

## **AI-Generated Graded Readers**

Masaru Uchida, Gifu University

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### **About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice. The text was translated from French into English and simplified using ChatGPT for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

### **Source Text**

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Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil [Les Fleurs du Mal]* (Simplified Edition,  
Adapted and Simplified from French by ChatGPT)

To the Reader

Foolishness, error, sin, and greed  
fill our minds and wear down our bodies,  
and we feed our sweet regrets  
as beggars feed their lice.

Our sins are stubborn, and our repentance is weak.  
We want a good reward for our confessions,  
then we gladly go back into the muddy road,  
thinking that cheap tears can wash us clean.

On the pillow of evil, Satan, the dark master,  
rocks our enchanted spirit to sleep,  
and the rich metal of our will  
turns into smoke in his clever hands.

It is the Devil who pulls the strings that move us.  
We find charm in ugly things.  
Each day we take one more step toward Hell,  
without horror, through filthy darkness.

Like a poor man of pleasure who kisses and bites  
the wounded breast of an old prostitute,  
we steal a secret pleasure as we pass  
and squeeze it hard like an old orange.

Packed together, crawling like a million worms,  
a crowd of Demons celebrates in our brains,  
and when we breathe, Death enters our lungs  
like an unseen river, with low sad sounds.

If rape, poison, the knife, and fire  
have not yet sewn their bright patterns  
on the common cloth of our poor fate,  
it is because our soul is not bold enough.

But among the jackals, panthers, dogs,  
monkeys, scorpions, vultures, snakes,  
all the screaming, howling, crawling monsters  
in the filthy zoo of our vices,

there is one more ugly, more evil, more unclean than all.  
It makes no great cry and no wild movement,  
yet it would gladly turn the world to dust  
and swallow the earth in one yawn.

It is Boredom. With a tear in its eye,  
it dreams of scaffolds while it smokes.  
You know this delicate monster, reader—  
false reader—my equal—my brother.

Spleen and Ideal

Blessing

When, by a law of the highest powers,  
the Poet appears in this tired world,  
his frightened mother, full of angry words,  
shakes her fists at God, who pities her.

“Why did I not give birth to a nest of snakes,  
instead of feeding this cruel joke?  
Cursed be the night of passing pleasure  
when my body conceived my punishment!

“Since you chose me among all women  
to be the shame of my sad husband,  
and since I cannot throw this shriveled monster  
into the flames like a love letter,

“I will pour back on him all the hate  
that crushes me from every side.  
I will twist this miserable tree so hard  
that its poisoned buds will never open.”

So she swallows the foam of her hate,  
and, not understanding eternal plans,  
she prepares, deep in hell,  
the fires for a mother’s crime.

Yet under the unseen care of an Angel,  
the poor child grows drunk on sunlight,  
and in all he drinks and all he eats  
he finds sweet food from heaven.

He plays with the wind, he speaks with the cloud,  
and sings as he walks his road of pain.

The Spirit that follows him on his journey  
weeps to see him happy like a bird in the woods.

All those whom he wants to love watch him with fear,  
or, growing bold because he is so calm,  
try to see who can make him cry  
and test their cruelty on him.

Into the bread and wine meant for his mouth  
they mix ashes and dirty spit.  
In false piety they throw away what he touches  
and blame themselves for following his steps.

His wife cries out in the public squares:

“Since he thinks I am beautiful enough to worship,  
I will work like the idols of old,  
and like them I will have gold laid over me.

“I will make myself drunk with nard, incense, and myrrh,  
with bowed knees, rich food, and wine,  
to see whether I can steal, laughing,  
the holy praise from the heart that loves me.

“And when I grow tired of these wicked games,  
I will put my thin but strong hand on him.  
My nails, like the nails of the harpies,  
will know how to cut a path into his heart.

“Like a very young bird, trembling and beating,

I will tear that red heart from his breast,  
and to feed my favorite beast,  
I will throw it on the ground with scorn.”

Toward Heaven, where his eye sees a shining throne,  
the calm Poet lifts his faithful arms,  
and the bright lightning of his clear mind  
hides from him the sight of the furious crowd.

“Blessed are You, my God, who give suffering  
as a holy cure for our unclean hearts,  
and as the best and purest gift  
that prepares the strong for sacred joy.

“I know that You keep a place for the Poet  
among the blessed ranks of the holy ones,  
and that You invite him to the eternal feast  
of Thrones, Virtues, and Dominations.

“I know that pain is the only true nobility  
which neither earth nor hell can wound,  
and that to make my mystic crown  
all times and all worlds must pay a price.

“But the lost jewels of ancient Palmyra,  
unknown metals, pearls from the sea,  
gathered by Your hand, would still not be enough  
for that bright and shining crown.

“For it will be made only of pure light,  
drawn from the holy fire of the first rays,

and mortal eyes, in all their brightness,  
are only dark and grieving mirrors of it.”

### The Albatross

Often, just for fun, the sailors  
catch albatrosses, great birds of the sea,  
lazy companions of the voyage  
that follow the ship above the bitter deep.

But when they put them down on the deck,  
these kings of the sky, ashamed and awkward,  
let their great white wings  
drag beside them like oars.

How weak and clumsy this winged traveler seems.  
He was so beautiful a moment ago,  
and now he is comic and ugly.  
One man touches his beak with a pipe,  
another limps in mockery  
of the bird that once flew.

The Poet is like that prince of the clouds  
who lives in the storm and laughs at the archer.  
Exiled on the ground, among insults and laughter,  
his giant wings keep him from walking.

### Rising

Above ponds, above valleys,  
above mountains, forests, clouds, and seas,  
beyond the sun, beyond the upper air,  
beyond the far edges of the stars,

my spirit, you move with ease,  
and like a strong swimmer happy in the water,  
you cut through the deep endless space  
with a joy that cannot be spoken.

Fly far away from these sickening vapors.  
Go wash yourself in the higher air,  
and drink, like some pure and holy wine,  
the clear fire that fills the shining sky.

Beyond troubles and heavy sorrow  
that weigh down our cloudy life,  
happy is the one who can rise  
on strong wings to bright and peaceful fields.

Happy is the one whose thoughts, like larks,  
take free flight into the morning sky,  
who moves above life  
and easily understands  
the language of flowers and silent things.

The Beacons

Rubens, river of forgetting, garden of ease,  
a pillow of fresh flesh where love cannot stay,

yet where life flows and never stops moving,  
like air in the sky and sea in the sea.

Leonardo da Vinci, deep and dark mirror,  
where charming angels, with gentle smiles  
full of mystery, appear in the shadow  
of glaciers and pines that close their land.

Rembrandt, sad hospital full of whispers,  
decorated only by a great crucifix,  
where prayer rises in tears from dirt  
and a winter ray suddenly cuts through.

Michelangelo, strange place where Hercules  
stand beside Christ,  
and powerful ghosts rise upright in the dusk,  
tearing open their shrouds with stretching fingers.

Puget, boxer's anger, shameless faun,  
you who gathered the beauty of rough men,  
great heart swollen with pride, weak yellow man,  
sad emperor of prisoners.

Watteau, carnival where many noble hearts  
move like burning butterflies,  
light fresh scenes under bright lamps  
that pour madness into the turning dance.

Goya, nightmare full of unknown things,  
of unborn children cooked at witches' feasts,  
of old women before mirrors and naked girls

while Demons pull up their stockings.

Delacroix, lake of blood haunted by evil angels,  
shadowed by a forest of evergreen firs,  
where, under a sorrowful sky, strange fanfares pass  
like a choked sigh from Weber.

These curses, these blasphemies, these cries,  
these ecstasies, these tears, these sacred songs,  
are an echo repeated by a thousand winding paths.  
For mortal hearts, they are a holy opium.

It is a cry repeated by a thousand guards,  
an order passed on by a thousand voices.  
It is a beacon lit on a thousand fortresses,  
a call from hunters lost in the deep woods.

For truly, Lord, the best proof  
we can give of our human worth  
is this burning sob rolling through the ages  
and dying at the edge of Your eternity.

The Muse for Sale

O Muse of my heart, lover of palaces,  
when January lets loose its cold winds,  
in the dark sadness of snowy evenings,  
will you have a coal to warm your purple feet?

Will you warm your marble shoulders

in the night light coming through the shutters?  
When your purse is empty and your room is cold,  
will you gather gold from the blue sky?

To earn your bread each night,  
you must, like a choir boy, swing the incense  
and sing sacred songs you hardly believe,

or, like a hungry street performer, show your charms  
and your laughter mixed with hidden tears  
to make the common crowd laugh.

### The Enemy

My youth was only a dark storm,  
crossed now and then by bright suns.  
Thunder and rain did such damage  
that very few red fruits remain in my garden.

Now I have reached the autumn of my thoughts,  
and I must use shovel and rake  
to gather again the flooded ground  
where the water has dug holes like graves.

And who knows whether the new flowers I dream of  
will find, in this soil washed bare like a shore,  
the secret food that could make them strong?

O pain, O pain. Time eats life,  
and the dark Enemy that gnaws at our hearts

grows stronger on the blood we lose.

### A Former Life

I lived for a long time under great arches  
that the sea suns colored with a thousand fires,  
and in the evening their tall and noble pillars  
looked like caves of dark stone.

The waves, carrying the image of the sky,  
mixed in a solemn and holy way  
the strong sounds of their rich music  
with the colors of sunset in my eyes.

There I lived in calm pleasure,  
among blue sky, waves, and shining light,  
with naked servants, full of sweet smells,

who cooled my forehead with palm leaves,  
and whose only care was to understand  
the secret pain that made me weak with longing.

### Traveling Gypsies

Yesterday the tribe with burning eyes  
set out on the road, carrying their children  
on their backs, or giving them, for their proud hunger,  
the treasure of their hanging breasts.

The men walk on foot under shining weapons,  
beside the wagons where their families lie,  
lifting to the sky eyes made heavy  
by sad regret for lost dreams.

From the bottom of its sandy hole, the cricket,  
watching them pass, sings louder.  
Cybele, who loves them, makes the green world grow,  
  
makes water run from rock and flowers rise in the desert  
before these travelers, for whom  
the familiar kingdom of future darkness stands open.

### Man and the Sea

Free man, you will always love the sea.  
The sea is your mirror. You look at your soul  
in the endless rolling of its waves,  
and your spirit is no less bitter than that deep water.

You love to go down into your own image.  
You hold it with your eyes and arms,  
and sometimes your heart forgets its own noise  
in the sound of that wild and untamed cry.

You are both dark and secret.  
Man, no one has measured the bottom of your depths.  
Sea, no one knows your hidden riches.  
You both guard your secrets with jealous care.

And yet for countless centuries  
you have fought each other without pity or regret,  
because you both love killing and death,  
eternal fighters, hard and merciless brothers.

### Don Juan in Hell

When Don Juan went down to the dark river below,  
and after he had paid his coin to Charon,  
a dark beggar, proud-eyed like an old wise man,  
took each oar in his strong and angry hand.

Women, with open dresses and hanging breasts,  
twisted under the black sky,  
and behind him, like a great herd of offered victims,  
they dragged out one long cry.

Sganarelle, laughing, asked for his wages,  
while Don Luis, with a shaking finger,  
showed to all the dead wandering on the shore  
the bold son who mocked his white hair.

Thin and pure Elvire, trembling in her grief,  
near the faithless husband who had run from her love,  
seemed to ask him for one last smile  
where the sweetness of his first promise might still shine.

Straight in his armor, a great man of stone  
stood at the helm and cut through the black water.  
But the calm hero, bent over his sword,

looked only at the wake and would see nothing else.

### The Punishment of Pride

In those wonderful times when Theology  
grew in its fullest strength and power,  
people say that one day a great doctor of the Church,  
after he had forced open cold hearts  
and shaken them in their deepest darkness,  
after he had climbed toward heavenly glory  
by strange roads unknown even to himself,  
roads where perhaps only pure Spirits had gone,  
cried out, like a man who has climbed too high  
and is seized by fear, with a Satan-like pride:

“Jesus, little Jesus, I lifted you very high.  
But if I had wanted to strike the weak place  
in your armor, your shame would equal your glory,  
and you would be only a laughing unborn thing.”

At once his reason left him.  
The light of that sun was covered with black cloth.  
All chaos rolled into that mind,  
that temple once alive, rich, and full of order,  
under whose high roof so much greatness had shone.  
Silence and night moved into him,  
like into a tomb whose key is lost.

From then on he was like the beasts in the street,  
and when he walked across the fields without seeing,

unable to tell summer from winter,  
dirty, useless, ugly, like a worn-out thing,  
he became the joy and laughter of children.

## Beauty

I am beautiful, mortals, like a dream made of stone,  
and my breast, where each person has been hurt in turn,  
is made to give the poet a love  
that is eternal and silent like matter itself.

I sit in the blue sky like a sphinx no one understands.  
I join a heart of snow  
to the whiteness of swans.  
I hate movement that changes lines,  
and I never cry and never laugh.

Before my great poses,  
which seem borrowed from the proudest monuments,  
poets will spend their days in hard study,

because I have, to hold these obedient lovers,  
pure mirrors that make all things more beautiful:  
my eyes, my wide eyes with their endless light.

## The Ideal

Those pretty little beauties in pictures,  
spoiled children of a spoiled age,

those feet in small boots, those fingers with castanets,  
will never satisfy a heart like mine.

I leave to Gavarni, poet of pale girls,  
his singing crowd of weak and sickly beauties,  
for among those faded roses  
I cannot find a flower like my red ideal.

