

**SYMONS ARTHUR, BAUDELAIRE
CHARLES**

POEMS IN PROSE

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Charles Baudelaire
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Charles Baudelaire

Poems in Prose

The "Petits Poèmes en Prose" are experiments, and they are also confessions. "Who of us," says Baudelaire in his dedicatory preface, "has not dreamed, in moments of ambition, of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, subtle and staccato enough to follow the lyric motions of the soul, the wavering outlines of meditation, the sudden starts of the conscience?" This miracle he has achieved in these *bagatelles laborieuses*, to use his own words, these astonishing trifles, in which the art is not more novel, precise and perfect than the quality of thought and of emotion. In translating into English a few of these little masterpieces, which have given me so much delight for so many years, I have tried to be absolutely faithful to the sense, the words, and the rhythm of the original.

A. S.

I

The Favours of the Moon

The Moon, who is caprice itself, looked in through the window when you lay asleep in your cradle, and said inwardly: "This is a child after my own soul."

And she came softly down the staircase of the clouds, and passed noiselessly through the window-pane. Then she laid herself upon you with the supple tenderness of a mother, and she left her colours upon your face. That is why your eyes are green and your cheeks extraordinarily pale. It was when you looked at her, that your pupils widened so strangely; and she clasped her arms so tenderly about your throat that ever since you have had the longing for tears.

Nevertheless, in the flood of her joy, the Moon filled the room like a phosphoric atmosphere, like a luminous poison; and all this living light thought and said: "My kiss shall be upon you for ever. You shall be beautiful as I am beautiful. You shall love that which I love and that by which I am loved: water and clouds, night and silence; the vast green sea; the formless and multiform water; the place where you shall never be; the lover whom you shall never know; unnatural flowers; odours which make men drunk; the cats that languish upon pianos and sob like women, with hoarse sweet voices!

"And you shall be loved by my lovers, courted by my courtiers. You shall be the queen of men who have green eyes, and whose throats I have clasped by night in my caresses; of those that love the sea, the vast tumultuous green sea, formless and multiform water, the place where they are not, the woman whom they know not, the ominous flowers that are like the censers of an unknown rite, the odours that trouble the will, and the savage and voluptuous beasts that are the emblems of their folly."

And that is why, accursed dear spoilt child, I lie now at your feet, seeking to find in you the image of the fearful goddess, the fateful godmother, the poisonous nurse of all the moonstruck of the world.

II

Which is True?

I knew one Benedict, who filled earth and air with the ideal; and from whose eyes men learnt the desire of greatness, of beauty, of glory, and of all whereby we believe in immortality.

But this miraculous child was too beautiful to live long; and she died only a few days after I had come to know her, and I buried her with my own hands, one day when Spring shook out her censer in the graveyards. I buried her with my own hands, shut down into a coffin of wood, perfumed and incorruptible like Indian caskets.

And as I still gazed at the place where I had laid away my treasure, I saw all at once a little person singularly like the deceased, who trampled on the fresh soil with a strange and hysterical violence, and said, shrieking with laughter: "Look at me! I am the real Benedicta! a pretty sort of baggage I am! And to punish you for your blindness and folly you shall love me just as I am!"

But I was furious, and I answered: "No! no! no!" And to add more emphasis to my refusal I stamped on the ground so violently with my foot that my leg sank up to the knee in the earth of the new' grave; and now, like a wolf caught in a trap, I remain fastened, perhaps for ever, to the grave of the ideal.

III

"L'Invitation au Voyage"

There is a wonderful country, a country of Cockaigne, they say, which I dreamed of visiting with an old friend. It is a strange country, lost in the mists of the North and one might call it the East of the West, the China of Europe, so freely does a warm and capricious fancy flourish there, and so patiently and persistently has that fancy illustrated it with a learned and delicate vegetation.

A real country of Cockaigne, where everything is beautiful, rich, quiet, honest; where order is the likeness and the mirror of luxury; where life is fat, and sweet to breathe; where disorder, tumult, and the unexpected are shut out; where happiness is wedded to silence; where even cooking is poetic, rich and highly flavoured at once; where all, dear love, is made in your image.

You know that feverish sickness which comes over us in our cold miseries, that nostalgia of unknown lands, that anguish of curiosity? There is a country made in your image, where all is beautiful, rich, quiet and honest; where fancy has built and decorated a western China, where life is sweet to breathe, where happiness is wedded to silence. It is there that we should live, it is there that we should die!

Yes, it is there that we should breathe, dream, and lengthen out the hours by the infinity of sensations. A musician has written

an "Invitation à la Valse": who will compose the "Invitation au Voyage" that we can offer to the beloved, to the chosen sister?

Yes, it is in this atmosphere that it would be good to live; far off, where slower hours contain more thoughts, where clocks strike happiness with a deeper and more significant solemnity.

On shining panels, or on gilded leather of a dark richness, slumbers the discreet life of pictures, deep, calm, and devout as the souls of the painters who created it. The sunsets which colour so richly the walls of dining-room and drawing-room, are sifted through beautiful hangings or through tall wrought windows leaded into many panes. The pieces of furniture are large, curious, and fantastic, armed with locks and secrets like refined souls. Mirrors, metals, hangings, goldsmith's work and pottery, play for the eyes a mute and mysterious symphony; and from all things, from every corner, from the cracks of drawers and from the folds of hangings, exhales a singular odour, a "forget-me-not" of Sumatra, which is, as it were, the soul of the abode.

A real country of Cockaigne, I assure you, where all is beautiful, clean, and shining, like a clear conscience, like a bright array of kitchen crockery, like splendid jewellery of gold, like many-coloured jewellery of silver! All the treasures of the world have found their way there, as to the house of a hard-working man who has put the whole world in his debt. Singular country, excelling others as Art excels Nature, where Nature is refashioned by dreams, where Nature is corrected, embellished,

re-moulded.

Let the alchemists of horticulture seek and seek again, let them set ever further and further back the limits to their happiness! Let them offer prizes of sixty and of a hundred thousand florins to whoever will solve their ambitious problems. For me, I have found my "black tulip" and my "blue dahlia"!

Incomparable flower, recaptured tulip, allegoric dahlia, it is there, is it not, in that beautiful country, so calm and so full of dreams, that you live and flourish? There, would you not be framed within your own analogy, and would you not see yourself again, reflected, as the mystics say, in your own "correspondence"?

Dreams, dreams ever! and the more delicate and ambitious the soul, the further do dreams estrange it from possible things. Every man carries within himself his natural dose of opium, ceaselessly secreted and renewed, and, from birth to death, how many hours can we reckon of positive pleasure, of successful and decided action? Shall we ever live in, shall we ever pass into, that picture which my mind has painted, that picture made in your image?

These treasures, this furniture, this luxury, this order, these odours, these miraculous flowers, are you. You too are the great rivers and the quiet canals. The vast ships that drift down them, laden with riches, from whose decks comes the sound of the monotonous songs of labouring sailors, are my thoughts which slumber or rise and fall on your breast. You lead them softly

towards the sea, which is the infinite, mirroring the depths of the sky in the crystal clearness of your soul; and when, weary of the surge and heavy with the spoils of the East, they return to the port of their birth, it is still my thoughts that come back enriched out of the infinite to you.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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