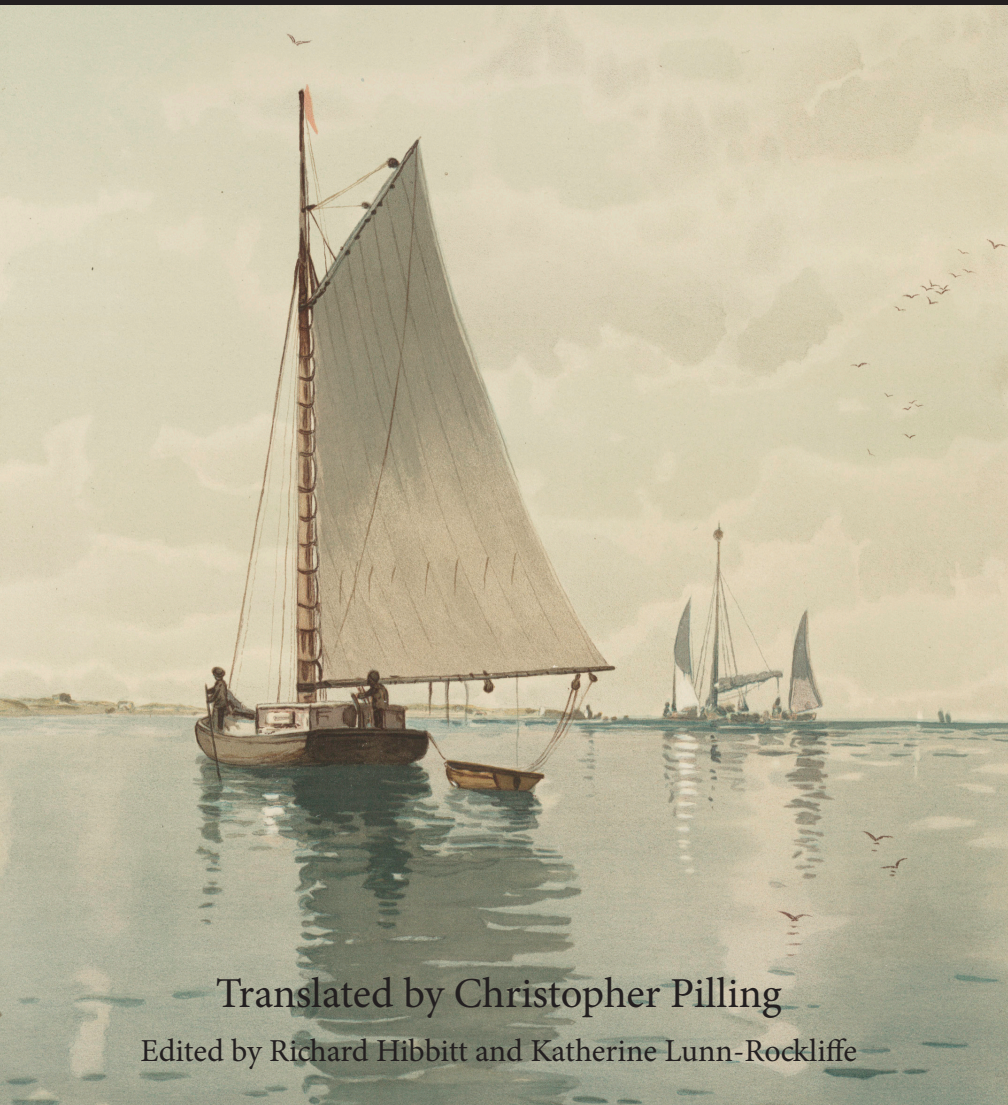


# Tristan Corbière

Oysters, nightingales  
and cooking pots

Selected poetry and prose in translation



Translated by Christopher Pilling

Edited by Richard Hibbitt and Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe

Tristan Corbière

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cooking pots

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Lunn-Rockliffe

With an introduction by Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe

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Oysters, nightingales and cooking pots: selected poetry and prose in translation

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We gratefully acknowledge the permission of Françoise Livinec Éditions, Paris, to reprint the following three recently discovered pieces by Tristan Corbière, which were originally published in *Album Louis Noir, Tristan Corbière* (© Françoise Livinec, 2013):

‘Le Bain de mer de Madame Xxxx’  
‘Petite pousie en vers passionnés’  
‘A mon Roscoff’

Further information about the original publication is available here: <http://francoiselivinec.com/>

The French text of all the other pieces is taken from Tristan Corbière, *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pierre-Olivier Walzer, Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), except for ‘Allons! Tristan!’, which was originally published in the journal *Cahiers pour l’art*, 11, March–April 1950, pp. 10–13.

We gratefully acknowledge the permission of the editors of *Modern Poetry in Translation* to reprint some of Christopher Pilling’s translations.

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The Editors



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## Translator's Note

This book is a sequel to *These Jaundiced Loves* (Peterloo Poets, 1995), the first complete translation of Corbière's *Les Amours jaunes* into English. It embraces nearly everything that has survived of what Edouard-Joachim Corbière (alias Tristan Corbière) wrote, apart from his letters. My title *Oysters, nightingales and cooking pots* is taken from the poem *À Madame Millet*. Add to them a violin, as Corbière does, in lines that then reduce him to a novice pen-pusher. Here he howls his verses in seedy bistros, but despite his self-deprecating pose in most of the poems in this collection, he can't help revelling in a wide range of revelations and self-revelations which add to the many in *Les Amours jaunes*. Here too are outstanding prose pieces which were published in *La Vie Parisienne* in 1874.

Christopher Pilling  
Keswick, 2017



## Introduction

Corbière is a poet who tests language to the limits, dislocating normal syntax, revelling in self-contradictory affirmations, and piling up puns. Combining forceful and precise descriptions of the physical environment, whether his native Brittany or the urban wilderness of Paris, with wittily self-lacerating introspection, he builds a kaleidoscopic view of the world and makes it impossible for us to know where he stands. He simultaneously undermines aesthetic conventions, traditional beliefs, and even his own pose as an outsider in revolt. Corbière's single published volume, *Les Amours jaunes*, appeared in 1873, during a time of intense poetic experimentation and innovation in France. Although he was a contemporary of Rimbaud and Mallarmé, Corbière was writing very much in isolation from this wider ferment, developing his own idiosyncratic style and actively sending up the myth of the artist as misunderstood loner. He relentlessly deflated the sentimental tone which had characterized much French poetry since



the early nineteenth century, ironically quoting from an array of literary works and systematically refusing grandiloquence by fracturing lines into staccato phrases and approaching the rhythms of ordinary speech. His poetry is often a multi-voiced cacophony in which popular sayings and obscene jokes jostle with ironically exaggerated Romantic clichés. Amidst the mordant posturing and visceral images there emerges a self-doubting personality with a clear-eyed view of the world, both celebrating elemental experience and mocking conventions of all kinds.

Corbière died at the age of twenty-nine, two years after *Les Amours jaunes* appeared, leaving to future readers only that dense volume and a scattered assortment of other texts: a handful of prose pieces, early versions of published poems, and a number of unpublished poems – some youthful satires on local figures, some simply excluded from *Les Amours jaunes*, and others which were handwritten later into his own copy of the printed book. Corbière's habitual verve resounds through these works. His sly humour and linguistic glee are already apparent in the earliest poems, while the later ones are as accomplished as the best of *Les Amours jaunes*. The prose reveals his visionary imagination and splices Breton culture with the myth of the *poète maudit*, evoking décor such as 'a stove-in rowing boat full of fresh hay for dogs and poets'. Just as Corbière's verse is heteroclitic in style, juxtaposing the lyrical and the ordinary – oysters, nightingales, and cooking pots being a characteristic medley – so his manuscripts juxtapose paintings with poems, and the margins of his copy of *Les Amours jaunes* are full of scribbled drafts, sketches, and pasted-in collages. The present volume reflects that spirit of multiplicity. It comprises most of Corbière's writing not included in *Les Amours jaunes*, and a handful of poems which have only very recently come to light.

Much of this material is now translated for the first time into English, and it is full of welcome surprises.

Corbière is very much a poet's poet, admired by Laforgue in the 1880s and then by Modernists and Surrealists alike. Almost unnoticed in his own lifetime, his ironic wit was championed by Pound and Eliot, and his influence in the Anglo-Saxon world has arguably been at least as important as in France, although his riotously sardonic verse has not been easily accessible in English, partly because, like all great poets, he is impossible to translate. Huysmans described Corbière's poetry as 'barely French', and Christopher Pilling's version of *Les Amours jaunes* forged an equivalent poetic idiom in English, recreating the energy, wit and tone of the original. The imaginative translation of the title as *These Jaundiced Loves*, which captures the multiple resonances of the colour yellow in French, is typical of his approach. *Oysters, nightingales and cooking pots* complements that tour de force, rendering the miscellany of works not included in *Les Amours jaunes* just as sure-footedly. Word play is conveyed with great panache, so the double meaning of 'vers' as both worms and lines of verse in 'les poètes pervers / Pêchent; leur crâne creux leur sert de boîte à vers' ('Paris nocturne') is echoed in an ingenious reworking of the fishing image: 'the black gutter where depraved poets please / To cast their lines, their hollow skulls the cans for worms.' A harpist is urged to stop harping on and a strumpet urged to trumpet – this is the spirit of Corbière, who emerges as vigorous and innovative as ever in this collection.

Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe,  
Hertford College, University of Oxford



## Editors' Note

Christopher Pilling is a poet, playwright and translator. His collections of poetry include *Snakes & Girls* (1970; winner of the New Poets Award), *In All the Spaces on All The Lines* (1971) *Foreign Bodies* (1992), *Cross Your Legs and Wish* (1994), *The Lobster Can Wait* (1998), *In the Pink* (1999), *Tree Time* (2003), *Life Classes* (2004), *Alive in Cumbria*, a collaboration with the photographer Stuart Holmes (2005), and *Coming Ready or Not: Selected and New Poetry* (2009; second edition 2013). His first play, *Torque-mada*, won the Kate Collingwood Prize and was subsequently published in 2009 as *A Splendid Specimen: A Tragedy in Five Acts*. Two other plays have been performed at the Theatre by the Lake, Keswick: *The Ghosts of Greta Hall* (co-written with Colin Fleming, 2000) and *Emperor on a Lady's Bicycle* (2002).

He has translated a number of poets, mainly from French but also from Latin. His first major translation, Tristan Corbière's

*Les Amours jaunes*, was published to great critical acclaim as *These Jaundiced Loves* (1995). This was followed by *The Dice Cup* (2000), a co-translation with David Kennedy of Max Jacob's prose poems *Le Cornet à dés*, which was shortlisted for the Weidenfeld Translation Prize in 2001. His translation of Lucien Becker's *Plein Amour*, published as *Love at the Full* (2004), was shortlisted for the 2005 Corneliu M. Popescu Prize for European Poetry Translation in 2005. In 2009 his translation of the Belgian poet Maurice Carême's late poems *Défier le destin* appeared under the title *Defying Fate*. In 2006 he won the British Centre for Literary Translation's annual John Dryden Translation Competition for selected translations of the Roman poet Catullus, whom he had been translating since the 1970s. In 2009 his translations of all of Catullus's surviving work, conceived as imitations in the style of Robert Lowell, were published in one collection under the title *Springing from Catullus*.

Christopher Pilling studied English and French at the University of Leeds from 1954 to 1957. He describes his experiences overleaf. We are delighted to renew this connection by publishing *Oysters, nightingales and cooking pots*, which will bring Tristan Corbière's poetry and prose to a wider audience.

Richard Hibbitt and Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe

## About the Translator

I got into Leeds by the skin of my teeth. My A level results weren't exactly outstanding, but the University invited me to sit special qualifying tests. I was sent home at lunchtime, thinking I must have failed, and couldn't quite believe it to hear I could take an honours course in General Arts. I had to choose four subjects: French, English, Philosophy and Biblical Studies for the first year, then three of these to degree level. Keen on sprinting, I went to train at the University athletics track, and while there I met a high jumper who suggested I abandon the Scissors and learn the Western Roll. It turned out he was Athletics captain and needed a second Western roller for the team that Saturday. Then again and again.

My first digs were in Headingley and I had to study in the sitting room with the family or with a paraffin heater on the linoleum-floored attic bedroom I shared with a civil engineer. The landlady specialised in Yorkshire puddings, so large they came as a first course on their own, and the landlady's daughter specialised in

overdoses of sleeping pills. In the next digs, still in Headingley, the landlady would arrive home a good ten minutes before she served the cooked meal. To walk to the tram, I would pass a house full of large colourful oil paintings and the hectic sounds of a tenor sax. Hearing similar sounds from a trio in the Union I realised it was Alan Davie, the Gregory Fellow in Art. My third landlady, often called on to cook for special Jewish meals, ensured we ate well, and with Catholics as fellow students and myself from a Quaker background, we had lively discussions.