What this heart needs, deep as an abyss,  
is you, Lady Macbeth, soul strong in crime,  
a dream from Aeschylus born in violent winds;

or you, great Night, child of Michelangelo,  
who twist calmly in a strange pose  
your beauty shaped for the mouths of Titans.

The Mask

An Allegorical Statue in the Style of the Renaissance

To Ernest Christophe, Sculptor

Let us look at this treasure of Florentine grace.  
In the movement of this strong body,  
Elegance and Strength, two divine sisters, are rich and full.  
This woman, truly a miracle,  
wonderfully strong, wonderfully slim,  
was made to sit on rich beds  
and delight the free hours of a prince or a church lord.

And see that fine and sensual smile  
where pride walks in delight,  
that long sly look, soft and mocking,  
that pretty face, framed in light cloth,  
where every line seems to say in triumph,  
“Pleasure calls me and Love crowns me.”

In a being of such majesty,  
see how charm grows still stronger through sweetness.  
Let us come closer and walk around her beauty.

O insult to art, O fatal surprise.  
This woman with a divine body, promising happiness,  
ends above in a two-headed monster.

But no. It is only a mask, a false front.  
This face, bright with an exquisite expression, lies.  
Look here instead, twisted in terrible pain:  
the true head, the honest face,  
turned backward and hidden behind the lying face.

Poor great beauty. The great river of your tears  
flows into my troubled heart.  
Your lie makes me drunk, and my soul drinks deeply  
from the waves that Pain pours from your eyes.

But why does she cry? She, perfect beauty,  
who could place all humankind at her feet—  
what hidden pain eats at her athlete’s side?

She cries, foolish man, because she has lived,

and because she still lives. But what she mourns most,  
what makes her shake down to her knees,  
is that tomorrow, sadly, she must live again—  
tomorrow, the day after, and forever—like us.

### Hymn to Beauty

Do you come from deep heaven or rise from the abyss,  
O Beauty? Your look, both hellish and divine,  
pours out good and crime together,  
and for that reason you can be compared to wine.

In your eye are both sunrise and sunset.  
You spread perfume like a stormy evening.  
Your kisses are a drink, your mouth a jar  
that can make the hero weak  
and the child brave.  
Do you rise from the black pit or come down from the stars?

Fate, delighted, follows your skirt like a dog.  
You scatter joy and disaster at random.  
You rule everything  
and answer for nothing.

You walk on the dead, Beauty, and laugh at them.  
Among your jewels, Horror  
is one of the most charming,  
and Murder, among your dearest ornaments,  
dances lovingly on your proud body.

The bright insect flies to you, candle-like light,  
crackles, burns, and says, "Let us bless this flame."  
The shaking lover leaning over his beautiful woman  
looks like a dying man touching his own grave.

Whether you come from heaven or hell, what does it matter,  
O Beauty, huge, frightening, innocent monster,  
if your eye, your smile, your foot  
open the door to an endless world  
that I love and have never known?

From Satan or from God, what does it matter?  
Angel or Siren, what does it matter,  
if you make the world less ugly  
and the moments less heavy,  
O fairy with velvet eyes,  
rhythm, perfume, light, my only queen?

## Hair

O fleece falling thick over the neck,  
O curls, O perfume full of slow ease.  
Joy. To fill the dark room tonight  
with the sleeping memories inside this hair,  
I want to shake it in the air like a handkerchief.

Soft Asia and burning Africa,  
a whole far world, absent and almost dead,  
lives in your depths, aromatic forest.  
As other spirits sail upon music,

mine, my love, swims upon your perfume.

I will go there where tree and man, full of life,  
grow weak under the heat of the air.  
Strong braids, be the waves that carry me away.  
You hold, black sea, a shining dream  
of sails, rowers, fire, and masts.

A loud harbor where my soul can drink  
great waves of perfume, sound, and color,  
where ships, moving through gold and rich cloth,  
open their wide arms to embrace  
the glory of a pure sky full of endless heat.

I will sink my head, drunk with love,  
into this dark ocean where another world is closed,  
and my fine spirit, touched by the rolling motion,  
will find again, O fruitful softness,  
the endless rocking of sweet and scented rest.

Blue hair, flag of stretched darkness,  
you give me back the wide round blue of the sky.  
On the soft edges of your twisted locks  
I drink deeply the mixed smells  
of coconut oil, musk, and tar.

For a long time, always, my hand in your heavy mane  
will scatter ruby, pearl, and sapphire there,  
so that you will never be deaf to my desire.  
Are you not the oasis where I dream,  
the flask from which I drink the wine of memory?

## Never Satisfied

Strange goddess, dark as night,  
with a smell of musk and tobacco,  
work of some dark magic, wild Faust of the savannah,  
sorceress with an ebony side, child of black midnight,

I prefer to wine, to opium, to all nights,  
the drink of your mouth where love walks proudly.  
When my desires travel toward you like a caravan,  
your eyes are the deep well where my sorrows drink.

By those two great black eyes, windows of your soul,  
O merciless demon, pour into me less fire.  
I am not the river Styx, to hold you nine times,  
and I cannot, wild Megara of pleasure,  
to break your courage and make you cry out,  
become Proserpine in the hell of your bed.

## The Dancing Snake

How I love to see, dear lazy one,  
the skin of your beautiful body  
shine and tremble  
like an unsteady star.

On your deep hair  
with its sharp perfume,

a wandering scented sea  
with blue and brown waves,

my dreaming soul sets sail  
like a ship waking  
in the morning wind  
for a far sky.

Your eyes, where nothing appears  
that is sweet or bitter,  
are two cold jewels  
where gold mixes with iron.

When I see you walk in rhythm,  
beautiful in your careless way,  
you seem like a snake  
dancing on the end of a stick.

Under the weight of your laziness,  
your childlike head  
sways with the softness  
of a young elephant,

and your body bends and stretches  
like a fine ship  
rolling from side to side  
and lowering its yards into the water.

Like a wave made bigger  
by the melting of loud glaciers,  
when the water of your mouth rises

to the edge of your teeth,

I think I drink a wine of Bohemia,  
bitter and victorious,  
a liquid sky  
that scatters stars in my heart.

### A Carcass

Remember the thing we saw, my soul,  
on that sweet beautiful summer morning.  
At the turn of a path there lay  
a horrible dead body on a bed of stones.

Its legs were in the air, like a shameless woman,  
burning and sweating poison.  
In a lazy and mocking way  
it opened its belly full of foul breath.

The sun shone on that rotting flesh  
as if to cook it well  
and give back, a hundred times over,  
all that great Nature had joined together.

And the sky looked at that proud body  
as if it were opening like a flower.  
The smell was so strong  
that you almost fainted on the grass.

Flies buzzed over the rotten belly.

From it came black armies  
of larvae that ran like a thick liquid  
down those living rags.

All of it went down and up like a wave,  
jumping and shining,  
and one might have said that the body,  
swollen by some faint breath, was living by growing more.

And that whole world made a strange music,  
like running water and wind,  
or grain that a farmer, with steady movement,  
shakes and turns in his basket.

The forms were fading and were only a dream now,  
a slow sketch still to come  
on a forgotten canvas, finished only later  
by the artist through memory.

Behind the rocks a worried dog  
looked at us with angry eyes,  
watching for the moment to take back  
from the skeleton the piece she had left there.

And yet you too will be like this dirt,  
like this horrible infection,  
star of my eyes, sun of my life,  
you, my angel and my passion.

Yes, you will be like this, queen of graces,  
after the last holy rites,

when you go under the grass and thick flowers  
to rot among the bones.

Then, my beauty, say to the worms  
that will eat you with kisses  
that I have kept the form and the holy essence  
of my love, though it has decayed.

From the Depths I Cry

I beg for your pity, you, the only one I love,  
from the dark pit into which my heart has fallen.  
It is a sad universe under a lead-colored sky,  
where horror and blasphemy swim in the night.

A sun without warmth hangs above it for six months,  
and for the other six months night covers the earth.  
It is a land more bare than the polar world,  
with no beasts, no streams, no green, no woods.

And there is no horror in the world  
greater than the cold cruelty of that ice sun  
and that endless night like old Chaos.  
I envy even the lowest animals  
that can fall into a dull sleep,  
so slowly does the thread of time unwind.

The Vampire

You who entered my grieving heart  
like a knife stroke,  
you who came, wild and dressed with beauty,  
strong as a crowd of demons,

to make your bed and your kingdom  
inside my humiliated mind—  
shameful woman to whom I am tied  
like a prisoner to his chain,

like the gambler to his game,  
like the drunk to his bottle,  
like rotting flesh to worms—  
cursed woman, cursed be you.

I asked the quick sword  
to win my freedom,  
and I asked false poison  
to help my cowardice.

But poison and sword  
looked at me with contempt and said,  
“You are not worthy to be taken  
from your cursed slavery.

“Fool. If our work  
freed you from her power,  
your kisses would bring back to life  
the corpse of your vampire.”

## One Night When I Lay Beside a Terrible Jewish Woman

One night, when I lay beside a terrible Jewish woman,  
like one dead body beside another dead body,  
I began to think, near that body for sale,  
of the sad beauty from whom my desire is kept.

I imagined again her natural majesty,  
her look armed with strength and grace,  
her hair that makes for her a sweet-smelling helmet,  
and whose memory wakes love in me again.

For I would gladly have kissed your noble body,  
and from your cool feet up to your black hair  
I would have opened the treasure of deep caresses,

if, some evening, with one tear won without effort,  
you could only, queen of cruel women,  
darken the brightness of your cold eyes.

## After-Death Remorse

When you sleep, my dark beautiful one,  
deep in a monument built of black marble,  
and when your room and your house  
are only a wet vault and a hollow grave;

when the stone, pressing on your fearful breast  
and your sides once softened by lovely ease,  
stops your heart from beating and wishing,

and your feet from running their adventurous road,  
  
the tomb, friend of my endless dream—  
for the tomb will always understand the poet—  
during those long nights where sleep is gone,  
  
will say to you, “What use was it, imperfect woman,  
not to have known what the dead weep for?”  
And the worm will bite your skin like remorse.

### The Cat

Come, my beautiful cat, onto my loving heart.  
Hold back the claws of your paw,  
and let me sink into your lovely eyes,  
mixed with metal and agate.

When my fingers slowly touch  
your head and your soft shining back,  
and my hand grows drunk with pleasure  
from feeling your electric body,

I see my woman in my mind. Her look,  
like yours, dear animal,  
deep and cold, cuts and pierces like a dart.

And from her feet up to her head  
a fine air, a dangerous perfume,  
moves around her dark body.

## The Balcony

Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses,  
you who are all my pleasures, you who are all my duties,  
you will remember the beauty of our caresses,  
the sweetness of the fire, the charm of evening,  
mother of memories, mistress of mistresses.

The evenings bright with burning coal,  
and the evenings on the balcony, covered in pink mist—  
how sweet your breast was to me, how kind your heart.  
We often spoke words that cannot die  
on evenings bright with burning coal.

How beautiful the suns are in warm evenings.  
How deep space is, how strong the heart.  
As I leaned toward you, queen of the adored,  
I thought I could breathe in the smell of your blood.  
How beautiful the suns are in warm evenings.

Night grew thick like a wall,  
and in the dark my eyes guessed your pupils,  
and I drank your breath, O sweetness, O poison,  
and your feet slept in my brotherly hands.  
Night grew thick like a wall.

I know the art of bringing back happy moments,  
and I see my past again, hidden in your knees.  
Why should I look for your soft beauty anywhere else  
but in your dear body and your gentle heart?

I know the art of bringing back happy moments.

Will those promises, those perfumes, those endless kisses  
rise again from a depth our eyes cannot measure,  
as young suns rise into the sky  
after they have washed themselves in the deep sea?  
O promises, O perfumes, O endless kisses.

### The Possessed Woman

The sun has covered itself with black cloth. Like it,  
O moon of my life, wrap yourself in shadow.  
Sleep or smoke as you wish. Be silent, be dark,  
and sink completely into the pit of Boredom.

I love you like that. Yet if you wish today,  
like an eclipsed star leaving half-darkness,  
to show yourself proudly in places full of madness,  
very well. Lovely knife, leap from your case.

Light your eyes in the fire of the lamps.  
Light desire in the eyes of rough men.  
Everything in you gives me pleasure, wild or sick.

Be what you want, black night or red dawn.  
There is not one nerve in my trembling body  
that does not cry, "O my dear Beelzebub, I adore you."

## A Ghost

### I. The Darkness

In the cellars of unfathomable sadness  
where Fate has already shut me away,  
where no pink and joyful light  
ever comes in,  
where I live alone with Night, my gloomy hostess,

I am like a painter whom a mocking God  
has condemned to paint, sadly, upon darkness,  
or like a cook with funeral hunger  
who boils and eats his own heart.

At times there shines, stretches, and opens  
a ghost made of grace and splendor.  
By her dreamlike eastern movement,  
when she reaches her full height,  
I know my beautiful visitor again.  
It is she—dark and yet full of light.

### II. The Perfume

Reader, have you ever breathed in,  
with drunken joy and slow delight,  
that grain of incense which fills a church,  
or the old musk of a perfumed bag?

Deep magic charm, by which the past,  
restored, makes us drunk in the present.  
So the lover, on the body he once adored,  
gathers the perfect flower of memory.

From her heavy and springing hair,  
living perfume bag, incense burner of the room,  
there rose a smell, wild and fierce.

And from her clothes, muslin or velvet,  
all filled with her pure young life,  
there came a smell like fur.

### III. The Frame

As a beautiful frame adds to a painting,  
though the hand that made it is already praised,  
something strange and charming  
by separating it from all the rest of nature,

so jewels, furniture, metals, and gold  
suited her rare beauty exactly.  
Nothing dimmed her perfect brightness,  
and everything seemed made to frame her.

