

## 9 PAGES

(16 poems by Dickinson-Brown from *The Dilapidated Heart* and *Bread and Wine*,  
followed by selections from *Notes pour mes petits-enfants / Notes for My Grandchildren*)

### THE ROMAN ROAD

There was a road here, long ago,  
Where now September beeches glow,  
Where the Roman ruin yields  
Artifacts from the ploughed fields.  
Old wind and rain have come and gone,  
Effacing things. They will this song.  
Here where September beeches grow  
There was a road once, long ago.

### HER LAST POEM

When I am dead, remember this for me:  
Furious morning birdsong, wind on the sea,  
A storm coming and a glass of old wine,  
The grace of the color green, the clear-eyed fine  
Smile of a girl, a grey horse in a stable.  
Remember, then, when I will not be able,  
The cry of stags, the delicacy of doves  
And never me. Remember what I loved.

### HUITAINE

Charme, grâce et style ! Il fait sien  
L'art de dire et d'écrire bien,  
Dit, avec élégance, rien.

### BAR-ROOM

Three magicians, middle-aged,  
Past their passion, past their rage,  
Prestidigitating, drinking,  
While their little time is shrinking.  
They are doing, just like you,  
What so many try to do:  
Make the huge, consuming past  
Disappear inside a glass.

## **AT NAPOLEON'S TOMB**

Silent, he abdicates  
Inside concentric walls.  
The crowd reverberates,  
Loud in marble halls.  
His death made half the Empire weep.  
Now he waits forever in his sleep.

## **LA VEUVE**

Après sa mort elle prit un amant,  
Meublant sa solitude. Elle l'aimait bien.  
Ce n'était pas ce que c'était avant,  
Mais c'était vivant : c'était mieux que rien.

## **AN OLD MAN CONTEMPLATES HIS GRAND-DAUGHTER**

*adapted from Ghirlandaio's painting in the Louvre*

She is lovely face and form,  
White teeth, and her complexion warm  
As sunny cherries, full of now,  
Like a lover's pretty vow,  
Like biting into ripened fruit,  
Like letters brimming with good news,  
Like flirting with the absolute,  
Nothing in the world refused  
Her, fresh in hope, delight and trust,  
Far from corrosion, far from dust.

## **SKINNY SONNET I**

I love you more than flies love honey;  
More than the businessman loves money;  
More than my dog loves everyone;  
More than carrion loves the sun;

More than the butterfly loves its flower;  
More than Bonaparte loved power;  
More than bacteria love to spread;  
More than the living fear the dead.

My love will last as long as taxes,  
Long as the lover in bed relaxes  
Airily in springtime breeze:  
As long as laughter, death, disease.

Perhaps I won't love quite so long  
But this is a pretty song.

\*

Take yourself a wife!  
Hold within your arms  
The very stuff of life!  
Penetrate her charms.

But age will mar her face  
And it will wither you.  
What the years don't erase,  
Misunderstandings do.

Exuberance of flesh  
Falters in duress.  
Then, in your distress,  
Marry loneliness.

### **INCIPIENCE**

Music is her toy.  
Heartbeats are her joy.  
She knows her parents' voices;  
In them she rejoices.  
She moves with her mother's motion,  
Grows in their commotion  
And enters the huge bold  
World nine months old.

### **SHOPKEEPER**

The old man sits in silence at his door,  
Watching a fly buzz: one fly, dropping in.  
He knows that when he's dead, there'll be no more  
Small shops to do your local shopping in.

Watches, washing machines, screws, nails, plugs, wires  
Crowd dusty corners. Much will never be sold  
To the old ones who come: the sick, retired,  
Lonely, the poor who have no cars, the cold

From off the street. She knew, before she died.  
He's happy that she isn't there to moan  
About his failure. When she was alive  
He was cruel to her. Now he dines alone,

Dreaming of her he never quite deserved  
And all the customers he does not serve.

