumes.

Laughter of children, discretion of slaves, austerity of virgins, horror of the faces and objects here, hallowed be you by the memory of this vigil. It began with all boorishness, behold, it ends with angels of fire and ice.

Little drunken holy vigil! If only on account of the mask you've granted us. We endorse you, method! We've not forgotten that yesterday you glorified every century of ours. We have faith in poison. We know how to give our whole life every day.

This is the age of ASSASSINS.

## Sentences

*(Illuminations XII: Phrases)*

When the world has reduced to a single dark wood for our four astonished eyes – to a beach for two loyal children – to a musical house for our clear sympathy – I will find you.

Let there be a single old man here below, calm and fine, surrounded by ‘unknown luxury’ – and I shall kneel at your feet.

Let me have realised all your memories – let me be she who can gag you – I’ll stifle you.

\*

When we are strong enough – who retreats? Joyful enough – who falls to ridicule? When we are most spiteful – what might they make of us?

Adorn yourself; dance, laugh. – I’ll never be able to throw Love out the window.

\*

Beggar girl, monstrous child, my comrade! How little you care about these wretched women, these manoeuvrings, and my problems. Tie yourself to us with your impossible voice, that voice! The only hope of this vile despair.

\*

An overcast July morning. A taste of ashes floats in the air – the odour of wood sweats on the hearth – soaked flowers – a havoc of promenades – mist from the canals in the fields – why not toys then and incense?

\*

I have stretched ropes from bell-tower to bell-tower; garlands from window to window; chains of gold from star to star, and I dance.

\*

The pond up there steams continually. What sorceress will rise against the white sunset? What violet foliage will fall?

\*

While public funds are poured out in fraternal feasts, a bell of rose-coloured fire tolls in the clouds.

\*

Deepening a pleasant flavour of Chinese ink, a black powder falls gently on my vigil. – I lower the gas jets, I throw myself on my bed and, turning towards the shadows, I see you my daughters, my queens!

## Workers

(*Illuminations XIII: Ouvriers*)

Oh that warm February morning! An untimely Southerly came to wake our absurd indigent memories, our youthful wretchedness.

Henrika wore a cotton skirt in brown and white check, fashionable no doubt last century; a bonnet with ribbons, a silk scarf. It was much sadder than mourning. We were taking a stroll in the suburbs. The weather was overcast, and that Southerly wind stirred all the vile odours from ravaged gardens and parched meadows.

It couldn't have bored my wife as much as me. In a sheet of water left by last month's floods on a path up there, she pointed out some tiny fish to me.

The town, with its noise and smoke from factories, followed us a long way down the roads. Oh, other world, dwelling-place blessed by the sky and the shadows! The Southerly wind reminded me of wretched childhood events, my summer despair, the terrible quantity of strength and knowledge that fate has always kept far from me. No! We'll not spend the summer in this miserly country where we shall never be anything but betrothed orphans. I'd not want this hardened arm to drag along a *dear image* any longer.

## The Bridges

*(Illuminations XIV: Les Ponts)*

Grey skies of crystal. A bizarre design of bridges, now straight, now curved, and others descending in oblique angles to meet the former, and these patterns repeating themselves in other well-lit windings of canal, but all so long and weightless that the shores, weighted with domes, sink and contract. Some of these bridges are still covered with hovels. Others bear masts, signals, frail parapets. Minor chords interlace, and fade; ropes rise from the banks. You distinguish a red coat, other clothes perhaps and musical instruments. Are those popular airs, snatches from noble concerts, the remains of public anthems? The water is grey and blue, wide as an arm of the sea.

A white ray, falling from on high, annihilates this comedy.

## City

*(Illuminations XV: Ville)*

I'm an ephemeral and not too discontented citizen of a metropolis thought to be modern because all known taste has been avoided in the furnishing and exterior of houses as well as the city plan. Here you cannot point out a trace of a single monument to superstition. Morals and language are reduced to their simplest expression, in short! These millions not needing to know each other pursue their education, work, and old age so identically that the course of their lives must be several times shorter than absurd statistics allow this continent's people. So, from my window, I see fresh spectres roaming through thick eternal fumes – our woodland shade, our summer night! – New Furies, before my cottage which is my homeland, my whole heart, since all here resembles this – Death without tears, our active daughter and servant, desperate Love and pretty Crime whimpering in the mud of the street.

## Ruts

*(Illuminations XVI: Ornières)*

On the right the summer dawn wakes the leaves and mists and the sounds of this corner of the park, and the slopes on the left hold the thousand rapid ruts of the damp road in their violet shadow. Magical procession. Wagons, indeed, loaded with gilded wooden animals, poles and gaudily-coloured canvas, galloped past furiously by twenty dappled circus horses, and men and children on their truly astonishing beasts – twenty vehicles, carved, decked out and be-flowered like ancient carriages or in fairy-tales, full of children dressed for suburban pastoral: – coffins even, under their canopies of night, flourishing their ebony plumes, filing past to the trot of the great blue-black mares.

## Cities

*(Illuminations XVII: Villes)*

Cities indeed! This is a people for whom those Alleghanies and Lebanons of dream were staged! Chalets of crystal and wood that move on invisible rails and pulleys. Old craters circled by colossi, and palm-trees of copper roaring melodiously in flames. Feasts of love resound, on canals that hang there behind the chalets. The hunt of chimes cries in the gorges. Guilds of gigantic singers flock among robes and *oriflammes* dazzling as the light on the summits.

On platforms in the midst of the gulfs, Rolands trumpet their valour. On bridges across the abyss, and the roofs of inns, the sky's heat covers the masts with flags. Crumbling apotheoses overtake the high meadows where seraphic centaresses step among avalanches. Above the line of highest crests, a sea troubled by Venus' eternal birth, charged with orphic fleets and the murmur of precious pearls and conches – that sea darkens at times with mortal lightning. On the slopes, harvests of flowers, vast as our swords and cups, bellow. Processions of Mabs in russet, opaline robes ascend the ravines. Their feet in the waterfalls and briars, the deer up there suckle at Diana's breast. The suburban Bacchantes sob, and the moon burns and howls. Venus enters caves of smiths and hermits. Clusters of bell-towers sing the ideas of peoples. From castles built of bone an unknown music issues. All the legends evolve and elks move through the towns. The paradise of storms subsides. Savages ceaselessly dance the nocturnal feast. And, once, I descended into the stir of a Baghdad street, where crowds sang the joy of fresh labours, in the dull breeze, circling without power to elude the fabulous phantoms of the hills where they must have gathered.

What kind arms, what sweet hour will recover that region from which my slumbers and slightest movements come?

## Vagabonds

*(Illuminations XVIII: Vagabonds)*

Pitiful brother! What atrocious vigils I owe to him! 'I failed to seize on this venture ardently. I made light of his infirmity. It would be my fault if we return to exile, to slavery.' He credited me with strange ill-luck and innocence, and added disquieting reasons.

I'd reply by jeering at this satanic scholar, and end by approaching the window. I created, beyond the landscape traversed by lines of rare music, phantoms of future nocturnal luxury.

After this vaguely hygienic diversion, I would stretch out on the straw mattress. And, almost every night, as soon as I was asleep, the poor brother would rise, with rotten mouth, and blinded eyes – such as he dreamed himself – and drag me across the room howling his dream of idiot sorrow!

I had in fact, in all sincerity, pledged to restore him to his primitive state as child of the sun – and we wandered, nourished on the wine of caves, and the biscuit of the road, myself impatient to find the place and the formula.

## Cities

*(Illuminations XIX: Cities)*

The official acropolis outdoes the most colossal concept of modern barbarity. Impossible to describe the dull light produced by the immutable grey sky; the imperial glare of the masonry, and the eternal snow on the ground. They have reproduced, with singularly appalling taste, all the classical architectural wonders. I view exhibitions of paintings in places twenty times larger than Hampton Court! What painting! A Norwegian Nebuchadnezzar designed the steps of the ministries; the minor officials I saw are, as it is, prouder than Brahmins, and I trembled at the aspects of the guardians of those colossi and their site supervisors. Through grouping the buildings in squares, terraces, and closed courtyards, they've squeezed out the bell-towers. The parks present primitive nature cultivated with wondrous art. The better district has inexplicable regions: an arm of sea, without boats, rolls its sheet of blue ground glass between quays weighted with giant candelabras. A short bridge leads to a gate immediately below the dome of the Sainte-Chapelle. This dome is artistic steel frame about fifteen thousand feet in diameter.