At times one might even think she believed  
that everything wanted to love her.  
She drowned, in the kisses of satin and linen,  
her beautiful naked body full of shivers,

and whether slow or sudden in all her movements,  
she showed the childlike grace  
of a monkey.

#### IV. The Portrait

Illness and Death turn into ashes  
all the fire that once burned for us.  
Of those great eyes, so eager and so tender,  
of that mouth in which my heart was drowned,

of those kisses strong as healing herbs,  
of those transports quicker than light,  
what is left? It is terrible, O my soul.  
Nothing but a very pale drawing in three colors,

which, like me, dies in loneliness,  
and which Time, that insulting old man,  
rubs each day with his rough wing.

Black killer of Life and Art,  
you will never kill in my memory  
the woman who was my pleasure and my glory.

I give you these verses so that, if my name  
happily reaches times far away  
and one evening makes human minds dream,  
like a ship favored by a great wind,

your memory, like uncertain old stories,

may trouble the reader like a drum,  
and by a brotherly and holy chain  
remain hanging from my proud poems;

you, cursed being, to whom from the deepest abyss  
up to the highest heaven nothing answers except me;  
you, who like a shadow with a passing trace  
walk with light foot and calm eye

over the foolish mortals who judged you bitter—  
statue with black eyes,  
great angel  
with a forehead of bronze.

Always the Same

“Where does this strange sadness come from,”  
you said, “rising like the sea  
against a black and naked rock?”  
When the heart has once made its harvest,  
to live is an evil. Everyone knows this secret.

It is a very simple pain, not a mystery,  
and, like your joy,  
it is clear for all to see.  
So stop searching, beautiful curious one,  
and though your voice is sweet, be silent.

Be silent, innocent soul, always delighted,  
mouth with a child’s laughter.

Even more than Life,  
Death often holds us  
with fine and hidden ties.

Let my heart drink itself drunk on a lie,  
sink into your lovely eyes  
as into a beautiful dream,  
and sleep for a long time  
in the shadow of your eyelashes.

Entirely

The Demon came to my high room  
this morning to see me,  
and trying to catch me in a mistake,  
he said, "I would like to know,

"among all the beautiful things  
that make up her charm,  
among all the dark or rosy parts  
that form her lovely body,

"which is the sweetest." O my soul,  
you answered the hateful one,

"Since in her everything is healing sweetness,  
nothing can be preferred.

"When everything in her delights me,  
I do not know whether one thing  
pleases me more than another.

She shines like Dawn  
and comforts like Night.

“And the harmony is too perfect  
that rules her whole beautiful body  
for weak analysis  
to mark down  
its many notes.

“O mystical change  
of all my senses melted into one.  
Her breath becomes music,  
just as her voice  
becomes perfume.”

What Will You Say Tonight, Poor Lonely Soul

What will you say tonight, poor lonely soul?  
What will you say, my heart, once worn and bitter,  
to the most beautiful, the best, the dearest one  
whose divine look has suddenly made you bloom again?

We will take proud joy in singing her praise.  
Nothing is sweeter than her gentle rule.  
Her spiritual flesh has the perfume of angels,  
and her eyes dress us in clothes of light.

Whether it is in the night and loneliness,  
or in the street and the crowd,  
her ghost dances in the air like a torch.

Sometimes it speaks and says,  
“I am beautiful, and I command  
that, for love of me, you love only Beauty.  
I am the guardian angel, the Muse, and the Madonna.”

### Confession

Once, only once, kind and gentle woman,  
your smooth arm rested on my arm.  
That memory has never faded  
from the dark bottom of my soul.

It was late. Like a new medal,  
the full moon spread its light,  
and the solemn greatness of night, like a river,  
flowed over sleeping Paris.

And along the houses, under the great gates,  
cats moved secretly,  
their ears alert, or, like dear shadows,  
they slowly walked beside us.

Then suddenly, in the free closeness  
born in that pale light,  
from you, rich and sounding instrument  
where only bright joy seems to sing,

from you, clear and cheerful like a trumpet  
in the shining morning,  
there escaped a note of sadness,

a strange note, shaking as it came.

Like a weak child, horrible, dark, unclean,  
of whom her family would be ashamed,  
and whom they would have hidden for a long time  
in a cellar, far from the world.

Poor angel, that sharp note sang,  
“Nothing on earth is certain,  
and selfishness always betrays itself,  
however carefully it paints its face.

“It is hard work to be a beautiful woman,  
and it is only the common task  
of a cold mad dancer  
who faints inside a practiced smile.

“To build on hearts is foolish.  
Everything breaks—love and beauty—  
until Forgetfulness throws them into its basket  
and gives them back to Eternity.”

I have often called back that enchanted moon,  
that silence and that softness,  
and that terrible confession whispered  
in the confessional of the heart.

The Flask

There are strong perfumes for which all matter

seems full of openings.

One feels that they enter even glass.

When one opens a box from the East  
whose lock cries out with a rough sound,

or some cupboard in a deserted house,  
full of the bitter smell of old black dust,  
one sometimes finds an old flask that remembers,  
and from it leaps, still living,  
a soul that returns.

A thousand thoughts slept there,  
funeral butterflies in their dark cocoons,  
gently trembling in your heavy darkness,  
until they open their wings and rise,  
tinted with blue, touched with pink, striped with gold.

That is the intoxicating memory  
that flies in the troubled air.  
The eyes close. Dizziness seizes  
the defeated soul and pushes it  
with both hands toward a dark gulf of human poison.

It throws the soul down at the edge  
of an ancient pit,  
where, like a sweet-smelling Lazarus  
tearing open his burial cloth,  
the ghostly body of an old love rises,  
charming, stale, and grave-like.

So when I am lost

in the memory of men,  
when I am thrown away  
into the corner of a dark cupboard,  
an old lonely flask, broken down,

dusty, dirty, ugly, cracked,  
I will be your coffin, lovable poison,  
the witness of your force and your power,  
dear poison prepared by angels,  
liquid that eats me away,  
O life and death of my heart.

### Poison

Wine knows how to dress  
the poorest dirty room  
with miraculous richness,  
and makes more than one magical porch rise  
in the gold of its red steam,  
like a setting sun in a cloudy sky.

Opium makes larger  
what has no limits,  
stretches the endless,  
deepens time, digs deeper pleasure,  
and fills the soul, beyond what it can hold,  
with dark and heavy joys.

But all that is worth less  
than the poison that flows

from your eyes, from your green eyes,  
lakes where my soul trembles  
and sees itself upside down.  
My dreams come in crowds  
to drink from those bitter depths.

All that is worth less  
than the terrible wonder  
of your biting saliva,  
which throws my soul into forgetting without regret  
and, carrying dizziness with it,  
rolls that weak soul  
to the shores of death.

### The Cat I

In my brain there walks,  
as if in its own room,  
a beautiful cat, strong, sweet, and charming.  
When it meows, one hardly hears it,  
so soft and quiet is its voice.

But whether that voice becomes calm or angry,  
it is always rich and deep.  
That is its charm and its secret.  
That voice, dropping and flowing  
into my darkest depths,  
fills me like a many-voiced poem  
and delights me like a magic drink.

It quiets the cruelest pains  
and holds all ecstasies inside itself.  
To say the longest thoughts,  
it has no need of words.  
No bow on any string  
can make my heart, that perfect instrument,  
sing its deepest string more royally  
than your voice, mysterious cat.

Seraphic cat, strange cat,  
in whom everything is, like an angel,  
as fine  
as it is harmonious.

### The Beautiful Ship

I want to tell you, soft enchantress,  
about the different beauties that dress your youth.  
I want to paint your beauty for you,  
where childhood joins hands with maturity.

When you walk, sweeping the air with your wide skirt,  
you look like a beautiful ship putting out to sea,  
full of sails, moving and rolling  
in a rhythm that is soft, slow, and lazy.

On your wide round neck, on your full shoulders,  
your head carries itself with a strange grace.  
With a calm and conquering air,  
you go on your way, majestic child.

Your breast, rising and pushing the shining cloth,  
your proud breast is like a fine cupboard,  
whose round bright doors  
catch flashes of light like shields.

Provoking shields, armed with pink points.  
Cupboard of sweet secrets, full of good things,  
of wines, perfumes, and strong drinks  
that could make brains and hearts lose their senses.

When you walk, sweeping the air with your wide skirt,  
you look like a beautiful ship putting out to sea,  
full of sails, moving and rolling  
in a rhythm that is soft, slow, and lazy.

Your noble legs, and the flying cloth they drive aside,  
trouble dark desires and tease them  
like two witches stirring  
a black magic drink in a deep bowl.

Your arms, which could play with young Hercules himself,  
are shining boas, strong like him,  
made to hold your lover stubbornly,  
as if to press him into your heart.

On your wide round neck, on your full shoulders,  
your head carries itself with a strange grace.  
With a calm and conquering air,  
you go on your way, majestic child.

## The Irreparable

Can we choke the old, long Remorse,  
that lives, moves, and twists itself,  
and feeds on us like the worm on the dead,  
like the caterpillar on the oak?  
Can we choke merciless Remorse?

In what drink, in what wine, in what bitter tea  
shall we drown this old enemy,  
destroying and greedy like a prostitute,  
patient like an ant?  
In what drink, in what wine, in what bitter tea?

Tell me, beautiful sorceress, if you know,  
tell this spirit full of pain,  
like a dying man crushed by the wounded,  
trampled under a horse's hoof,  
tell me, beautiful sorceress, if you know.

Tell that dying man, already smelled by the wolf  
and watched by the crow,  
tell that broken soldier  
whether he must give up hope  
of his cross and his grave.  
Tell that poor dying man.

Can one light up a muddy black sky?  
Can one tear open darkness  
thicker than pitch, with no morning and no evening,

no stars and no funeral lightning?  
Can one light up a muddy black sky?

Hope, which once shone in the inn windows,  
is stained and dead forever.  
Without moon and without rays,  
where can one find shelter  
for the martyrs of an evil road?  
The Devil has put out every light in the inn windows.

Lovely sorceress, do you love the damned?  
Tell me, do you know the unforgivable?  
Do you know Remorse, with its poisoned face,  
for which our heart is the chosen mark?  
Lovely sorceress, do you love the damned?

The irreparable eats our soul  
with its cursed tooth,  
our soul, poor and broken monument,  
and often, like a termite,  
it attacks the building at its base.  
The irreparable eats our soul with its cursed tooth.

Sometimes, deep in some common theater  
made bright by the loud orchestra,  
I have seen a fairy light  
a miraculous dawn  
in an infernal sky.

Sometimes, deep in such a common theater,  
I have seen a being made only of light, gold, and thin cloth

throw down the huge Satan.  
But my heart, where ecstasy never comes,  
is a theater where people wait,  
always, always in vain,  
for the Being with wings of shining cloth.

### Conversation

You are a beautiful autumn sky, clear and pink.  
But sadness rises in me like the sea,  
and when it falls back, it leaves on my bitter lip  
the burning memory of its muddy taste.

Your hand slips in vain across my fainting chest.  
What it seeks, my friend, is a place laid waste  
by the claw and the fierce tooth of woman.  
Do not search for my heart anymore. The beasts have eaten it.

My heart is a palace made ugly by the crowd.  
There men get drunk, kill each other, and fight by the hair.  
A perfume floats around your naked throat.

O Beauty, hard whip of souls, this is your will.  
With your eyes of fire, bright as festivals,  
burn to ashes these torn pieces the beasts have left.

### Autumn Song

Soon we will fall into the cold darkness.

Goodbye, bright light of our too-short summers.  
I already hear the wood falling  
with funeral blows onto the stones of the yard.

All winter will return into my being: anger,  
hate, shivering, horror, hard forced labor,  
and like the sun in its polar hell,  
my heart will become only a red block of ice.

I listen, trembling, to each log that falls.  
Even a scaffold being built gives no duller sound.  
My spirit is like a tower collapsing  
under the blows of a tireless heavy ram.

Rocked by that endless beating,  
I seem to hear a coffin being nailed shut somewhere.  
For whom? Yesterday it was summer. Now it is autumn.  
That mysterious sound is like the sound of departure.

I love the greenish light of your long eyes,  
sweet beauty, but today everything is bitter to me,  
and nothing, not your love, not the room, not the fire,  
is worth to me the sun shining over the sea.

And yet love me, tender heart. Be a mother  
even to an ungrateful man, even to a cruel one.  
As lover or sister, be the passing sweetness  
of a glorious autumn or a setting sun.

A short task. The grave is waiting, hungry.  
Ah, let me, with my head resting on your knees,

taste, while regretting the white burning summer,  
the yellow gentle ray of the late season.

### Afternoon Song

Though your cruel eyebrows  
give you a strange look  
that is not the look of an angel,  
sorceress with tempting eyes,

I adore you, light woman,  
my terrible passion,  
with the devotion  
of a priest before his idol.

The desert and the forest  
give perfume to your rough hair.  
Your head has the pose  
of mystery and secret things.

Perfume moves over your flesh  
like smoke around a censer.  
You charm like evening,  
dark and warm nymph.

Even the strongest magic drinks  
are worth less than your laziness,  
and you know the caress  
that can bring the dead back to life.

Your hips are in love  
with your back and your breasts,  
and your slow rich poses  
make even the cushions surrender.

Sometimes, to calm  
your mysterious rage,  
you seriously give out  
both the bite and the kiss.

You tear me, dark one,  
with a mocking laugh,  
and then you place upon my heart  
your eye, soft as the moon.

Under your satin shoes,  
under your charming silk feet,  
I place my great joy,  
my genius, and my fate,

my soul healed by you,  
by you, light and color,  
explosion of heat  
in my black Siberia.

