

COLIN MATTHEWS
SEASCAPES
CLAIRE BOOTH · MARCUS FARNSWORTH
THE NASH ENSEMBLE · JESSICA COTTIS



onyx

COLIN MATTHEWS b.1946

SEASCAPES

SEASCAPES (2019/20)

Text: Sidney Keyes (1922-1943)

1	1.	The Island City	3.16
2	2.	From: North Sea	1.11
3	3.	Night Estuary	3.12
4	4.	Interlude	0.34
5	5.	Seascape	5.12

AS TIME RETURNS (2017/18)*

Text: Ivan Blatný (1919-1990)

6	1.	Black	0.31
7	2.	Ba, Ba, Black Sheep	1.58
8	3.	Autumn	4.08
9	4.	The Drifter Sleeps in the Meadow	1.38
10	5.	Small Variation	2.20
11	6.	The Life of Bees	1.18
12	7.	Interlude 1	0.38
13	8.	Autumn III	3.19
14	9.	Interlude 2	0.55
15	10.	If you came with me	3.05
16	11.	The Last Poem / Fate	1.51

THE ISLAND (2007)

Text: Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926)

17	i.	the island	3.16
18	ii.	the farms	4.07
19	iii.	the star	2.24

A LAND OF RAIN (2016/17)

Text: Nicholas Moore (1918–1986), after Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867)

20	1.	Spleen (I've Got a Right to Sing the Blues)	2.17
21	2.	Dreamscape	3.12
22	3.	For the Tomb of a Press Baron	1.21
23	4.	Sonnet 117	1.28
24	5.	King Juda of Bikini (The Lethal River)	1.42
25	6.	A Bad Dream Recurring	2.13
26	7.	Potpourri	1.25
27	8.	Accidie	2.24
28	9.	Désuétude (fragments)	2.11
29	10.	Envoi: After the Deluge	1.37
30	11.	Spleen	3.39

CLAIRE BOOTH soprano · **MARCUS FARNSWORTH*** baritone

THE NASH ENSEMBLE · **JESSICA COTTIS** conductor



COLIN MATTHEWS: TWENTY-NINE SONGS

The song with piano has become almost a defunct genre these days, except in the special enclave of the United States. The song with instrumental ensemble, though, thrives, not least in the hands of Colin Matthews. Why should this be? It may have something to do with the importance of timbre in today's music. Every one of the songs on this album contains pleasures of finely nuanced instrumental blending; this is a composer who, for all the characteristic energy of his orchestral writing (and of many numbers here), admires and achieves delicacy – a word that springs to mind perhaps because not just of how sensitively Matthews sets the very word 'delicate' in the second song of the cycle *A Land of Rain*, but also of how the connotations of that word are teased out in the surrounding music, delicacy of instrumentation certainly included. In the first bar of this song, 'Dreamscape', scored for woodwind and percussion (piano, with touches of harp and vibraphone to begin with), the colour changes approximately every half-beat – and one has to say 'approximately' here because the rhythm, too, is fluid.

We have dived into the most fully scored of these works (17 players) and into what is also a collection in different voices, as the composer partly explains in his note: one minute French languor (in which Matthews has made himself an expert through his Debussy orchestrations), cousin to Kurt Weill the next. But we could enter anywhere and find choice scoring.

As to the no less enjoyable varieties of voice and character, they are prompted partly by the voice – and the singer – for whom Matthews is writing at the time. A soprano is not a baritone, and Claire Booth is not Marcus Farnsworth. But Matthews's response is governed, too, by his choice of poet. It is not perhaps the most pressing priority of song, but it is a pleasant side-product that Matthews introduces us to poets we might not have encountered. This is something he has been doing for a while. He was ahead of the crowd where Pessoa was concerned (*Night's Mask*, 1983–4, another example of the song with ensemble, seemingly his first). Now he introduces us to a Czech émigré, a soldier killed in action at the age of 20, a visual artist turning his considerable hand to Rilke, and a slightly madcap translator of Baudelaire – people off-centre, brought into the light of music.