From certain viewpoints on the copper bridges, platforms, stairs which wind round the covered markets, I thought I might judge the depth of the city! That was the prodigious thing I could not decide: what levels of other districts lay above and below the acropolis? For the visitor in our day exploration is impossible. The commercial quarter is a circus in uniform style, with arcaded galleries. No shops to be seen, but the snow in the street is trampled; a few nabobs, rare as walkers on a London Sunday morning, move towards a diamond coach. A few red velvet divans: polar drinks are served, whose price ranges from eight hundred to eight thousand rupees. Regarding the concept of searching out theatres in this circus, I tell myself that the shops must contain sombre dramas enough. I think there are police; but the laws must be so strange that any idea of the adventurers in this place eludes me.

The suburbs, as elegant as any fine street in Paris, are favoured by a semblance of sunlight; the democratic element numbers a few hundred souls. Here again, the houses are not in rows; the suburbs lose themselves oddly in the country, the 'County', which fills the endless west with forests and vast plantations where savage gentlemen hunt for news in the light which they created.

## Vigils

*(Illuminations XX: Veillées)*

### I

It's repose in the light, neither fever nor languor, on the bed or the field.

It's the friend neither ardent nor weak. The friend.

It's the beloved not tormented, and not tormenting. The beloved.

The air and the world unsought. Life.

- Was this it, then?
- And the dream cools.

### II

The lighting returns to the centre-post. From the room's two extremities, a stage-set of sorts, harmonic risers meet. The wall facing the watcher is a psychological succession of frieze-like intersections, atmospheric layers and geological undulations – Intense and rapid dream of deeply-felt groupings, with beings of all types in all perspectives.

### III

The lamps and rugs of the vigil make the sound of waves, at night,  
beside the hull, around the rudder.

The sea of vigil like Amélie's breasts.

The tapestries, half-way up, copses of lace tinted emerald, into  
which the turtledoves of the vigil dart.

.....

The slab of black hearth, real suns of the beaches: ah, wells of  
magic; sole view of dawn, this once!

## Mystic

*(Illuminations XXI: Mystique)*

On the sloping bank, angels swirl their woollen robes on pastures of steel and emerald.

Fields of flame leap to the rounded hilltop. On the left the ridge-mould is trampled by every murder, every battle, and every sound of disaster spins out its arc. Behind the ridge to the right the line of ascent, of progress.

And, while the frieze at the top of the picture is formed of the twisting and leaping murmur of the conches of human seas and nights,

The flowery sweetness of stars and sky and the rest descends opposite the embankment, like a basket – against our face, and creates the abyss flowering and blue below.

## Dawn

*(Illuminations XXII: Aube)*

I embraced the summer dawn.

Nothing was stirring yet on the fronts of the palaces. The water was dead. The crowds of shadows had not yet left the woodland road. I walked, waking vivid warm breaths, and the precious stones looked up, and wings rose without sound.

The first adventure, on the path already full of cool pale gleams, was a flower that told me its name.

I smiled at the blond dishevelled waterfall among the fir trees: on the silvered peak I recognised the Goddess.

Then I lifted the veils one by one. In the lane, waving my arms. On the plain where I denounced her to the cockerel. In the city, she fled among bell-towers and domes, and, running like a beggar across the marble quays, I chased after her.

At the top of the road, near a laurel wood, I surrounded her with her gathered veils, and I felt her vast body a little. Dawn and the child fell down at the foot of the wood.

Waking, it was noon.

## Flowers

*(Illuminations XXIII: Fleurs)*

From a terrace of gold – among threads of silk, grey gauze, green velvets and crystal discs that darken like bronze in the sun – I watch the foxglove open on a carpet of silver filigree, eyes and hair.

Yellow gold coins sprinkled on agate, mahogany columns supporting an emerald dome, bunches of white satin and fine sprays of rubies surround the rose of water.

Like a god with vast blue eyes and snowy forms, sea and sky draw hosts of young and vigorous roses to the terraces of marble.

## Mundane Nocturne

*(Illuminations XXIV: Nocturne Vulgaire)*

A gust opens operatic breaches in the walls – obscures the pivoting of shattered roofs – disperses the boundaries of hearths – eclipses the windows.

From the length of vine, resting my foot on a gargoyle – I climbed into this coach whose period is clearly indicated by the convex glass, bulging panels, and curved seats. Hearse of my slumbers, isolate, shepherd's hut of my foolishness, the vehicle turns on the turf of the abandoned highway: and in a flaw at the top of the right-hand window revolve pale lunar figures, leaves, breasts.

– A green and a blue, very deep, invade the image. Unharnessing by a patch of gravel.

– Here one whistles for the storm, the Sodoms and Jerusalems, the wild beasts and armies.

(– Coachman and creatures of dream will they take to the most stifling thickets again, to plunge me to the eyes in the silken spring.)

– And to send us, whipped on, through lapping waters and spilling draughts, to roll over the mastiffs' baying...

– A breath disperses the boundaries of the hearth.

## Marine

*(Illuminations XXV: Marine)*

Chariots of copper and silver –  
Prows of silver and steel –  
Ploughing the foam –  
Rooting up stumps of the thorns.  
The currents of the heath,  
And the vast ruts of the ebb-tide,  
Flow away in circles towards the east,  
Towards the pillars of the forest,  
Towards the posts of the jetty,  
Whose angle is battered by whirlwinds of light.

## **Winter Feast**

*(Illuminations XXVI: Fête d'Hiver)*

The cascade sounds behind the comic-opera shanties. Catherine-wheels prolong, in the orchards and avenues by the meander – the greens and reds of sunset. Nymphs from Horace with Empire hair-styles – Rounded Siberian women, Chinese girls like Bouchers.

## Anguish

*(Illuminations XXVII: Angoisse)*

Can it be that She will win pardon for my eternally crushed ambitions – that a comfortable ending will repair ages of poverty – that the day of success will lull us to sleep on the shame of our fatal clumsiness?

(O palm-trees! Diamond! – Love! Vigour! – Higher than every joy or glory! – of all kinds, everywhere – Demon, god – youth of this being-here: I!)

That the accidents of magical science and movements of social brotherhood will be cherished as a progressive restitution of primal freedom? ...

But the Vampire who makes us behave dictates that we amuse ourselves with what she leaves us, or else be more amusing.

To roll on wounds through the wearying air and the sea; in torment, through the silence of murderous water and air; through smiling tortures, in their atrociously tumultuous silence.

## Metropolitan

*(Illuminations XXVIII: Métropolitain)*

From the indigo strait to the seas of Ossian, on the pink and orange sands that the vinous sky has washed, crystal boulevards have risen and intersected, occupied at once by poor young families who shop at the fruiterers. No riches. – The city!

From the desert of bitumen, in headlong flight under sheets of fog spread in frightful layers through the sky that curves, retreats, descends formed of deeply sinister black smoke that the Ocean in mourning delivers, flee helmets, wheels, ships, cruppers – The battle!

Raise your head: that arched wooden bridge; the last kitchen-gardens of Samaria; those masks illumined by the lantern fluttered by the cold night; the foolish undine with the noisy dress, in the river depths; luminous skulls among the pea-plants – and the other phantasmagoria – the countryside.

Roads bordered by rails and walls, barely containing the thickets, and the atrocious flowers you would call souls and sisters. Dramas damning with tedium – the property of fairy-tale ultra-Rhine aristocracies, Japanese, Guarani, still fit to receive the music of the ancients – and there are inns which are always open no longer – there are princesses, and, if you are not too overwhelmed, the study of stars – the sky.

The morning when, with Her, you wrestled among the glints of snow, the green lips, the ice, the black flags and blue light-rays, and the purple perfumes of the Polar sun – your vigour.

## **Barbarian**

*(Illuminations XXIX: Barbare)*

Long after the days and the seasons, the beings and countries,  
the banner of bloodied meat on the silk of seas and of arctic  
flowers: (they do not exist.)

Having recovered from the old fanfares of heroism – that still  
attack our hearts and heads – far from the ancient assassins.

– Oh! The banner of bloodied meat on the silk of seas and of  
arctic flowers: (they do not exist.)

Ecstasies!

The blazes raining in gusts of frost. – Ecstasies! – fires in the  
rain from the wind of diamonds hurled out by the earthly heart,  
charred for us. – O world! –

(Far from the old retreats and the old flames, that you hear and  
feel,)

The blazes and foams. The music, churning of gulfs and the  
shock of icicles on the stars.

O ecstasies, O world, O music! And here, forms, sweats, hair  
and eyes, floating. And the white tears, boiling – O ecstasies! –  
and the feminine voice reaching the depths of volcanoes and arctic  
caves.

The banner...