I liked reading the regular poetry magazine *Poetry & Audience* but was too held back to submit poems until after I'd left. A friend took the liberty of showing my only handful to Geoffrey Hill, one of our English lecturers, and apparently he approved of four lines. Years later when I was teaching at Ackworth School in Yorkshire, I joined the Gregory Fellow's workshops and was invited in 1971 to be in a special edition of the magazine, edited by Alan Ram, called, of all things, *Four Poetry & Audience Poets*. It's listed today on Amazon at £94.59. One of the four, James Sutherland-Smith, I was told last year by a friend of his sister, had reviewed my translation of Catullus online in BOWWOW SHOP 5. I had just bought his *Popeye in Belgrade* – small world!

Though I didn't know it at the time and have never met him, another reviewer, Harry Guest, also at our University, praised my translation of the nineteenth-century poet from Brittany, Tristan Corbière, in ultra-glowing terms. He has since seen my attempt to get under the skin of the youthful Catullus as 'equally scurrilous and lyrical'. Martin Bell, whose translation of Laforgue also appears in *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation*, came to workshops in Leeds, and spoke highly of my Corbière. As a member of the French Society, I performed in two plays, one by

Molière where I had a long long speech as the *deus ex machina*, the nearest I shall ever get to godhead, and the other *Rome n'est plus dans Rome* by Gabriel Marcel, where I got my wires crossed as a non-speaking electrician. Other memories: Barry Cryer, MC for the Rag Show at the City Varieties; John Heath-Stubbs lecturing with an enormous alarm clock to see when to finish. Big bands giving the hops a swing and the only ball I went to enlivened by Ray Ellington and the glamorous Marion Ryan.

As my degree was in General Arts I could not break into my three-year studies to spend a year as an Assistant in France, but the University was willing to grant me such a year in the Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs in Moulins after my degree. What's more, when I returned I asked permission to study for an MPhil by thesis, and the French Department agreed to this as long as I passed a written exam on nineteenth-century French poetry. The thesis has been under way for fifty years, though I'm not sure the French Department know I'm still on the books. I have published a complete translation of Tristan Corbière's work and lectured on him in his home towns. The translation was launched in Brittany, thanks to Brittany Ferries for the crossing and the Mayor of Roscoff for the reception. With it being a fat bilingual edition of some 460 pages, the publisher's secretary, with her hippy companion, was stopped at Customs to reveal what she was smuggling in such a large box, so the books arrived only twenty minutes before the speeches.

I entered for the New Poets Award in 1970. It was a new national poetry prize, the brainchild of John Barnard, with the support of other members of the University English department (Alistair Stead, Martin Fido, Brian Scobie, Bernard Dineen, Richard Douro), and had Christopher Ricks and Peter Porter as judges. It



was sponsored by the Arts Council and the Yorkshire Post as well as the University School of English, so when I won with *Snakes & Girls* it was handset by John Barnard in Caslon Old Face Type on the School of English Press and launched in Leeds Town Hall when the Earl of Harewood (one of the patrons) and Sheridan Morley were launching their new books. Recordings were made for the archives, special broadsheets were printed and readings were in the university and at the Ilkley Festival. On the strength of *Snakes & Girls* (sold out many moons ago but incorporated now in *Coming Ready or Not*) Peter Porter was to ask me to review poetry for the *Times Literary Supplement*.

The *Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation* (1980) was reviewed in *The Observer* by Gavin Ewart saying ‘If anybody thinks translation is a dead duck, he or she should try Robert Garioch’s Lallans version of Giuseppe Belli, or Christopher Pilling’s Englishing of Corbière. It’s work like this (and Fitzgerald’s famous personal extravaganza based on Omar Khayyam) that redeems the whole concept of translating from one language into another...a more complete and satisfying collection could hardly be imagined.’

I have had Parkinson’s for about sixteen years but still give occasional readings of my poems and translations at literature festivals and on other occasions.

Christopher Pilling

## About the Editors

Richard Hibbitt is Senior Lecturer in French and Comparative Literature in the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies at the University of Leeds. His publications include essays on Charles Baudelaire, Jules Laforgue and Arthur Rimbaud. He is the co-editor of *Comparative Critical Studies*, journal of the British Comparative Literature Association.

Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe is Fellow and Tutor in Modern Languages at Hertford College, University of Oxford. She is the author of *Tristan Corbière and the Poetics of Irony* (Oxford University Press, 2006). Her current projects include a study of progress in Victor Hugo's poetry. She is co-editor of *Cahiers Tristan Corbière* (éditions Garnier, Paris).



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## Parade

(oubliée)

Place S.V.P. Provinciaux  
de Paris & Parisiens de  
Carcassonne!

Et toi, va mon Livre —  
Qu'une femme te corne,  
Qu'un fesse-cahier te  
fesse, qu'un malade  
te sourie!

Reste pire —  
tes moyens te le permettent.

Dis à ceux  
du métier que tu es un  
*monstre d'artiste...*

Pour les autres: 7 f. 50.

Va mon livre & ne  
me reviens plus.

## Flaunting it!

Make room, if you please, all you Provincial folk  
 From Paris & Parisians from Carcassonne!  
 As for you, my Book, off you go — it's no joke  
 That a woman may turn a corner down, have you on

Or deafen you, that a nine-to-five office clerk  
 May land you one, that a sick man smile your way!  
 Stay as bad as you are — or worse — your work  
 May not be recognised, but you'll have had your say.

Tell any in your profession your verse can reach  
 That you're a *monster artist, an artistic freak*.  
 As for all the others: they're 7fr 50 each.  
 Off you go, my book, and no more hide and seek.

T



**Video 1:** *Parade (oubliée) / Flaunting it!*

Watch a reading of this poem at <https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.1> or scan the QR code.





**Poèmes Divers**

**Poems & Occasional Verse**

Épitaphe  
pour  
Tristan Joachim-Édouard Corbière,  
philosophe, épave, mort-né

Mélange adultère de tout:  
De la fortune et pas le sou,  
De l'énergie et pas de force,  
La Liberté, mais une entorse.  
Du cœur, du cœur! de l'âme, non —  
Des amis, pas un compagnon,  
De l'idée et pas une idée,  
De l'amour et pas une aimée,  
La paresse et pas le repos.  
Vertus chez lui furent défauts,  
Âme blasée inassouvie.  
Mort, mais pas guéri de la vie,  
Gâcheur de vie hors de propos  
Le corps à sec et la tête ivre,  
Espérant, niant l'avenir,  
Il mourut en s'attendant vivre  
Et vécut s'attendant mourir.

Epitaph  
for  
Tristan Joachim-Edouard Corbière,  
philosopher, down-and-out, still-born

A pure adulterous mish-mash:  
 Man of fortune short of cash,  
 Bounding energy on the wane,  
 Liberty with an ankle-sprain.  
 Heart-felt feelings, no soul though —  
 Friends, yes, but companion, no,  
 An intellect who'd no idea,  
 Lover no girl would come near,  
 Weary bones unable to rest.  
 Virtues in him were faults at best,  
 Blasé at heart with passions rife.  
 Dead, but not recovered from life,  
 Wrecker of life who'd missed the boat,  
 Head swimming, body high and dried,  
 Denying the future, living in hope,  
 Waiting to come to life, he died  
 And lived, taking death in his stride.



**Video 2:** *Épitaphe pour Tristan Joachim-Edouard Corbière, philosophe, épave, mort-né / Epitaph for Tristan Joachim-Edouard Corbière, Philosopher, down-and-out, still-born* Watch a reading of this poem at <https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.2> or scan the QR code.

## La Balancelle

*La balancelle Le Panayoti prise sur les forbans, par la corvette  
La Lamproie et se rendant à Smyrne, commandée par le  
lieutenant Bisson avec un équipage français est assaillie  
dans l'archipel par une flotte de tartanes pirates et se fait  
sauter avec eux*

*par*

*Trémintin de l'île de Batz, quartier-maître et pilote à bord et  
pour ça [sic] cavalier de la religion d'honneur mis envers et  
contre tout, par Édouard Tristan Corbière.*

*(Île de Batz, 1867.)*

Deux requins dans ton lit, un' garc' dans ton hamac!  
Tas d' sacrés chiens d' mat'lots, ouvrez-moi l'œil... cric... crac!  
Vous allez voir comm' quoi dix-huit mat'lots et l'of-  
Ficier qui commandait pétèr'ent leur dernier loff.

Moi, j'étais quartier-maîtr', quartier-maître et pilote  
De d' sur un' balançoir' qu'y gna pas dans la flotte,  
Un' manière d' barquass' que les autr's avaient pris  
D' sur les forbans (sensé les pratiq's du pays).  
V' saurez pour vot' gouvern' que j'avions mis not' sac  
Et l' pavillon d' l'Emp'reur sur c't' espèc' d' bric-à-brac.

Pour lors, donc, nous croisons sur la mer *archi-belle*  
Ousque l' temps est si beau et la mer est si belle  
Qu'on dirait qu'y en a pas; mais c'est infecté d' Turcs,  
D'archi-Turcs qui vous cur'nt la carcass': c'est leur truc.  
Gna toujours du soleil ou, pour du moins, la lune  
Là, et c'est bleu qu'on doublé, qu'on navig' comm' sur une  
Pancarte à perruquier; pour de l'eau, c'est de l'eau,  
Mais tout d' mêm' ça n'est pas un' vrai (*sic*) mer à mat'lots,  
De l'eau douc' qu'est sal, quoi! c'te mer-là, c'te mer-là  
C'est comm' les poissons roug's dans les débits d' tabac.  
Pour le nom du navir', ni Français, ni Breton,  
Ni d' Saint-Malo non plus... un sacré nom de nom,  
Le Panayotif, quoi!... mais pour le nom d'un brave,  
C'est le nom de Bisson, commandant, rud' cadavre,  
Un' moutur' premier brin pour le mat'lot sauté  
Q' l' tonnerre d' Dieu n'est qu'un' d'mi-foutaise à côté.

## The Bilancella

*The bilancella* The Panayoti, captured from pirates by the corvette The Lamprey and heading for Smyrna, captured by lieutenant Bisson with a French crew is set upon in the archipelago by a fleet of piratical lateen coasters and blown up with them

by

*Trémintin from the Isle of Batz, quartermaster and pilot on board and therefore promoted to the rank of cavalier of the reigion of honour achieved in the face of all contingencies, by Édouard Tristan Corbière.*

(Isle of Batz, 1867.)

Two sharks in your bed, a hussy in your hammock!  
You pack of rampant sea-dogs, keep y'r eyes skinned... for luck...  
You'll see how eighteen sailors and their commanding officer took off close to the wind on their final luff.

I was quarter-master, quarter-master and pilot  
On what seemed like a seesaw, couldn't be an islet  
But some sort of a boat, that jacktars had snatched  
Back from the pirates (they're considered a local catch)  
And in order to steer we'd each dumped our kitbag  
And the Emperor's flag on this heaving bric-a-brac.

So then we were sailing the oh so lovely sea  
With the weather so fine an' the sea so beautifully  
There you'd think it weren't; but it's infected with Turks,  
Out-and-out Turks who'd come to clean you out — as perks.  
The sun's always out too, at least that there moon is,  
Shining like the blue moon in the song whose tune is  
Like the blues on a wig-maker's sign, a blue rinse  
For landlubbers, not sea-worthy salts, and since  
It isn't a real sailor's sea, the water's yes water,  
But not a patch on the real McCoy — that snorter!  
It's fresh water wi' salt in, which makes a poor fist  
— Like those bowls of goldfish at the tobacconist.  
Now the ship's name isn't French, nor is it Breton,  
Nor from St-Malo... it's some mouthful tho' — they've set on  
*Le Panayotif*, yep!... unlike the name of its commander:  
Bisson, a rough an' ready fellow, up with his dander  
Tho' to grill any cocky devil an' give him grief  
Side o' which God's thunder's nobbut a half-baked beef.

“À ta santé, Bisson, c’est la sacré’ bouteille  
De ton vieux matelot; à ta santé, ma vieille!”