PAUL GRIFFITHS



SEASCAPES (2019/20)

for soprano and 9 players

Sidney Keyes died in Tunisia in April 1943 at the age of 20. Although usually spoken of as a war poet, none of the poems he is believed to have written during his short period of active service survive. However of the poems I have chosen to set, all but one (*The Island City*) were written after he had enlisted in April 1942. Their mood is darker than his earlier work, but it is significant that his major 'war' poem *The Foreign Gate* was written while he was still at Oxford in February 1942. He is probably best known for Tippett's 1950 settings of *The Heart's Assurance* and *Remember Your Lovers*, but his *Collected Poems* (a volume of little more than 100 pages) reveal a remarkably sophisticated perspective, heavily influenced by Rilke and Yeats but demonstrating an exceptional, individual voice, brutally cut off. Victoria Sackville-West wrote of 'the astonishing maturity of his mind, the intense seriousness of his outlook, and his innate pre-occupation with major things'.

Seascapes was commissioned by the Nash Ensemble.

AS TIME RETURNS (2017/18)

for baritone and 12 players

I first came across the poetry of Ivan Blatný (1919–1990) several years ago, and was immediately struck by the remarkable circumstances of his life. One of the leading Czech poets of his generation, he defected to England in 1948, becoming a non-person in his own country – all references to him were expunged, and his poetry was blacklisted. Life in exile was not easy for Blatný – he suffered a mental breakdown soon after his arrival, but recovered sufficiently to work for a time as a journalist for the BBC and Radio Free Europe. From 1954 until shortly before his death he lived in mental institutions and care homes in Essex and Suffolk, spending the last five years of his life in a nursing home in Clacton-on-Sea. He was not so much mentally ill as paranoid about being kidnapped and returned to Czechoslovakia. For about 10 years he stopped writing, but then began to fill dozens of notebooks, most of which were simply thrown away by his carers. In 1977 a nurse discovered his identity and began preserving his work: a collection of his writing eventually found its way to Prague, where it was published in samizdat in 1982. His poetry began to be published openly in Czechoslovakia in the year of his death.

I have set, for baritone and an ensemble of 12 players, poems from the 1940s in translation as well as some of his later poetry, much of it composed in English as well as in a polyglot mixture of English, Czech and German. The title, *As Time Returns*, is taken from a line from a poem in the collection *Old Addresses*, published in Canada in 1979.

'To go here and there, slow to return,
as time returns, as distance returns too,
nostalgic like stamps on a letter.'

[Translated by Matthew Sweeney]

As Time Returns was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation, Library of Congress, and the London Sinfonietta.

THE ISLAND (2007)

for soprano and 7 players

There is no special resonance in revisiting words written exactly a century ago, but Rainer Maria Rilke's ability to transform the ordinary into something transcendent has not lost anything of its power in the intervening years since the *Neue Gedichte* – 'New Poems' – were written, in 1907 and 1908. Their title, plain though it is, reflects the change of direction that Rilke felt he was taking, towards a new subtlety and intimacy.

I have set these three linked poems as a short unbroken cycle, the introspection of the first two opening into new directions in the third.

The Island was composed in 2007 as a gift for Claire Booth and the Nash Ensemble.

A LAND OF RAIN (2016/17)

for soprano and 17 players

Nicholas Moore (1918–1986), the son of the philosopher G.E. Moore, was considered one of the major poets of his generation in the 1940s, rated as highly as Dylan Thomas. For various reasons he fell out of favour in the 1950s, and he turned instead to horticulture, writing a monograph on the Tall Bearded Iris in 1956. When in 1968 George Steiner initiated a competition in the *Sunday Times* for translations of Baudelaire, Moore sent in 31 separate translations of one of the *Spleen* poems, *Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux*, mostly under eccentric pseudonyms: some anagrams – Alonso Moriche, Ion Lomas-Roche – others simply knockabout – H R Fixon-Boumphrey, W H Laudanum. These give an indication of the general tone of these translations, which is very far from conventional. Moore felt that translation was almost always an inadequate representation of the original: by making different versions, he wrote, he could 'in effect illustrate my own thesis of the impossibility of translation. Why I did so many is simply that one thing led to another.'

