

# **BREAD AND WINE**

Poems 1988 - 2009

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*At non erunt aeterna quae scripsit; non erunt fortasse, ille tamen scripsit tamquam essent futura.*  
- Pliny the Younger, on Martial

Poems in which the first letter of each line is not always capitalised  
are written in syllabic or experimental meters.

*AFTER MARTIAL, III, ii*

*Go quickly, little book:  
Seek readers for the ages  
Before some unread cook,  
Sweating in his kitchen,  
Rips out all your pages  
To wrap his chips and fish in.*

**PRAYER**

*If a few readers, through the ages,  
Buy, love, praise or understand these pages  
Then I will have had good wages –  
Though I'd thank God even more  
For two or three who do all four.*

### **TO A READER**

*My sister says you've read a page  
Of what I'm writing as I age.  
I like to think that, over tea  
On rainy days, you'll find a bit  
Of rhymed simplicity in it  
And perhaps a little wit,  
Though precious little majesty  
And far too much mortality.*

### **AU LECTEUR**

*Prends garde ! Tu consultes  
Des mots, plutôt pratiques,  
Écrits pour des adultes :  
Des vers non poétiques.*

### **ARS POETICA**

*Write of the real: love, hate, wine and grief.  
Let it be metered, simple, rhymed and brief.*

### **HER LAST POEM**

When I am dead, remember this for me:  
High Mass in the cathedral, wind on the sea,  
A storm coming and a glass of old wine,  
The music of Shakespeare's rhymes, the clear-eyed fine  
Smile of a girl, the red leaves of September.  
Remember, then, when I will not remember,  
Goya, Vermeer, the delicacy of the dove,  
And never me. Remember what I love.

### **CAESAR SENEX**

He sits in an old wicker chair –  
He can't get out of it these days –  
And pisses on himself. They tie him in:  
Not as a prisoner, of course:  
Just to be sure the old man won't fall out,  
Whose watery eyes stare at the rooves of Rome  
And the first, universal evening stars.

## THE IKON PAINTER

The man on the magic screen, flashing his colored,  
Instant electric messages, insists  
We all want to be happy – and *fulfilled*.  
He smiles, and doesn't see what's wrong with that.  
Nor do you, my friend. A glass of port?  
After my first divorce, I put on weight  
And drank a lot and even took bright drugs  
Which made me feel good like I can't describe.  
And so I stopped, with self-preserving sense.  
I didn't see my children any more.  
God, how I wanted happiness back then!  
Last weekend, at the opening, I declined  
Good caviar – intense and luscious grey  
Shining on icy silver – just because  
I like it so. Not many clients come  
To visit me, and my good friends –  
My loyal friends, who were supposed to be  
Bulwark against this solitude and age –  
Come rarely now. I rarely go to them.  
Now I'm married to another wife,  
Who likes me even less than did the last:  
I love her tenderly and faithfully  
And I give all the little rest I have  
To teaching my six fleeting children how  
To live – with small success, but I have hope.  
Mornings, I paint Madonnas, as you know:  
Gold and blue paint, drying on stiff wood –  
Here's another, which I think you'll like.  
I lose myself in them. I don't know why –  
Shine of the cold gold background, lighting halo,  
Depth forever in her ritual eye  
And rigid folds of azure. I don't try  
To be happy any more, although I am.

## SUMMER

My old grandfather had nothing to do.  
I was small; to me, everything was new.  
We went for a walk in the July heat  
down long roads past red poppies and ripe wheat.

## SEASON'S GREETINGS

The good gods of yore  
Are utterly undone:  
Enlightened, we adore,  
At Christmas, two new ones:  
Kneel to the god of More!  
Worship the god of Fun!

## VIEUX SNOB LXII

*in which He Develops la Tumeur de la Finesse*

He's aging too fast, next to this loud lady  
Monstrously badly dressed – one of the kind  
Whom in the street, in dance halls or in shady  
Bars, back then, he might have wined and dined  
And made proposals to. These days they feel  
Free, which is what they are. They order sweet,  
Bland, ignorant, expensive, vulgar meals –  
Coke with oysters, ketchup on fine meat.  
And there's worse! He fears the brainless chat:  
Her mouth is full, she lifts a dirty glass  
(God didn't make her pretty mouth for that)  
And O, sweet Jesus! what she says is crass.  
He calls the waiter. He's no longer able  
To stomach this. He asks for a different table.