Pour lors donc, j’étais d’ quart. — “Ouvre l’œil, au bossoir,  
Trémintin, que me dit Bisson, vois-tu, ce soir,  
Ça sent l’ pirat’!... “Gros temps, nous étions sous une île  
Ousqu’y pouss’ des pirat’s pas par douzain’, par mille...  
— Ouvre l’œil au bossoir! Et nous torchions d’ la toile  
À fair’ fumer ma chique, et rafal’ par rafale  
L’ Panayotif pliait comme un’ plume à goëland.  
— Ouvre l’œil au bossoir!... Tonnerr’, voile à l’avant!  
Branle-bas de combat: du trois-six plein les bailles  
(Ça donn’ du cœur au mond’), nous allons rir’, racaille!  
— Voile au vent, voil’ sous l’ vent! autant dir’ voil’ partout,  
Comm’ si j’en accouchions par l’œil, par tous les bouts.  
Mais c’est Bisson avec sa plus grande uniforme  
(Ah! quel homm’ veillatif!), aiguillet’s, claque à cornes,  
Enfin, tout l’ tremblement. Moi je m’ dis: “gnaura chaud!”  
— Trémintin, qu’y me hèle, accoste à moi, mat’lot:  
T’as du cœur? — Moi? pour ça, foi de Dieu, plein mon ventre!  
— Bon! Si j’aval’ ma gaffe avant toi, faut pas s’ rendre.

— J’ sais ça z’aussi bien q’ vous. — Oui, mais faut m’ foutre le feu  
Dans la soute à poudre, et... Ta main, pilote, adieu!

Et c’est qu’y m’ croch’ la main, c’tè patt’-ci, c’est la même.  
Tout comme un officier, ni plus ni moins, tout’ d’ même.  
— Quoi, c’est tout ça? Ma foi, mon commandant Bisson,  
Que vous êt’s bien bégueul’ de prendr’ tant de façons!  
J’ saut’rons l’ Panayotif, quoiq’ je n’ suis qu’un gabier,  
J’ vous l’ saut’rons aussi z’haut que l’ premier officier.  
— Silence, l’ mond’ partout!” — Moi, j’ me colle une chiq’ fraîche.  
À tribord de ma gueul’, sous mon sifflet, la mèche  
Piqué’ sur les affûts. — Nous y v’là, veille au grain.  
C’est q’ tout’s ces balançoïr’s nous tombaient d’ssus, grand train;  
On r’nâclait leurs odeurs, à c’tè mulon d’ vermine;  
Gnavait des femm’s aussi, ça vous jutait un’ mine,  
Un’ mine!... et ça pouillass’ comme rats à poison  
D’ sur des quartiers d’ citrouill’s grées en papillons.  
Sacrés tortillards, va!... Bisson, j’ vois q’ ça l’ gargouille  
D’ pincer l’ carcan d’avec c’tè damné tas d’ grenouilles.  
Il fout là son cigare, un bon bout. — Avant d’main,  
Mon garçon, que je m’ dis, gn’aura d’ la viande à r’quins!”  
Tout not’ monde était crân’ comm’ des p’tits amours, parce  
Q’ j’avais dit q’ l’ commandant leur cuisinait sa farce.

“Here’s t’ y’r health, Bisson, pal — poured from the pottle\*  
Of y’r old shipmate. Bottoms up, we’ll sink it by the bottle!”

But now I was on watch. — “Eyes skinned at the cathead,  
Trémintin, ’cos you see, tonight, as Bisson said,  
I smell pirates!...” Weather vile, we were off ’n island  
Where pirates grow not by the dozen, but the thousand...  
“Eyes skinned, swabbers!...” And we swabbed the sails of the *yawl*  
Till our chewed plug steamed, and squall by blustery squall,  
The Panayotif flexed like a seagull’s feather.  
“Eyes skinned, my lads! Ye gods, hoist some sail to weather  
The onslaught. Up ’n at it: fill the buckets with grog  
(It’ll buck the men up), we’ll have some fun, you dogs!”  
“Sail to windward, sail to leeward, might as well piss  
In any direction, from every orifice.”  
But it’s Bisson, spurrer-on, in outsize uniform  
(Ah! how wide-awake he is!), in opera hat, horns  
An’ all, the whole caboodle. I say: “Things’ll get hot!”  
“Trémintin,” he hails me, “draw alongside. You got  
The guts, jack?” “What me? my God aye, a bellyful!”  
“Good! If I snuff it first, don’t you surrender, pal.”

“I know as well as you” “Yes, but it’s you to ignite  
The powder keg, and... Your hand, pilot, goodbye!”

At which he grabs my hand, this very paw, no less,  
Just as an officer might, not specially to impress.  
“Z’that all it is? Captain Bisson, I’m one of us,  
How ultra prudish you are, making such a fuss!  
I’ll blow the Panayotif up, not that a topman should,  
I’ll blow it up as high as the first officer would.”  
“Silence, the lot of you!” — I stuff a fresh quid in  
To starboard of my mug, under my whistle, the pin  
Pointed t’wards the guns. “Here it is, and it’s a belter.”  
Stair-rods come drumming down helter-skelter;  
We grumbled at the stink from the heaps of vermin;  
There were women too, dribbling juicy women,  
Some allure!... they were lousy, poisonous rats in bales  
On quarters of pumpkin-shapes rigged out with sails.  
Damn wrigglers, come off it! I see old Bisson’s dogged  
By them, lusts to whip the shackles off this heap of frogs.  
He shoves a cigar in, a good stub’s worth. “And mark

\*pottle: container holding half a gallon



V' pensez q' les Turcs, c'est fort, c'est pas un cuir chrétien,  
 C'est comm' culots d' gargouss' grées en grouins d' chiens  
 Et pis des pistolets, plein l' ventre d' leurs culottes,  
 Longs comm' canul' à vach's... paraît q' c'est leur marotte!  
 Faut croire qu' l' bon Dieu couchait, par un' nuit d' mardi gras,  
 D'avec la mèr' Ribott, quand il fit ces trogn's là.  
 Jésus queu bosse d' rir'! — Timonier, barr' dessous...  
 Feu tribord, aval' ça! tout le mond', casse-cou!  
 Et les Bretons aussi! — Attrape à en découdre! —  
 Et v'lan! v'là leur volé' (bonn' Vierg', queu drôls de bougres!)  
 Ça nous raffl' proprement, comme un coup d' *torlischtri*,  
 — Attrape à riposter! — Je tèn fous, v'là m's amis,  
 Comm' des cancr's en chaleur, qui croch'nt à l'abodage,  
 Et leurs sangsu's d' femm's donc, queu cancan, queu ramage!  
 L' poil dressait d' leurs quat'z yeux, leur lang' sortait d' leurs  
 dents.  
 J' n'étions plus q' sept... les autr's dans l' vent' d' ces chiens  
 savants.

Bisson en avait plein, comm' des poux sur un' galle,  
 Qui lui suçaient la vie; y se s'coue, y s'affale  
 Avec un' mèch' qui fum' (g'a pas d' fumé sans feu).  
 Moi, je r'nifle son truc et je m' ferm' les deux yeux  
 Par précaution... Et j' saut'... c'est sauté!!... c'est tout drôle,  
 J' sais comm' quoi j'ai sauté, mais j' sais pas la parole  
 C'est comm' qui dirait comme une espèc' d' rognonn'ment,  
 Du coton qu'on s' fourrait dans l'oreill' sensément  
 Et comme un bon coup d' poing qui saut'... J'aval' ma chique  
 Du coup... J' m' sentais en l'air, comm' pochard au physique,  
 Pourvu q' ça dur', c'est bon... Tou [*sic*] à coup l' commandant  
 M' raze, au razibus d' moi que j'en sentais le vent,  
 En l'air, en quat' morceaux, sans compter l'uniforme,  
 C'était dur... un mat'lot, ça!... qu'il a sa colonne  
 Qu'on lui planté'z aux pieds dans l' port de Lorient  
 (Lorient, séjour de guign'!). Pour moi, tout en volant  
 Comme un ballon crevé du milieu des nuages  
 J' voyais mes moricauds tout en bas à la nage,  
 Un' ratatouill' d' boyaux, de femm's et d' pistolets,  
 Et j' voyais tout' la mer, grand' comm' un' baille à bras;  
 Et j' voyais l'il' de Batz, ousqu'une femm' qui n'est plus  
 M' faisait, en m'attendant sauf vot' respect, un animal cocu,  
 Cerf à la Marengo... A c't instant-là ma chique  
 Que j'avais avalé me brassait un' colique...  
 Je m' sentais r'descendr' raide, et j' tombe érabouilli;  
 Comme un' crèp' en ralingu', dans l' chaud d' c'te bouilli'

My words, lad, tomorrow there'll be meat for the sharks!"  
 The whole of our crew were full of themselves, let loose  
 'Cos I'd said the captain would be cooking his goose.  
 You think that the Turks are tough, haven't Christian hide,  
 They're like cartridge caps, like dogs' muzzles from the side  
 And sons of a gun, bellies of their pants chock-full,  
 Long and thin like syringe nozzles... seems that's their pull!  
 You'll be thinking God's had it off one Mardi Gras night  
 With ol' Ma Carouse to make those faces such a fright.  
 Jesus, we fell about laughing! "Helmsman, helm down...  
 Fire to starboard, swallow that! you daredevil clowns!"  
 And the Bretons too: "Why not pick a fight!" Wham! Swish!  
 They've fired a volley (Holy Mary, what queer fish!)  
 That cleans us out completely, like a dose of senna pods,  
 "Now retaliate!" Not bloody likely, they're my bods,  
 Like dunces on heat, who hold fast when up and doing,  
 And their bloodsucker wives, what tattle, what cooing!  
 Their hair stood on end, tongues protruded from teeth.  
 Nobbut seven of us... performing dogs for those beneath:  
 Bisson had had his fill of them, like lice on mange  
 Sucking out his life; he shakes himself, moves out of range  
 Collapsing with a smoking wick (no smoke without fire).  
 I sniff his plan and close my eyes, I've no desire  
 To get hooked... And I jump out of my skin!!... That's odd,  
 I know what it felt like to jump, but not the clod  
 Of a word, sounding like it was hummed, unclear  
 Like cottonwool had been deftly stuffed in one's ear  
 And getting a sudden punch... I swallow my quid  
 Straight off... feel floaty, like a tippler on the skids,  
 But while it lasts it's great... Suddenly the captain  
 Shaves me, I felt the wind of it as it happened —  
 In the air, in four pieces, not counting the uniform,  
 It was hard... a sailor, though!... who had his column  
 Of men brought to his feet in Lorient siding  
 (Lorient, that jinxed resort). As for me, while flying  
 Like a burst balloon from the midst of the clouds, so  
 I could see my darkies swimming down below,  
 A ratatouille stew: women, guns and entrails,  
 And I could see all the sea, big as a mighty pail;  
 And the Isle of Batz, where a wench whose track's gone cold  
 Turned me into, pardon me, a beast, a cuckold,  
 A white spotted stag... At that very mo the plug  
 I'd swallowed stirred up a painful stomach bug...  
 I felt myself go rigid and I fell quite squashed

D' tripaillons en pagail', de têt's, de jamb's sans maîtres,  
Des ventr's qui criaient seuls, et des œils sans lunettes,  
Et j' nageais d' vers la cô't, mais v'là mon â'm' que j' rends,  
Je m' sentais monter la cagn' par tout l' tempérament.

---

J' sais pas trop c' que ça dure, un jour ou un semestre,  
Mais je n' respirais plus qu' par l' dernier bouton d' guê'tre;  
Tout c' qu'a d' sûr, c'èst qu'un jour j' rouvre l'œil rond et bien,  
D'vinez où?... sauf respect, sous l' nez d'un chirurgien  
D' troisièm' classe. Y gn'vait queuqu' monde d' la *Lamproie*  
Qu' avait r'luqué du larg' l' bastringue d' notre exploit,  
Et qui m'avait r'pêché en drive (et j' les r'merci')  
Parmi l' Panayoti... moi, j' dis l' *Panier rôti!*...

---

À ta santé, Bisson!... Là, l' vin n' se pomp' q' par cruches  
Dans c'te gueuzard d' climat, et le sesq' comm' de juste  
Sensitif au ma'lot, et les crêch's à cochons  
C'est tout colonn's comm' cell' de Lorient à Bisson.

---

... Moi, j' nai pas d' colonn', mais j'ai gagné dans c't' exploit  
L'honneur d'êt' survécu, la gal' turque, et ma croix.

Like a bolt-rope pancake, in the swirl of a mashed-  
 Up mess of innards, heads, legs like separate wrecks,  
 Bellies bellowing loneliness, eyes with no specs,  
 My whole body's feeling, as I swam towards the coast,  
 Such indolence rise that I'm giving up the ghost.