## NEW MOVIE

The script, the tunes, the acting aren't much good:  
Explosions, orgasms and Hollywood.  
The movie titillates with sex and crime  
But this is how we like to kill our time:  
Snickering at the latest dirty jokes  
And sobbing on the sofa with our cokes.

## THIRTEEN WAYS TO WRITE A BAD POEM

*Literary:*

This verse ethereal is what thou hast.

*Allusive:*

Gertrude's pigeons, Proust's cakes, Shelley's past.

*Obscure:*

I piddle on the yellow moon, and you.

*Egocentric-masturbatory:*

I turn in bright me, and the world turns too.

*Prosaic:*

My aunt served me a cup of breakfast tea.

*Sentimental:*

Love, your caress is a soft symphony.

*Pornographic:*

My Love! My God! I live to fondle knees!

*Precious:*

Ah! The exquisite *paleur* of the quail!

*Political:*

Fashionable senators in jail.

*Personal-Confessional:*

Though it's a subject Jane Austen avoids,

Let's chat a bit about my hemorrhoids.

*Mismetered:*

I think I've only occasionally heard,

Or seen printed, a much more confusing word.

*Misrhymed:*

This is a sorry misrhymed poem a-

Bout the incompetence of a writer.

*Pseudo-experimental:*

Broken cor

ners of me

tric lines bore

me. This po

em has no

wit.

## DISTANCE

Parce que tout devient trop poignant  
Je vis et vieillis en m'éloignant,  
M'absentant, ne m'approchant de rien,  
Vouvoyant Dieu, ma femme et mon chien.

## LA PLUS BELLE DÉCLARATION D'AMOUR QU'IL AIT CONNUE

Un jour d'hiver, elle lui a dit,  
*Il fait froid, chéri, viens dans mon lit,*  
Et le pauvre, un peu gonflé, a dit,  
*Un gros plein de soupe comme moi?*  
Et elle a dit, dans son désarroi,  
*Mon amour, tout ce que j'ai, c'est toi.*

## OLD WOMAN AT MASS

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 Mozart'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 routines of mortality,  
Wine, hue or drug could give me this,  
Not even furious lovers' bliss.

V

Music was scraped from Mozart'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.  
I am with them. I pray I am with Him.

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***Selections from Notes pour mes petits-enfants / Notes for My Grandchildren***

Il existe un genre de science-fiction qui présente  
un monde post-moderne habité de gens violents, brutaux, dégénérés,  
errant comme des aveugles dans les ruines d'une civilisation.  
Ce n'est pas de la fiction.

\*

There is a sort of science fiction set in a post-modern world  
of violent, brutal, degenerate people, wandering blindly  
among the ruins of civilization.  
It isn't fiction.

\*

Vous qui vous réjouissez à l'idée  
d'un homme insignifiant dans un univers sans limite, cherchez donc  
dans le vaste désert de l'espace une seule cathédrale, un Parthénon,  
un Angkor Vat ou une créature qui pense.

\*

Fools seek the extraordinary, the exotic.  
Look at the sparrows & the poppies!  
Remember Dürer's dandelions.

\*

Les imbéciles courent après l'extraordinaire et l'exotique.  
Voilà les moineaux ! Voilà les coquelicots !  
Souviens-toi des pissenlits de Dürer !

\*

En France, la loi est comme la Reine du Muguet :  
on est heureux de voter pour elle, mais on ne lui obéit pas.

\*

You who, strangely, gloat over man's insignificance in a limitless universe  
would do well to scan the desert of space for a single cathedral, a Parthenon,  
an Angkor Vat, or anyone who can think.

\*

Au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, la musique devint l'art de l'orgasme.  
Au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, la musique devint l'art de la masturbation.

\*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, music became the art of the orgasm.  
In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became the art of masturbation.

\*

I have my own culinary eco-system: I don't eat lettuce.  
Rabbits eat lettuce, & I eat rabbits.