Sisina

Imagine Diana in her proud hunting dress,  
riding through the forests or beating the bushes,  
with hair and breast in the wind, drunk on noise,

beautiful and challenging the best riders.

Have you seen Théroigne, lover of bloodshed,  
driving a barefoot people into attack,  
with cheek and eye on fire, playing her part,  
going up royal stairs with a sword in her hand?

Such is Sisina. But this gentle warrior  
has a soul as kind as it is deadly.  
Her courage, made wild by gunpowder and drums,  
knows how to lay down its arms before those who beg.

And her heart, burned and torn by flame,  
still keeps, for anyone worthy of it,  
a deep store of tears.

To a Creole Lady

In the perfumed land that the sun caresses,  
I knew, under a roof of trees all red with bloom  
and palm trees from which laziness falls on the eyes,  
a Creole lady with little-known charms.

Her skin is pale and warm. The dark enchantress  
has noble grace in the way she holds her neck.  
Tall and slender as she walks, like a huntress,  
her smile is calm and her eyes are sure.

If you came, Madame, to the true land of glory,  
to the banks of the Seine or the green Loire,

beautiful enough to grace old noble houses,

you would make a thousand sonnets grow  
in the hearts of poets hidden in cool shadows,  
and your great eyes would master them more than your dark ones.

### The Ghostly Return

Like angels with fierce eyes,  
I will come back into your room  
and slip toward you without a sound  
with the shadows of the night.

And I will give you, my dark one,  
kisses cold as the moon  
and caresses like a serpent  
crawling around a grave.

When pale morning comes,  
you will find my place empty,  
and until evening that place  
will stay cold.

As others rule by tenderness,  
over your life and over your youth,  
I want to rule  
by fear.

### Autumn Sonnet

Your eyes, clear as crystal, say to me,

“For you, strange lover, what am I worth?”

Be charming and be silent. My heart, which hates almost all things  
except the innocence of old simple creatures,

does not want to show you its hellish secret,  
nor its black story written with fire,  
you whose hand invites me into long sleep.  
I hate passion, and thought hurts me.

Let us love each other softly. Love in its dark hut,  
hidden in shadow, bends its fatal bow.

I know the weapons in its old storehouse:

crime, horror, and madness. O pale daisy,  
are you not, like me, an autumn sun,  
my so white, my so cold Marguerite?

### The Moon's Sadness

Tonight the moon dreams more lazily,  
like a beautiful woman on many cushions  
who with a light and wandering hand  
touches the shape of her breasts before sleep.

On the satin back of soft white clouds,  
half-dying, she gives herself to long sweet weakness,  
and lets her eyes wander over the white visions  
that rise in the blue sky like flowers.

When sometimes, in her idle sadness,  
she lets fall a secret tear upon this world,  
a faithful poet, enemy of sleep,

takes that pale tear into the hollow of his hand,  
with rainbow light like a piece of opal,  
and hides it in his heart far from the eyes of the sun.

### The Cats

Fervent lovers and severe scholars  
both love, in their mature years,  
cats, strong and gentle, pride of the house,  
who like them are sensitive to cold and stay at home.

Friends of learning and of pleasure,  
they seek silence and the horror of darkness.  
Erebus would have taken them for his funeral horses  
if they could bend their pride to slavery.

While dreaming, they take on the noble pose  
of great sphinxes stretched out in lonely places,  
who seem to sleep inside an endless dream.

Their fertile loins are full of magical sparks,  
and grains of gold, like fine sand,  
dimly fill their mysterious eyes with stars.

## The Pipe

I am the pipe of a writer.  
One can see, by looking at my face,  
Abyssinian or African in shape,  
that my master is a great smoker.

When he is full of sorrow,  
I smoke like a poor cottage  
where supper is being prepared  
for the farmer coming home.

I wrap and rock his soul  
in the moving blue net  
that rises from my burning mouth,

and I roll a strong healing leaf  
that charms his heart  
and cures his tired mind.

## Music

Music often takes hold of me like the sea.  
Toward my pale star,  
under a ceiling of mist or in a wide sky,  
I set sail.

With chest forward and lungs filled  
like cloth in the wind,  
I climb the backs of piled-up waves

that night hides from me.

I feel within me all the passions  
of a suffering ship.

The good wind, the storm, and all its shaking

rock me over the great gulf.

At other times there is calm, flat water,  
great mirror of my despair.

#### Burial of a Cursed Poet

If on some heavy dark night  
a good Christian, out of pity,  
buries your praised body  
behind some old broken wall,

then, at the hour when chaste stars  
close their sleepy eyes,  
the spider will weave its web there,  
and the snake will raise its young.

All year long you will hear above your condemned head  
the cries of wolves,  
the games of hungry witches,

the play of old lustful men,  
and the secret plans  
of dark thieves.

## The Happy Dead Man

In rich earth full of snails,  
I want to dig for myself a deep grave,  
where I can spread out my old bones at ease  
and sleep in forgetfulness like a shark in the sea.

I hate wills, and I hate tombs.  
Rather than beg one tear from the world,  
while still alive I would rather invite the crows  
to tear the last pieces from my filthy body.

O worms, black companions with no ears and no eyes,  
see a dead man come to you, free and happy,  
philosophers who love life, children of decay.

Go through my ruin without regret,  
and tell me whether there is still some torture left  
for this old body without a soul, dead among the dead.

## The Cracked Bell

It is bitter and sweet, in winter nights,  
to listen near the fire that shakes and smokes  
while far memories slowly rise  
to the sound of bells singing in the fog.

Happy is the bell with a strong throat  
that, though old, still stays quick and healthy,

and faithfully sends out its religious cry  
like an old soldier standing watch under a tent.

But my soul is cracked, and when in its sadness  
it wants to fill the cold night air with song,  
its weak voice often seems

like the thick last breath of a wounded man  
left beside a lake of blood under a great pile of dead,  
dying without moving, in terrible effort.

### Spleen I

The month of rain, angry with all life,  
pours from its urn in great streams  
cold darkness on the pale people  
of the nearby graveyard and death on the foggy edge of the town.

My cat on the floor, looking for a bed,  
moves without rest its thin sick body.  
The soul of an old poet wanders in the drain  
with the sad voice of a freezing ghost.

The deep bell complains, and the smoky log  
sings out of tune with the coughing clock,  
while in a card game full of dirty perfume,

the handsome jack of hearts and the queen of spades,  
sad gift from some old sick woman,  
talk darkly of their dead loves.

## Spleen II

I have more memories than if I were a thousand years old.

A great chest with drawers, full of bills,  
verses, love letters, lawsuits, songs,  
and heavy hair tied up in receipts,

hides fewer secrets than my sad brain.

It is a pyramid, an immense tomb,  
which holds more dead than the common grave.

I am a graveyard hated by the moon,

where, like remorse, long worms drag themselves  
and always attack my dearest dead.

I am an old room full of faded roses,  
where a whole pile of old fashions lies mixed together,

where sad pastel pictures and pale painted ladies  
alone still breathe the smell of an opened bottle.

Nothing is longer than crippled days  
when, under the heavy snow of snowy years,

boredom, fruit of sad lack of wonder,  
grows to the size of immortality.

Now you are no longer living matter,  
but only stone surrounded by a vague fear,

sleeping in the depth of a foggy desert,  
an old sphinx unknown to the careless world,

forgotten on the map, whose savage humor  
sings only in the light of the setting sun.

### Spleen III

I am like the king of a rainy country,  
rich but powerless, young and yet very old,  
who, laughing at the bows of his teachers,  
is bored with his dogs as with all other beasts.

Nothing can cheer him, not hunting, not falcons,  
not his dying people under his balcony,  
not the foolish song of his favorite clown.  
His flowered bed turns into a tomb,

and the ladies of the court, for whom every prince is handsome,  
can no longer find shameless clothes  
to pull one smile from that young skeleton.  
The learned man who makes gold for him

has never been able to pull out  
the spoiled thing inside his being,  
and even those baths of blood from old Rome,  
remembered by the powerful in their late years,

have not been able to warm that dull dead body  
where, instead of blood,  
the green water of Lethe flows.

## Spleen IV

When the low heavy sky weighs like a lid  
on the groaning spirit caught in long boredom,  
and from the horizon, holding the whole circle,  
it pours down on us a black day sadder than night;

when the earth is changed into a wet prison,  
where Hope, like a bat,  
beats against the walls with its timid wing  
and strikes its head on rotten ceilings;

when the rain, spreading its endless lines,  
copies the bars of a huge prison,  
and a silent people of ugly spiders  
comes to stretch its webs inside our brains;

then the bells suddenly leap up in fury  
and throw toward heaven a terrible scream,  
like wandering spirits without a country  
who begin to cry without stopping.

And long funeral cars, with no drums and no music,  
pass slowly through my soul. Hope, defeated, weeps,  
and cruel terrible Anguish, ruling like a tyrant,  
plants its black flag on my bent skull.

## The Taste of Nothingness

Sad spirit, once in love with struggle,

Hope, whose spur once drove your fire,  
does not want to ride you anymore. Lie down without shame,  
old horse whose foot strikes every stone.

Give in, my heart. Sleep your animal sleep.  
Beaten spirit, tired old robber,  
love has no taste for you now, no more than fighting.  
So goodbye to brass songs and the sighs of the flute.

Pleasures, tempt no more this dark and sullen heart.  
Lovely Spring has lost its smell.  
And Time swallows me minute by minute,  
like endless snow swallowing a stiff frozen body.

I no longer look there for the shelter of a hut.  
I look down from above on the round earth.  
Avalanche, will you carry me away  
in your fall?

### Alchemy of Pain

One thing lights you with its fire.  
Another covers you with mourning.  
What says to one, "Burial,"  
says to the other, "Life and splendor."

Unknown Hermes who helps me  
and who has always filled me with fear,  
you make me equal to Midas,  
the saddest of all alchemists.

Through you I turn gold into iron  
and paradise into hell.

In the shroud of clouds  
I find the body of someone dear,

and on the shores of heaven

I build  
great tombs.

### A Pagan's Prayer

Ah, do not let your fire die.  
Warm my numb heart again,  
Pleasure, torture of souls.  
Goddess, hear the one who begs you.

Goddess spread through the air,  
flame in our dark place below,  
answer a soul that is fading  
and offers you a song of bronze.

Pleasure, always be my queen.  
Take the face of a siren  
made of flesh and velvet,

or pour your heavy sleep  
into the shapeless and holy wine,  
Pleasure, soft and changing ghost.

## The Lid

Wherever he may go, on sea or land,  
under a burning sky or a white sun,  
servant of Jesus, lover of pleasure,  
dark beggar or shining Croesus,

city man, country man, wanderer, one who stays,  
whether his small brain is quick or slow,  
man everywhere suffers the fear of mystery  
and looks upward only with a trembling eye.

Above, the Sky—that wall of a vault that chokes him,  
a bright ceiling for a foolish opera  
where every actor walks on blood-stained ground,

terror of the man of pleasure, hope of the mad hermit—  
the Sky, black lid of the great pot  
where the vast unseen Human Race boils.

## The Unexpected

Harpagon, watching over his dying father,  
said to himself, dreaming before those already white lips,  
“I think we have enough old boards  
up in the attic, do we not?”

Célimène coos and says, “My heart is good,  
and of course God made me very beautiful.”

Her heart. A hard dried heart, smoked like a ham,  
cooked again in eternal fire.

A cloudy writer, who thinks he is a torch,  
says to the poor man he has drowned in darkness,  
“Where do you see him, that maker of Beauty,  
that Restorer you praise?”

Better than all of them, I know certain lovers of pleasure  
who yawn night and day, complain, and cry,  
repeating, weak and vain, “Yes, I want  
to become virtuous—in an hour.”

The clock, in its turn, says softly, “He is ready,  
the damned one. I warn the rotten flesh in vain.  
Man is blind, deaf, and fragile, like a wall  
where an insect lives and bites.”

And then Someone appears, whom they all denied,  
and says to them, mocking and proud,  
“I think you have taken enough communion  
in my joyful Black Mass.

“Each of you has made me a temple in his heart.  
In secret, you have kissed my filthy back.  
Know Satan by his victorious laugh,  
huge and ugly like the world.

“Could you really believe, surprised hypocrites,  
that one can mock the master and cheat him,  
and that it is natural to receive two rewards,

to go to Heaven and also be rich?

“The hunted animal must pay the old hunter  
who waits a long time for his prey.  
I will carry you away through the thick darkness,  
companions of my sad joy,

through the thickness of earth and rock,  
through the confused piles of your ashes,  
into a palace as great as I am, made in one block,  
and not of soft stone,

for it is made with universal Sin,  
and it contains my pride, my pain, and my glory.”

Yet high above, at the top of the universe,  
an Angel sounds the victory

of those whose heart says, “Blessed be your whip,  
Lord. Blessed be pain, O Father.  
My soul in your hands is not a useless toy,  
and your wisdom has no end.”

The sound of the trumpet is so sweet  
in those solemn evenings of heavenly harvest  
that it enters like ecstasy into all  
whose praise it sings.

Midnight Examination

The clock, striking midnight,  
ironically tells us  
to remember what use  
we made of the day that is leaving.

Today, fatal date,  
Friday the thirteenth, we have,  
in spite of all that we know,  
lived like heretics.

We have insulted Jesus,  
the clearest of all gods.  
Like a parasite at the table  
of some monstrous rich man,

we have, to please the brute,  
worthy servant of Demons,  
insulted what we love  
and praised what disgusts us.

