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From Verlaine

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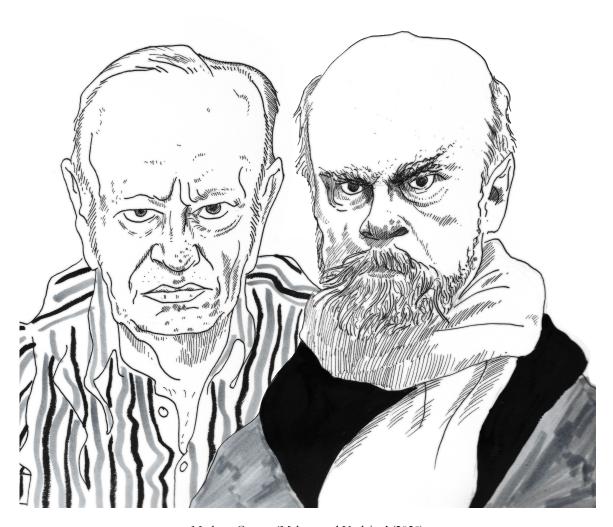
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Mathew Creasy, 'Mahon and Verlaine' (2020)

From Verlaine

Derek Mahon

Mandolin

From under echoing trees The serenading suitors Offer old gallantries To their fair auditors.

There's Aminte and Tircis, Clitandre as ever was, Damis who voices his Love songs to deaf ears.

Then their silken tunics And long trailing gowns, Their verve and fancy tricks, Their shadowy blue outlines

Swirl in romantic washes Of moonlight grey and rose While a mandolin crashes In a light, shivering breeze.

In Muted Tones

At peace in the half-light Of these great boughs above, Why should we not admit This silence to our love,

Dissolve heart, soul and senses With their ecstatic fervour In the vague indolence Of oak-tree and conifer?

Half-close your eyelids, place Your hands upon your heart And from your quiet breast Let worldly thoughts depart.

Let's yield, this afternoon, To the soft lullaby That comes to murmur in The long grass where we lie.

Soon when the evening air Falls from darkened trees The voice of our despair, A nightingale's, will rise.

Green

These are for you, these branches, fruits and flowers, Also my heart that beats for you alone. Don't break it, please, with those white hands of yours; And may this plain gift be an acceptable one.

Just look at me, dripping with morning dew, Dew the cold wind has frozen to my brows. Let me, exhausted, rest up here with you And think consoling thoughts of our best days.

Here on your youthful breast let my head lie Still echoing with your kisses; let it know Relief from the emotional storm, and may I Doze for a little as you're dozing now.

To Clymène

Strange songs of the gondolier, Songs without words ... My dear Girl, because your eyes The colour of skies;

Because your voice, a melodious Spectacle that clouds And clears the horizon Of my reason;

Since your unique bouquet Of swan-like clarity, And since the white glow Of your breath too;

Since everything you are (A sweet angelic choir, Glory of seraphim, Your scent and rhythm)

Has, with its soft phrases And synaesthetic graces, Tempted my sly heart – oh, Let it be so!

The Old Refrain

It's languorous ecstasies, It's amorous reveries, The rustle of beech trees In a rushing breeze, Those tiny voices Among the wood noises.

O frail, fresh respiration! -Its whistle and whisper Like the unspoken cry Blown grasses sigh, Or the rumbling mutter Of pebbles underwater.

This soul now complaining In drowsy melancholy, It's our own, surely? It's yours, yes, and mine Breathing its old refrain To the warm night again.

Art poétique

The music is the important thing. Opt for the singular, the rare, the faint, the soluble in air, no rhetoric and no posturing.

Take note, it's absolutely fine to sound a bit ambiguous; best is a grey, indefinite verse where the exact and vague combine –

behind the veil a twinkling eye, vibration of the noonday light, a violet star concourse, bright in an exhausted autumn sky.

Not primary colour but nuance, nuance alone that can unite dream to dream and horn to flute, informs all such experience.

Resist the lure of mocking 'wit', the glib reductionism, the cheap sarcasm at which the angels weep. Avoid the nasty taste of it.

Take eloquence and wring its neck and, while we're at it, it's high time to be more circumspect with rhyme. If not, it soon dictates the work.

The damage it has done already! What daft idiot, deaf to tone, forged from tin this specious coin that rings so false to everybody?

Music and yet more music, please! May your own song be something light we hear soaring, a soul in flight to other loves and other skies.

May it presage the greater future borne on a brisk morning wind bestowing scents of thyme and mint. The rest is only literature.

Down in the Woods

Some, like the innocent and the neurasthenic, find in the woods only a languorous charm, fresh breezes, warm scents. Good luck them. Others, dreamers, are seized with vague panic.

Good luck to them! I, nervous and aghast, racked by a strange, insistent guilt complex, tremble here like a faintheart who expects a trap, perhaps an encounter with a ghost.

These great boughs, like sea waves never still, with their dark silences and even darker shadows – a sad and sinister décor – inspire fears both profound and risible.

Worst is summer dusk when a fiery sky merges in the grey-blue of mists its range of blood hues while a distant angelus rings out like the echo of a plaintive cry.

Wind rises hot, strong; wild convulsions race crazily through the increasingly opaque density of the oaks until, grown weak, they escape like exhalations into space.

Night hovers, an owl flies, and you think back to grim rumours warning of awful things. Below a thicket there, there, hidden springs chuckle like killers lying in wait to strike.