## **LE CADRAN SOLAIRE**

Écoute le bruit sec du vent :  
Je vais là-bas auparavant.

## **THE COPY OF A COPY OF A COPY**

Lost in the depths of a museum,  
vague in a library's disarray,  
on a shelf, in the sand or a tomb,  
is a rich sculpture, a tuned poem,  
a torn cello score waiting for sound.  
This may be in such a place one day,  
maybe found and loved, or never found,  
maybe found, and read, and thrown away.

## **THE MUTE INGLORIOUS MILTON**

Extinct potential: no one knows  
The poems he was going to compose!  
He lived in promise, but he died in prose.



## TESTAMENT

These names on tombstones that involve our pain  
Will grow fainter in the wind and rain.  
The dead are planted in a heavy soil.  
We weep for them, even as we recoil  
Before the mouldy fact. We help each other,  
Dry the children's tears, console the brother.  
In this antique hush of family death,  
In this memorial to departed breath,  
There is dark sweetness, shadow, milk and honey,  
And estrangement, when we speak of money.

## ON REREADING OLD POEMS

I come back to perfect lines  
In ancient meters and old rhymes:  
Image and counsel, understood  
Like antique silver or worn, polished wood.

## THE CELLAR

The withered silence that she heard,  
The intimate remark deferred,  
Were what she needed not to know  
And hid above what was below.

"I can't" is what each might have said  
If conversation with the dead  
Were not a monologue that shed  
Dim light on what hung overhead.

### **AFTER BARNABE GOOGE**

You love love, my love, and I'll love cash.  
Love's a fleet illusion; hard cash lasts.  
I shall not be betrayed by shiny gold:  
It will stay with me even when I'm old.  
Like a devoted, brilliant metal saint,  
It will make no demand and no complaint.  
Darling, if later I still dream of you,  
It will not matter: money buys love, too.

### **PAUVRES VERS LUISANTS**

La rose ne peut plus lui plaire.  
Elle ne craint ni froid, ni feu,  
Seule et muette dans la terre  
Qui lui couvre ses frêles yeux.

### **OLD MAN FEEDING A CAT**

Old Tom calls old Tom: he wants to feed him.  
Tom fulfils Tom's need for Tom to need him.

### **VIEUX SNOB'S EPITAPH**

My time is done: to my disgust,  
I have discovered what I must.  
The love I thought was love was lust  
And even passion's turned to dust,  
But I've found something I can trust.

### **THE PSYCHOANALYST AT P. KUCHER'S TOMB**

Peter here was sexually loaded;  
He tried abstinence, but he exploded.

### **THE ORIGIN OF ORIGIN**

*(for Alex Roth)*

Coming from what we can't conceive,  
Going to what we can't conceive,  
Particles move in counterpoint, like fugues.  
They have no consciousness we're conscious of,  
But they have urgency, like God, or love.

## **OLD BELLE II**

Poor old Belle has found a spot  
Right on her nose. It looks like rot.  
She hopes it's a pimple, but it's not:  
It grows its own life. Old Belle knows  
It's like the darkness on a rose.  
She hopes the doctor has a magic answer.  
She hears the ancient wailing of the cancer.

## **MY MOTHER AT HER MIRROR**

All my life, and unknown to me,  
Bitterness and pride were marking me.

## **2 HISTOIRES D'AMOUR**

1  
For him, this was no sacred, ancient rite  
But just a lazy afternoon's delight,  
Pleasing and light, a little like fast food:  
Cheap thrills don't change you, they indulge your mood.  
He zips up and checks the time while she  
Dreams of children, love and poetry.

2  
They talk of weather and the plumber's bill  
But not why she might stay, or if she will.  
He lives out her absence: she is there  
Still, for a while, like perfume in the air  
Fading invisibly, while he embraces  
The shadows of the solitude he faces.