We have saddened, like a slave executioner,  
the weak man whom people wrongly despise.  
We have greeted huge Stupidity,  
Stupidity with the forehead of a bull.

We have kissed stupid Matter  
with great devotion,  
and blessed the pale light  
of rotting flesh.

At last, to drown dizziness in madness,

we, proud priests of the Lyre,  
whose glory is to open wide  
the drunkenness of funeral things,

have drunk without thirst  
and eaten without hunger.  
Quick, let us blow out the lamp  
so that we may hide in darkness.

### Sad Madrigal

What does it matter to me whether you are wise?  
Be beautiful, and be sad. Tears  
add charm to the face,  
as a river does to a landscape.  
A storm makes flowers young again.

I love you most when joy  
runs away from your defeated forehead,  
when your heart sinks into horror,  
when over your present there spreads  
the terrible cloud of the past.

I love you when your great eye pours out  
a warm water like blood,  
when, in spite of my hand rocking you,  
your pain, too heavy to hide, breaks through  
like the last breath of someone dying.

I drink in, divine pleasure,

deep and delicious hymn,  
all the sobs of your breast,  
and I think your heart grows bright  
from the pearls your eyes pour out.

I know that your heart, full  
of old uprooted loves,  
still burns like a furnace,  
and that under your breast  
you still hide some of the pride of the damned.

But, my dear, until your dreams  
have reflected Hell,  
and in a nightmare without rest,  
dreaming of poison and knives,  
in love with powder and iron,

opening yourself to everyone only with fear,  
reading sorrow everywhere,  
shaking when the hour strikes,  
you have not yet felt the grip  
of irresistible Disgust.

Then you will not be able, slave queen,  
you who love me only with fear,  
in the horror of unhealthy night,  
to say to me, your soul full of cries,  
“I am your equal, O my King.”

The Warner

Every man worthy of the name  
has in his heart a yellow Serpent,  
set there as if on a throne,  
which, if he says, "I want," answers, "No."

Sink your eyes into the fixed eyes  
of wild women or water spirits.  
The Fang says, "Think of your duty."

Make children, plant trees,  
polish verses, carve marble—  
the Fang says, "Will you live tonight?"

Whatever he begins or hopes for,  
man does not live for one moment  
without suffering the warning  
of that unbearable Snake.

To a Malabar Girl

Your feet are as fine as your hands, and your hips  
are wide enough to make the fairest white woman jealous.  
To the thoughtful artist your body is sweet and dear.  
Your great velvet eyes are darker than your skin.

In those hot blue lands where your god made you,  
your work is to light your master's pipe,  
to fill the bottles with cool water and sweet smells,  
and to chase the wandering mosquitoes from the bed.

And as soon as morning makes the trees sing,  
you go to the market for pineapples and bananas.  
All day, wherever you wish, you walk with bare feet  
and softly sing old unknown songs.

And when evening comes in its red coat,  
you gently lay your body on a mat,  
where your floating dreams are full of hummingbirds,  
always graceful and bright like you.

Why, happy child, do you want to see our France,  
that crowded land cut down by suffering,  
and trust your life to the strong arms of sailors  
to say a great goodbye to your dear tamarind trees?

You, half dressed in thin light cloth,  
shivering here under snow and hail,  
how you would weep for your free and gentle days  
if a hard corset shut in your sides,

if you had to search in our mud for your supper  
and sell the perfume of your strange beauty,  
your thoughtful eye following, through our dirty fogs,  
the ghostly shapes of lost palm trees.

The Voice

My cradle stood next to the library,  
a dark Babel where novels, science, and old tales,

Latin dust and Greek dust,  
all were mixed together. I was as tall as a great book.

Two voices spoke to me. One, sly and firm,  
said, "The Earth is a cake full of sweetness.  
I can, and then your pleasure would never end,  
give you an appetite just as large as it."

And the other said, "Come, oh come travel in dreams,  
beyond what is possible, beyond what is known."  
And that voice sang like the wind on the shore,  
a crying ghost, from no one knows where,

which touches the ear and still fills it with fear.  
I answered, "Yes, sweet voice." From that moment  
comes what one may, sadly, call my wound  
and my fate.

Behind the scenes of this great life,  
in the darkest part of the abyss,  
I clearly see strange worlds,  
and, victim of my own clear vision,

I drag with me serpents  
that bite my shoes.  
And since that time, like the prophets,  
I have loved the desert and the sea with tenderness.

I laugh in times of grief  
and cry in times of celebration.  
I find a sweet taste in the bitterest wine.

I often take facts for lies,  
and with my eyes on the sky  
I fall into holes.

But the Voice comforts me and says,  
“Keep your dreams.  
The wise do not have  
such beautiful ones as fools do.”

Hymn

To the dearest one, to the most beautiful one,  
who fills my heart with light,  
to the angel, to the immortal idol,  
greetings in immortality.

She spreads through my life  
like air full of salt,  
and into my never-filled soul  
she pours the taste of the eternal.

Always fresh little bag of perfume  
that sweetens the air of a dear room,  
forgotten incense burner that still sends up smoke  
secretly through the night,

how can I speak truly of you,  
love that cannot be spoiled?  
Grain of musk lying unseen  
in the depth of my eternity.

To the angel, to the immortal idol,  
to the very good one, to the very beautiful one  
who is my joy and my health,  
greetings in immortality.

### The Rebel

A furious Angel falls from heaven like an eagle,  
grabs the unbeliever by the hair,  
and says, shaking him, “You will learn the rule.  
For I am your good Angel, do you hear? I want it.

“You must love, without making a face,  
the poor, the evil, the twisted, the foolish,  
so that when Jesus passes  
you may spread a triumphal carpet with your charity.

“That is Love. Before your heart grows cold,  
light your ecstasy again for the glory of God.  
That is the true pleasure  
whose charm does not die.”

And the Angel, punishing as much as he loves,  
beats the cursed man with giant fists.  
But the damned man always answers,  
“I do not want to.”

### The Fountain

Your beautiful eyes are tired, poor lover.  
Stay a long time without opening them again,  
in that lazy pose  
where pleasure has surprised you.

In the court the fountain talks  
and is never silent, day or night.  
Softly it keeps alive the ecstasy  
into which love has thrown me this evening.

The open jet,  
in a thousand flowers,  
where happy Phoebe  
puts her colors,  
falls like a rain  
of broad tears.

So your soul, set on fire  
by the burning flash of pleasure,  
jumps, quick and bold,  
toward the vast enchanted skies.

Then, dying, it pours itself out  
in a wave of sad weakness  
which, by an unseen slope,  
comes down to the bottom of my heart.

The open jet,  
in a thousand flowers,  
where happy Phoebe

puts her colors,  
falls like a rain  
of broad tears.

O you, whom night makes so beautiful,  
how sweet it is, leaning above your breasts,  
to hear the eternal complaint  
sobbing in the basins.

Moon, sounding water, blessed night,  
trees that tremble all around,  
your pure sadness  
is the mirror of my love.

The open jet,  
in a thousand flowers,  
where happy Phoebe  
puts her colors,  
falls like a rain  
of broad tears.

#### The Romantic Sunset

How beautiful the Sun is when it rises fresh,  
like an explosion throwing out its greeting.  
Blessed is the one who can, with love,  
greet its setting, more glorious than a dream.

I remember. I saw everything—flower, spring, furrow—  
grow weak under its eye like a beating heart.

Let us run toward the horizon, it is late, run quickly,  
to catch at least one slanting ray.

But I chase in vain the god who withdraws.  
The irresistible Night sets up its rule,  
black, wet, deadly, and full of trembling.

A smell of the grave swims in the darkness,  
and my fearful foot crushes, by the edge of the swamp,  
unexpected toads and cold snails.

### The Abyss

Pascal had his abyss moving with him.  
Alas, all is abyss—action, desire, dream,  
speech—and many times on my hair standing upright  
I feel the wind of Fear passing.

Above, below, everywhere, depth and shore,  
silence, space, terrible and charming.  
On the floor of my nights God with His wise finger  
draws a nightmare with many shapes, without rest.

I fear sleep as one fears a great hole,  
full of vague horror, leading one knows not where.  
Through every window I see only the infinite,

and my spirit, forever haunted by dizziness,  
envies the numbness of nothingness.  
Ah, never to go out from Numbers and Beings.

## The Laments of an Icarus

The lovers of prostitutes  
are happy, well-fed, and full of strength.  
As for me, my arms are broken  
from embracing clouds.

It is because of those strange stars  
that burn deep in the sky  
that my eyes, now burned out,  
see only memories of suns.

In vain I wanted from space  
to find the end and the middle.  
Under some eye of fire that I do not know,  
I feel my wing breaking.

And burned by love of beauty,  
I will not have the high honor  
of giving my name to the abyss  
that will serve me as my grave.

## Meditation

Be wise, O my Pain, and stay more quiet.  
You asked for Evening. It comes. Here it is.  
A dark air wraps the city,  
bringing peace to some, worry to others.

While the low crowd of mortals,  
under the whip of Pleasure, that merciless executioner,  
goes to gather remorse in their slavish feast,  
my Pain, give me your hand. Come here.

Far from them, see the dead Years  
leaning over the balconies of the sky  
in old-fashioned dresses.  
See smiling Regret rise from the water.

See the dying Sun fall asleep under an arch,  
and like a long burial cloth stretched in the East,  
hear, my dear, hear  
the sweet Night walking.

#### The Self-Tormentor

I will strike you without anger  
and without hate, like a butcher.  
Like Moses striking the rock,  
I will make from your eyelid

the waters of suffering spring out  
to water my Sahara.

My desire, swollen with hope,  
will float on your salty tears

like a ship that goes out to sea,  
and in my heart, made drunk by them,

your dear sobs will sound  
like a drum calling men to battle.

Am I not a false note  
in the holy symphony,  
because of hungry Irony  
that shakes me and bites me?

It is in my voice, that harsh cry.  
That black poison is all my blood.  
I am the dark mirror  
where the cruel woman looks at herself.

I am the wound and the knife.  
I am the slap and the cheek.  
I am the broken wheel and the limbs,  
the victim and the executioner.

I am the vampire of my own heart,  
one of those great abandoned ones  
condemned to eternal laughter  
and no longer able to smile.

The Irremediable

An Idea, a Form, a Being  
fallen from the blue sky  
into a muddy, lead-colored Styx  
where no eye from Heaven can enter;

an Angel, careless traveler,  
tempted by love of the ugly,  
struggling at the bottom of a huge nightmare  
like a swimmer;

fighting, in funeral fear,  
against a giant whirlpool  
that sings like mad people  
and spins in the darkness;

an unhappy man under a spell,  
fumbling in useless ways,  
trying to escape a place full of snakes,  
searching for the light and the key;

a damned soul going down without a lamp,  
at the edge of an abyss  
whose smell betrays  
its wet depth;

down endless stairs without a rail,  
where slimy monsters stay awake,  
and their wide eyes of fire  
make the night even blacker

and show nothing  
but themselves;

a ship trapped in the pole,  
as if in a prison of crystal,  
trying to find by what deadly narrow sea

it fell into that jail—

clear signs, perfect image  
of a fate beyond cure,  
which makes one think  
that the Devil always does his work well.

Dark and shining face-to-face,  
which a heart made into its mirror;  
a well of Truth, clear and black,  
where a pale star trembles;

an ironic, hellish lighthouse,  
torch of Satan-like graces,  
the only comfort and the only glory—  
conscience inside Evil.

The Clock

Clock, dark god, frightening and calm,  
whose finger warns us and says, “Remember.”  
Soon the living pains  
will plant themselves in your fearful heart like arrows.

Dreamlike Pleasure will run away  
toward the horizon  
like a spirit disappearing behind the stage.  
Every moment eats a piece  
of the delight given

to each man for his short season.

Three thousand six hundred times an hour,  
the Second whispers, "Remember."  
Quickly, with its insect voice,  
Now says, "I know the Past,

and I have sucked your life  
with my dirty mouth."

Remember. Remember. Be mindful.  
My metal throat speaks every language.  
Minutes, foolish man, are pieces of gold ore.  
You must not let them go

without pulling the gold from them.

Remember that Time is a greedy gambler  
who always wins, never cheating. That is the law.  
Day grows less, night grows more. Remember.  
The abyss is always thirsty. The water-clock empties.

Soon the hour will strike  
when holy Chance,  
when noble Virtue, your still-virgin wife,  
when even Repentance, last poor inn on the road,

will all say to you,  
"Die, old coward. It is too late."

## Paris Scenes

### The Sun

Along the old poor district,  
where shutters hang from broken houses  
and hide secret pleasures,  
when the cruel sun strikes again and again

the city and the fields,  
the roofs and the wheat,  
I go out alone to practice  
my strange fencing,

smelling in every corner  
for the chance of a rhyme,  
stumbling on words  
as on paving stones,

sometimes hitting against lines  
I had dreamed long ago.

This fatherly giver, enemy of weakness,  
wakes the worms in the fields  
as it wakes the roses.  
It sends care up into the sky

and fills both minds and hives with honey.  
It makes crippled men young again

and gentle and happy  
like girls.

It tells the harvest  
to grow and ripen  
in the immortal heart  
that always wants to flower.

And when, like a poet,  
it comes down into the city,  
it gives honor to the lowest things  
and enters like a king,

without noise and without servants,  
into every hospital  
and every palace.

### The Offended Moon

O Moon, quietly loved by our fathers,  
from your high blue lands  
where the stars follow you  
like a bright and elegant court,

my old Cynthia, lamp of our dark rooms,  
do you see lovers on their rich beds  
showing their fresh white teeth in sleep?  
Do you see the poet striking his head against his work?