## Promontory

*(Illuminations XXX: Promontoire)*

The golden dawn and shivering evening find our brig in the offing opposite this villa and its grounds, forming a promontory as extensive as Epirus or the Peloponnese, Japan's main island, or Arabia! Temples lit by the return of theories; immense views of modern coastal defences; dunes illustrated with torrid flowers and bacchanals; Carthage's great canals and the embankments of a sleazy Venice; faint eruptions of Etna, crevasses of flowers and glacial water; laundries surrounded by German poplars; slopes of singular parks hung with the crowns of Japanese Trees; and the curved facades of the 'Royals' and 'Grands' of Scarborough and Brooklyn; and their railways flank, undermine, overhang the hotel's elevations, chosen from the most elegant most colossal constructions of Italy, America, Asia, whose windows and terraces, at present full of costly illuminations, drinks and breezes, are open to the influence of voyagers and the nobility – who permit, in daylight hours, all the tarantellas of the coasts – and even the ritornellos of the illustrious vales of art, to adorn the facades of the Palace-Promontory with marvels.

## Scenes

*(Illuminations XXXI: Scènes)*

The ancient Comedy pursues its harmonies, portions out its idylls:  
Boulevards of planking.

A long wooden pier from one end to the other of a rocky field,  
where the barbarous crowd move beneath bare trees.

Down corridors of black gauze, following the walkers with  
their lanterns and leaves,

Theatrical birds swoop down on a masonry pontoon stirred by  
the archipelago covered with spectators embarking.

Lyrical scenes accompanied by flute and rum, sloping to  
recesses at ceiling height round the salons of modern clubs or  
ancient Oriental halls.

Magical sights manoeuvre at the amphitheatre's rim crowned  
with thickets – or move and modulate for the Boeotians, in the  
shade of tall shifting trees, at the edge of cultivation.

The comic opera splits apart on our stage at the ridge where  
ten partitions intersect, that stretch from gallery to footlights.

## **Historic Evening**

*(Illuminations XXXII: Soir Historique)*

In whatever evening, for instance, the simple tourist retiring from our economic horrors finds himself, the hand of a master wakes the harpsichord of meadows; cards are played in the depths of the pond, mirror, evoker of queens and favourites; there are saints, sails, and threads of harmony, and legendary chromaticism in the sunset.

He shudders at the passing of the hunts and the hordes. Drama drips on the platforms of turf. And the superfluity of the poor and the weak on these stupid levels!

To his slave's eye, Germany towers upwards toward moons; Tartar deserts light up; ancient revolts foment at the heart of the Celestial Empire; along the stairways and armchairs of rocks a little world, pale and flat, is to be built. Then a ballet of known seas and nights; chemistry without virtue, and impossible melodies.

The same bourgeois magic wherever the packet-boat deposits us! The most elementary physicist feels it is no longer to possible to submit oneself to this personal atmosphere, this fog of physical remorse, observation of which is already an affliction.

No! The moment of the steam room, of evaporating seas, of subterranean conflagrations, of the wandering planet and the consequent exterminations, certainties indicated with so little malice by the Bible and the Norns which it will fall to the serious being to witness – However it will be no matter of legend!

## Movement

*(Illuminations XXXIII: Mouvement)*

The movement of lace at the brink of the weir,  
The gulf at the stern,  
The swiftness of slope,  
The vast sway of the current  
Draw the voyager through extraordinary lights  
And chemical change  
Surrounded by waters of the vale  
And the strom.

These are the conquerors of the world  
Seeking their personal chemical fortunes;  
Amusement and comfort travel with them;  
They carry the education  
Of races, classes and creatures, on this vessel  
Repose and vertigo  
In the diluvial light,  
In terrible nights of study.

For from the conversation among the equipment, the blood,  
the flowers, the fire, the gems,  
The anxious calculations on the fleeing deck,  
– One sees, rolling by like a dyke beyond the hydraulically-  
powered road,  
Monstrous, illuminating endlessly – their store of studies;  
Driven themselves into harmonious ecstasy,  
And the heroism of discovery.

Among the most surprising atmospheric events,  
A young couple hold aloof on the ark,  
– Is it a pardonable primitive shyness? –  
And sing and mount guard.

## **Bottom**

*(Illuminations XXXIV: Bottom)*

Reality being too thorny for my great personality – I found myself nonetheless, at my lady's, as a large blue-grey bird soaring towards the ceiling mouldings or trailing my wing in the shadows of evening.

I have been, at the foot of the bed-head supporting her adored jewels and her physical masterpieces, a large bear with violet gums, fur grizzled with sorrow, and eyes of crystal and the silver of console-tables.

All became shadow and fiery aquarium.

At daybreak – bellicose June dawn – I ran to the fields, an ass, braying and brandishing my grievance, till the Sabine women of the suburbs came to throw themselves on my neck.

## H

*(Illuminations XXXV: H)*

Everything monstrous violates Hortense's atrocious gestures. Her solitude is the erotic machinery; her lassitude, the amorous dynamic. Under surveillance by infancy, she has been, at many epochs, the ardent hygiene of races. Her door is open to poverty. There, the morality of living beings is disembodied in her passion or action. – Oh, terrible shudder of unskilled loves on the blood-stained floor and amongst transparent hydrogen find Hortense!

## Prayer

(*Illuminations XXXVI: Dévotion*)

To my Sister Louise Vanaen de Voringhem: – her blue coif turned towards the North Sea. – For the shipwrecked.

To my Sister Léonie Auboïs d’Ashby. Baow! – The buzzing, stinking summer grass. – For the fevers of mothers and children.

To Lulu – demon – who has maintained her taste for the oratories of the age of *Les Amies* and her unfinished education. For men. – To Madame \*\*\*.

To the adolescent I was. To this old saint, hermitage or mission. To the spirit of the poor. And to a very high clergy. Also to every cult, in such a place of memorial cults and among such events that one must surrender, according to the aspirations of the moment or our own serious vices.

This evening, to Circeto of the icy heights, fat as a fish, and illuminated like the ten months of reddish light – (her heart amber and spunk) – my only prayer as silent as the regions of night and preceding acts of daring more violent than this polar chaos.

At any price and in every guise, even in metaphysical journeys. – But then no more.

## Democracy

*(Illuminations XXXVII: Démocratie)*

‘The flag goes with the foul landscape, and our dialect muffles the drum.

In the Interior we’ll nourish the most cynical prostitution. We’ll massacre logical rebellions.

To the spiced and sodden countries! – In the service of the most monstrous exploitations, industrial or military. Farewell here, no matter where. Voluntary conscripts we’ll possess a fierce philosophy: ignorant of science, wily for our comforts: let the world go hang. That’s true progress. Forward – march!’

## **Fairy**

*(Illuminations XXXVIII: Fairy)*

For Helen embellishing saps conspired in virgin shadows and impassive radiance, in astral silence. The summer heat was entrusted to mute birds and the requisite indolence, to a mourning barge beyond price among bays of dead loves and sunken perfumes.

After the moment of the woodcutters' wives air, to the murmur of torrent below the ruined woods, to the cattle-bells in the echoing valleys, and the cries of the steppes.

For Helen's childhood thickets and shadows trembled, the breasts of the poor, and heavenly legends.

And her eyes and her dance superior even to the precious gleams, the cold influences, and the pleasure of the unique scenery and hour.

## War

*(Illuminations XXXIX: Guerre)*

As a child, certain skies refined my perspective: all characters shaded my features. Phenomena shifted about. Now, the eternal inflection of moments and the infinity of mathematics drive me through this world where I submit to every civic honour, respected by strange children and enormous affections. I dream of a war, of right or of might, of quite unexpected logic.

It's as simple as a phrase of music.

## Genie

*(Illuminations XL: Génie)*

He is affection and the present because he has built the house open to the foaming winter and the sounds of summer, he who purified food and drink, he who is the charm of fugitive places and the superhuman delight of halts. He is affection and the future, the power and love that we, held in rage and boredom, watch as it passes by in the stormy sky among banners of ecstasy.

He is love, perfect and reinvented measure, marvellous and unexpected reason, and eternity: beloved machinery of the fatal forces. We have all known the terror of his surrender and our own: O pleasure in our health, impulse of our faculties, selfish affection and passion for him, he who loves us throughout his infinite life..... And we summon him again and he travels on...And if Adoration vanishes, it resounds, his promise resounds: 'Away with these superstitions, these ancient bodies, these households and these ages. It is this époque that has darkened!'

He will not go; he will not descend from any heaven again, he will not achieve the redemption of Woman's anger and Man's gaities, and all that sin: because it's finished, he exists, and he's loved.

O his breaths, his heads, his running: the terrible swiftness of the perfection of forms and action!

O fecundity of the spirit and vastness of the universe!

His body! The redemption dreamed of, the shattering of grace meeting with new violence!