### **I AM THAT I AM**

*Now* is when you have been and will be;  
*Ago* is when you are, pervading me.  
I think I hear you speaking, wordlessly.

### **ANOREXIA**

*or the wish not to have a body*

Pale flowers failing in frail air,  
They are excessively aware,  
Refusing to grow sick and old  
And gothic truth they won't be told:  
Red blood dripping from fresh meat,  
Brilliant insects crushed beneath their feet.

### **ON AN INNOVATOR**

New art! And artless! But at least it sold.  
He broke new ground who could not till the old.

## **PORTRAIT OF A LADY**

"Don't talk to me of Plato!"  
She sang of here and now,  
Then turned into tomorrow,  
Which yesterday had sent,  
Bringing years of sorrow  
Which did not relent.  
What she wanted came and went,  
Becoming then, becoming gone.  
Now she sings a broken song.

## **THE RICH MAN**

*(for Elizabeth Daryush)*

The sun shines, pale in the November sky,  
Birds flit and make their melodies in trees  
Light with late fall, and he thinks he knows why  
He is alive in this uncertain breeze.  
The doorman opens golden doors. With ease  
He enters a world of porcelain and bright  
Antique silver piled with delicacies  
Brought from around the world for his delight.  
Tonight, at home, light gleaming on her hair,  
Adding another pleasure to his life,  
He'll turn in white sheets and caress the bare  
Delicate shoulders of his naked wife.  
Outside, in cold, the plants that bloomed in May  
Shrivel, confuse and crumble in decay.

### **ON MY FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY**

I learned to live, then to thrive,  
Then to renounce instead.  
But I've got used to being alive  
And not to being dead.

### **PLATO**

What, that's physical, is left of him?  
A tooth, a bleached white bone, a snatch of hair?  
Or is the physical bereft of him?  
The shadows of his words remain, like prayer.

### **LE SPLEEN**

Faith, hope and love are far away.  
Here, in silence, on a sunless day,  
Even appetite has lost its sheen.  
In a corner sits the brown toad, routine.

## **ON AN ABANDONED BUILDING**

They stumbled into formless green excess  
And stayed to locate and map wilderness,  
Bringing components with them: fine cut stone  
Placed geometrically in a muddy unknown:

Iron and mortar, nails and tongue-and-groove  
For doors, walls, fixtures, windows, steps and rooves.  
They built a church, shop or house: a shaped redoubt  
Where people came and lived their meaning out.

Someone sang Rossini or supplied  
Goods to those who did not want to die  
Like frogs or bacteria. Perhaps the head  
Of a family spoke here about the dead.

Broken stones remain, hardly discerned.  
Insects, mud and flowers have returned.

## **TO CELDRIC THE THIEF**

It's hard to understand a just God who  
Could make mosquitoes, cancer, shit and you.



*from* **THE WOMAN MARRIED TO THE CARPENTER**

...When I left him he was dumb with pain.  
He knows how old planks bite beneath the plane.  
The sawdust reassures him, and the sound  
Of screaming boards, now that I'm not around.  
After we slowly failed, he turned to friends,  
Hoping they'd understand, or would pretend.  
Then our sons grew up and went away,  
Deepening his good-natured, thick dismay.  
He sands a splinter, as if working wood  
Would smooth the ragged edges in his head.  
Lonely and useless, he did what he could:  
He concentrated on a piece of wood.

**REGRET**

These bright rose leaves are vivid, fresh and green:  
These petals, dropping from their flowers, seem  
As red as when we did not know their names.  
Fresh but not new: the flowers are the same.  
The ignorant sun burns down on me and them.  
Springs, Falls and Summers have come back since then  
Unchanged, but we have changed. A blind disease  
Has spread through us, subtle and unsuspected.  
Nor sun nor you nor I could have expected  
Flesh would change so among these constant leaves.  
Something has altered. Something is bereaved,  
And you're not here now. These are another's hands,  
Aging in time I cannot understand.