Do you see the snakes

joining together under dry grass?  
Under your yellow mask,  
with your secret foot,

do you still go, as in older days,  
from evening until morning,  
to kiss the faded graces  
of Endymion?

“I see your mother, child  
of this poor age,  
bending over her mirror  
with the heavy weight of years,

and skillfully putting white powder  
on the breast  
that fed you.”

#### To a Red-Haired Beggar Girl

White girl with red hair,  
whose dress, through its holes,  
lets one see both poverty  
and beauty,

for me, poor poet,  
your young sickly body,  
full of freckles,  
has its own sweetness.

You wear more proudly  
than some queen in a romance  
with velvet shoes  
your heavy wooden clogs.

Instead of a short rag,  
let a great court dress  
fall in long, loud folds  
behind your heels.

And in place of torn stockings,  
let there still shine on your leg,  
for the eyes of wicked men,  
a golden knife.

Let badly tied ribbons  
show for our sins  
your two beautiful breasts,  
bright as eyes.

Let your arms, when one wishes to undress you,  
pretend to refuse  
and drive away with playful blows  
the little laughing fingers.

Pearls of the purest water,  
sonnets by old master Belleau,  
forever offered  
by your chained lovers,

crowds of little poets

giving you their first fruits  
and watching your shoe  
under the staircase,

many a page, in love with chance,  
many a lord and many a Ronsard  
would wait with delight  
for your fresh little room.

You would count on your beds  
more kisses than lilies,  
and bring under your law  
more than one Valois.

And yet you go begging  
for some old broken bit  
lying at the door  
of a cheap eating place at the street corner.

You walk, looking from below,  
at little jewels worth almost nothing  
which I cannot, oh forgive me,  
give to you.

So go, then, with no other ornament—  
no perfume, no pearls, no diamond—  
than your thin nakedness,  
O my beauty.

The Swan

Andromache, I think of you. That little river,  
poor and sad mirror where once there shone  
the great majesty of your widow's grief,  
that false Simois made larger by your tears,

suddenly made my rich memory grow  
as I crossed the new Carrousel.  
Old Paris is gone. The shape of a city, sadly,  
changes faster than the heart of a human being.

Now I see only in my mind  
that camp of huts,  
those piles of rough pillars and unfinished tops,  
the grass, the great stones green from rainwater,  
and in the windows the confused shining  
of broken old things for sale.

There once stood a great place of animals.  
There, one morning, at the hour  
when Work wakes under the cold clear sky,  
when the street-cleaning wagons push a dark storm  
through the silent air,

I saw a swan that had escaped from its cage.  
With its webbed feet rubbing the dry stones,  
it dragged its white feathers over the rough ground.  
Near a stream with no water, the poor creature,  
opening its beak,

beat its wings nervously in the dust,

and seemed to say, its heart full  
of memory of its beautiful native lake,  
“Water, when will you rain?  
Thunder, when will you sound?”

I see again that unhappy creature,  
strange and fatal myth,  
sometimes raising its eager head  
on its shaking neck toward the sky,  
like the man in Ovid,

toward that mocking and cruelly blue sky,  
as if it were sending up a complaint to God.

Paris changes, but in my sadness  
nothing has moved. New palaces, scaffolds, blocks of stone,  
old poor districts—everything becomes, for me,  
an allegory,  
and my dear memories are heavier than rocks.

So before the Louvre one image oppresses me.  
I think of my great swan, with its wild movements,  
like exiles, absurd and noble,  
eaten by a longing with no end. And then I think of you,

Andromache, fallen from the arms of a great husband,  
made low like common cattle under proud Pyrrhus,  
bending in ecstasy beside an empty tomb,  
widow of Hector, and wife of Helenus.

I think of the black woman, thin and sick,

walking in the mud, searching with wild eyes  
for the lost coconut trees of splendid Africa  
behind the huge wall of fog.

I think of everyone who has lost  
what can never be found again, never, never—  
of those who drink only tears  
and nurse Pain as if it were a good wolf,

of thin orphans drying up like flowers.  
So, in the forest where my spirit goes into exile,  
old Memory sounds its horn with all its breath.  
I think of sailors forgotten on an island,

of prisoners, of the defeated,  
and of many others too.

### The Seven Old Men

Busy city, city full of dreams,  
where the ghost, in broad daylight, catches the passer-by,  
where mysteries flow everywhere like sap  
through the narrow channels of the mighty giant,

one morning, while in the sad street  
the houses, made taller by the mist,  
looked like the two banks of a swollen river,  
and the whole scene, like the soul of an actor,

was covered by a dirty yellow fog,

I walked on, making my nerves hard like a hero  
and arguing with my already tired soul  
through the suburb shaken by heavy carts.

Suddenly an old man appeared,  
whose yellow rags copied the color  
of that rainy sky,  
and whose look would have made people give him alms  
if wickedness had not shone in his eyes.

His pupils seemed dipped in bitter poison.  
His look sharpened the cold itself,  
and his beard, long-haired and stiff as a sword,  
stuck out like the beard of Judas.

He was not bent but broken.  
His back made with his leg  
a perfect right angle,  
so that his stick, completing his appearance,  
gave him the awkward shape and step

of a crippled animal  
or a Jew with three legs.  
Through snow and mud he stumbled on,  
as if he were crushing the dead under his shoes,  
more hostile to the universe than indifferent.

Then another just like him followed—  
same beard, same eyes, same back, same stick, same rags.  
Nothing separated this hundred-year-old twin  
from the first one. They seemed from the same hell,

and these strange ghosts walked

with the same step toward an unknown goal.

To what filthy plot was I being offered?

What evil chance was making me so low?

For I counted, minute after minute,

seven times, that terrible old man multiplying himself.

Whoever laughs at my fear,

and does not feel a brotherly shiver,

should remember that in spite of all that decay

these seven hateful monsters

seemed eternal.

Could I, without dying, have seen the eighth—

that cruel double, ironic and fatal,

that disgusting phoenix, son and father of himself?

But I turned my back

on the infernal line.

Angry like a drunk man who sees double,

I went home. I shut my door in fear,

sick and dark in spirit,

my mind burning and confused,

wounded by mystery and by absurdity.

In vain my reason tried to take the helm.

The storm, playing, threw all its efforts aside,

and my soul danced and danced, like an old boat

without masts,

on a monstrous sea with no shores.

## The Little Old Women

In the winding folds of old capitals,  
where everything, even horror, can turn to enchantment,  
I watch, obeying my dark moods,  
for strange beings, old and broken, yet charming.

These disjointed monsters were once women,  
Eponine or Lais. Broken creatures, bent or twisted—  
let us love them. They are still souls.  
Under torn skirts and cold cloth

they creep on, beaten by cruel winds,  
shaking at the loud rolling of the buses,  
pressing to their side, like holy relics,  
a little bag embroidered with flowers or signs.

They trot along like puppets.  
They drag themselves like wounded animals,  
or dance without wishing to dance, poor little bells  
from which a merciless Demon hangs.

Their eyes are holes from which water shines.  
Their eyes are like wells made by a million tears,  
like metal pots where a gold light trembles,  
light that seems to come from distant evenings.

They seem to move through snow, mud, noise,  
and the cruel crowd,

with something noble still under all their ruin,  
something old, secret, and unconquered.

Do they feel in their old bones  
the sharp hidden cold of winter?  
Or do they remember, at evening,  
when the city lights begin to burn,

their proud young days,  
the lovers, the mirrors, the silk,  
the perfumes, the famous names,  
all the power they once held?

One was wounded by her unhappy country.  
Another was crushed by the grief her husband gave her.  
Another, pierced like a Madonna by her child—  
all of them could have made a river with their tears.

Ah, how many of those little old women I have followed.  
One of them, especially, at the hour  
when the setting sun makes the sky bleed  
with red wounds,

used to sit alone on a bench, thoughtful,  
to hear one of those brass concerts  
with which soldiers sometimes fill our gardens,  
and which, in those golden evenings  
when one feels life come back,

pour a little heroism into the hearts of city people.  
That woman, still straight, proud, full of rule and order,

breathed in that lively warlike music with hunger.  
Her eye sometimes opened like the eye of an old eagle.  
Her marble forehead seemed made for laurel.

So you walk on, stoic and without complaint,  
through the chaos of living cities,  
mothers with bleeding hearts, courtesans, or saints,  
whose names were once on every tongue.

You who were once grace, or glory—  
no one knows you now. A rude drunk man  
insults you in passing with a laughing kind of love.  
A cowardly dirty child dances behind your heels.

Ashamed to exist, dried-up shadows,  
afraid, bent low, you move along the walls,  
and no one greets you, strange fates,  
pieces of humanity ripe for eternity.

But I, I who watch you tenderly from far away,  
my anxious eye fixed on your uncertain steps,  
as if I were your father—wonderful thing—  
I taste, without your knowing it, secret joys.

I see your young passions open again.  
Dark or bright, I live your lost days.  
My multiplied heart enjoys all your vices.  
My soul shines with all your virtues.

Ruins, my family, minds like mine,  
each evening I give you a solemn farewell.

Where will you be tomorrow, women of eighty years,  
under the terrible claw of God?

### A Passing Woman

The deafening street cried around me.  
Tall, thin, in deep mourning, majestic in sorrow,  
a woman passed, with a rich and graceful hand  
lifting and swinging the edge of her dress.

Quick and noble, with a leg like a statue,  
I drank in, tense like a madman,  
from her eye, pale sky where the storm is born,  
the sweetness that fascinates and the pleasure that kills.

A flash—then night. O passing beauty,  
whose look made me suddenly live again,  
shall I see you again only in eternity?

Elsewhere, far from here, too late, never perhaps.  
For I do not know where you flee, and you do not know where I go,  
O you whom I would have loved, O you who knew it.

### Evening Twilight

Here comes charming evening, friend of the criminal.  
It comes like an accomplice, with wolf-like steps. The sky  
slowly closes like a great bedroom alcove,  
and impatient man changes into a wild beast.

O evening, dear evening, desired by the one  
whose arms can honestly say, "Today  
we worked." Evening is the one that relieves  
minds eaten by savage pain,  
the stubborn scholar whose forehead grows heavy,  
and the bent worker going back to his bed.

Yet at the same time unhealthy demons  
wake heavily in the air, like men of business,  
and beating their wings, they strike shutters and awnings.  
Through the lights troubled by the wind,  
Prostitution begins to shine in the streets.  
Like an ant hill, it opens all its hidden roads.

Everywhere it makes for itself a secret path,  
like an enemy trying a sudden attack.  
It moves inside the muddy heart of the city  
like a worm stealing from Man what he eats.  
Here and there one hears kitchens hissing,  
theaters crying out, orchestras growling.

The shared tables, whose delights are games of chance,  
fill with prostitutes and cheats, their partners.  
And thieves, who know neither rest nor mercy,  
soon begin their work as well,  
gently forcing doors and boxes  
to live for a few days and dress their lovers.

Gather yourself, my soul, in this serious hour,  
and close your ear to this roaring.

It is the time when the pain of the sick grows worse.  
Dark Night takes them by the throat. They finish  
their fate and go toward the common abyss.  
The hospital fills with their sighs.

Many a one will never again come back  
to seek the fragrant soup,  
by the fire in the evening, near a loving soul.  
Most of them, indeed, have never known  
the sweetness of a home  
and have never truly lived.

### Gambling

In faded chairs old courtesans sit,  
pale, with painted eyebrows, soft and fatal eyes,  
making little sweet faces, while from their thin ears  
fall the small hard sounds of stone and metal.

Around the green tables are faces without lips,  
lips without color, jaws without teeth,  
and fingers shaking in an infernal fever,  
searching the empty pocket or the beating breast.

Under dirty ceilings a line of pale lamps  
and huge oil lights throw their brightness  
onto the dark foreheads of famous poets  
who come there to waste their bloody sweat.

That is the black picture which, in a dream at night,

I saw spread out before my clear-seeing eye.  
I too, in a corner of the silent cave,  
saw myself leaning there, cold, silent, and jealous.

Jealous of the stubborn passion of those people,  
of the funeral joy of those old whores,  
and all of them gladly trading before my face,  
one his old honor, another her beauty.

And my heart was afraid to envy many a poor man  
running with great desire toward the gaping abyss,  
and who, drunk on his own blood, would in the end  
prefer pain to death and hell to nothingness.

### Dance of Death

Proud, like a living woman, in her noble shape,  
with her large bouquet, her handkerchief, and her gloves,  
she has the ease and careless grace  
of a thin coquette with strange airs.

Has anyone ever seen at a ball a waist more fine?  
Her exaggerated dress, in its royal width,  
falls richly over a dry foot  
pressed by a bright little shoe, pretty as a flower.

The lace playing along her collarbones,  
like a sensual stream rubbing against a rock,  
modestly protects from foolish laughter  
the funeral charms she wants to hide.

Her deep eyes are made of emptiness and darkness,  
and her skull, dressed with flowers in an artistic way,  
sways softly on her fragile bones.

O charm of a nothingness dressed with madness.

Some will call you a caricature,  
those lovers drunk on flesh who do not understand  
the nameless elegance of the human frame.  
Great skeleton, you answer my dearest taste.

Do you come to trouble, with your powerful grin,  
the feast of Life? Or does some old desire,  
still kicking your living carcass,  
push you, trusting fool, to the sabbath of Pleasure?

To the song of violins, to the flame of candles,  
do you hope to chase away your mocking nightmare,  
and do you come to ask from the flood of wild joy  
a little coolness for the hell burning in your heart?

Unending well of foolishness and fault,  
eternal still of ancient pain,  
through the curved bars of your ribs  
I still see the restless snake wandering.