The sight of him, the sight of him! All the old kneeling and pains lifted at his passing.

His light! The abolition of all sonorous and moving suffering in a more intense music.

His step! Migrations more enormous than the old invasions.

O He and We! Pride more kindly than lost charities.

O world! And the clear song of new misfortunes!

He has known us all and loved us all. May we know on this winter night, from cape to cape, from tumultuous pole to chateau, from the crowd to the sands, from glance to glance, strength and feelings weary, how to hail him and see him, and send him on his way again, and under the tides and over the deserts of snow, follow his visions, his breaths, his body, his light.

## Youth

*(Illuminations XLI: Jeunesse)*

### I

SUNDAY

Problems aside, the inevitable descent from the sky and the visit of memories and the gathering of rhythms occupy the dwelling, the head and the world of the mind.

– A horse takes off on the suburban turf past the fields and woodlands, riddled with carbonic plague. A wretched woman in some drama, somewhere in the world, sighs for improbable abandonment. Desperadoes long for storms, drunkenness and wounds. Little children stifle curses beside the rivers.

Let us resume our studies to the sound of the all-consuming work that gathers and rises among the masses.

## II

### SONNET

Man of normal constitution, was the flesh not a fruit hung in the orchard, oh childish days! The body a treasure to squander; oh, to love, Psyche's peril or strength? Earth had slopes fertile in princes and artists, and progeny and the race drove us to crime and mourning: the world, your fortune and your peril. But now, that toil rewarded, you, your calculations, you, your impatience, are no more than your dance and your voice, neither fixed nor forced, though for the double consequence of success and invention a reason, with unassuming and fraternal humanity, in the imageless universe – strength and right reflect the dance and the voice only now appreciated...

## III

### TWENTY YEARS

The instructive voices exiled...physical ingenuousness bitterly stale...Adagio. Ah, the infinite egoism of adolescence, the studious optimism: how full the world was of flowers, that summer! The airs and the forms dying...A choir, to calm impotence and absence! A choir of glass with nocturnal melodies...Indeed the nerves will soon be on the hunt.

#### IV

You are still at the temptation of Anthony. The antics of curtailed zeal, the tics of puerile pride, weakening, and terror. But you will set yourself to this work: all the harmonic and architectural possibilities will stir round your perch. Perfect unforeseen beings will offer themselves to your experiments. Around you will gather dreamily the curiosity of ancient multitudes and idle wealth. Your memory and your senses will be simply the fodder for your creative impulse. As for the world, when you emerge, what will have become of it? Nothing, in any case, of its present seeming.

## Sale

*(Illuminations XLII: Solde)*

For sale what the pawnbrokers have not sold, what nobility and crime have not tasted, what's unknown to love and the infernal honesty of the masses; what neither the age nor science need acknowledge:

The Voices reconstituted; the fraternal awakening of all the choral and orchestral energies and their instantaneous application; the occasion, unique, for freeing our senses!

For sale bodies beyond price, of no known race, world, sex, or descent! Riches spurting at every step! An unrestricted sale of diamonds!

For sale anarchy for the masses; irrepressible pleasure for connoisseurs; atrocious deaths for the faithful, for lovers!

For sale habitations and migrations, sports, perfect enchantments and comforts, and the sound, motion and future they create!

For sale unheard of applications of computation and leaps of harmony. Chance finds and unsuspected terms, with immediate possession.

Wild and infinite impulse towards invisible splendours, intangible delights, with its maddening secrets for every vice and its frightening gaiety for the crowd.

For sale bodies, voices, immense unquestionable opulence, all that which is never for sale. The vendors have not yet reached the end of their stock! The salesmen won't have to claim their commission for a long while yet!

## A Season in Hell - Prologue

(*Une Saison en Enfer*)

Once, if I remember rightly, my life was a feast where all hearts opened, and all wines flowed.

One evening I sat Beauty on my knees – And I found her bitter – And I reviled her.

I armed myself against Justice.

I fled. O sorceresses, O misery, O hatred, it was to you my treasure was entrusted!

I managed to erase all human hope from my mind. I made the wild beast's silent leap to strangle every joy.

I summoned executioners to bite their gun-butts as I died. I summoned plagues, to stifle myself with sand and blood. Misfortune was my god. I stretched out in the mud. I dried myself in the breezes of crime. And I played some fine tricks on madness.

And spring brought me the dreadful laugh of the idiot.

Now, just lately, finding myself on the point of uttering the last *croak*, I thought of seeking the key to the old feast, where I might perhaps find my appetite again!

Charity is the key – This inspiration proves I have been dreaming!

'You're a hyena still...' the demon cries who crowned me with such delightful poppies. 'Win death with all your appetites; your egoism, all the deadly sins.'

Ah, I've practised too many! – But, dear Satan, I beg you, an eye a little less inflamed! And while awaiting my few cowardly little deeds, for you who prize in a writer the lack of descriptive or instructive skill, for you, I tear off these few hideous pages from my notebook of a damned soul.

## **Bad Blood**

*(Une Saison en Enfer: Mauvais Sang)*

I've the whitish blue eye of my Gallic ancestors, the narrow skull, and the awkwardness in combat. I find my clothing as barbarous as theirs. But I don't butter my hair.

The Gauls were the most inept flayers of cattle and burners of grass of their age.

From them I get: idolatry and love of sacrilege: – oh, all the vices, anger, lust – magnificent, the lust – above all lying and sloth!

I've a horror of all trades. Masters and workers: all peasants, ignoble. The hand on the pen's the same as the hand at the plough. – What an age of hands! – I'll never get my hand in. Anyway service goes too far. The honesty of beggary upsets me. Criminals disgust me like eunuchs: me, I'm whole, and it's all one to me!

But! Who made my tongue so deceitful that it's guided and safeguarded my laziness till now? Without even using my body to live, and idler than a toad, I've lived everywhere. Not a family in Europe I don't know. – I mean families like mine, who owe it all to the declaration of the Rights of Man. – I've known every son of good family!

\*

If only I'd forerunners at some time or other in the history of France!

But no, nothing.

It's obvious to me I've always belonged to an inferior race. I don't understand rebellion. My race never rose up except to pillage: like wolves round a beast they haven't killed.

I recall the history of France, eldest daughter of the Church. As a peasant I'd have made the journey to the Holy Land: I have all the roads of the Swabian plains in my head, all the views of Byzantium, the ramparts of Suleiman: the cult of the Virgin; tenderness for the crucified, wake in me among a thousand profane enchantments. – I sit, a leper, among broken pots and nettles, at the foot of a wall ravaged by the sun. – Later, a mercenary, I'd have bivouacked under German midnights.

Ah! Again: I dance the Sabbath in a red glade, with old women and children.

I remember nothing more distant than this country and Christianity. I'd never be finished with viewing myself in this past. But always alone: without a family: what language, even, did I speak? I never see myself in the counsels of Christ: nor in the councils of the Lords – representatives of Christ.

What was I in the last century? I only discover myself in the present day. No more vagabonds, no more vague wars. The inferior race has spread everywhere – the people, as one says, reason: the nation and science.

Oh! Science! They've altered everything. For the body and the soul – the Eucharist – we've medicine and philosophy – old wives' remedies and arrangements of popular songs. And the diversions of princes and the games they prohibited! Geography, cosmography, physics, chemistry! ...

Science! The new nobility! Progress. The world progresses! Why shouldn't it turn as well?

It's the vision of numbers. We advance towards the Spirit. It's quite certain: it's oracular, what I say. I know, and unaware how to express myself without pagan words, I'd rather be mute.

\*

The pagan blood returns! The Spirit is near, why doesn't Christ help me by granting my soul nobility and freedom? Alas! The Gospel has passed! The Gospel! The Gospel.

I wait for God with greed. I've been of inferior race from all eternity.

Here I am on the Breton shore. How the towns glow in the evening. My day is done: I'm quitting Europe. Sea air will scorch my lungs: lost climates will tan me. To swim, trample the grass, hunt, above all smoke: drink hard liquors like boiling metals – as those dear ancestors did round the fire.

I'll return with iron limbs; dark skin, a furious look: from my mask I'll be judged as of mighty race. I'll have gold: I'll be idle and brutal. Women care for those fierce invalids returning from hot countries. I'll be involved in politics. Saved.

Now I'm damned, I have a horror of country. The best is a good drunken sleep on the beach.

\*

One doesn't go. – Let's take to the roads again, full of my vice, the vice that has thrust its roots of suffering into my side, since the age of reason – that rises to the sky, strikes me, knocks me down, drags me along.

The last innocence, and the last timidity. I've said it. Not to carry my disgust and betrayals through the world.

Let's go! Marching, burdens, deserts, boredom, anger.