### **W. H. AUDEN AT FIFTY**

Like an intimate, quintessential scar,  
After long years, your face is who you are.

### **ON AN INSECT IN AMBER**

Was it a way to God, a resurrection  
Into amber, out of imperfection?  
Out of wild detail, all part, unwhole,  
And knowing nothing of its insect soul?  
It lived unconsciously with what it had:  
Hunger and cold, attack and pain were bad  
And life, alertly warmed in sun, was good  
And there was nothing that it understood.  
And there was nothing.  
This is nothing too:  
A thought not knowing what it's meant to do,  
Wandering improbability  
Until it reaches immobility:  
Definition, clear and static form,  
Permanent, pure, although no longer warm.

### **ET LACRIMATUS EST IESUS**

...then he touched the cadaver –  
it had started decaying –  
and I could not tell whether  
it was the Lord's hands trembling  
or the loved corpse, returning.

## EINSTEIN

Light is Queen. Distance and Time  
Change as they must to keep her sublime.

## DISTANCE

Le quotidien devenait poignant :  
Il vit et vieillit en s'éloignant,  
S'abstenant, ne s'approchant de rien,  
Vouvoyant Dieu, sa femme et son chien.

## OLD WOMAN AT MASS

*(for William Byron Webster)*

I

This book trembles in my hand.  
I have a Mass to understand  
In a still church, under a spire.  
The chalice wavers in gold fire.  
Something escapes the bread and wine:  
Latin, silent, out of time.

II

If this rite is ignorance,  
A futile need for penitence,  
A spectacle, an old delusion,  
Then this silver-gilt effusion's  
Only solace for tired men,  
Ink from Haydn's mortal pen.

### III

Now, here, an adequation yields  
Bursts of color on bright fields,  
Attracting flesh to fleeting treasure,  
Space and number giving pleasure:  
No beginning, cause or ends.  
Fragrance falls on random winds.

### IV

O, nevertheless identity  
Will search for its destiny!  
No pleasure, friend or family,  
No customs of mortality,  
Wine, hue or drug could give me this,  
Not even furious lovers' bliss.

### V

Music was scraped from Haydn's pen:  
Fugitive man. But even when,  
Wrought of dust and vacancy,  
The Masses were perfunctory,  
Finite, distant or mundane,  
Sacred Masses they remain.

### VI

I pray in passion. I will die.  
Mortality was crucified:  
The rite that, still, I celebrate  
Is our ancestors' estate.  
I turn, like them, toward Bethlehem,  
Praying, to be with them and Him.

## THE WIND AND THE GLASS

Drinking from the bottle would be crass:  
He always made himself drink from a glass.  
It was often dirty, and he, distraught,  
But he kept some dignity, he thought,  
If only because of the glass, and the staying at home:  
He had learned to wield the glass alone.  
The icy wind wailed just outside the door:  
He drank, and didn't hear it any more.  
Though he was one who didn't suffer fools  
Gladly he would have broken a few rules  
For someone – anyone – with whom to speak,  
Especially when the wind began to shriek.  
The problem was, he figured, they're all dead.  
The problem was the memories in his head.  
The banshees moaned outside his fragile door:  
He drank, and didn't hear them any more.  
The problem was the passing of the past;  
The problem was more precious liquid splashed  
On ancient trousers that do not smell good;  
The problem was, you see, he understood.  
He hears the old wind keen outside his door  
And thinks how much he loved that sound, before  
He turned into a dying, drunken bore.  
He doesn't like that howling any more.

### **OLD SNOB'S OBITUARY**

*the gentleman who became too fine to live in the world*

Too many trials he was turning from!  
Cheap thrills, bad breath, bad grammar, chewing gum,  
Loud clothes and conversation; indiscreet  
Women who put on make-up in the street  
Or yawn, smoke, scratch themselves, grimace and stare,  
Synthetic perfume crouching in their hair;  
Businessmen – brown shoes with navy blue,  
Hats indoors and everything brand new –  
Aiming smoke and personal questions at you;  
Stories of sex and money, neither true;  
Red roses sent to Mother or to friends;  
Watery stale coffee, plastic pens.  
So he grew old, fat, nasty and sublime  
On harpsichords, cigars, *foie gras* and wine.  
Born *extra fin*, he blossomed in finesse  
And now rots in genteel loneliness.