To tell the truth, I fear that your coquetry  
will not find a prize worthy of its effort.  
Which mortal heart can understand the mockery?  
Only the strong grow drunk on the charm of horror.

The abyss of your eyes, full of terrible thoughts,  
makes dizziness grow, and careful dancers  
will not look at, without bitter sickness,  
the eternal smile of your thirty-two teeth.

And yet, who has not held a skeleton in his arms,  
and who has not fed on things from the grave?  
What do perfume, clothing, or fine dress matter?  
Whoever acts disgusted only thinks himself beautiful.

Nose-less dancer, irresistible whore,  
tell those dancers who pretend to be shocked,  
“Proud pretty boys, in spite of powder and red paint,  
you all smell of death, perfumed skeletons.

“Faded Antinouses, smooth-faced dandies,  
polished corpses, old lovers with gray hair,  
the universal turning of the dance of death  
carries you away to places no one knows.

“From the cold banks of the Seine to the burning edge of the Ganges,  
the mortal herd jumps and faints, without seeing  
in a hole in the ceiling the trumpet of the Angel  
open like a black gun.

“In every land, under every sun, Death admires you  
in your twisting movements, ridiculous Humanity,  
and often, like you, perfuming herself with myrrh,  
mixes her irony with your madness.”

## Love of Lies

When I see you pass, my dear lazy one,  
to the music of instruments breaking against the ceiling,  
holding your harmonious and slow movement,  
and carrying the boredom of your deep look,

when I look, in the gaslight that colors it,  
at your pale forehead, made beautiful by a sickly charm,  
where the torches of evening light a dawn,  
and at your eyes, drawing me in like those of a portrait,

I say to myself, "How beautiful she is,  
and strangely fresh." Her massive memory,  
royal and heavy like a tower,  
and her heart, bruised like a peach,  
are ripe, like her body, for skillful love.

Are you an autumn fruit with supreme taste?  
Are you a funeral vase waiting for tears,  
a perfume that makes one dream of far-off oases,  
a soft pillow, or a basket of flowers?

I know there are eyes, the most melancholy eyes,  
that hide no precious secret,  
beautiful boxes without jewels, locket without relics,  
emptier and deeper than the sky itself.

But is it not enough that you are appearance,  
to gladden a heart that runs from truth?  
What does your foolishness or your coldness matter?

Mask or decoration, hail. I adore your beauty.

### I Have Not Forgotten

I have not forgotten, neighbor of the city,  
our white house, small but quiet,  
its plaster Pomona and its old Venus  
in a poor little grove hiding their naked limbs,

and the sun in the evening, flowing and splendid,  
which behind the window where its sheaf broke apart  
seemed, like a great open eye in the curious sky,  
to watch our long and silent dinners,

spreading widely its beautiful candle-like reflections  
over the simple tablecloth and the rough curtains.

### The Big-Hearted Servant

The big-hearted servant whom you were jealous of,  
and who sleeps her sleep under humble grass,  
we should bring her some flowers.

The dead, the poor dead, have great sorrows.

And when October blows, trimming the old trees,  
its melancholy wind around their stones,  
surely they must find the living very ungrateful,  
sleeping warmly in their beds as they do,

while, eaten by black dreams,  
with no bedfellow and no good talk,  
old frozen skeletons worked by the worm,  
they feel the snows of winter dripping down,  
and the century passing, while no friend and no family  
replace the rags hanging on their gate.

When the log whistles and sings, if in the evening,  
quietly, I saw her sitting in the armchair,  
if, in a blue and cold December night,  
I found her hidden in a corner of my room,

serious, and coming from the depth of her eternal bed  
to cover the grown child with her motherly eye,  
what could I answer that faithful soul  
seeing tears fall from her hollow eyelid?

### Mist and Rain

O ends of autumn, winters, springs soaked with mud,  
sleep-giving seasons, I love you and praise you  
for wrapping my heart and my brain  
in a cloudy winding sheet and a vague tomb.

In this great plain where the cold south wind plays,  
where through the long nights the weathercock grows hoarse,  
my soul, better than in the time of warm new spring,  
will open wide its raven wings.

Nothing is sweeter to a heart full of funeral things,

and on which frost has long been falling,  
O pale seasons, queens of our lands,  
than the unending sight of your pale darkness—

unless it is, on a moonless evening,  
two by two,  
to lay pain to sleep  
on a chance-made bed.

Wine

The Soul of Wine

One evening the soul of wine sang in the bottles:

“Man, toward you, my dear poor brother,  
from my glass prison and my red wax seals,  
I send a song full of light and brotherhood.

I know how much labor, sweat, and burning sun  
must be given on the flaming hill  
to make my life and give me a soul.  
But I will not be ungrateful or harmful.

For I feel a great joy when I fall  
into the throat of a man worn out by work,  
and his warm chest is a sweet tomb  
where I am far happier than in my cold cellars.

Do you hear the Sunday songs sounding,  
and hope singing in my beating heart?  
With your elbows on the table and your sleeves turned up,  
you will praise me, and you will be glad.

I will light the eyes of your delighted wife.  
I will give your son back his strength and color,  
and I will be, for that weak athlete of life,  
the oil that makes the muscles of fighters strong.

Into you I will fall, vegetable ambrosia,  
precious grain thrown by the eternal Sower,  
so that from our love poetry may be born,  
and rise toward God like a rare flower.”

### The Ragpickers' Wine

Often, in the red light of a street lamp  
whose flame the wind beats and troubles,  
in the heart of an old muddy suburb  
where humanity swarms in stormy unrest,

one sees a ragpicker coming, shaking his head,  
stumbling and striking the walls like a poet,  
and, not caring about the spies, his subjects,  
pouring out his whole heart in glorious plans.

He makes promises, gives noble laws,  
throws down the wicked, lifts up the victims,  
and under the sky spread like a hanging cloth,

he grows drunk on the splendor of his own virtue.

Yes, these people hunted by family troubles,  
ground down by labor and tormented by age,  
broken and bent under a heap of rubbish,  
the confused vomit of huge Paris,

come back smelling of old barrels,  
followed by companions whitened in many battles,  
whose mustaches hang like old flags.

Banners, flowers, and triumphal arches

rise before them by a solemn magic,  
and in the dazzling and shining feast  
of trumpets, sun, cries, and drums,  
they bring glory to a people drunk with love.

So through playful humanity  
wine rolls gold like a shining river.  
Through the throat of man it sings its victories  
and rules by its gifts like true kings.

To drown bitterness and rock to sleep the laziness  
of all those old cursed people who die in silence,  
God, touched with regret, had made sleep.  
Man added Wine, the holy son of the Sun.

The Murderer's Wine

My wife is dead. I am free.

So now I can drink all I want.  
When I came home without a coin,  
her cries tore my nerves apart.

I am happy as a king.  
The air is pure, the sky is beautiful.  
We had a summer just like this  
when I first fell in love.

The terrible thirst that tears at me  
would need, to satisfy itself,  
as much wine as her grave can hold.  
That is not a small thing to say.

I threw her down into a well,  
and I even pushed over her  
all the stones from the edge.  
I will forget her, if I can.

In the name of our loving promises,  
which nothing can break,  
and to make peace between us  
as in the beautiful days of our drunken joy,

I begged her to meet me  
one evening on a dark road.  
She came there, foolish creature.  
We are all more or less mad.

She was still beautiful,  
though very tired, and I—

I loved her too much. That is why  
I said to her: leave this life.

No one can understand me.  
Did even one of these stupid drunkards  
ever think in his sick nights  
of making a burial cloth out of wine?

That hard, filthy woman,  
strong as an iron machine,  
never, in summer or winter,  
knew true love,

with its black enchantments,  
its hellish train of alarms,  
its little bottles of poison, its tears,  
its sounds of chains and bones.

Now here I am, free and alone.  
Tonight I will drink until I fall dead.  
Then, without fear and without regret,  
I will lie down on the earth

and sleep like a dog.  
The cart with its heavy wheels,  
loaded with stones and mud,  
or the stopped wagon,

may crush my guilty head  
or cut me in half.  
I care no more about that

than about God, the Devil, or the Holy Table.

### The Solitary Man's Wine

The strange look of a woman of pleasure,  
which slips toward us like the white ray  
the moving moon sends to the trembling lake  
when she wishes to bathe her lazy beauty there,

the last bag of coins in a gambler's fingers,  
a shameless kiss from thin Adeline,  
the sounds of soft and weakening music  
like the distant cry of human pain,

all that is worth less, O deep bottle,  
than the rich healing balms your fruitful belly  
keeps for the thirsty heart of the faithful poet.  
You pour into him hope, youth, and life,

and pride too, that treasure of every poor man,  
which makes us triumphant  
and like the gods.

### The Lovers' Wine

Today the sky is splendid.  
Without bit, without spurs, without reins,  
let us ride on wine  
toward a magical and holy heaven.

Like two angels tortured  
by a burning fever,  
in the blue crystal of morning  
let us follow the far-off mirage.

Softly balanced on the wing  
of the wise whirlwind,  
in a shared madness,  
my sister, swimming side by side,

we will flee without rest  
and without pause  
toward the paradise  
of my dreams.

Flowers of Evil

A Martyr

Among bottles, rich cloth,  
paintings, marble, and sweet-smelling dresses  
that fall in proud heavy folds,  
in a warm room, like a closed glass house,  
where the air itself feels dangerous and deadly,  
and where dying flowers in glass cases  
breathe out their last weak sigh,

a headless body lies there, pouring out  
on the thirsty pillow  
a red living blood like a river,  
and the cloth drinks it in  
with the greed of a field.

Like pale visions born from shadow,  
visions that hold our eyes and will not let them go,  
the head lies on the bedside table  
with its dark mass of hair  
and its precious jewels,  
like a strange flower.

Empty now of thought,  
it gives out from its turned white eyes  
a vague pale look like evening light.  
On the bed the naked trunk shamelessly displays,  
in the fullest abandonment,  
the secret splendor and fatal beauty  
that Nature gave to it.

A pink stocking, with small pieces of gold,  
still remains on one leg like a memory.  
The garter, like a secret burning eye,  
sends out a hard shining look.  
The strange sight of this loneliness,  
and of a great soft portrait nearby,  
with its tempting eyes and pose,

shows us a dark love,  
a guilty joy, and wild feasts

full of hellish kisses,  
in which a swarm of evil angels  
must once have rejoiced  
while swimming in the folds of the curtains.

And yet, when one sees the fine thin shape  
of that sharp shoulder,  
that slightly pointed hip,  
that quick waist like an angry snake,  
one thinks: she is still very young.  
Did her soul, driven mad,  
and her senses, bitten by boredom,

open themselves at last  
to the thirsty pack  
of wandering and lost desires?  
Did the revengeful man whom you could not satisfy in life,  
though you gave him so much love,  
pour out on your dead and willing flesh  
the endless size of his desire?

Answer, unclean body.  
And lifting your hard hair  
with a feverish hand,  
tell me, terrible head,  
did you keep on your cold teeth  
the final goodbye?

Far from the mocking world,  
far from the dirty crowd,  
far from curious judges,

sleep in peace, strange creature,  
sleep in peace  
inside your mysterious grave.

Your husband runs through the world,  
and your deathless form  
keeps watch near him while he sleeps.  
No doubt he will be faithful to you  
as you were to him,  
faithful and constant  
until death.

### Damned Women

Lying on the sand like thoughtful cattle,  
they turn their eyes toward the line of the sea,  
and as their feet search for each other  
and their hands move closer together,  
they feel soft weakness  
and bitter shivering.

Some, loving long shared secrets,  
go into the deep places of the groves  
where the little streams keep talking,  
and there they slowly spell out  
the love of timid young childhood  
while scratching the bark of young trees.

Others, like sisters, walk slowly and seriously  
through rocks full of ghostly shapes,

where Saint Anthony once saw rise before him,  
like red flowing lava,  
the bare breasts  
of his temptations.

There are some who, by the light  
of dying pieces of burning wood,  
call on Bacchus to help them  
from the silent hollow  
of old pagan caves,  
calling him to put to sleep  
their screaming fevers and their ancient remorse.

And others, whose breasts love holy cloth,  
hide a whip under their long garments  
and mix, in the dark wood  
and the lonely nights,  
the foam of pleasure  
with the tears of suffering.

O virgins, O demons, O monsters, O martyrs,  
great souls that despise common reality,  
seekers of the infinite, holy women and wild ones,  
sometimes full of cries, sometimes full of tears,  
you whom my soul has followed  
through your own hell,

poor sisters, I love you  
as much as I pity you,  
for your dark pain,  
your thirst that nothing can satisfy,

and the jars of love  
with which your great hearts are filled.

### The Two Good Sisters

Vice and Death are two pleasant daughters,  
rich in kisses and full of health.  
Their sides, always virginal and dressed in rags,  
have never borne a child  
through all their endless labor.

To the dark poet, enemy of family life,  
favorite of hell and poor courtier,  
graves and brothels show under their shade  
a bed that Remorse has never known.

The coffin and the room of pleasure,  
both fertile in blasphemy,  
offer us in turn, like two good sisters,  
terrible pleasures  
and dreadful sweetness.

When will you bury me, Vice with dirty arms?  
O Death, when will you come,  
beautiful rival of her charms,  
upon her foul myrtles  
among your black cypress trees?

### Allegory

She is a beautiful woman, with a rich proud neck,  
who lets her hair fall into her wine.

The claws of love, the poisons of the gambling house,  
everything slides away and grows dull  
against the granite of her skin.

She laughs at Death  
and mocks Vice,  
those monsters whose hands, always scratching and cutting,  
have still respected, in all their destroying games,  
the hard majesty  
of that firm straight body.