-----

I'm not clear how long it lasts, a day or half a year,  
 But I could only breathe through the last spat's hole, I fear.  
 All that's for sure is I must open my eyes again,  
 And wide, but guess where?... with respect, on a wen  
 Under a third class surgeon's nose. The *Lamprey's* wise  
 Men had had an eye on the junk of our enterprise  
 And they'd fished me with a golf club (thanks to everybody)  
 From off the Panayoti... I call it *Pan o' toddy!*...

-----

Bottoms up, Bisson. Here all the wine comes in jugfuls  
 In this beggarly climate, and we have great mugfuls  
 Of kindness for all sailors and we don't want to piss on  
 An obelisk like the one at Lorient to Bisson.

-----

... I don't have a column, but I had no sense of loss,  
 Just the honour of surviving Turkish mange and my cross.

Sous un portrait de Corbière  
EN COULEURS FAIT PAR LUI  
ET DATÉ DE 1868

Jeune philosophe en dérive  
Revenu sans avoir été,  
Cœur de poète mal planté:  
Pourquoi voulez-vous que je vive?

L'amour!... je l'ai rêvé, mon cœur au grand ouvert  
Bat comme un volet en pantenne  
Habité par la froide haleine  
Des plus bizarres courants d'air;  
Qui voudrait s'y jeter?... pas moi si j'étais ELLE!...  
Va te coucher, mon cœur, et ne bats plus de l'aile.

J'aurais voulu souffrir et mourir d'une femme,  
M'ouvrir du haut en bas et lui donner en flamme,  
Comme un punch, ce cœur-là, chaud sous le chaud soleil...

Alors je chanterais (faux, comme de coutume)  
Et j'irais me coucher seul dans la trouble brume  
Éternité, néant, mort, sommeil, ou réveil.

Ah si j'étais un peu compris! Si par pitié  
Une femme pouvait me sourire à moitié,  
Je lui dirais: oh viens, ange qui me consoles!...

-----  
...Et je la conduirais à l'hospice des folles.

On m'a manqué ma vie!... une vie à peu près;  
Savez-vous ce que c'est: regardez cette tête.  
Dépareillé partout, très bon, plus mauvais, très  
Fou, ne me souffrant... Encor si j'étais bête!

La mort... ah oui, je sais: cette femme est bien froide,  
Coquette dans la vie; après, sans passion.  
Pour coucher avec elle il faut être trop roide...  
Et puis, la mort n'est pas, c'est la négation.

Legend for a portrait of Corbière  
 IN COLOUR PAINTED BY HIMSELF  
 AND DATED 1868

Young philosopher cast adrift,  
 Came back without having been,  
 Heart of a poet in the wrong scene:  
 Between life and me why the rift?

Love!... I've dreamed it, my heart that's open wide  
 Beats like a shutter blown skew-whiff  
 And lets in on each and every side  
 The oddest breezes that are stiff  
 With cold. Who'd want to plunge clear-eyed  
 Into love?... Not me if I were HER!... And what for?  
 Off to bed, heart, don't beat your wings any more.

I would have loved to suffer and die for a girl,  
 Be open top to toe so my heart could unfurl,  
 Hot in the hot sun, like punch — there for the taking...

Then I would sing (out of tune as usual, off-key)  
 And I would go to bed alone — outlook bleary:  
 Eternity, nothingness, death, sleep, or waking.

Ah if only I were understood a bit! If out of pity  
 A woman could give me half a smile — I'd say: Come,  
 My angel, my consoling angel, console me!...

—————

... And I'd lead her to the lunatic asylum.

My life has given me the slip!... a life of sorts;  
 You know what I mean: how lacking can you get!  
 Oddball anywhere, very good, by some reports,  
 Or bad, or mad, insufferable — to me... And wet!

Death... well actually I know: she's a cock-teaser,  
 A coquette in life; after which, without elation,  
 You'd need to be too stiff to sleep with her...  
 Then again, death doesn't exist, she's negation.

Je voudrais être un point épousseté des masses,  
Un point mort balayé dans la nuit des espaces,  
...Et je ne le suis point!

Je voudrais être alors chien de fille publique,  
Lécher un peu d'amour qui ne soit pas payé;  
Ou déesse à tous crins sur la côte d'Afrique,  
Ou fou, mais réussi; fou, mais pas à moitié.

I'd like to be a bit of fluff dusted off the face  
Of the earth, a bit-part swept off the stage into space.  
... But I'm not a bit!

And I'd like to be the dog of our local whore,  
To lick a little love and not pay for the pleasure;  
Or a spanking goddess from some African shore,  
Or mad — and a roaring success; mad, no half measure.



## Une mort trop travaillée

C'était à peu près un artiste,  
C'était un poète à peu près  
S'amusant à prendre le frais  
En dehors de l'humaine pièce.

Puis, écœuré de toute envie  
En équilibre sur la vie  
Et, ne sachant trop de quel bord...  
Il se joua, lui contre *un mort*.

Au *bac*... — Au bac à qui perd gagne  
Il perdit, ou, comme on voudra  
Donc, dans trois mois, il se tûra!  
Pour aller vivre à la campagne

... Trois mois... Ce n'est pas qu'il se pleure...  
C'est un avenir à vingt ans,  
Trois mois pour dorer de bon temps  
La pilule du grand quart d'heure...

Vingt-quatre heures, c'est l'ordinaire,  
Mais lui faisait tout en flânant  
Et voulait prendre de l'élan  
Puisqu'il n'avait qu'un saut à faire —

Tant en prit (jusqu'à sa pantoufle,  
Avant soi voulant tout laver)  
Qu'enfin il lui restait de souffle,  
Juste assez pour se le souffler.

Or, jusqu'au bout dans ses toilettes  
Suivant ses instincts élégants,  
Lâchant la vie avec des gants  
Prit la mort avec des pincettes.

Il fit donc faire en Angleterre  
Deux fins pistolets de *Menton*,  
L'un, pour s'appuyer au menton  
Et l'autre pour faire la paire.

## A death worked too hard for

He was an artist, more or less,  
 He was a poet of sorts, a hack  
 Who loved leaving the beaten track  
 To breathe air that's cool and fresh.

Then, sickened with having to learn,  
 Balanced astride the life force  
 And not knowing which way to turn...  
 He played himself, man versus corpse.

At *the bac*... where loser takes all.  
 He lost, so, take it or leave it,  
 In three months' time he'll achieve it —  
 Dying... to live by the sea wall.

... Three months... It isn't self-pity...  
 It's a future when you are twenty,  
 Three months of serendipity:  
 The gilded pill, two shakes of plenty.

Twenty four hours, that's the norm,  
 But he, the stroller, wanting to take  
 Off with a run, went against form  
 As he'd only one leap to make —

But took so many steps — clomper  
 Out to clear the decks of himself —  
 That he'd barely enough puff left  
 To be his very own prompter.

Then, getting dolled up, he pleases  
 — With elegant instincts he shone —  
 To let go of life with his gloves on  
 And take hold of death with tweezers.

He had two pistols (one and a spare)  
 Made in England (labelled Chinon!)  
 One of them to rest his chin on,  
 The other to make them a pair.

Le pistolet, c'est un peu bête —  
Outil presque médicinal —  
Mais, pour lui, ça n'allait pas mal  
Qui manquait de plomb dans la tête.

Et, ma foi, pour se fondre l'âme,  
C'est aussi neuf que le poison,  
C'est aussi chaud que le charbon  
Ou que le creuset d'une femme!

C'est une affaire de calibre,  
De goût, de dégoût ou d'argent —  
Laissons-le donc trois mois chargeant  
Ses pistolets. — Il est bien libre. —

Et puis, quels bijoux que ces armes  
En acier mat, un peu trop sec.  
Ça donnait un froid non sans charmes,  
Frisson chaud à coucher avec!

Il les avait fait faire exprès,  
Voulant dans son suprême exprès  
Que ce fût une bouche vierge  
Qui lui mouchât son dernier cierge.

Il avait fait graver son nom  
En spirale sur le canon,  
Et comme autour d'un mirliton  
Cet aphorisme simple et sage  
En vers que je vous transcris tels:  
"Ici, ce qui manque aux mortels  
Pour savoir mourir, c'est l'usage.

Ces pistolets sont une pose.  
Eh bien posez comme il posa.  
Allez, bourgeois, c'est quelque chose  
De poser encor devant ça! — ”.

Il écrivit à sa maîtresse,  
Comme on le fait en pareil cas...  
— Et même quand on n'en a pas  
Alors, c'est "Amanda" l'adresse —

A pistol's the arm of a fool —  
 An almost medicinal tool —  
 For him that wasn't so bad, lacking lead  
 In his pencil, I mean his head.

To blow out one's brains, one's soul,  
 Shooting's as cool as poison, as hot  
 As a lump of smouldering coal  
 Or a woman's melting pot!

It's a question of calibre, the bore;  
 Of taste, distaste or cash — So let's see to  
 Leaving him for three months more  
 Loading his pistols. — He's free to. —

And then, what jewels they are, these arms  
 — Dull steel, a little too primitive.  
 He'd feel their cold, but that had its charms,  
 A warm shiver to sleep with!

He had had them made with a view  
 To a chance that in a supreme set-to  
 It might be a virgin's mouth  
 Blowing his final candle out.

He had had his name engraved  
 In a spiral round the barrel  
 And like verse round a kazoo he'd saved  
 This simple, intelligent moral:  
 I'll transcribe it such as it is:  
 "To know how to die what mortals  
 Lack down here on earth is practice.

Having these pistols is a pose.  
 Well then, pose till you're out of breath  
 Like him, you bourgeois, the so-and-so's  
 Still posing in the face of death! —"

He wrote to his sweetheart, and a  
 Real act of love that was... — He'd done  
 It even though he hadn't one!  
 So he addressed it to "Amanda" —

Lui pour que sans pleurer ni rire, elle chantât  
Il lui mit ça sur l'air de "J'ai du bon tabac"  
Mon rat,

"Lis-moi jusqu'au bout, lis ça comme un conte.  
Je me suis tué pour tuer le temps.  
Je te lègue tout: comme fin de compte  
Je laisse après moi: vingt ans, dont 20 francs.

"Puis ces pistolets: l'un dans ta ruelle  
Avec mon amour, au mur accroché,  
Comme objet d'art et, que lui soit fidèle  
À ce dernier feu que j'aurai lâché.

"L'autre encor chargé, mets-le dans ma boîte,  
Réveille-matin réglé pour ma nuit,  
Dans cette couchette un peu trop étroite  
Pour mettre au pied ma descente de lit.

"Si tu m'as aimé, ne ris pas ma Belle,  
Je ne me fais pas, va, d'illusions.  
Mais j'étais très mâle et toi très femelle  
Et tu m'as aimé... par convulsions.

"Si tu m'as aimé, qu'allais-je donc dire,  
Te donner peut-être des rendez-vous?  
Tiens, je ris par chic, je veux, je veux rire!...  
Eh bien! viens pendant qu'on mettra les clous."

Il se demanda si son âme  
Allait crever comme un abcès  
Ou s'éteindre comme une flamme,  
Puis il se dit: Eh bien! après?

Le moment venu (faiblesse physique)  
Il s'ingurgita (c'est assez petit)  
Un cruchon de rhum, toni-viatique,  
Pour se mettre enfin plus en appétit —

Il se mit devant son armoire à glace  
(Chez le photographe il n'eût pas fait mieux)  
Pour se voir un peu tomber avec grâce,  
Se jetant encor de la poudre aux yeux.

Then he, so she might sing without crying or laughing,  
Put it to the tune of “I’ve got the world on a string”

“My darling,

Read it to me to the final chapter,  
Read it like a proper story. I killed  
Myself to kill time. I’ve wrapped her  
Up, my worthless youth, in my will,

With these pistols — and leave you the lot  
With my love. One’s fixed to the wall,  
Like a work of art, so it will not pall  
Until I’ve fired the final shot.

The other — it’s still loaded — put  
It in my box-alarm set for my night  
In this put-me-up that’s a little too tight  
To place my bed-mat at the foot.

If you really loved me — don’t laugh, my Lovely,  
You see, I don’t have any illusions.  
But I was very male and you very...  
Female and you loved me... in convulsions.

If you really loved me — now I’ll blow the gaff  
And ask you for a date, perhaps, to save my skin?  
Listen, I laugh a stage-laugh, but I *do want* to laugh!...  
So! come while they’re knocking the nails in.”

