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From Verlaine

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Goldsmiths
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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 noontday 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.