She walks like a goddess  
and rests like a sultana.  
In pleasure she has a kind of holy faith,  
and with her open arms, filled by her breasts,  
she calls to the race of men  
with her eyes.

She believes, she knows,  
this barren virgin and yet necessary one  
for the movement of the world,  
that the beauty of the body  
is a sublime gift  
that tears forgiveness  
from every shame.

She does not know Hell,  
nor Purgatory.

And when the hour comes  
to enter the black Night,  
she will look at the face of Death  
like a newborn child—  
without hatred and without remorse.

### A Voyage to Cythera

My heart, like a bird, flew happily  
and moved freely around the ropes.  
The ship rolled under a cloudless sky  
like an angel drunk on bright sunlight.

“What is that sad black island?” we asked. “It is Cythera,”  
we were told, “a land famous in songs,  
the common Eldorado of all old bachelors.  
Look well. After all, it is only a poor little place.”

Island of sweet secrets and feasts of the heart,  
where the shining ghost of ancient Venus  
still seems to float above the sea like a perfume  
and fill the spirit with love and softness.

Beautiful island of green myrtles and open flowers,  
honored forever by every nation,  
where the sighs of loving hearts  
roll like incense through a garden of roses,

where the endless cooing of a dove—  
but Cythera was now nothing more than poor land,

a rocky desert troubled by harsh cries.  
Yet I did notice one strange thing.

It was not a temple among leafy shadows,  
where a young priestess, loving flowers,  
went about with her body burning from secret heat,  
opening her dress a little to the passing wind.

But as we passed near enough to the shore  
for our white sails to disturb the birds,  
we saw that it was a gallows with three branches,  
black against the sky like a cypress tree.

Fierce birds, sitting on their food,  
were tearing in rage at a hanging body already ripe.  
Each drove its dirty beak, like a tool,  
into every bleeding corner of that rotting flesh.

The eyes were only two holes. From the fallen belly  
the heavy intestines hung down on the thighs,  
and those executioners, full of ugly delight,  
had completely cut off his manhood with their beaks.

Under his feet, a crowd of jealous four-footed beasts,  
their noses lifted, circled and wandered.  
One larger animal moved in the middle  
like an executioner among his helpers.

You who lived on Cythera, child of so fair a sky,  
silently you suffered all these insults  
to pay for your shameful worship

and for the sins that denied you burial.

Ridiculous hanged man, your pain is mine.

At the sight of your hanging limbs,  
I felt, like vomit rising to my teeth,  
the long river of old bitter grief.

Before you, poor devil so dear to memory,  
I felt again all the beaks and all the jaws  
of the tearing crows and black panthers  
that once loved to work upon my flesh.

The sky was beautiful. The sea was calm.  
But for me, from then on, all was black and bloody.  
Alas, my heart seemed buried  
in that thick symbolic cloth like a burial sheet.

On your island, O Venus, I found still standing  
only a gallows of symbols where my own image hung.  
O Lord, give me the strength and the courage  
to look at my heart and my body without disgust.

Revolt

Abel and Cain

Race of Abel, eat, drink, and sleep.  
God smiles kindly on you.

Race of Cain, crawl in the mud  
and die in misery.

Race of Abel, your sacrifice  
smells sweet to Heaven.

Race of Cain, your task  
will never have an end.

Race of Abel, see your crops  
and your cattle grow rich.

Race of Cain, your hungry body  
shakes and burns.

Race of Abel, your gold gives birth  
to more gold and more children.

Race of Cain, your heart  
burns with need.

Race of Abel, you grow and feed  
like worms in rotting wood.

Race of Cain, drag your people  
up to the sky

and throw God down  
to the earth.

Race of Abel, your shame—  
here is the iron plow defeated.

Race of Cain, into the earth  
drive the great spear.

Race of Abel, behold the field  
and the fruit of your seed.

Race of Cain, your womb  
is still barren.

Race of Abel, enjoy, grow fat,  
and live in peace.

Race of Cain, inside your cave  
tremble and cry out.

Race of Abel, climb to Heaven  
like a thick tree.

Race of Cain, in the muddy depths  
fall like iron.

Race of Cain, O race with burning heart,  
hear this great cry:

Throw God down  
to the earth.

## The Litanies of Satan

O you, wisest and fairest of the Angels,  
god betrayed by fate and robbed of praise,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

O Prince of exile, to whom wrong was done,  
and who, defeated, rises stronger than before,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You who know everything, great king of things below,  
familiar healer of human pain,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You who even to the leper and the outlaw  
teach, through love, the taste of Heaven,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You who make Death, your old strong mistress,  
give birth to Hope—the mad and lovely one,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You who give the condemned man your calm proud look  
that lets him curse the crowd and the scaffold,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You who know in what corners of jealous lands  
the hidden God buried the precious stones,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You whose clear eye knows the deep storehouses  
where the sleeping metals lie,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You whose broad hand hides the cliffs  
from the walker who falls while sleepwalking,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You who gently taught weak old bones  
how to stand up again when a horse had stepped on them,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You who, so that suffering men may be comforted,  
mixed salt and sulfur in gunpowder,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You who set your mark, your subtle sign,  
on the forehead of Croesus when he has no pity,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

You who put into the eyes and hearts of girls  
the worship of wounds and the love of rags,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

Support of exiles, lamp of inventors,  
confessor of the hanged and of plotters,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

Foster father of those whom angry God the Father  
drove from the earthly paradise,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery.

Prayer

Glory and praise to you, Satan, in the heights  
of Heaven, where once you ruled,

and in the deep places of Hell, where, defeated,  
you dream in silence.

Grant that my soul may one day rest  
beneath the Tree of Knowledge,

near you, when its branches spread  
above your forehead like a new temple.

Death

### The Death of Lovers

We will have beds full of light perfumes,  
deep couches like tombs,  
and strange flowers on shelves,  
opened for us under fairer skies.

Using up their last warmth in rivalry,  
our two hearts will be like two great torches,  
whose double light will shine back  
in our two spirits, those twin mirrors.

One evening made of rose and mystical blue,  
we will exchange one final flash,  
like a long sob  
full of farewells.

And later an Angel, opening the doors a little,  
will come, faithful and joyful,  
to bring life again to the dimmed mirrors  
and the dead flames.

### The Death of the Poor

It is Death that comforts, alas, and keeps us alive.  
It is the goal of life, and the only hope

which, like an elixir, rises in us and makes us drunk,  
and gives us the heart to walk on until evening.

Through storm, snow, and frost,  
it is the trembling light on our black horizon.  
It is the famous inn written in the book,  
where one will be able to eat, sleep, and sit down.

It is an Angel holding in his magic fingers  
sleep and the gift of ecstatic dreams,  
and remaking the bed  
of the poor and naked.

It is the glory of the Gods. It is the mystic storehouse.  
It is the poor man's purse and his ancient homeland.  
It is the open doorway  
toward the unknown heavens.

### A Curious Man's Dream

Do you know, as I do, that sweet pain,  
and do people say of you, "What a strange man"?  
I was about to die. In my loving soul  
there was a special illness,  
desire mixed with horror.

Fear and sharp hope, but with no rebellion.  
The more the fatal sandglass emptied itself,  
the more my torture grew bitter and delicious.  
My whole heart was tearing itself away

from the familiar world.

I was like a child hungry for the show,  
hating the curtain as one hates an obstacle.  
At last the cold truth appeared.

I was dead without surprise,  
and the terrible dawn wrapped itself around me.  
What? Is that all?  
The curtain was raised,  
and I was still waiting.

### The Voyage

For the child who loves maps and prints,  
the universe is as large as his appetite.  
Ah, how great the world is by lamplight,  
and how small it is in the eyes of memory.

One morning we leave, our minds full of fire,  
our hearts swollen with bitterness and desire,  
and we go, following the rhythm of the wave,  
rocking our endless longing on the limited sea.

Some go, happy to escape an ugly country.  
Others flee the horror of their cradle.  
A few, astrologers drowned  
in the eyes of a woman,  
that tyrant Circe with dangerous perfumes,

drink themselves drunk on space and light  
and blazing skies,  
so that they may not be changed into beasts.  
The ice that bites them, the suns that darken them,  
slowly erase the mark of kisses.

But the true travelers are only those  
who leave for the sake of leaving.  
Light-hearted people, like balloons,  
they never move away from their fate,  
and, without knowing why, always say, "Let us go."

Those whose desires have the shape of clouds,  
who dream, as a young soldier dreams of the cannon,  
of great changing pleasures, unknown pleasures,  
whose names the human mind  
has never been able to learn.

We imitate, horror of horrors, the spinning top and the ball  
in their dancing and jumping. Even in sleep  
Curiosity troubles us and rolls us onward,  
like a cruel Angel whipping suns.

Strange fate, where the goal keeps moving,  
and, being nowhere, can be anywhere.  
There Man, whose hope is never tired,  
runs forever like a madman  
to find rest.

Our soul is a three-masted ship looking for its ideal land.  
A voice sounds on deck, "Look sharp."

A voice from the masthead, fierce and mad, cries,  
“Love... glory... happiness.” Hell—it is only a reef.

Every island pointed out by the lookout  
is an Eldorado promised by Fate.  
Imagination, which sets up its wild feast,  
finds, in the morning light,  
nothing but a poor rock.

O poor lover of imagined lands.  
Must one chain him, throw him into the sea,  
that drunken sailor, inventor of new Americas,  
whose mirage only makes the gulf more bitter?

Like the old wanderer, stamping in the mud,  
dreaming, nose in the air, of shining paradises,  
his enchanted eye discovers a Capua  
wherever a candle lights  
some dirty inn.

Amazing travelers, what noble stories  
we read in your eyes, deep as the sea.  
Show us the jewel boxes of your rich memories,  
the wonderful treasures made of stars and upper air.

We want to travel without steam and without sail.  
To brighten the boredom of our prisons,  
let your memories pass across our minds,  
stretched tight like canvas,  
with all their framed horizons.

Tell us, what did you see?

“We saw stars and waves.  
We saw sands as well.  
And in spite of many shocks  
and unexpected disasters,  
we were often bored, just as we are here.

The glory of the sun on the violet sea,  
the glory of cities in the setting sun,  
lit in our hearts an uneasy fire,  
a desire to plunge into a sky  
whose reflection tempted us.

The richest cities, the grandest landscapes,  
never held the mysterious attraction  
of those things chance makes with clouds,  
and desire always  
left us uneasy.

Pleasure only adds strength to desire.  
Desire, old tree whose food is pleasure,  
while your bark grows thicker and harder,  
your branches want to see  
the sun more closely.

Will you always go on growing,  
great tree more living than the cypress?  
Yet we did carefully gather  
some sketches for your hungry album,  
brothers who find beautiful

all things that come from far away.

We greeted idols with elephant trunks,  
thrones covered with shining jewels,  
palaces with such fairy richness  
that for your bankers they would be a ruinous dream,

costumes that are drunkenness for the eyes,  
women whose teeth and nails are colored,  
and clever jugglers  
caressed by snakes.”

And then? And then what else?

“O childlike minds,  
so that we may not forget the most important thing,  
we saw everywhere, and without even looking for it,  
from top to bottom of the fatal ladder,  
the boring show  
of immortal sin.

Woman, low slave, proud and foolish,  
adoring herself without laughter,  
loving herself without disgust.  
Man, greedy tyrant, lustful, hard, and selfish,  
slave of the slave,  
a gutter flowing in the sewer.

The executioner enjoying his work,  
the martyr sobbing,  
the feast flavored and perfumed by blood,

the poison of power weakening the despot,  
and the people in love  
with the whip that makes them stupid.

Many religions like ours,  
all climbing toward heaven.  
Holiness, like a delicate rich man in a feather bed,  
finding pleasure among nails and rough hair.

Humanity talking, drunk on its own genius,  
and now mad as it was long ago,  
crying out to God in furious pain,  
‘O my equal, O my master, I curse you.’

And the least foolish, bold lovers of madness,  
fleeing the great herd fenced in by Fate  
and taking shelter in the endless opium—  
that is the eternal report  
of the whole globe.”

Bitter knowledge, the knowledge gained from travel.  
The world, small and monotonous, today,  
yesterday, tomorrow, always, shows us our own face—  
an oasis of horror in a desert of boredom.

Must one leave? Must one stay? If you can stay, then stay.  
Leave, if you must. One runs, another hides,  
trying to deceive the watchful and deadly enemy,  
Time. There are, alas, runners without rest,

like the Wandering Jew and like the apostles,

for whom nothing is enough, neither wagon nor ship,  
to flee that shameful net-thrower. There are others  
who know how to kill him without leaving their cradle.

When at last he sets his foot upon our back,  
we will be able to hope and cry, "Forward."  
Just as once we set out for China,  
our eyes fixed on the wide sea, our hair in the wind,

we will go aboard the sea of Darkness  
with the joyful heart of a young passenger.  
Do you hear those voices, charming and funeral,  
singing, "This way, you who want to eat

the perfumed lotus. It is here that they gather  
the miraculous fruits your heart longs for.  
Come, drink yourselves drunk on the strange color  
of this afternoon that never ends."

From the familiar voice we know the ghost.  
There our Pylades stretch out their arms to us.  
"To cool your heart, swim toward your Electra,"  
says she whose knees we once kissed.

O Death, old captain, it is time. Let us raise anchor.  
This country bores us, O Death. Let us sail.  
Though sky and sea are black as ink,  
our hearts, as you know, are full of light.

Pour us your poison, that it may comfort us.  
We want, since this fire burns our brains so hard,

to plunge to the bottom of the gulf—Heaven or Hell, what does it matter?—  
to the bottom of the Unknown, to find something new.