### **VIEUX SNOB ON HIS EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY**

Four limber parts and one stiff one –  
Dammit! I had lots of fun.  
But things have changed. What can be done  
With four stiff parts and one soft one?

### **EPITAPH FOR A HACK**

I was a journalist. I worked all day  
To make a magazine you threw away.  
Ten thousand days I served my paper masters  
Updated trivia and fresh disasters.

### **TO A LUMPENINTELLECTUAL**

We tried to understand your book:  
No matter what approach we took,  
We damn near drowned in gobbledygook.

### **FLUX**

*Midnight.* As he marked the time,  
Entering a date, like fixing rhyme,  
It moved beyond the scope of verse  
Into the teeming universe.

### **LASCIATE OGNE SPERANZA VOI CH'INTRATE**

No one wants to think it could be sin,  
And yet there is a tiny twitch of doubt:  
As ye sow, or as ye stick it in,  
So shall ye reap, in terms of what comes out.

### **PICARDY II**

This is back country the Parisian disdains.  
They don't stop now, but you still hear the dark trains  
screaming through the old Picardy wind and rain.  
The outlines of the Gothic churches remain  
near the closed shops and the abandoned cafés.  
Lichen ages, and the ancient stone decays.

### **VIEUX SNOB'S LOVE POEM**

Darling! The remains of life with me!  
Enough to chill you to the very bone.  
But I've become your daily company  
And you don't want to live and die alone.



## WHAT THEY WERE LOOKING FOR

They are lying side by side,  
Each one searching deep inside.  
Is it love or is it sin?  
He penetrates; she takes him in.  
She exposes as he pries  
But nobody finds paradise  
In a bed in which he lies.  
Their two bodies are laid bare  
But they find little. They lie there.

## EPIGRAM LIV

Drink to Saint Originality!  
The gods love them who hate conformity!  
(Except, of course, those few who may have meant  
Something actually different.)

## SYNTHETICS

Maybe you don't recognise  
My good old face – it's been revised:  
New teeth, my nose a smaller size,  
Colored lenses on my eyes.  
My bosom has been optimised  
But my little ears are where  
They were before (unlike my hair).  
What was isn't what you see:  
Turn on the music, lights, TV and me!

## **THE POETS**

These priests of Modern Artistry  
And Neosensitivity  
Tinker with symbol, image, sound  
And try too hard to be profound.

## **CONTEMPT**

It needs no arrogance,  
Does not require hate,  
Feeds on incompetence,  
Imbibes the second-rate  
And stares, implacably,  
At everything that you will never be.

## **THE FUNERAL**

Here we are very  
still, ordinary,  
bored and badly dressed,  
too heavy with flesh.  
There was a time when  
we were all children,  
dreaming of the best.

*from* **APRIL IN PICARDY**

...The old air warms, a wood dove calls,  
Gillyflowers glow on the stone walls;  
Rising from Gothic ruins, pale sun shines  
Into the east rooms while young mothers, free  
Of husbands and small children, brew their tea  
In quiet kitchens, looking out on shrubs and pines  
Filling with thrushes, light and melody:  
April morning, here in Picardy.

#### **OLD SNOB'S EPITAPH FOR HIS DEAD MISTRESS**

Weep no more, dead lovely;  
Now I will be true:  
Your beauty in my memory,  
Your moods down there with you.

#### **HYPOCHONDRIA**

The rented flat was silent; nothing moved  
Her, nothing happened; her life was the bare  
Reflection of gray light on stagnant smooth  
Water; of this, vaguely, she was aware.  
Still, a voice inside had always said,  
*Something will come of this; something will come,*  
And she had thought there was a life ahead:  
Someone who, one day, she would become.  
Yet no real friend, no lover and no child,  
No house, no garden that needed her care,  
No work of art had come, not even wild  
Illusion: nothing, nothing she could share  
With anyone. No one had ever stayed.  
Sickness filled the life she had not made.