Moore had never given up writing poetry, and the interest aroused by his *Spleen* poems, which were first published in 1973, both enhanced his almost forgotten reputation and encouraged him to continue writing, in spite of poor health. A substantial collection of Selected Poems was published in 2014. In setting ten of Moore's versions I have embraced a similar stylistic diversity, sometimes serious, more often parodistic, occasionally introspective. Baudelaire's original is a strange and exotic vision of decadence and ennui, and I can't claim to have made an attempt to unravel its inner meaning or to have treated the poem as narrative – any more than would a setting of this poem that might have been made in the 1880s by, say, Henri Duparc, probably the first composer to set Baudelaire. I have tried to match the often uninhibited, satirical mood of many of the translations, a challenge that was daunting but always stimulating. One of the few difficulties I faced was that Moore frequently translates 'bouffon favori' in the seventh line by the name of a specific singer – Jacques Brel, Bob Dylan, Elvis (in the translation I've included beside the original – one which, although perhaps closest of all to its source, I did not set – he uses 'his pop-singer'). He also refers by name to politicians and prominent figures of the 1960s. To include such names seemed to me to pin the poems down too much to a particular time, so I have mainly avoided those versions, or in a few cases either omitted the lines in question or transposed lines from other poems (Moore himself set an example by frequently imitating or sharing lines between one poem and another). Some of what look to be shorter versions (since Moore generally follows Baudelaire's 18 lines of rhyming couplets) are in fact fragments of the originals, abbreviated to give more variety of shape and duration to their settings; while 'Potpourri' is in fact a compilation made from three different poems, which seemed to me to be justifiable both in view of the considerable freedom that Moore himself took throughout, and because – since I could hardly set all 31 – there were lines which I did not want to lose. However the very brief stanza 'Envoi: After the Deluge' is his own concise summary of the original poem, and leads to the final setting of Baudelaire.

A Land of Rain was commissioned by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and is dedicated to Stephen and Jackie Newbould.

COLIN MATTHEWS

SEASCAPES

Claire Booth *soprano*
Pippa Davies *alto flute*
Gareth Hulse *oboe*
Timothy Lines *bass clarinet*
Richard Watkins *horn*
Hugh Webb *harp*
John Reid *piano*
Ben Nabarro *violin*
Gordon Cervoni *viola*
Hannah Roberts *cello*

AS TIME RETURNS

Marcus Farnsworth *baritone*
Pippa Davies *alto flute*
Tim Lines *bass clarinet*
Simon Haram *alto sax*
Llinos Owen *bassoon*
Richard Watkins *horn*
Chris Brannick *percussion*
Hugh Webb *harp*
John Reid *celesta*
Matthew Jones *viola 1*
Gordon Cervoni *viola 2*
Gemma Rosefield *cello*
Lynda Houghton *double bass*

THE ISLAND

Claire Booth *soprano*
Pippa Davies *alto flute*
Richard Watkins *horn*
John Reid *piano*
Hugh Webb *harp*
Ben Nabarro *violin*
Gordon Cervoni *viola*
Hannah Roberts *cello*

THE NASH ENSEMBLE

JESSICA COTTIS conductor

A LAND OF RAIN

Claire Booth *soprano*
Pippa Davies *flute*
Gareth Hulse *oboe*
Lewis Graham *bass clarinet*
Tim Lines *clarinet*
Simon Haram *soprano sax*
Richard Watkins *horn*
Luke Whitehead *bassoon*
Jason Evans *trumpet*
Andy Wood *trombone*
Hugh Webb *harp*
Chris Brannick *percussion*
John Reid *piano*
Ben Nabarro *violin 1*
Tiago Soares Silva *violin 2*
Matthew Jones *viola*
Hannah Roberts *cello*
Lynda Houghton *double bass*



SEASCAPES

Text: Sidney Keyes, *Collected Poems* (1945)

1 1. THE ISLAND CITY

Walking among this island
People inhabiting this island city,
Whose coast recedes, whose facile sand
Bears cold cathedrals, restively:
I see a black time coming, history
Tending in footnotes our forgotten land.