Whom shall I hire myself to? What beast must be adored? What saintly image attacked? What hearts shall I break? What lie must I uphold? – Wade through what blood?

Rather, protect oneself from justice – a hard life, pure brutalisation – to open the coffin lid with a withered hand; sit down, stop your breath. So no old age, no dangers: to be terrified is un-French.

– Ah! I am so forsaken I could offer any divine image no matter what my urges towards perfection.

O my self-denial, O my marvellous pity! Even down here!

*De profundis Domine*, what a creature I am!

\*

Still a child, I admired the stubborn convict on whom the prison gates always close again: I visited inns and lodgings that he might have sanctified with his presence: I saw the blue sky with his mind, and the flowering labour of the countryside: I scented his fate in the towns. He had more strength than a saint, more good sense than a traveller – and he, he alone! As witness to his glory and reason.

On the roads, on winter nights, without shelter, without clothing, without bread, a voice would clutch my frozen heart: ‘Weakness or strength: with you it’s strength. You don’t know where you’re going or why you’re going: go everywhere, react to everything. They won’t kill you any more than if you were a corpse.’ In the morning I had such a lost look, such a dead face, that those who met me *perhaps they did not see me*.

Suddenly, in the towns, the mud would seem red or black to me, like the mirror when the lamp is carried about in the next room, like a treasure in the forest! Good luck, I’d cry, and I’d see a sea of flames and smoke in the sky: and to right and left all the riches flaming like a trillion lightning flashes.

But orgies and the company of women were forbidden me. Not even a friend. I could see myself before an angry crowd, facing the firing-squad, weeping with a misery they couldn’t have understood, and forgiving them! – Like Joan of Arc! – ‘Priests, professors, masters, you’re wrong to hand me over to justice. I’ve never been part of this race. I’ve never been a Christian: I’m of the race that sings under torture: I don’t understand the law: I’ve no moral sense, I’m a brute: you’re wrong...’

Yes, I’ve shut my eyes to your light. I’m a beast, a black. But I can be saved. You are really blacks, you maniacs; wild beasts, misers. Merchant, you’re a black: magistrate, you’re a black: general, you’re a black: emperor, you old sore, you’re a black: you’ve drunk an untaxed liquor, Satan’s make. – This race is inspired by fever and cancer. Old folks and invalids are so respectable they ask to be boiled. – The cleverest thing is to quit this continent, where madness prowls to find hostages for these wretches. I’m off to the true kingdom of the sons of Ham.

Do I know nature yet? Do I know myself? – *No more words*. I bury the dead in my gut. Shouts, drums, dance, dance, dance, dance! I don't even see the moment when the whites land and I'll fall to nothingness.

Hunger, thirst, shouts, dance, dance, dance, dance!

\*

The whites are landing. Cannon! We have to submit to baptism, clothes, work.

I've received the *coup de grâce* to my heart. Ah! I hadn't foreseen it!

I've done nothing wrong. The days will pass easily for me, repentance will be spared me. I'll not have known the torments of the soul that's almost dead to virtue, where the light rises severely like that from funeral tapers. The fate of a son of good family, an early coffin scattered with crystal tears. Doubtless, debauchery is foolish; vice is foolish, rottenness must be thrown out. But the clock has not yet taken to striking only hours of pure sadness! Shall I be carried off like a child to play in paradise forgetting all unhappiness?

Quick! Are there other lives? – Repose with riches is impossible. Wealth has always been so public. Divine love alone offers the keys of knowledge. I see that nature is nothing but a show of kindness. Farewell chimeras, ideals, errors.

The rational song of the Angels rises from the lifeboat: it is divine love. – Two Loves! I can die of earthly love, or die of devotion. I've left souls for whom the pain of my departure increases! You have chosen me from the shipwrecked: those who are left aren't they my friends?

Save them!

Reason is born in me. The world is good. I'll bless life. I'll love my brothers. These are no longer childish promises. Nor the hope of escaping old age and death. God give me strength and I praise God.

\*

Tedium's no longer my love. Rage, debaucheries, madness, all of whose joys and disasters I know – my whole burden's laid down. Let us appreciate without dizziness the extent of my innocence.

I'd no longer be capable of demanding the comfort of a bastinado. I don't think I'm embarking for a wedding with Jesus Christ for father-in-law.

I'm not a prisoner of my reason. I said: 'God, I want freedom in salvation: how to pursue it? Frivolous tastes have quit me. No need for self-sacrifice or divine love any more. I don't regret the age of sensitive hearts. Each has his reason, scorn, pity: I retain my place at the summit of this angelic ladder of good sense.

As for established happiness: domestic or not...no, I can't. I'm too dissipated, too feeble. Life flowers through work, an old truth: me, my life is too insubstantial, it flies off and drifts around far above the action that focus dear to the world.

What an old maid I'm becoming, lacking the courage to love death!

If God would grant me celestial, aerial, calm, prayer – like the ancient saints – the Saints! Strong ones! The anchorites, artists for whom there's no longer need!

Continual farce! My innocence should make me weep. Life is the farce all perform.

\*

Enough! Here is the sentence. - March!

Ah! My lungs burn, my brow throbs! Night revolves in my eyes, in this sun! Heart...limbs...

Where to? To fight? I'm weak! The others advance. Equipment, arms...the weather! ...

Fire! Fire at me! Here! Or I'll surrender – Cowards! – I'll kill myself! I'll hurl myself under the horses' hooves!

Ah! ...

– I'll get used to it.

That would be the French way, the path of honour!

## Night in Hell

(*Une Saison en Enfer: Nuit de L'Enfer*)

I have swallowed a famous gulp of poison – Thrice blessed be the thought that came to me! – My guts are burning. The venom's violence wracks my limbs; deforms me, fells me. I'm dying of thirst; I'm stifling, unable to cry out. It's hell, the everlasting torment! See how the flames rise up! I'm burning in the proper manner. Well then, demon!

I've glimpsed a conversion to goodness and joy, salvation. Let me describe the vision, the air of hell suffers no hymns! It was of millions of enchanting creatures, sweet spiritual harmony, strength and peace, noble ambitions, who knows what?

Noble ambitions!

There's life yet! – What if damnation is eternal! A man who wants to mutilate himself is truly damned, is he not? I think myself in hell, therefore I am. It's the ratification of the catechism. I'm the slave of my baptism. Parents, you caused my wretchedness and your own. Poor innocent! – Hell can't touch pagans – There's life yet! Later the delights of damnation will deepen. A crime, quick, let me fall into the void, in the name of human law.

Quiet, quiet there! ... Here's shame and reproach: Satan, who says that the fire is ignoble, that my anger is fearfully stupid. – Enough! ... Of the errors whispered to me, magic, false perfumes, puerile music. – And to think that I grasp truth, see justice: my judgement is sane and sound, I am ready for perfection... Pride – the skin of my head dries up. Pity! Lord, I'm afraid. I thirst, such thirst! Ah, childhood, grass, the rain, the lake over stones, *the moonlight when the clock struck twelve!* ...the devil's in the belfry, at that hour. Mary! Holy Virgin! – Horror at my stupidity.

Back there, aren't there honest souls, who wish me well? ... Come...I've a pillow over my mouth; they can't hear me, they're phantoms. Besides, no one ever thinks of others. Let no one come near me. I smell of scorching, that's certain.

The hallucinations are innumerable. That's what has always been wrong with me, in fact: no belief in history, obliviousness to principles. I'll be quiet about it: poets and visionaries would be jealous. I am a thousand times richer, let's be as miserly as the sea.

See there! The clock of life has just stopped. I am no longer in the world – Theology is no joke, hell is certainly *down below* – and heaven above – Ecstasy, nightmare, slumber in a nest of flames.

What tricks while waiting in the countryside...Satan, Ferdinand, runs rife with wild seed...Jesus walks on the purple briars, without bending them...Jesus once walked on the troubled waters. The lantern showed him to us standing, pale with brown tresses, on the flank of an emerald wave...

I shall unveil all the mysteries: mysteries religious or natural, death, birth, future, past, cosmogony, nothingness. I am a master of phantasmagoria.

Listen! ...

I possess every talent! – There is no one here, yet there is someone: I don't wish to spill my treasure – Shall it be negro chants, the dance of houris? Shall I vanish, dive deep in search of *the ring*? Shall I? I will make gold, cures.

Have faith then in me, faith soothes, guides, heals. Come, all you – even the little children – let me console you, may a heart go out to you – the marvellous heart! – Poor men, workers! I don't ask for prayer; with your trust alone, I'll be happy.

– And let us consider myself. It makes me regret the world very little. I was lucky not to suffer more. My life was nothing but sweet follies, it's regrettable.