He wondered whether his whole frame  
Was going to burst like an abscess  
Or be extinguished like a flame,  
Then said to himself: Well! what next?

The moment having come (physical lapse)  
He swallowed in one (it’s not very big)  
A small jug of rum, last-rites-tonic perhaps,  
To pep up his appetite (once more the pig) —

He stood in front of his mirror, full face,  
(A stance no photographer would despise)  
To see himself momentarily fall with grace,  
Still throwing powder into his eyes.

Froid et brûlant baiser, il colla sur sa bouche  
La bouche où son dernier soupir est arrêté!...  
Il tombe, le coup part, suivi d'un éclair louche  
Et la charge...

Excellente; il s'est juste raté!

#### MORALE

Drôle de balle et drôle pistolet!  
Il en porte aujourd'hui les marques:  
Il est marchand de contremarques  
À la porte du Châtelet.

With an icy burning kiss (burning to ash?),  
He glued to his mouth the mouth his last sigh kissed!...  
He falls, the shot goes off, then the rum flash  
And the bang...  
    Excellent; he's gone and missed!

MORAL

Strange pistol and bullet that went astray!  
He still bears the marks of them today:  
He's selling countermarks for gold plate  
And pass-outs at the Châtelet gate.



Donc Madame, une nuit, un jour que j'étais ivre,  
Peut-être ivre de vous, j'ai voulu faire un livre  
Et je prends un crayon, j'écris sur mes genoux,  
Sur le vôtre peut-être — enfin c'est bien à vous  
Et je puis, par raccroc, qui sait, être un génie  
Ou bien un [*illisible*], enfin toute ma vie  
J'ai le droit de me taire et tout ce qui s'ensuit.  
Je puis être bête à m'en réveiller la nuit.  
Mais va, j'avais toujours dans mon drôle de livre  
Un joli trait bizarre, un coup de crayon [...]

Well, Madam, one night, on a day when I was pissed,  
 Woozy for you perhaps, I wanted to write the gist  
 Of a book so, taking a pencil to write on my lap  
 Or yours perhaps — well it felt like yours — and wrap  
 Things up by being, by some fluke, a genius  
 Or a *[illegible]*, anyway all my life it's been thus:  
 I've a right to say nothing and what comes with the right.  
 Or I can *act* dumb — and that's what wakes me at night.  
 But, seriously, I'd always pursue, in my joke  
 Of a book, some pretty odd line, a pencil stroke [...]



**Video 3:** *Donc Madame, une nuit...* / *Well, Madam, one night...* Watch a reading of this poem at <https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.3> or scan the QR code.

## Deux dédicaces des *Amours Jaunes*

### I

SUR L'EXEMPLAIRE DE M. LE VACHER

*Exemplaire de mon gendre.*

Mon blazon pas bégueule  
est comme moi faquin  
Nous bandons à la gueule  
Fond troué d'arlequin.

### II

SUR L'EXEMPLAIRE DE M. LE GAD

Nous sommes tous les deux deux fiers empoisonneurs.  
À vous les estomacs, Le Gad, à moi les cœurs!

## Un distique

Mon cher, on m'a volé... Que je plains ton malheur!  
— Oui, mon cher, un album. — Que je plains le voleur.

## Two dedications of *Les Amours Jaunes*

### I

IN M<sup>R</sup> LE VACHER'S COPY

*My son-in-law's copy.*

My coat-of-arms isn't strait-laced  
Like me it's vulgar and coarse  
We come off in your face  
Harlequin's holey arse.

### II

IN M<sup>R</sup> LE GAD'S COPY

Both of us are skilled, Le Gad, in the poisonous arts.  
You poison people's stomachs, and I their hearts!

## Couplet

I've been robbed, you know... — You haven't! Oh no, good grief!  
— They've pinched my sketch book. — I *am* sorry... for the thief!



**Video 4:** *Un distique / Couplet* Watch a reading of this poem at <https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.4> or scan the QR code.

## Paris diurne

Vois aux cieus le grand rond de cuivre rouge luire,  
Immense casserole où le Bon Dieu fait cuire  
La manne, l'arlequin, l'éternel plat du jour.  
C'est trempé de sueur et c'est poivré d'amour.

Les Laridons en cercle attendent près du four,  
On entend vaguement la chair rance bruire,  
Et les soiffards aussi sont là, tendant leur buire;  
Le marmiteux grelotte en attendant son tour.

Tu crois que le soleil frit donc pour tout le monde  
Ces gras graillons grouillants qu'un torrent d'or inonde?  
Non, le bouillon de chien tombe sur nous du ciel.

Eux sont sous le rayon et nous sous la gouttière  
À nous le pot-au-noir qui froidit sans lumière...  
Notre substance à nous, c'est notre poche à fiel.

Ma foi j'aime autant ça que d'être dans le miel.

## Paris by day

See the large red copper disc emblazon the sky,  
Enormous saucepan in which the Good Lord above  
Brings manna to the boil: left-overs, still called Try-  
The-Chef's-Special, steeped in sweat and peppered with love.

Packed round a brazier the Dossers are milling,  
You can vaguely hear their rancid flesh start to burn;  
The boozers are there too, tankards up for filling;  
One down-and-out shivers as he waits his turn.

You think it's the sun that's frying, for young and old,  
These seething greasy meat-scraps, drenched in floods of gold?  
No, it's pigswill for us that the heavens let fall.

While they stand in sunbeams, we've our backs to the wall,  
Ours the pitch-pot going cold — here it isn't sunny! —  
Our very substance is a bladder full of gall.

Christ, I'd rather have that than their pot of honey.

## Paris nocturne

*Ce n'est pas une ville, c'est un monde.*

— C'est la mer: calme plat — et la grande marée,  
Avec un grondement lointain, s'est retirée.  
Le flot va revenir, se roulant dans son bruit —  
— Entendez-vous gratter les crabes de la nuit...

— C'est le Styx asséché: Le chiffonnier Diogène,  
Sa lanterne à la main, s'en vient errer sans gêne.  
Le long du ruisseau noir, les poètes pervers  
Pêchent; leur crâne creux leur sert de boîte à vers.

— C'est le champ: Pour glaner les impures charpies  
S'abat le vol tournant des hideuses harpies.  
Le lapin de gouttière, à l'affût des rongeurs,  
Fuit les fils de Bondy, nocturnes vendangeurs.

— C'est la mort: La police gît — En haut, l'amour  
Fait la sieste en tétant la viande d'un bras lourd,  
Où le baiser éteint laisse sa plaque rouge...  
L'heure est seule — Écoutez: ... pas un rêve ne bouge.

— C'est la vie: Écoutez: la source vive chante  
L'éternelle chanson, sur la tête gluante  
D'un dieu marin tirant ses membres nus et verts  
Sur le lit de la morgue... Et les yeux grand'ouverts!

## Paris by night

*It's not a city, it's a world.*

— It's the sea: — dead calm — The Spring tide has felt bound,  
With a distant rumbling, to withdraw its sway.  
Its waves will return, rolling themselves in their sound —  
— Can you hear the crabs of night scratching away...

— It's the dried-up Styx: Rag 'n bone Diogenes,  
Lantern in hand, wanders down it; he never squirms  
But it's the black gutter where depraved poets please  
To cast their lines, their hollow skulls the cans for worms.

— It's the wheat-field: Hideous harpies swirl and swoop  
On what's impure, gleaning shreds of lint caked in pus.  
The alley cat, on the watch for rats, flees the troop  
Of Shit-creek's sons, harvesters of night's detritus.

— It's death: Here lieth the police — And love, upstairs,  
Taking a siesta, sucks a heavy arm's meat  
Where an old love-bite's left its blotch — Love is for pairs —  
The hour is solitary — Listen: ... dreams drag their feet...

— It's life: Listen: the spring water is up for air,  
Singing its everlasting song, that seems to slide  
Over a sea-god's slimy head, and his stretched bare  
Green limbs on the bed of the Morgue... Eyes open wide!



**Video 5:** *Paris nocturne / Paris by night-*  
Watch a reading of this poem at <https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.5> or scan the QR code.



## Petit coucher

(RISETTE)

Le plaisir te fut dur, mais le mal est facile  
Laisse-le venir à son jour.  
À la Muse camarade on ne fait plus d'idylle;  
On s'en va sans l'Âge — à son tour —

Ton drap connaît ta plaie, et ton mouchoir ta bile;  
Chante, mais ne fais pas le four  
D'aller sur le trottoir quêter dans ta sébile,  
Un sou de dégoût ou d'amour.

Tu vas dormir: voici le somme qui délie;  
La Mort patiente joue avec ton agonie,  
Comme un chat maigre et la souris;

Sa patte de velours te pelotte et te lance.  
Le paroxysme encor est une jouissance:  
Tords ta bouche, écume... et souris.

## Time for bed

(smiling sweetly)

Pleasure was so hard for you, but evil's easy —  
Let it thrive and come to a head.  
It's no go the Muse, she's a death-mask and wheezy;  
One goes off alone to be dead —

Your sheet knows your come and your handkerchief your snot;  
Sing up, but do not bite the dust  
By taking to the streets with your little begging pot  
For a pittance of love or disgust.

You'll have a sleep: for troubled waters that's the oil;  
Patient Death though is playing with your mortal coil,  
Skinny-cat-with-a-mouse style;

Her velvet paw fondles you and throws you. Treasure  
Such paroxysms — they're another sensual pleasure:  
Twist your mouth, foam at the lips... and smile.

Moi ton amour? — Jamais! — Je faisais du théâtre  
Et pris sous le *manteau d'Arlequin*, par hasard  
Le sourire écaillé qui lézardait ton plâtre  
La goutte de sueur que buvait ton bon fard.

Ma langue s'empâtait à cette bouillie âcre  
En riant nous avons partagé le charbon  
Qui donnait à tes yeux leur faux reflet de nacre  
À tes cils d'albinos le piquant du chardon.

Comme ton havanais, sur ta lèvre vermeille  
J'ai léché bêtement la pommade groseille  
Mais ta bouche qui rit n'a pas saigné... jamais.

L'amende est de cent sous pour un baiser en scène...  
Refais ton tatouage, ô Jézabel hautaine,  
Je te le dis sans fard, c'est le fard que j'aimais.

Me your love? — Never! — It was all put on, an act.  
 For my pure-chance disguise, I've Harlequin to thank:  
 The flaking smile that was making your plaster crack,  
 The drop of sweat that your excellent make-up drank.

My tongue was pasty with that acrid stickiness;  
 Laughingly we had our share of the black mascara  
 Which gave your eyes a false mother-of-pearl aura,  
 And your albino lashes a thistly prickliness.

Like your cheroots, I've smudged your rosy lips' lipstick  
 By foolishly licking off its red-currant slick  
 But your mouth is still laughing — it has never bled.

The penalty for kissing on stage is a pound per kiss...  
 Put your face back on, doll yourself up, brazen Miss  
 Jezebel, I tell you candidly, I loved that red.



**Video 6:** *Moi ton amour? / Me your love?*

Watch a reading of this poem at <https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.6> or scan the QR code.

## Pierrot pendu

### I

La femme est une pilule  
Que tu ne sais plus dorer  
Ta lyre, outil ridicule  
[-----]

### II

C'est fini la comédie,  
À la Morgue les Amours!  
Arrêtons sur la my-die  
La patraque de nos jours.

### III

À la maîtresse chérie  
De ton chanvre laisse un bout,  
Elle fut la galerie  
Qui l'admira malgré tout.

### IV

Va, ça lui portera veine  
-Ce dernier nœud de licol  
Pour toucher dans la quinzaine  
Un vrai monsieur en faux-col.

### V

Qu'elle corne, la corneuse:  
C'est aussi pur mais le soir [?]  
Qu'elle râle, la râleuse  
Et qu'elle trotte au trottoir.

## Pierrot strung up

## I

Woman is a pill, a lily  
 You can't gild any more,  
 Your lyre, an implement that's silly  
 (-----)

## II

The comedy's over, a has-been,  
 Off to the Morgue with your Loves! such Likes!  
 Let's halt it, the worn-out machine  
 Of our days, when twelve o'clock strikes.

## III

Just leave a talisman, a braid  
 Of hemp for that sweetheart of yours.  
 She was the gallery and stayed  
 To admire the show, for all its flaws.

## IV

It'll be a comfort, albeit Dutch  
 — A last slip-knot in the halter —  
 In a fortnight's time it will touch  
 A stiff-collar whose love won't falter.

## V

Let her trumpet it, the strumpet:  
 She's chaste too. Let her rattle, she's tight  
 In the throat, too stingy to hump it;  
 And let her walk the streets at night.