Hearing the once virginal
But ageing choirs of intellect
Sing a psalm that would appal
Our certain fathers, I expect
No gentle decadence, no right effect
Of falling, but itself the barren fall:
And Yeats' gold song-bird shouting over all.

2 2. FROM: NORTH SEA

The evening thickens.
Figures, figures like a frieze
Cross the sea's face, their cold heads
Disdainful of the wind that pulls their hair.
The brown light lies across the harbour wall.

3 3. NIGHT ESTUARY

And yet the spiked moon menacing
The great humped dykes, scaring the plaintive seafowl,
Makes no right image, wakes no assertive echo.
Though one may stride the dykes with face upturned
To the yellow inflammation in the sky
And nostrils full of the living samphire scent,

There is no kindness in man's heart for these.
In this place and at this unmeaning hour,
There is no hope for a man's hope or his sorrow.

O you lionhearted poet's griefs, or griefs
Wild as the curlew's cry of passage;
O hope uneasy as the rising ebb
Among the sedges, cold and questing guest;
Leave me alone this hour with the restive night.
Allow me to accept the witless landscape.

4 4. INTERLUDE

5 5. SEASCAPE

Our country was a country drowned long since,
By shark-toothed currents drowned:
And in that country walk the generations,
The dancing generations with grey eyes
Whose touch would be like rain, the generations
Who never thought to justify their beauty.
There once the flowering cherry grasped the wall
With childish fingers, once the gull swung crying
Across the morning or the evening mist;
Once high heels rattled on the terrace
Over the water's talk, and the wind lifted
The hard leaves of the bay; the white sand drifted
Under the worm-bored rampart, under the white eyelid.

Our country was a country washed with colour.
Its light was good to us, sharp limning
The lover's secret smile, the fine-drawn fingers;
It drew long stripes between the pointed jaws
Of sea-bleached wreckage grinning through the wrack
And turned cornelian the flashing eyeball.

For here the tide sang like a riding hero
Across the rock-waste, and the early sun
Was shattered in the teeth of shuttered windows.

But now we are the gowned lamenters
Who stand among the junipers and ruins.
We are the lovers who defied the sea.

AS TIME RETURNS

Text: Ivan Blatný

Translations are indicated by italicised text;
all else is Blatný's original.

6 1. BLACK

Come on you lazy censors
confiscate my poem
put a dark oblong in its place
(I wanted to say black –
black jako na úmrtním oznámení
[black as in the obituary])

from *The Drug of Art* (2007)

7 2. BA, BA, BLACK SHEEP

The mountain black sheep descended
to the valley but Rosa Bonheur
can't paint them black is
the colour of death and there is
no death in the universe

Luckily enough because I enjoy life
pending between the table and the television
Be quiet sister
a monad can die

I'll stay a bit selfishly
thinking only of the coloured cover
of the book on the table in my workshop

from *Uncollected Poems* (1980s)

8 3. AUTUMN

*Raking leaves in the park, what could be better.
To go here and there, slow to return,
as time returns, as distance returns too,
nostalgic like stamps on a letter.*

*I found a letter, written only in lead,
rainworn, half torn.*

*O epistolary era, where have you fled?
I have written long letters as Rilke used to;
no more, farewell, it's November, late.
The red horses are out of the gate.*

from *Old Addresses* (1979); translated by Matthew Sweeney

9 4. THE DRIFTER SLEEPS IN THE MEADOW

*The good for nothing wanders the city streets
always under pressure of the moral institutes
But he won't go to a borstal
meadows die Wiesen await him outside of the city*

*Wie dream as dream how a dream
zbytečná otázka
(a useless question)
no matter I can't remember a thing.*

from *Bixley Remedial School* (1979, 1982);
translated by Veronika Tuckerová and Anna Moschovakis