\*

J'ai mon propre écosystème : je ne mange pas de salade.  
Les lapins mangent de la salade, et moi, je mange les lapins.

\*

Méfiez-vous d'un homme qui n'aime ni manger ni boire ni rire.

\*

Never trust a man who doesn't eat & drink heartily,  
& never trust a man who doesn't laugh.

\*

The gods made us mediocre, egoistic, lazy, sneaky,  
hypocritical & lustful, then crowned us with stupidity  
so we would not recognize ourselves.

\*

Les dieux nous ont faits médiocres, égoïstes, paresseux, sournois,  
hypocrites et sensuels, puis ils nous ont couronnés de stupidité  
pour qu'on ne se reconnaisse pas.

\*

Nous ne vivons plus avec l'art : il a été placé dans une maison de retraite.  
Le dimanche, parfois, on lui rend visite.

\*

La bourgeoisie est la seule classe qui se déteste.

\*

We no longer live with art: it's been moved to a retirement home.  
On Sundays, sometimes, we visit it.

\*

Aujourd'hui, nous payons les agriculteurs pour qu'ils ne cultivent pas ;  
demain, peut-être, nous les paierons pour ne pas devenir agriculteurs.  
Moi, je saurais ne pas être agriculteur.

\*

What a fine thing it is to own a fast, beautiful car, with rare wood & leather seats!  
Pity you can't be buried in it.

\*

We now pay farmers not to grow things.  
Perhaps one day we'll pay people not to be farmers.  
I could manage that.

\*

The bourgeoisie is the only class that attacks itself.

\*

Quelle joie d'être propriétaire d'une belle voiture puissante,  
avec climatisation et des sièges en cuir !  
Dommage qu'on ne puisse s'y enterrer.

\*

Getting married is like playing the lottery:  
you don't know anybody who's won, but you think you will.

\*

Se marier, c'est comme jouer à la Loterie :  
tu ne connais personne qui ait gagné, mais tu crois en ta chance.

\*

The problem with your average intellectual is that he isn't.

\*

Le problème avec les intellectuels, c'est qu'ils ne le sont pas.

\*

Man is but a speck in an unfathomably huge, expanding universe.  
Only God & the speck know this.

\*



L'homme n'est qu'une poussière dans un univers énorme et peu sondable.  
Il n'y a que Dieu et la poussière qui le savent.

\*

Comme le bonheur, l'originalité vient d'elle-même ou ne vient pas.  
La chercher, c'est ne pas la trouver.

\*

Happiness & originality come by themselves or do not come at all.  
If you go looking for them, you won't find them.

... / ...

Life is a conjunction of misery & joy.

\*

La vie est une union de la misère et de la joie.

\*

The fusion of music & words, Gregorian chant, or a Mass by Byrd or Bach, Mozart or Haydn:  
celebrated in a fine cathedral, it is the richest experience available on earth.

\*

La fusion de la musique avec la parole sacrée :  
un chant grégorien, une Messe de Byrd ou de Vivaldi, de Fauré ou de Haydn...  
La célébration d'une telle Messe dans une grande cathédrale  
est l'expérience la plus riche qui soit sur la terre.

\*

La vie est un palimpseste.

\*

Life is a palimpsest.

\*

There are moments when I am lost in contemplation or awareness  
of someone or of something else: the wind in the leaves of a tree,  
a spider in its web, an old woman in the street, a friend's joy.  
At these times my self-consciousness is not perhaps dissolved, but it is minimal,  
& I approach something more & better than myself: God, or the Universe.

\*

Il est des moments où nous nous perdons dans la contemplation d'un autre  
ou d'une chose : le vent dans des feuillages, une araignée dans sa toile,  
un enfant dans la rue, la vie d'un ami. Pendant ces moments la conscience de soi  
n'est peut-être pas dissoute, mais elle est minimale.  
Nous approchons ainsi de quelque chose de plus grand et de meilleur que nous :  
Dieu, ou l'Univers.