## Allons! Tristan!...

Allons! Tristan! Bon chien sans race,  
Croisé de guigne et de dégoût,  
Donne ta chaîne et prends ma place:  
J'aboierai contre les matous!

Sans rancune... contre les chattes!  
— Face de femme... ongles de fer!  
— A nous! Madame! Eh, bas les pattes,  
Cher Monsieur! — Démon de l'enfer!

Nous sommes nés à même enseigne:  
“Au Mois-noir”, un jour d'ouragan...  
— Plaignons! Les Pauvres, qu'on les plaigne!  
Plaindre le Pauvre est élégant...

Comment dormir? – Eh! dans ta niche  
— Une niche pour chaque chien!  
En Saint Joseph, mon pied-de-biche  
Éloignera tous les mâtins!

— Mais, c'est très mal... Vous êtes homme?  
— Bah! – Non! – comme toi j'ai des poux!  
Chien de bohème plus en somme  
Chien par ma chienne que vous tous!

Un pas de côté, c'est la chute!  
Respectez l'ordre des humains...  
— Non! j'ai déjà fait la culbute  
Tiens! prends ma patte avec ta main!

“Ah! frappe-toi le cœur...” – Du vide...  
Mon cœur est un tonneau percé,  
Crevé... – Tonneau des Danaïdes  
Pourri, même pas à brûler...

Allons, Tristan, donne ta chaîne...  
— La chaîne, c'est la Liberté!  
Lever la patte au pied d'un chène:  
Elle viendra me caresser.”

## Come on, Tristan!

Come on! Tristan! Good dog, though a cross  
 Between bad luck and a real disgrace,  
 Give me your chain and you, you take my place –  
 Act as me and I'll bark at every *big boss*,

And, no hard feelings, at every tomcat too.  
 You've the look of a female with iron claws –  
     Come to us, Madam Harridan! And you,  
 Dear Sir, Demon from Hell, retract your paws.

At our birth the inn-sign over our door  
 Was "The Black Month" and a wild storm was howling.  
 Let's complain! And let's pity the Poor  
     — Pitying the Pauper is the *done* thing...

How on earth can one sleep in a booth? –  
 There's a kennel for each in the pound!  
 By St Joseph, my hound's tooth  
 Will scare off every rampaging hound.

But that's very bad. Aren't you a man?  
 Good God no! – Like you, I've my share of fleas!  
 I'm a bohemian dog, plus I think I am  
 A mongrel, born of a bitch if you please...

Just slipping sideways, you could stumble,  
 You should respect the law of the land...  
 No fear! I've already had a tumble  
 So hold my paw with your hand!

Ah! Beating my chest is no good,  
 My broached heart is a barrel that's split!  
 The Danaids are leaving me like rotten wood,  
 A dead loss, not worth burning — pyre in a pit.

Come on, Tristan, give up your chain,  
 The chain known as Liberty! And then  
 She will come over and stroke me  
 Once I've cocked a leg up an oak tree.



LE BAIN DE MER DE MADAME Xxxx  
(120 kilog sur l'air de Sara la baigneuse)  
(UN CÉTACÉ QUI LAVE SA VAISSELLE)

Ah! Madame HIX se déferle!  
Londe perle  
Ses petits bonds d'éléphant.  
Dans la crique qu'elle hume,  
Elle écume  
Les petits flots et les fend

Comme Moïse et son arche  
Elle marche;  
Sa poupe se cache à l'eau  
Et le pêcheur, dans la brume  
De l'écume,  
Se dit: c'est un cachalot.

Sous son huileuse opulence,  
Le flot rance  
Se calme tout arrondi,  
Un œil se forme et surnage,  
O potage!...  
.... Excepté le Vendredi.

Elle s'échoue et se roule,  
Et la houle  
Se soulève en débordant.  
Et s'affaisse  
En disant: c'est différent!

La frégate bat la lame  
Et se pâme,  
Les grands fonds ont le frisson.....  
Et là-bas le sémaphore  
Vite arbore  
Ces signaux à l'horizon:

Un gros vapeur à la côte;  
La mer haute  
Subit une pression.  
Forte influence d'orage.  
L'équipage  
Est tout en perdition,

MADAME HIXE'S DIP IN THE SEA  
 (120 kilog to the tune of Sara the swimmer)  
 (A CETACEAN HAS A WASH-DOWN)

Ah! Madame HIXE unfurls  
 herself and, each a pearler,  
 she quickly transmits  
 the bubbles in little elephantine leaps  
 which she keeps  
 frothing up in tiny waves and splits

them as Moses did,  
 advancing his Ark; he hid  
 his stern  
 in the water. And the lone  
 fisherman in the mist of the foam  
 says to himself: it's the sperm...

Beneath its oily opulence  
 the rancid sea once  
 caused it to be becalmed  
 and take the shape  
 of an eye to ape  
 the flotsam floating to the surface, unharmed.

O vegetable soup, except on Fridays.  
 In the creeks she inhales,  
 fails to turn tail, runs aground  
 then rounds  
 on herself and the swell grows,  
 almost overflows.

A big steamer  
 is nearing  
 the coast, and once  
 the high tide is feeling  
 the pressure, the crew are reeling,  
 aware of the strong influence

of groundswell and storm,  
 they signal in stark semaphore  
 and a foolish loop  
 keeps repeating Steamer in distress

Et la ligne toute bête  
Se répète:  
“Vapeur en perdition.”  
.... Elle, en sa soupe azurée,  
Enivrée  
Souffle au large sa chanson:

*“Ah! Si j'étais la baleine  
dont l'haleine  
pousse deux jets d'eaux en l'air,  
j'aurais dans les mers de glace  
plus d'espace  
pour mieux apprendre à nager.*

*Je mangerais la pirogue  
Frêle, où vogue  
Le Waler américain  
J'irais digérer lascive  
En dérive  
Sur le ventre d'un requin!”*

Mais la baigneuse essoufflée  
Et salée  
Soulage les flots lassés,  
Et court, tenant sa culotte  
Qui clapote,  
En se disant c'est-assez!

Le guetteur du semaphore  
Sue encore  
De ses fous et vains ébats.  
Nul n'arborera: Détresses!  
Quand les tresses  
De la baigneuse iront bas.

Tipsy on her azure soup, she  
blows her song out to sea:

“Ah! If I were the sperm-whale  
bound to exhale  
two jets of water from my skin,  
I would have in the seas of ice  
more than twice  
the space to learn to swim in.

I'd gobble up the frail canoe  
(The American Waler sails there too)  
When embarked  
and drifting for free  
I'd digest lasciviously  
on the belly of a shark!”

But the breathless female bather,  
a salty raver,  
relieves the weary waves and races away  
gayly waving clap-  
happy panties,  
and saying to herself: We'll call it a day!

-----  
The semaphore reader,  
still in a sweat as info feeder,  
on his mad vain points of view,  
puts the frigate through its paces –  
it will swoon and no one replaces  
IN DISTRESS! when the bather's tresses are  
see-through.

PETITE POUËSIE EN VERS PASSIONNÉS DE 12  
PIEDS SUR UN AIR SENSITIVE ET SUR ROSALBA

La véritable pomme d'amour ainsi que de virginité du débit  
de tabac de St Pierre-Quilbignon (Finistère)

L'oiseau, becquetant sa cerise souriante,  
Rencontre pour noyaux, (*O trop douce erreur!*) trente-  
Deux perles d'Orient. L'abeille des essaims,  
Balance, illusée, en butinant ses deux seins,  
Où la rosée épanche un bouton (*La folâtre!*)  
"La coupe la plus pure est du côté du cœur  
"Mais aussi pure est l'autre, Abeille, étant sa sœur"  
Sur son teint, doux combat du lys et de la rose,  
Les yeux bandés d'amour, le papillon se pose.  
Son regard fait cligner Phoebus; et, fats, les cieux  
Redoublent d'azur en se mirant dans ses yeux.  
Le pâtre voit tomber d'en l'air des hirondelles  
Affolées, prenant ses bandeaux pour leurs ailes.  
Baignant célestement dans ses deux saphirs d'yeux  
Ses cils ont des rivaux qui les font ombrageux:  
Ce sont ses 2 sourcils à l'arc de Sycomore,  
Languissamment penchés pour boire un peu d'aurore.  
Près de sa taille, on prend pour chênes les roseaux.  
Sa chevelure-lac brille en moisson d'ébène,  
Caressant le zephyr qui retient son haleine

Vers faits à St Pierre-Quilbignon et remis au net par *Rosalba* personnellement, et à l'orthographe pour le jour de sa fête le 15 juillet milhuitcent 67 et pour le bon motif, avec des gravures à la main et à l'encre au bout des vers de pouésie, pour l'intelligence de ceux qui n'ont pas l'habitude

PO HUT TREE LITTLE PIECE OF PASSIONATE  
VERSE, TWELVE FEET PER LINE, BASED ON MIMO-  
SA AND ROSALBA

The real love-apple as well as the one for virginity on sale at  
the tobacco kiosk of St Peter's Quilbignon (Finistère)

The bird, pecking its smiling cherry  
comes across (O too sweet an error!)  
not thirty-two cherry stones or kernels  
(but thirty-two oriental pearls)  
The swarm-fed bee is poised, illusion-led  
having gathered nectar from her two  
plump breasts on which the dew  
wets a bud (the woman's mad!)  
"The purest cup is on the heart-side but seeing  
The other side is equally pure, Bee being  
her sister." Over their looks lily and rose pick gentle fights  
And on eyes blindfolded by love, the butterfly alights.  
To look at her makes Phoebus wink and, conceited  
with self-regard, the heavens find their blueness repeated.  
The pastor sees swallows fall from the sky, maddened,  
and taking headbands as wings, he's saddened,  
holy-bathing in the two sapphires he has for eyes.  
Her eyelashes have rivals which make them like starch.  
It is her two eyebrows at Sycomore arch,  
languishingly leaning down to drink a little dawn.  
The heavens are gazing at one another in awe.  
seeing reeds, if not as oaks, they're near the same size,  
her purple-lake hairdo shines like an ebony harvest  
stroking the breeze which is holding its breath.

Lines of verse written at St Peter's Quilbignon and written out  
neatly by Rosalba herself and in spelling suited to her feast day  
on the 15 July eighteen hundred and 67 and for a good reason,  
with hand-drawn and ink-drawn sketches at the end of the lines  
of po hut tree, to increase the knowledge of those who are not  
in the know



**Œuvres En Prose**

**Prose Pieces**



## À mon Roscoff

Dors, vâ, mon pauvre Roscoff, dors dans ta brume grise, personne ne te chantera que les Margats et les Cormorans tes poètes à toi! Dors, vieux nid de corsaires, vieux trou à contrebandiers, avec tes tourelles borgnes flanquées là le pied planté dans la tourmente, l'œil au large et leurs toits à coups de poing sur le coin de l'oreille.

Dors, vâ, maintenant sur ton lit de goëmons, sous ta couverture d'artichaux,

Dors, et la belle lame du Noroi viendra te bercer et la brise salée chantera à tes pignons ébréchés qui scient les nuages raz,

Dors et les rafales de mer qui affolent tes girouettes plaintives, ronfleront dans tes grandes cheminées, et la marée viendra faire sa ronde dans tes caves de roc sourd,

Dors, et tu rêveras, tu rêveras à tes souvenirs, à tes jours de gloire, à tes nuits rouges avec tes écumeurs de mer, n'est-ce pas, belle fille-de-joie d'alors?

Dors maintenant, ta grande chandelle de l'île de Batz est là, qui veille sur les brisans là bas, le coq de ton clocher veille là bas sur les sables blancs, et le vieux *tousseux* de Perharidy à plat-ventre au soleil comme un gros lézard invalide, avec sa croûte de fer grelée par la lune et le poudrain, tient encor piquée là vers l'anglais sa gueule chargée de jonc-marin en fleur.... Dors, vâ, mon Roscoff.... et moi aussi.

## To my Roscoff

Sleep, go on, my poor Roscoff, sleep in your grey mist, no one will sing to you but your very own poets, the Margats and the Cormorants! Sleep, ancient nest of pirates, ancient hidey-hole of smugglers, with your one-eyed turrets, flanked there with feet planted in the tempest, with their eye facing the open sea and their punch-drunk roofs knocked askew above one ear,

Sleep, go on now on your bed of sea-wrack, beneath your blanket of artichokes,

Sleep and the fine blade-waves of the Nor-wester will come and rock you, and the salty breeze will sing to your nicked gable-ends which can saw any clouds in half.