10 **5. SMALL VARIATION**

*Thursday 8p.m. On the table:
Matches, cigarettes, tobacco, knife, and lamp.
My tools.
You already know my music from five or six things,
You already know my music from five or six things,
My little song,
As it sizzles on the stove, as it bubbles in quietude,
The song of the interlude, Which happens only once
in history.
Matches, cigarettes, tobacco, knife, and lamp.
And dust on all of them.
The silent horse gallops and carries it on hoof.
Dust of the barren flat
Dust of the barren flat.
For the last time unsettled, is lost into history.*

from *This Night* (1944); translated by Matthew Sweeney

11 **6. THE LIFE OF BEES**

*Queen, drones, bee-workers, život včel¹
that is the bee-hive's personelle
Now I must whisper in low tone
I was today a dying drone
But I am fresh and Glück-alive
back in the úl, back in the hive*

from *Another Poetical Lesson* (1980s)

12 **7. INTERLUDE 1**

13 **8. AUTUMN III**

*All my lovely years, where have they whirled,
those lovely hallways that led to sweet women,
the murmurs, ankles, the magic of the world?
Oh why, why did I stay alone, alone, alone?
The orchard shook and fell like a dead goddess.
The undertakers usher out the bier.
The castle stands, oh nonetheless,
and shreds fly far and near.
The villages drowse in the autumn plains
while actors take their grease paint off the train
The curtain rises. The band begins to play.*

from *Old Addresses*; translated by Justin Quinn

14 **9. INTERLUDE 2**

15 **10. IF YOU CAME WITH ME**

*If you came with me, you'd see what I like.
A church, a bridge, a ditch – this country side
so ordinary and beautiful beside
a river, the chestnut's fragrant shade, its look
So water from the well clears off the dust
that settled on a face ruddy and tanned,
and falls on books, on a letter from a friend,
and covers paintings quietly drapes a bust.
It was July and I was coming back.
You at the window, waving from afar,
the swifts just risen like an airborne bazaar,
glittering roosters, the castle's glossy stack.*

¹ 'The life of bees' is a reference to Maurice Maeterlinck's *La Vie des abeilles*; 'úl' is 'hive'. This is the only late polyglot poem with a rhyme scheme.

*And near the earth the sky was set ablaze
by wooded hills, then darkened from the top.
I heard a cry above the goldsmith's shop.
For breakfast I had strawberries. Such days!*

from *Brno Elegies* (1941); translated by Justin Quinn

16 **11. THE LAST POEM / FATE**

I have now two pens and plenty of papers

The will to life is remorselessly exploding all eternity
there is no death (luckily enough)
we must acquiesce
there is now and then the yes
yes we want it so
we can't choose the absolute nothing.

from *Bixley Remedial School*

THE ISLAND

Text: Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Die Insel – Nordsee':
Neue Gedichte (1907/1908);
translated by Stephen Cohn

17 **I. THE ISLAND IN THE NORTH SEA**

The tide wipes out the path across the flats,
everything everywhere now looks alike.
The nearby island keeps its eyes tight shut.
Enclosing it on every side, the dyke
contains and stultifies the islanders,
born into sleep in which they will confuse

all words with one another. Words are sparse
and when they speak their only sentences
are like short epitaphs upon the weird
things, water-washed and unexplained,
which came to them and stayed. Objects like these
from childhood on are all that meets their eyes :
things inconsiderate, improvident,
which only underline their solitude.

18 **II. THE FARMS**

As if it lay within a ring, a crater
of the moon, a dam surrounds each farm.
Their gardens, dressed alike, have wind-combed hair
like orphans roughly schooled by storm
and daily saddened by the deaths it brings.
The people keep indoors and stare for hours
at crooked mirrors showing exotic things
among familiar objects on their dressers.

At evening, someone's son might stroll outdoors
and draw some chords from his harmonica –
a wailing melody as soft as tears
he once heard playing in a foreign harbour.
Upon the outer dyke a sheep appears
larger than life and almost ominous.