Bah! Let us make every possible grimace.

Decidedly, we are beyond the world. No more sounds. My sense of touch: gone. Ah, my chateau, my Saxony, my rank of willows! Evenings, dawns, nights, days...How weary I am!

I ought to have a hell for my anger, a hell for my pride, – and a hell for my caresses; a concert of hells.

I'm dying of lassitude. It's the tomb; I'm going to the worms, horror of horrors! Satan, you trickster, you want to destroy me with your enchantments. I demand, I demand one prick of the fork, one drop of the fire!

Ah, to rise again to life! To set eyes on our deformities. And that poison, that kiss a thousand times damned! My weakness, the world's cruelty! My God, have pity, hide me, I can't defend myself! – I'm hidden yet un-hidden.

It's the fire that flares again with its damned soul.

## Ravings I – Foolish Virgin, The Infernal Spouse

*(Une Saison en Enfer: Délires I: Vierge Folle, L'Époux Infernal)*

Let us hear the confession of a companion in hell:

'O divine Spouse, my Lord, do not refuse the confession of the most sorrowful of your servants. I am lost. I am drunk. I am impure. What a life!

Forgiveness, divine Lord, forgiveness! Ah, forgiveness! What tears! And what tears again, later, I hope!

Later, I will know the divine Spouse! I was born His slave. – The other can beat me for now!

At present, I inhabit the world's depths! O my friends! ... No, not my friends...Never such ravings such torments...It's so stupid!

Ah, I suffer, cry out! I suffer truly. And yet all is permitted me, weighed down with the contempt of the most contemptible hearts.

Well then, let us confide this thing, though we repeat it twenty times more – just as drearily, as insignificant!

I am slave to the infernal Spouse, he who ruined the foolish virgins. It's indeed that very same demon. It's no spectre, it's no phantom. But I who have lost my wisdom, who am damned and dead to the world – they won't kill me! – How can I describe him to you! I can't speak any more. I am in mourning, I weep, I fear. A little coolness, Lord, if you please, if you graciously please!

I'm a widow...– I was a widow... – why yes, I was very respectable once, I was not born to be a skeleton! ... – He was almost a child...His mysterious sensitivities seduced me. I forgot all my human tasks to follow him. What a life! The true life is absent. We are not in this world. I go where he goes, I have to. And often he's angry with me, *me, poor soul*. The Demon! – He's a Demon you know, *he's not a man*.

He says: “I don’t like women. Love must be re-invented, that’s certain. All *they* do is long for security. Once gained, heart and beauty are set aside: only cold disdain remains, the fodder of marriage, nowadays. Or else I see women, with the marks of happiness, whom I could have made into fine comrades, devoured from the start by brutes as sensitive as posts...”

I listen to him make infamy of glory, charm of cruelty. “I’m of a distant race: my forefathers were Scandinavian: they slashed their sides, drank their own blood. – I’ll make cuts all over; I’ll tattoo myself, I long to be hideous as a Mongol: you’ll see, I’ll scream in the streets. I want to be mad with rage. Never show me gems, I’d crawl on the carpet and writhe. My treasure, I’d like to be stained all over with blood. I’ll never work...” On several nights, his demon seized me; we rolled about, I wrestled him! – At night, often, drunk, he lies in wait in the streets or houses, to frighten me to death. – “They’ll cut my throat, truly; it will be ‘disgusting’.” Oh, those days when he chooses to stroll about like a criminal!

Sometimes he speaks in a kind of tender patois, of death which brings repentance, of the wretches who must exist, of painful toil, and partings that rend hearts. In the hovels where we used to get drunk together, he would weep to see those around us, wretched cattle. He would help to their feet the drunks in dark alleys. He’d a wicked mother’s pity for little children. – He’d go about with the air of a little girl on the way to her catechism. – He feigned all knowledge, of commerce, art, medicine. – I followed him, I have to!

I could see the whole scene with which, in his mind, he surrounded himself: clothes, fabrics, furniture; I lent him emblems, another face. I saw all that touched him, as he would have created it for himself. When he seemed listless, I followed him, myself, in strange and complex deeds, far out, for good or ill: I was certain of never entering his world. How many hours of vigil, beside his dear sleeping body, questioning why he wanted to evade reality so deeply! No man every wished for it so. I realised – without fearing for him – that he might well prove a serious danger to society. – He knows perhaps secrets for *transforming life*? No, he only seeks them, I'd tell myself. Then, his charity is bewitched, and I'm its prisoner. No other soul would have had the strength – the strength of despair – to endure it – to be protected and loved by him! Besides, I could never imagine him with some other soul: one sees one's own Angel, never another's – I think. In his soul it was as if I were in a palace, emptied so none as base as self can be seen: that's it. Alas! I depended on him deeply. But what did he want with my dull cowardly existence? He made me no better, even though he failed to kill me! Sadly distressed, I sometimes said to him: "I understand you." He shrugged his shoulders.

So, my grief endlessly renewed, finding myself even more bewildered in my own eyes – as in all those eyes that would have wished to stare at me, had I not been condemned to be forgotten forever by all! – I became ever hungrier for his kindness. With his kisses and loving embraces, it was truly heaven, a sombre heaven, which I entered, and where I would gladly have been left, poor; deaf, dumb, blind. I was already used to it. I saw us as two good children, free to wander in the Paradise of sorrow. We were well suited. Deeply stirred, we toiled together. But, after a penetrating caress he would say: “How odd it will seem to you, when I’m no more, all you have been through. When you no longer have my arms beneath your neck; nor my heart to rest on, nor this mouth on your eyes. Because I must go far away, one day. And then, I must help others: it’s my duty. Though that’s scarcely appealing...dear soul...” Suddenly I saw myself, with him vanished, in the grip of vertigo, hurled into the most frightful darkness: death. I made him promise never to leave me. He gave it twenty times, that lover’s promise. It was as frivolous as my telling him: “I understand.”

Ah, I have never been jealous of him! He will never leave me, I think. To do what? He knows no one; he will never work. He wants to live like a sleepwalker. Would his goodness and kindness alone grant him rights in the world of reality? At times, I forget the pitiful state into which I’ve fallen: he will make me strong, we shall travel, we’ll hunt in the deserts, sleep on the pavements of unknown towns, without cares or troubles. Or I will wake, and laws and customs will have changed – thanks to his magical powers – the world, remaining the same, will leave me to my desires; joys, nonchalance. Oh, will you grant me the life of adventures that exists in children’s books, to repay me, I’ve suffered so? He cannot. I don’t know what’s ideal for him. He told me he had regrets, hopes: they can’t involve me. Does he talk to God? Perhaps I should address myself to God. I am in the deepest abyss, and no longer know how to pray.

If he explained his sadness to me, would I understand it any better than his raillery? He attacks me, spends hours making me ashamed of all in this world that has the power to touch me, indignant if I weep.

“– You see that elegant youth, entering that fine and peaceful house: he’s called Duval, Dufour, Armand, Maurice, who knows? A woman devoted herself to loving this spiteful fool: she died; she’s certainly a saint in heaven, now. You’ll kill me as he killed her. That’s our fate, we charitable hearts...” Alas, he had days when all human activity seemed to him a plaything of grotesque delirium; he would laugh horribly for hours! – Then, he would resume his pose of a young mother, a beloved sister. If he were only less savage, we would be saved! But his sweetness too is deadly. I submit to him. – Ah, I am mad!

One day perhaps he’ll miraculously vanish; but I must know if he’s to attain some heaven, so I may glimpse my little friend’s assumption!’

A strange ménage!

## Ravings II – Alchemy of the Word

*(Une Saison en Enfer: Délires II: Alchimie du Verbe)*

My turn. The history of one of my follies.

For ages I boasted of possessing all possible landscapes, and found the celebrities of modern painting and poetry absurd.

I loved idiotic pictures, fanlights, stage scenes, mountebanks' backcloths, inn-signs, popular prints; unfashionable literature, church Latin, erotic books with poor spelling, novels of grandmother's day, fairy tales, little books for children, old operas, empty refrains, naïve rhythms.

I dreamt of crusades, unrecorded voyages of discovery, republics without histories, wars of suppressed religion, moral revolutions, movements of races and continents: I believed in every enchantment.

I invented the colour of vowels! *A* black, *E* white, *I* red, *O* blue, *U* green. – I regulated the form and motion of every consonant, and, with instinctive rhythms, I flattered myself I'd created a poetic language, accessible some day to all the senses. I reserved the translation rights.

It was academic at first. I wrote of silences, nights, I expressed the inexpressible. I defined vertigos.

\*

Far from the village girls, birds and cattle,  
On my knees, what was I drinking, all  
Surrounded by tender hazel copses,  
In an afternoon mist, green and warm?