## NOT ONE OF THEM WILL FALL

One summer morning I found,  
next to the bathroom sink, bound  
inside a drop of water,  
a mosquito-like creature  
and for a moment I thought  
of freeing it, but did not.  
That night it was still striving  
and very slowly dying.

## LOVE

*Do you remember, he said, the time one Fall  
you and I picnicked under that great oak tree?  
Your hair was dishevelled in September breeze.  
You took my hand and told me you were happy.  
She stared a long time at the decaying trees,  
and said No. I don't remember that at all.*

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Father swelled at first,  
Mother swelled at last:  
Into the world I burst,  
Into time I passed  
And as I built my past  
I took myself a wife  
And took up time and space  
And lived a busy life:  
A time that time erased.

### **TO THE AUTHOR OF A TRITE BOOK**

You took your sextant and departed  
Into waters fully charted:  
It was done before you started.

### **DEATH ON WHEELS**

The thing's wheeled off: God knows where it's going.  
We look away, then continue chatting  
about sports, neighbors, weather, not asking  
what chances the wretch might have of lasting  
another weekend. Why are we talking  
trivia? Silence. Someone says "He's doing  
just fine," as if what we all know's coming  
isn't. We have lost the art of praying.  
If we faced the truth, we'd all be screaming.

### **THE DILAPIDATED HEART**

I kneel and pray here, under a Gothic spire,  
Seeking unbodied love without desire.

## THE SOLITUDE OF THE SECOND-RATE

And the seconds, also, are keen,  
they who make the art called minor,  
for they have glimpsed something finer  
and they know what the best have seen.

## DESPAIR

I hear the sharp cry of the cat's quarry,  
once! Evening light moves horizontally  
on the lawn I walk across, a frail glass  
of red wine in my hand helping me pass  
through shadows. Sometimes I hear the sad call  
of the dove or the slow call of the owl  
and the shadows move on, and I recall  
what I saw in Africa, or the smell  
of disinfectant in a hospital.  
My friend Monville's come by again, to tell  
the third or fourth version of the same tale;  
I pour him plenty of the good red wine.  
It isn't that I'm not conscious of time,  
it's just that I've set up fragile, thin walls  
adorned with artefacts, silver and fine  
etchings. I drink all the cognac I dare:  
it helps me forget, or at least ignore,  
what's on the other side, though I'm aware,  
of course, that it will soon come through these walls,  
that at best I have a brief interval,  
that I might perhaps have found grace somewhere,  
that every stranger was my brother,  
that we should be kinder to each other,  
that solitude is excruciating,  
that dark cold and the cold dark are waiting.

### **ON A DANDY**

His silk and Shetland clothes  
(The only things he knows)  
Customize and hide  
The useless stuff inside.

### **THE ABSENCE OF SPACE-TIME**

No second, third or even first dimension:  
No time, no line, and so no comprehension.

### **THE SUPERMARKET**

Gray roots and a bald patch on her head;  
her old ankles swell like rising bread.  
On her table, this plastic ivy,  
rich green and shiny, might look pretty  
next Sunday, when her niece comes to tea.

## **THE CONCERT**

Only old people are present,  
overdressed, shaky, hesitant:  
Madame smells of disinfectant;  
Monsieur has spittle on his face,  
bumps people as he finds a place  
to sit, and then he drops his cane.  
Silence comes. The rich violins  
take his mind off the routine pain.  
The music seduces his wife,  
recalling her passions and sins.  
She thinks that, surely, her long life,  
the beat she still feels in her pulse,  
ought to have led to something else.

## **VERY TECHNICAL POEM**

I've lived my life with paper and pens,  
comments in margins, books as friends,  
examining intrinsic, rhymed facts  
beyond my being, not gestures or acts  
done, or the sublime, complex confession  
of love, but lucid paper expression.



### **REDSHIFT**

Dark power races here and there;  
Energy is everywhere  
As the gray shadow, gravity,  
Is driven to infinity.