19 **III. THE STAR**

What lies within is near. All else lies far
away. The things within, so busy, overfull
and everyday, stay inexpressible.
It is as if the island were a star
too small and space, fiercely dispassionate,
had crushed it unaware. It circles on

and unilluminated and unheard
proceeds alone

through darkness in an orbit of its own
intent on making end to all of this,
continuing blindly and outside the course
of galaxies, of other stars or suns.

A LAND OF RAIN

Text: from Nicholas Moore, *Spleen: Thirty-one versions of Baudelaire's Je suis comme le roi...*, after Charles Baudelaire, 'LXXVII Spleen' in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857)

20 SPLEEN (I'VE GOT A RIGHT TO SING THE BLUES)

I am like One who rules a Land of Rain;
Young: rich; but impotent and I complain
Like an old man ...
... dreams make my flowered bed seem like a tomb.

21 DREAMSCAPE

An alchemist makes gold in his crucible;
A white-bearded savant
With delicate fingers.

He stands close, as in a picture,
Before a Dalí-like landscape
Of bones and blood.

A river twists in the distance;
The gold watch has no face,
And, instead of hands,
The twitching sting of a bee.

A harvest-field of stone
Gravestones each bear the legend 'Rome...'

But none of this is exciting to my young eyes.
No vice of blood can warm the dead.
'Join me' I hear my own corpse cry,
And, winding through my veins,
Instead of blood,
The slow green waters of Lethe.

22 FOR THE TOMB OF A PRESS BARON

I'm the Alexander of a flooded empire,
Rich, but still powerless perhaps. I tire;
And grow distrustful of my editors,
Tired of my dogs, afraid to back a horse.
I don't find fun in birds – of flesh or steel,
Black Power or genocide. My fools are real,
But all their potent, slanted, madcap tales
Can't pull me out from my sick, private hells.
My hotel room becomes a catafalque.
The 'actresses' – at moguls they won't baulk –
Can't with their topless dresses draw a smile
From this once young and powerful crocodile,
Whose skeleton smart bankers can't enring
With gold enough to hide corruption's sting.
Nazi putsches, hydrogen bombs, fanned strife
Of the bloodiest kind can't bring this corpse to life,
Whose young-old bones contain, instead of blood,
The pale green waves of Lethe's death-frothed flood.

*So here lies Alexander. May his bones
Not quite outlast, perhaps, our worthier ones.*

23 **SONNET 117**

Battered by storm and swept by flood,
I'm king, but hapless, and no good
Find in old counsellors or young,
Nor in the beasts I stroll among.
It isn't my idea of sport
To see my ailing people brought
To nothing or hear comic songs
About our ever-present wrongs.
A bed as stony as a tomb
Is indispensable to gloom,
While whores in shocking disarray
Are not the thing for corpses' play,
Nor any slick magician's gold
A recipe for evil's cold,
Nor bathing in a bath of blood
A resurrection for my mood.
Nothing can warm, or force to breathe, the
Green inheritor of Lethe.

Absinthe makes the Art green ponder

24 **KING JUDA OF BIKINI (THE LETHAL RIVER)**

I'm like the king of a too clouded atoll,
Rich, but quite powerless; young, but in a squall;
Distrusting precepts, sick of Werner Braun;
All dogs and beasts dead; nothing left to own.
I can't enjoy myself with great steel birds;
Nor does my tribe's erosion leave me words.
As for the clownish military, singing
Glory of our return, my heart is wringing.
The royal bed I slept in's just a tomb,
The women useless, when they have no home.

Their lovely prince can't pluck their breasts or thighs
From this unsmiling isle of obsequies
Where gold's been poured to leave skeletal planes,
Things sticking from the sand, blown limbs, bruised brains.
The Roman bloodbaths weren't a patch on this;
If they made old men smile, this is death's kiss.
Strontium can't warm anything but weeds;
My blood grows green with gangrene in the reeds.