Sleep and the sea-storms, which madden your doleful weathercocks, will snore in your large chimneys and the high tides will come on their rounds to your sound-deadening rock caverns,

Sleep and you will dream, you'll dream of your memories, of your glory days, of your nights rouged by your maritime buccaneers, each a lovely floosie of yesteryear?

Sleep now and your big candle on the île de Batz is there to oversee the breakers out there, the weathercock on your bell-tower there to watch over the white sands and the old *cougher* of Perharidy flat on his belly in the sun like a plump disabled lizard, its iron crust pockmarked by the moon and hailstones, still keeping his cannon aimed towards the English, its throat cram-full flowering furze.... Sleep, go on, my Roscoff... and I shall too!

I  
CASINO DES TRÉPASSÉS

Un pays, — non, ce sont des côtes brisées de la dure Bretagne: *Penmarc'h, Toul-Infern, Poul-Dahut, Stang-an-Ankou...* Des noms barbares hurlés par les rafales, roulés sous les lames sourdes, cassés dans les brisants et perdus en chair de poule sur les marais... Des noms qui ont des voix.

Là, sous le ciel neutre, la tourmente est chez elle: le calme est un deuil.

Là, c'est l'étang plombé qui gît sur la cité d'Ys, la Sodome noyée.

Là, c'est la *Baie-des-Trépassés* où, des profondeurs, reviennent les os des naufragés frapper aux portes des cabanes pour quêter un linceul; et le *Raz-de-Sein*, couturé de courants que *jamais homme n'a passé sans peur ou mal*.

Là naissent et meurent des êtres couleur de roc, patients comme des éternels, rendant par hoquets une langue pauvre, presque éteinte, qui ne sait rire ni pleurer...

C'est là que j'invente un casino.

CASINO DES TRÉPASSÉS

(STATION D'HIVERNAGE)

À LA BONNE DESCENTE DES DÉCOURAGEUX  
À PIED ET À CHEVAL.

C'est un ancien clocher, debout et décorné. Sa flèche est à ses pieds — tombée. Des masures à coups de ruines flanquées en tas contre lui, avec un mouvement ivrogne, à l'abri du flot qui monte et du souffle qui rase.

Ah! c'est que c'est une bonne tour, solide aux cloches comme aux couleuvrines, solide au temps; un vieux nid des templiers, bons travailleurs en Dieu, ceux-là! sacrés piliers de temple et de corps de garde. On sent encore en entrant cette indéfinissable odeur de pierre bénite qui ne s'en va jamais.

L'intérieur est un puits carré, quatre murs nus. A mi-hauteur, une entaille en ogive longue et profonde donne une raie de lumière. La brise bourdonne là-haut comme une mouche emprisonnée. De loin en loin, sur les parois, montent de petits jours noirs: c'est l'escalier dans l'épaisseur des murailles; sur les haltes, sont ménagées des logettes, avec un œil en meurtrière ouvert sur l'horizon. C'est là que gîteront nos hôtes.

# I

## DEAD MEN'S CASINO

A country, — no, it's the harsh broken coastline and rock-strewn slopes of Brittany: *Penmarc'h*, *Toul-Infern*, *Poul-Dahut*, *Stang-an-Ankou*... Barbarous names blared by squalls and flurries of wind, rolled under the muffled swell of the waves, broken in the breakers and lost in goosepimples on the marshes... Names that have voices.

There, beneath a neutral sky, the tempest is in her element: the lull is a time to mourn.

There, under a leaden expanse of water, lies the town of Ys, the drowned Sodom.

There lies *Dead Men's Bay* from whose depths the bones of ship-wrecked sailors return to rap on the doors of every shack to beg a winding-sheet; and the *Raz-de-Sein*, criss-crossed by currents no man has ever sailed through without fear or misfortune.

There, creatures the colour of the rockface are born and die, patient as eternal beings, hiccupping a poor, almost dead language, unfitted for laughter or weeping...

That's where I invent a casino.

### DEAD MEN'S CASINO (WINTER STOPOVER) THE OPEN ARMS FOR THE OUT OF PLUCK FOR HORSE-RIDERS & FOOT-SLOGGERS

It's an old belfry, still upright but with its horns trimmed. Its spire is at its feet — where it fell. Tumbledown cottages flung drunkenly against it in heaps, are sheltered from the incoming tides and the close-shaving gusts of wind.

The thing is, it's a good tower, solid enough for bells and culverins, those five hundredweight cannons, and strong enough to withstand time and weather; a former hidey-hole for Knights Templar, and what good workers in the service of God they were! hallowed pillars of the temple and the guardroom. On entering you can still breathe that indefinable smell of consecrated stone that never goes away.

The interior consists of a square well with four bare walls. Half-way up, a long deep-set ogive-slit lets in a ray of light. The breeze buzzes up there like a caged bluebottle. Every so often little black openings climb these interior walls: they go with the steps winding up within their thickness; at every landing alcoves have been built, each with a bull's eye looking out to the horizon. This is where our guests will lodge.

Système cellulaire: douze pieds carrés, murs blanchis à la chaux, hauteur d'appui en châtaignier d'un beau ton; autour, des clous-de-la-Passion pour clouer les vêtements; une couchette de nonne, une auge de pierre pour les ablutions, une longue-vue, une espingole chargée à chevrotines pour les canards ou les *philistins*. Voilà.

En bas, dans la nef dallée de pierres tombales, la cuisine, cuisine à tout faire. — On entre à cheval. — Four d'alchimiste; cheminée grande comme une chaumine pour coucher les mâtures de navires (car — Dieu aidant — la grève vaut une forêt en coupe réglée); des landiers d'enfer pour flamber le goémon.

Sous le manteau, des escabelles pour le bonhomme Homère, le docteur Faust, le curé Rabelais, Jean Bart, saint Antoine, Job le lépreux et autres anciens vivants: un trou pour les grillons, s'ils veulent. Une torche en veille piquée près la crémaillère; partout des crampons pour accrocher le sabot aux allumettes, la boîte au sel, les andouilles, le rameau béni, les bottes suiffées, un fer à cheval qui porte bonheur.

Contre le mur culotté, les armes et harnais de chasse, de pêche et de gueule: canardiens, harpons, filets, vaisselles d'étain, cuivres, fanaux. À la porte, le billot des exécutions; au centre, un vrai *dolmen* pour la ripaille entouré de fauteuils roides charpentés comme des bois de justice. Aux poutres du plafond sont hissées des herse pour les grandes natures mortes. Au coin, dans le clair-obscur, un coucou droit dans un bon cercueil de chêne, sonnait le glas des heures. Tout plein le vaste bénitier, une famille de chats électriques; dessous, un gras roquet de tourne-broche rognonne, et, clopin-clopant, de-ci de-là, des canards drôles.

En haut, à une simple élévation de cathédrale, au niveau de la fenêtre géante, nous ferons l'unique étage, plate-forme en charpente en manière de *chambre des cloches*. On y montera par l'escalier en boyau ou par des haubans de vaisseau garnis d'enfléchures avec une grande hune pour palier. C'est l'atelier. — *Studio di far niente*.

Le jour est manœuvré à volonté par le rideau d'un théâtre en faillite. Au milieu, table monumentale jonchée de papiers; dessous, des peaux de phoques. Alentour, divans perses. Aux murs, tentures d'arlequin, tapisseries, cuirs colorés, voiles tannées, pavillons, guenilles sordides superbes. Des images d'Épinal collées en lambeaux sur la porte. En face, un poêle russe et la bouilloire à thé. Au fond, un orgue de chapelle pour les musiciens de Barbarie, et des niches pour les vieux saints qu'on ne fête plus. Une

Cellular lay-out: twelve foot square, whitewashed walls, fine chestnut window ledges, Christ's Passion nails as coat-hooks; a nun's palliase, a stone trough for ablutions, a telescope, a blunderbuss primed with buckshot for ducks or *Philistines*. And that's it.

At ground level, in the nave paved with tombstones, the kitchen — an all-purpose kitchen. — You can enter on horseback. — There's an alchemist's oven, a fireplace as large as a small cottage, big enough to accommodate a ship's masts (for — God willing — a stretch of sand is as good as a forest that's regularly felled); and firedogs from hell for burning bladder-wrack.

Ensconed under the chimney-breast: wooden stools for good old Homer, Doctor Faust, Parson Rabelais, Jean Bart who put the fear of God into Dutch and English alike, Saint Anthony, Job the leper and other ancients who live on, and a hole for the crickets, should they want one. A night-torch rammed near the trammel; everywhere clamps — for hanging the clog that holds matches, the box for salt, the sausages made of chitterlings, the palm-branches, the waxed boots, and a horseshoe for good luck.

Against the smoke-stained wall, weapons and harness for the chase, fishing and hunting with hounds: duck-guns, harpoons, nets, pewter dishes, copper pans, lanterns. At the door, the execution block; in the centre, a real *dolmen* for revelries, surrounded by stiff armchairs shaped like guillotines. Hoisted on the ceiling beams are battens for outside still lifes. In the corner, in *chiaroscuro*, a free-standing cuckoo-clock in a good oak coffin, tolling the knell of the hours. Quite filling the huge font, a family of electric cats; below, a plump pug on a turnspit growls, and hobbling about, hither and thither, waddle odd looking ducks.

At the top, on a simple cathedral-like elevation, level with the giant window, we will have the sole storey, a wooden platform erected to form a sort of *bell-loft*. Access will be by a narrow spiral staircase or by a ship's guy-ropes rigged with ratlines to a maintop platform that serves as landing. That's the workshop — *Studio di far-niente*.

Daylight is adjusted at will by the curtains from a theatre that hasn't made ends meet. In the middle, a monumental table strewn with papers; under it, sealskins. All around, Persian divans. On the walls, harlequin wall-hangings, tapestries, hand-coloured calfskin, battered sails, flags, splendidly sordid tatters. Scraps of stock Épinal prints still stuck to the door. Facing you, a Russian cooking range and the kettle for making tea. At the rear, a chapel organ for barrel-organists, and recesses for superannuated saints. A large canvas on a stretcher for painters

grande toile sur châssis pour les peintres déposer leurs ordures. Une chaloupe défoncée pleine de foin nouveau pour les chiens et les poètes. Un lit de camp: des philosophes dessus et deux petits cochons noirs dessous. À côté, un débit de tabacs. Dans l'espace, des hamacs pendus comme toiles d'araignées, parmi des appareils de gymnastique. Au bout d'une chaîne à puits crochée à perte de vue, oscille le lustre, vrai grappin d'abordage forgé par un maréchal-ferrant ivre et vierge.

Plus haut, si haut qu'on peut monter, c'est la galerie extérieure et la plate-forme découverte qui commande là-bas, lavée par les grains, balayée par les trombes, grêlée par les lunes. Un coq rouillé se ronge, empalé sur le paratonnerre.

Des petits jardins engorgent les gargouilles. Aux angles deux mâchicoulis bayent sur l'abîme et deux clochetons *montrent du doigt le ciel*.

Lun sera gréé en poste de guetteur: mât de télégraphe à grands bras fantastiques et beffroi affolé que les sautes de vent mettront tout seul en branle, dans les nuits de liesse, pour le naufrage.

L'autre, attendant aussi un vent de hasard... attendra.

Là, je veux des petits vitraux obscurs, grillagés, impénétrables dans la barbacane profonde hérissée d'artichauts de fer; une porte de fer à secret, pleine de clous, armée de verrous... et grand ouverte.

Je veux l'oubliette aérienne, capitonnée de fleurettes pompadour, encombrée de fleurs en fleurs; un canari empaillé dans une cage dorée, un miroir de Murano plus grand que nature, un sofa Crébillon et un plafond en dôme peint par Mahomet (7<sup>e</sup> manière)...

C'est pour l'épave qui est en l'air, la flâneuse du rêve, l'ombre grise qui va vite comme les morts de ballade... et qui ne vient pas. Madame Marlborough, peut-être:

"Anne, ma sœur Anne, ne vois-tu rien venir? Rien! Rien que l'ouragan qui festoie, la girouette qui tournoie, la brume qui noie..."

#### CASINO DES TRÉPASSÉS

Oh! la haute vie sauvage qui vivra là, messeigneurs, hôtes de céans!

to dump their rubbish. A stove-in rowing-boat full of fresh hay for dogs and poets. A camp bed: philosophers above it and two little black pigs below. Nearby a tobacconist's kiosk. In the space remaining, hammocks slung like spiders' webs in the midst of gymnastic apparatus. Attached to a well-chain, hooked up so high it's out of sight, sways the chandelier, a real grappling-iron forged by a fuzzled farrier, who's a virgin still.