From that young Oise, what could I be drinking,  
– Mute elms, flowerless turf, dull sky –  
From yellow gourds, far from my dear hut slinking?  
A gold liquor that yields sweat by and by.

I made a dubious inn-sign – Weather  
Came coursing the heavens. At evening  
Lost in a virgin sand the wood's water,  
The wind, of God, the ponds re-icing:

– I could not drink: I saw gold, weeping!

\*

At four on a summer morning,  
The slumber of love still lasts.  
Under the hedge fade fast  
    Scents of the night's feasting.

Down there and already astir  
In the Hesperidean sun,  
In their vast workshop, as one,  
In shirtsleeves – the Carpenters.

In their deserts of foam, tranquilly,  
They prepare costly panelling  
    On which the city  
    Will daub its deceitful painting.

O, for those workmen, charming  
Subjects of a king of Babylon,  
Venus! Leave the lovers sleeping,  
Whose souls a crown have on.

    O Queen of the Shepherds  
Take strong drink to the workers too,  
    So their efforts may be deferred  
As they wait to bathe in the sea at noon.

\*

Poetical archaisms played a key role in my alchemy of the word.

I accustomed myself to pure hallucination: I saw quite clearly a mosque instead of a factory, a college of drummers consisting of angels, a salon in the depths of a lake; monsters, mysteries; a vaudeville title conjured up terrors before me.

Then I explained my magical sophisms with hallucinatory words!

I ended by treating my mental disorder as sacred. I was idle, prey to a heavy fever: I envied the happiness of beasts – caterpillars: that represent Limbo's innocence, moles: the sleep of virginity!

My character was embittered. I took my leave of the world in various ballads:

## SONG OF THE HIGHEST TOWER

Let it come, let it come  
The day when hearts love as one.

I've been patient so long  
I've forgotten even  
The terror and suffering  
Flown up to heaven,  
A sick thirst again  
Darkens my veins.

Let it come, let it come  
The day when hearts love as one.

So the meadow  
Freed by neglect,  
Flowered, overgrown  
With weeds and incense,  
To the buzz nearby  
Of foul flies.

Let it come, let it come  
The day when hearts love as one.

I loved the wilds, scorched orchards; faded shops, lukewarm drinks. I would drag myself through stinking alleys, and, eyes closed, offer myself to the sun, god of fire.

“General, if there’s one old cannon left on your ruined ramparts, bombard us with chunks of dried earth. Fire on the windows of splendid stores! Into the salons! Make the city eat its own dust. Oxidise the gargoyles. Fill the boudoirs with burning powdered rubies...”

Oh, the drunken gnat in the pub urinal, in love with borage, that a ray of light dissolves!

## HUNGER

If I've any taste, it's for barely  
Anything but stone and slurry.  
I breakfast ever on air,  
Coal, iron and the rockery.

My hungers, turn. Hungers, browse  
The field of sound.  
Suck the gaudy venom  
From the weedy ground.

Eat what's broken, pebbly,  
That old religious debris;  
Rocks from a past deluge,  
Loaves sown in grey valleys.

\*

The fox howled in the leaves  
Spitting out bright plumes  
From his poultry feast:  
Like him I self-consume.

The fruits and the veg  
Wait only for the pickers;  
But the spider in the hedge  
Eats violets, no others.

Let me sleep! Let me simmer  
On the fires of Solomon.  
Down the rust, boiling over,  
Mingling there with the Kedron.

At last, O happiness, O reason, I plucked from the sky the azure,  
which is of blackness, and I lived, a golden spark of *natural* light.  
From joy, I adopted the most clownish exaggerated expression  
possible:

It's found we see!  
What? – Eternity.  
It's the sun, mingled  
With the sea.

My immortal soul  
Keep your vow  
Despite empty night  
And the day's glow.

Thus you'll diverge  
From the mortal weal  
From the common urge,  
To fly as you feel...

– No hope, never,  
No entreaty here.  
Science and patience,  
Torture is real.

No more tomorrow,  
Embers of satin,  
Your own ardour  
The only duty.

It's found we see.  
– What? – Eternity.  
It's the sun, mingled  
With the sea.

\*

I became a fabulous opera: I saw that all beings are fated for happiness: activity is not life, but a way of wasting strength, an enervation. Morality is a weakness of the brain.

To every being, I felt, several *other* lives seemed due. This gentleman knows not what he does, he's an angel. This family is a pack of dogs. Before several men I have spoken aloud in a moment of their other lives. – Thus, have I loved a pig.

None of the sophistries of madness – that madness they lock away – were forgotten by me: I could recite them all, I know the system.

My health was threatened. Terror arrived. I fell into a slumber for several days, and, waking, continued in saddest dream. I was ripe for death, and by a perilous road my weakness led me to the confines of the world and Cimmeria, land of shadows and whirlwinds.

I was forced to travel, to distract myself from the enchantments thronging my brain. Over the sea, which I loved as if it were sure to cleanse me of defilement, I saw the consoling cross arise. I had been damned by the rainbow. Happiness was my fatality, my remorse, my worm: my life would forever be too immense to be devoted to strength and beauty.

Happiness! Its tooth, sweet unto death, warned me at cockcrow – *ad matutinam*, at *Christus venit*, – in the darkest cities:

O seasons, O chateaux!  
Where is the flawless soul?

The magic study I pursued,  
Of happiness, none can elude.

A health to it, each time  
The Gallic cock makes rhyme.

Ah! There's nothing I desire,  
It's possessed my life entire.

That charm has taken heart and soul  
Scattered all my efforts so.

O seasons, O chateaux!

The hour of its flight, alas!  
Will be the hour I pass.

O seasons, O chateaux!

\*

That's all past. I know these days how to greet beauty.

## The Impossible

(*Une Saison en Enfer: L'Impossible*)

Ah, that life of my childhood, the highway in all weathers,  
supernaturally sober, more disinterested than the finest of beggars,  
proud of having neither country nor friends, how foolish it was. –  
And only now do I realise!

– I was right to despise those fellows who never lose the  
chance for a caress, parasites on the cleanliness and health of our  
women, now they are in such slight accord with us.

I was wholly right in my disdain: since I am fleeing!

I'm fleeing!

I'll explain.

Yesterday, I was still sighing: 'Heaven! There are enough of  
us damned down here! I've already spent too long, myself,  
amongst this crew! I know them all. We'll always recognise each  
other; we find each other disgusting. Charity's unknown to us. But  
we're polite; our relations with people are perfectly correct.' Is it  
surprising! People! Merchants, fools! – We're not dishonoured –  
But the elect, how would they receive us? For there are  
pugnacious and joyous folk: a false elect since we need neither  
audacity nor humility to approach them. They are the sole elect.  
They never bless others!

Having found two *sous* of sense again – it's quickly spent! – I  
see my ills come of not realising soon enough that we are in the  
West. The western swamps! Not that I believe the light altered, the  
form extenuated, the movement astray... Well, then! Here my  
mind wants to burden itself absolutely with all the cruel  
developments the mind has suffered since the end of the East...it  
bears a grudge my mind!

...My two *sous* of sense are spent! – Mind has authority: it  
wants me to be in the West. It would have to be silenced for me to  
end as I wish.

I consigned to the devil the martyrs' palm-leaves, the light of art, the pride of inventors, the ardour of looters; I returned to the East and primal eternal wisdom – It seems that's a dream of gross idleness!

Yet I hardly dreamt of the pleasure of escaping from modern suffering. I'd not the bastard wisdom of the Koran in mind – But is there not true torture in the fact that, ever since that declaration of knowledge Christianity, man has cheated himself, proved the obvious, swollen with pleasure at repeating the proof, and lived only like that! Subtle torture, foolish; the source of my spiritual divagations. Nature could be bored, perhaps! Monsieur Prudhomme was born with Christ.

Is it not because we nurture mists! We eat fever with our watery greens. And the drunkenness! And tobacco! And ignorance! And devotions! – Isn't all that far from the thought, the wisdom of the East, the primeval land? Why a modern world, if they invent such poisons!

Men of the Church say: 'Understood. But you really mean Eden. Not for you, the history of eastern peoples. – It's true: it was Eden I dreamt of! What has that purity of ancient races to do with my dream!

The philosophers: The world has no age. Humanity simply moves about. You are in the West, but free to inhabit your East, as old as you wish it – and live there well. Don't be one of the defeated. Philosophers, you belong to your West.

My mind, be on your guard. No violent decisions on salvation. Stir yourself! – Ah, science is not swift enough for us!

– But I see my mind is asleep.