25 **A BAD DREAM RECURRING**

As the Ruler of a storm-flooded country, I
Am rich, but powerless, young, but terribly
Ancient, and all my ministers' sycophancy
Doesn't make up for my boredom with the beastly.
I can't take joy in all-too-gameless sport;
From my balcony seeing my people dying. Caught
In this dilemma, our Pop Queen's meaning ballad
Only reminds us of our present bad.
Our bed-covers are like the flower-girl's tomb.
It's said women make every Ruler room,
But none can wear a dress libidinous
Enough to warm a dead man's boneyard rictus.
Nor can that sick man, managing our trade,
Make it look healthier with corrupter's aid.
Nor would pogroms – however Stalinesque –
Raise any new life that's not quite grotesque
Or warm the cockles of a skeletal
Heart – pumping water green as fear, and lethal.

26 **POTPOURRI**

I'm like the Father Christmas of a wet
And ungay Country; rich and youthful, yet
Powerless, outmoded; learning from the snows
Of my regalia nothing but more woes,
Not laughing at my dogs or reindeer, nor
My legend dying on the nursery floor.
I'm not enticed by the grotesque swing-song
From my cruel illness's intrinsic wrong.
My eiderdown, embossed with antique flowers,
Reminds me of those sad Egyptian towers
Where mummied princes lie besides their drabs
Unsmilingly with dead dogs and scarabs.
Though glories of our blood and state contrive
With bloodbaths to keep alive
Old roués, nothing can warm a corpse from disillusion,
Whose blood's as pale as a green-tea infusion.

27 **ACCIDIE**

I'm like the Pluto of a rainy hell,
Rich but powerless, young, but too old as well;
Whose counsellors' kow-towing he distrusts.
Bored with his dogs, and sick of other beasts.
Nothing can cheer him...

New tyrants spill new blood,
Yet it can't warm this carcass back to breath
Whose blood's only the green green lymph of Death.

28 **DÉSŪÉTUDE (fragments)**

I'm young, but jaded,
Distrustful of advisers,
Whose joy has faded.

Nothing can make him happy,
He finds the dances feeble,
And no distraction.

His bed is like a tomb.
Nor can the milling women staunch his gloom.
The golden ornaments around his neck
Seem like a noose of inner doubt and wreck.
A corpse too old for any warmth to flood,
Whose veins are greened with Lethe, dry of blood.

29 **ENVOI: AFTER THE DELUGE**

Not riches, power, advisers, pets, sports, gold
Nor even naked women cheer the old
In heart. Bones will be bones. All that remains
Instead of blood, green water, clotted veins.

30 SPLEEN

Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux,
riche, mais impuissant, jeune et pourtant très vieux,
qui, de ses précepteurs méprisant les courbettes,
s'ennuie avec ses chiens comme avec d'autres bêtes.
Rien ne peut l'égayer, ni gibier, ni faucon,
ni son peuple mourant en face du balcon.
Du bouffon favori la grotesque ballade
ne distrait plus le front de ce cruel malade ;
son lit fleurdélié se transforme en tombeau,
et les dames d'atour, pour qui tout prince est beau,
ne savent plus trouver d'impudique toilette
pour tirer un souris de ce jeune squelette.
Le savant qui lui fait de l'or n'a jamais pu
de son être extirper l'élément corrompu,
et dans ces bains de sang qui des Romains nous viennent,
et dont sur leurs vieux jours les puissants se souviennent,
il n'a su réchauffer ce cadavre hébété
où coule au lieu de sang l'eau verte du Léthé.

I am like the king of an ancient swampland,
Wealthy, but impotent, young, but cold-in-hand,
Who distrusts his advisers and their flattery,
But is bored with his dogs – and his horsery and cattery.
Nothing makes him laugh – neither blood sports nor pets
Nor his tribe cut down like grass on the palace steps.
His pop-singer he regards as a grotesque clown
And as no distraction from the cruel sickness that gets him down
His flowery, flag-bedizened bed is like a coffin
And his fancy-women, who find it lovely to let any toff in,
Can't display a sufficiently indecent dress,
To rub up a smile from this skeleton's nakedness.
The sorcerer who conjures up his gold
Can't rid it of the corruption it's forced to hold,
And in the baths of blood the Romans brought us,
In which new age-mad potentates have caught us,
He can't warm up that jaded corpse,
Where – instead of blood – green everglades of Lethe.

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