### **CARVED ON A TOMBSTONE**

I don't change. I don't betray.  
I mean what I do not say.  
Now, stranger, go away:  
You'll be back another day.  
I have nothing more to say.

## UNE CHAROGNE

- Baudelaire

Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme,  
Ce beau matin d'été si doux :  
Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme  
Sur un lit semé de cailloux,

Les jambes en l'air, comme une femme lubrique,  
Brûlante et suant des poisons,  
Ouvrait d'une façon nonchalante et cynique  
Son ventre plein d'exhalaisons.

Le soleil rayonnait sur cette pourriture,  
Comme afin de la cuire à point,  
Et de rendre au centuple à la grande Nature  
Tout ce qu'ensemble elle avait joint ;

Et le ciel regardait la carcasse superbe  
Comme une fleur s'épanouir.  
La puanteur était si forte, que sur l'herbe  
Vous crûtes vous évanouir.

Les mouches bourdonnaient sur ce ventre putride,  
D'où sortaient de noirs bataillons  
De larves, qui coulaient comme un épais liquide  
Le long de ces vivants haillons.

Tout cela descendait, montait comme une vague,  
Ou s'élançait en pétillant ;  
On eût dit que le corps, enflé d'un souffle vague,  
Vivait en se multipliant.

Et ce monde rendait une étrange musique,  
Comme l'eau courant et le vent,  
Ou le grain qu'un vanneur d'un mouvement rythmique  
Agite et tourne dans son van.

Les formes s'effaçaient et n'étaient plus qu'un rêve  
Une ébauche lente à venir,  
Sur la toile oubliée, et que l'artiste achève  
Seulement par le souvenir.

Derrière le rocher une chienne inquiète  
    Nous regarde d'un œil fâché,  
Epiant le moment de reprendre au squelette  
    Le morceau qu'elle avait lâché.

– Et pourtant vous serez semblable à cette ordure,  
    A cette horrible infection,  
Etoile de mes yeux, soleil de ma nature,  
    Vous, mon ange et ma passion !

Oui ! telle vous serez, ô la reine des grâces,  
    Après les derniers sacrements,  
Quand vous irez, sous l'herbe et les floraisons grasses,  
    Moisir parmi les ossements.

Alors, ô ma beauté ! dites à la vermine  
    Qui vous mangera de baisers,  
Que j'ai gardé la forme et l'essence divine  
    De mes amours décomposés !

## CARRION

Recall the thing we saw, my divine one,  
    That soft, fine summer morn  
At the turn in the path: vile carrion  
    On a bed of small stone,

Legs spread like a harlot's thighs, obscenely  
    Burning, sweating poisons,  
The casual, cynical, opened belly  
    Full of exhalations.

The sun shone on this decaying creature,  
    Cooked it to perfection,  
As if to give richly back to Nature  
    What it had joined as one,

And the sky looked at the superb carcass,  
    Like a flower in bloom.  
The stench was so strong that, there on the grass,  
    You thought that you would swoon.

The flies swarmed upon this putrid belly;  
And out of it poured black  
Legions of maggots, like a thick jelly  
Along a living rag.

All of that like a wave, rising, falling,  
Bright and revived,  
As if the body, with vague breath swelling,  
Lived and multiplied.

And this world exhaled a strange music like  
Wind and water churning:  
Or a winnower's grain, movements rhythmic,  
Always moving, turning.

Into a dream these forms have evanesced,  
A sketch coming slowly,  
Canvas forgot; the artist will finish  
Only through memory.

A worried she-dog, from behind the stone,  
Looks at us with hatred,  
Waiting to take back from the skeleton  
Her morsel, deserted.

– And yet you also will be like this slime,  
This frightful infection,  
You, sun of my nature, O star of mine,  
My angel and passion!

Yes! Even such will you be, O queen of grace,  
After extreme unction,  
When you rot under rich blossoms and grass,  
Among dry skeletons.

Then, my beauty, tell the kissing vermin  
You are the fine food of,  
That I've kept the form and essence divine  
Of my decomposed love!