If it were always awake from now on, we would soon arrive at truth, which perhaps surrounds us with its angels weeping! ... – If it had been awake till now, I would never have yielded to pernicious instincts, in an immemorial age! ... If it had always been awake, I should be voyaging full of wisdom! ...

O Purity! Purity!

It's this very moment that has granted me a vision of purity! – By mind one goes to God!

Heart-rending misfortune!

## Lightning

(*Une Saison en Enfer: L'Éclair*)

Human labour! It's the explosion that lightens my abyss from time to time.

'Nothing's in vain: on to Science, forward!' Cries the modern Ecclesiastes, that's to say *The Whole World*. And yet the corpses of the wicked and idle still fall on the hearts of others...Ah! Quick, quick, a moment: there, beyond the night, that future recompense, eternal...shall we escape them? ...

– What can I do? I know work: and Science is too slow. How prayer gallops and light groans... I see that clearly. It's too simple, and the weather's too warm: they'll do without me. I've my duty: I'll be proud the way others are, in setting it aside.

My life's used up. Let's go! Cheat, do nothing, O the pity! And we'll exist by amusing ourselves, dreaming monstrous loves and fantastic universes, moaning and quarrelling with the world's shows, acrobat, beggar, artist, ruffian – priest! In my hospital bed, the smell of incense returned to me so strongly: guardian of the holy herbs, confessor, martyr...

I recognise now my rotten childhood education. So what! ...Let me be twenty, if the others are going to be twenty...

No! No! Now I rebel against death! Work seems too trivial for my pride: my betrayal to the world would be too brief a torment. At the last I'll attack to right and left...

Then – oh – poor dear soul, eternity would not be lost to us!

## Morning

(*Une Saison en Enfer: Matin*)

Once upon a time did I not have a pleasant childhood, heroic, fabulous, to be written on leaves of gold – too fortunate! For what crime, what error, have I merited present weakness? You who claim that the creatures sob with grief, that the sick despair, that the dead have bad dreams, try to recount my fall and my slumber. I can explain myself no better than the beggar with his incessant *Our Father's* and *Hail Mary's*. *I can speak no more.*

Yet today I think I've finished my tale of hell. It was hell, for certain; the ancient one, whose gates the son of man opened wide.

From the same desert, in the same night, always my weary eyes wake to the star of silver, always, without troubling the Kings of life, the three mages, heart, soul, and mind. When shall we go beyond the shores and mountains, to hail the birth of fresh toil; fresh wisdom, the rout of tyrants and demons, the end of superstition, to adore – as newcomers – Christmas on earth!

The song of the heavens, the march of peoples! Slaves, let us not curse life.

## Farewell

(*Une Saison en Enfer: Adieu*)

Autumn already! – But why regret an eternal sun, if we are engaged in discovering the divine light – far from races that die with the seasons.

Autumn. Our ship towering in the motionless fog turns towards the port of poverty, the enormous city with a sky that's flecked with fire and mud. Ah! The rotting rags; the bread soaked with rain, the drunkenness, the thousand loves that have crucified me! She'll never have done then, this ghoulish queen of millions of souls and corpses *who will be judged!* I see my skin ravaged again by mud and pestilence, worms filling my hair and my armpits, and bigger worms in my heart, stretched out among ageless unknowns, without feeling...I might have died there...Horrible imagining! I detest poverty.

And I fear winter because it's the season of comfort!

– Sometimes I see limitless beaches in the sky covered by white nations full of joy. A great golden vessel, above me, waves its multicoloured flags in the morning breeze. I've created all the feasts, all the triumphs, all the dramas. I've tried to invent new flowers; new stars, new flesh, new languages. I believed I'd gained supernatural powers. Ah well! I must bury my imagination and my memories! Sweet glory as an artist and story-teller swept away!

– I! I, who called myself magus or angel, exempt from all morality, I'm returned to the soil, with a task to pursue, and wrinkled reality to embrace! A peasant!

Am I wrong? Is pity the sister of death, for me?

Well, I shall ask forgiveness for nourishing myself with lies.  
Let's go.

But no friendly hand! And where to find help?

\*

Yes, the present hour is very severe at least.

Since I can say the victory is won: the gnashing of teeth, the hissing of flames, the pestilential sighs are fading. All the foul memories are vanishing. My last regrets flee. – My envy of beggars, brigands, friends of Death, all sorts of backward ones. – Damned ones, if I revenged myself!

It's necessary to be absolutely modern.

No hymns: hold the yard gained. Harsh night! The dried blood smokes on my face, and I've nothing at my back but that horrible stunted tree! ...Spiritual combat is as brutal as the warfare of men: but the vision of justice is God's delight alone.

Still, now is the eve. Let us receive every influx of strength and true tenderness. And at dawn, armed with an ardent patience, we'll enter into the splendid cities.

What did I say about a friendly hand? One real advantage, is that I can smile at old false loves, and blast those lying couples with shame – I've seen the hell of women down there: – and it will be granted me to *possess truth in a soul and a body*.

*April-August, 1873*

### Extract from the 'Voyant' Letter

*(Lettre à Paul Demeny: Charleville, 15 mai 1871)*

'Romanticism has never been properly judged. Who could judge it? The Critics! The Romantics! Who prove so clearly that the singer is so seldom the work, that's to say the idea sung and intended by the singer.

For *I* is another. If the brass wakes the trumpet, it's not its fault. That's obvious to me: I witness the unfolding of my own thought: I watch it, I hear it: I make a stroke with the bow: the symphony begins in the depths, or springs with a bound onto the stage.

If the old imbeciles hadn't discovered only the false significance of Self, we wouldn't have to now sweep away those millions of skeletons which have been piling up the products of their one-eyed intellect since time immemorial, and claiming themselves to be their authors!

In Greece, as I say, verse and lyre took rhythm from Action. Afterwards, music and rhyme are a game, a pastime. The study of the past charms the curious: many of them delight in reviving these antiquities: – that's up to them. The universal intelligence has always thrown out its ideas naturally: men gathered a part of these fruits of the mind: they acted them out, they wrote books by means of them: so it progressed, men not working on themselves, either not being awake, or not yet in the fullness of the great dream. Civil-servants – writers: author; creator, poet: that man has never existed!

The first study for the man that wants to be a poet is true complete knowledge of himself: he looks for his soul; examines it, tests it, learns it. As soon as he knows it, he must develop it! That seems simple: a natural development takes place in every brain: so many *egoists* proclaim themselves authors: there are plenty of others who attribute their intellectual progress to themselves! – But the soul must be made monstrous: after the fashion of the *comprachicos*, yes! Imagine a man planting and cultivating warts on his face.

I say one must be a *seer* (*voyant*), make oneself a *seer*.

The Poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, rational and immense *disordering* of *all the senses*. All forms of love, suffering, madness: he searches himself; he consumes all the poisons in himself, to keep only their quintessence. Unspeakable torture, where he needs all his faith, every superhuman strength, during which he becomes the great patient, the great criminal, the great accursed – and the supreme Knower, among men! – Because he arrives at the *unknown*! Because he has cultivated his soul, already rich, more than others! He arrives at the unknown, and when, maddened, he ends up by losing the knowledge of his visions: he has still seen them! Let him die charging among those unutterable, unnameable things: other fearful workers will come: they'll start from the horizons where the first have fallen!

.....

I'll go on:

So the poet is truly the thief of fire, then.

He is responsible for humanity, even for the *animals*: he must make his inventions smelt, felt, heard: if what he brings back from *down there* has form, he grants form: if it's formless he grants formlessness. To find a language – for that matter, all words being ideas, the age of a universal language will come! It is necessary to be an academic – deader than a fossil – to perfect a dictionary of any language at all. The weak-minded *thinking* about the first letter of the alphabet would soon rush into madness!

This language will be of the soul for the soul, containing everything, scents, sounds, colours, thought attaching to thought and pulling. The poet would define the quantity of the unknown, awakening in the universal soul in his time: he would give more than the formulation of his thought, the measurement of his *march towards progress*! An enormity become the norm, absorbed by all, he would truly be an *enhancer of progress*!

This future will be materialistic, you see. – Always filled with Number and Harmony, these poems will be made to last. – At heart, it will be a little like Greek poetry again.

Eternal art will have its function, since poets are citizens. Poetry will no longer take its rhythm from action: *it will be ahead of it*!

These poets will exist! When woman's endless servitude is broken, when she lives for and through herself, when man – previously abominable – has granted her freedom, she too will be a poet! Women will discover the unknown! Will her world of ideas differ from ours? – She will discover strange things, unfathomable; repulsive, delicious: we will take them to us, we will understand them.

Meanwhile, let us demand *new things* from the *poets* - ideas and forms. All the clever ones will think they can easily satisfy this demand: that's not so! .....