Higher up, as high as can be climbed, is the outside gallery and, overlooking the whole region, an open platform washed by rainstorms, swept by whirlwinds, pockmarked by moonlight. A rusty weathercock pecks away at itself, impaled on the lightning conductor.

Little gardens clog the gargoyle gutter-spouts. At the quoins two machicolated gateways gape over the abyss and two pinnacles point a finger at the sky.

One will be rigged as a lookout post: a telegraph mast with fantastic big arms and demented belfry that sudden upsurges of wind will set ringing, on gala nights, when there's a wreck to plunder.

The other, also waiting for a chance wind... will wait.

There, I want small dark leaded windows with grills, impenetrable in the tall barbican, bristling with clusters of iron spikes; a secret iron gate studded with nails, reinforced with bolts... and wide open.

I want the oubliette to be aerial, lined with pompadour pattern flowerets, chock-a-block with flowers in bloom; a stuffed canary in a gilded cage, a larger than life Murano mirror, a Crébillon sofa and a domed ceiling painted by Mahomet (7<sup>th</sup> manner)...

All this is for the poor wreck up in the air, the strolling woman of dreams, the grey shadow who gallops away like the dead in ballads... going but never coming. The Duchess of Marlborough, perhaps:

"Anne, sister Anne, do you see nothing coming? — Nothing! Nothing but the hurricane skirling, the weathervane whirling, the dense mist swirling..."

#### *DEAD MEN'S CASINO*

Oh! the wild high life that will be lived there, my lords, guests of this establishment!



À LA BONNE DESCENTE DES DÉCOURAGEUX

Nargue de tout!

Oh! *la rude revalescière!* Oh! *le grand* à pleins poumons! le cynisme élégant! l'oubli qui cicatrise et le somme qui délire!...

À nous la libre solitude à plusieurs, chacun portant *quelque chose là*, tous triés d'entre les autres par la lourde brise qui chasse au loin les algues sèches et les coquilles vides.

Ici, nos moyens nous permettent d'être pauvres.

Pas de bonhomme poncif à gâter le paysage, notre mer et notre désert. Frères, voici votre uniforme: chapeau mou, chemise brune en drap de capucin, culottes de toile à voiles, bottes de mer en cuir fauve. Nous sommes beaux, allez!

À vous, chasseurs, les grands sables et les marais; à vous, matelots, la mer jolie et ses poissons qui mangent souvent du pêcheur; voici vos baleinières de cèdre blanc, braves embarcations hissées sous le porche à leurs potences de fer.

Voici nos équipages d'aventure: des *frères-la-côte*, brutes antiques, pilotes comme des marsouins, cuisiniers à tous crins et femmes de chambre...

Terriens, terrez dans les chaumières. Vous autres, gêtez dans les cellules, nichez dans les aires, perchez dans les haubans!

Pas d'esprit, s'il vous plaît: on est sobre de mots quand on s'est compris une fois.

Toi, fainéant, fais un livre — tout homme a son livre dans le ventre — et l'ennui berceur se penchera sur toi. Peintre ficeleur, dépouille le vieux *chic*. Ô harpiste! écoute et tais-toi! Rimeur vidé, voici venir les heures hantées...

Humons l'air qui soûle...! Et toi qui es malade de la vie, viens ici cacher ta tête, et repose sur le gazon salé, dans le désabonnement universel.

Tristan.

Penmarc'h. — Septembre.

## A1 HOSTELRY FOR THE OUT OF PLUCK

To hell with everything!

Oh! a hearty tatie-pot to buck us up! Oh! we're great if we fill our lungs and speak out! what elegant cynicism! forgetting is healing, and forty winks spell release!...

Give us the freedom to be alone together in groups, each of us inspired, each kept apart by the strong breeze that blows dry seaweed and empty seashells away.

Here, our means allow us to be poor.

No run-of-the-mill fellow to spoil our countryside, our sea and our desert. Brothers, here's your uniform, soft felt hat, brown shirt in Capuchin cloth, sailcloth breeches, fawn leather sea-boots. We can strut, can't we?

Huntsmen, you can keep your great stretches of sand and marshland; sailors, keep the pretty pretty sea and its fish given to dining on fishermen; here come your whaling boats in white cedar wood, gallant vessels hoisted onto their iron brackets under the porch.

Here are our crews for the occasion: shipmates o' the coast, old rough-necks, porpoise-like pilots, whole-hog cooks and chambermaids...

Landlubbers, bury yourselves in your cottages. And the rest of you, stay put in prison cells, nest in eyries, perch in the shrouds!

And no witticisms, please: we're sober of speech once we've understood one another.

You, lazybones, write a book — everyone has a book in him — and ennui will bend over and soothe you. Got up as a painter, slough off the old style. O harpist! stop harping on and listen! Rhymester, emptied of rhymes, here come the haunted hours...

Let's breathe the air that inebriates...! And you who are heartsick of living, come and hide your head here, and lie back on the salty turf, having cancelled your subscription to life.

Tristan.

Penmarc'h. — September.

## II L'AMÉRICAINNE

D'accord, gentlemen-sailors, en France, on n'a pas idée d'un yacht; les cotres anglais sont d'admirables chevaux de course. Et vos goëlettes américaines, jolies comme tout sur la mer jolie! J'ai vu des vieux marins attendris leur prodiguer des noms d'oiseaux! Mais, s'il me fallait, avec ces amours-là sous les pieds, donner dans les brisants, finoler dans les arêtes, j'aurais peur pour la peinture!

Pour moi, la navigation de plaisance doit être, avant tout, excentrique; une chose défendue aux bourgeois de la mer: sortir quand ils sont forcés de rentrer, chasser dans l'ouragan qui les chasse et battre la lame qui les bat. Braver tranquillement est une des plus grandes voluptés sur terre comme sur mer, et je mets cela bien au-dessus de la satisfaction que vous trouvez à filer plus ou moins de nœuds à l'heure sur vos yachts de plaisance. Sans compter qu'avec mon sabot de misère, par une brise fraîche à démâter, j'aurais sur vous une prodigieuse supériorité de marche et je tiendrais le pari de noyer des clippers encore plus marins que les vôtres.

Mon sabot, c'est un *lougre*, un fin flibustier brutal à la mer brute, sourd au temps; et, même en calme, avec sa mine de tourmente, il semble toujours faire tête au grain. Ras d'eau, ras de mâture: trois mâts comme des pieux hardiment penchés sur l'arrière. Trois larges voiles triangulaires tannées, voilà pour courir son bord.

Le poste et la cale prennent la moitié de la coque, l'autre moitié, c'est la chambre, doublée en chêne blanc, nue comme le pont. Un coup de pompe là-dedans et la toilette est faite. Un coup de mer fait aussi bien. Autour sont les soutes qui servent de divans, et ses grands charniers étanchés pour les provisions, les effets et les armes; au milieu, la table à roulis. Pour la nuit, on croche aux barrots de bons cadres de toile douillets et larges comme des lits de noces. Ici, voyez-vous, le vrai confort est la simplicité.

Et mon équipage!

Vous avez, gentlemen-sailors, de superbes marins, des lions de mer au beefsteak, propres comme ma petite sœur, forts comme des demi-dieux, soit.

## II THE AMERICAN GIRL

O.k. I agree, gentlemen-sailors<sup>†</sup>, in France, a yacht's out of the question; English cutters are admirable racehorses. And your American schooners, pretty as a picture on the pretty sea! I've seen tender-hearted old salts lavish birds' names on them! But if I had to breast the breakers and pick my way among the fishbones with those darlings under my feet I'd fear for the paintwork!

For me, leisure boating should be, more than anything, eccentric; something beyond the pale for your sea-loving bourgeois: you're setting off out when they'd have to come back in, hurrying into the hurricane that's assailing them and spanking the waves that are spanking them. Facing up quietly and courageously to things is one of the most sensual pleasures on earth and at sea, and I rate that well above the satisfaction you get spinning along at more or less knots per hour on your pleasure yachts. What's more, even in my miserable skiff and with a wind stiff enough to unmast you, I'd have enormous superiority of speed over you and wager I could scupper clippers far more seaworthy than yours.

My tub's a *lugger*, a great freebooter, rough and ready for the roughest sea, deaf to the weather, oblivious of time; and, even in calms, with its fraught tempest-tossed expression, always seeming prepared to face up to any squall. Boat and rigging barely clear of the water. Three masts, like long stakes leaning boldly aft, skimming the wake. Three wide weathered triangular sails all that's needed to tack at speed.

The foc's'le and the hold take up half the hull, the other half is the sleeping quarters, lined in white oak, bare as the deck. A blast with the hosepipe and it's washed down. A single swill by the sea does just as well. All around are stowage places that serve as bunks, and large watertight containers for provisions, belongings and arms; in the middle is the slotted table. For night time, snug canvas hammocks are hung on the deck beams: they're soft and wide as bridal beds. Here, you see, real comfort is wedded to simplicity.

And my crew!

Granted, they are, gentlemen-sailors<sup>†</sup>, superb seafarers, beefsteak<sup>†</sup> sea lions, as clean and wholesome as my little sister and strong as demi-gods.

<sup>†</sup> this symbol indicates words and phrases already in English in Corbière's text.

Moi, j'ai là, jetés sur mon pont, une vingtaine de chenapans bons à rien, bons à tout; triés soigneusement dans les pays où j'ai passé. Tous gens de sac mais de corde, race scorbutique, assez lâche, mais dure au mal et insouciante du danger par habitude.

Ils se soucient peu de moi et moi d'eux. Ils savent seulement que je les tirerais comme des pingouins, au besoin ou à ma fantaisie. Tout ce qu'ils pouvaient réclamer à la loi c'est le baigne et, galère pour galère, ils préférèrent la mienne.

Quand j'en ai assez, je les change comme du linge sale, en les rendant, s'il me plaît, à leur patrie. C'est ce qu'ils craignent le plus.

J'ai un Maltais, contumace partout, et un Yankee dépendu. — En voilà deux qui manquent de pied à terre. — Deux nègres décrochés d'un garde-manger royal au Gabon. J'ai ensuite un cousin, forçat *in partibus*, dont j'ai un vieux coup de couteau; je lui ai fait, du reste, avec un rasoir, une croix sur la joue en souvenir; puis un petit voyou de Paris, un *loustic*, qui a une balle de moi dans la mâchoire. Ces deux-là je les garde précieusement en échantillon pour effrayer les autres; ce sont les plus gentils de tous. — Le reste est à l'avenant: douze baleiniers américains pour les deux baleinières; un bossu qui sert de mousse, de cock, de chien et de porte-bonheur; un tigre de six mois qui sert de chat.

Dans ce ramas, j'ai pourtant des créatures à moi: quatre Bretons à têtes de taureau, quatre frères, tous les quatre baptisés au berceau du nom de *Fanch'* et n'en voulant pas démordre. Ce sont des hommes en barre, et sur ceux-là, je peux dormir: mon second, le maître d'équipage, le chef de timonerie et le capitaine d'armes.

Pas d'uniforme; tous gardent leur couleur. Seulement, tous portent au poignet gauche, tatoué à perpétuité, mon chiffre: un T barré.

Quelquefois, pour passer le beau temps, dans un port je jette à quai cette bordée d'écume rougeie. — Tout le monde à terre pour une nuit! — Ah! c'est une nuit pour la gendarmerie!... Et on rallie à l'aurore, tous bleus, éreintés, saignants, bienheureux.

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And as a bonus, tossed up here on deck, I've a score of good for nothing rogues who are good for anything: carefully picked from lands I've sailed to. Gallows-birds all, whipcord fellows but prone to scurvy, quite cowardly but tough when there's real trouble and careless of danger as a matter of course.

They're not much bothered about me nor I about them. They only know that I'd shoot them like I would razorbills, if need be or on a whim. All they could legally claim is penal servitude and, weighing one raw deal against another, galley for galley, they prefer mine.

When I've had enough of them, I change them like dirty linen, packing them off, if I feel like it, back to where they came from. That's what they fear the most.

I've a Maltese fellow on the wanted list everywhere and a Yankee saved from the gallows — That's two with no lodgings on land. — I've a pair of Negroes lifted from the royal larder of the Gabon. Then I've a cousin, a convict *in partibus*‡, from whom I have an old knife wound; in return for which, as a memento, I sliced a cross on his cheek with a razor; and then a cocky little tear-away from Paris, who has a bullet from me in his jaw. I keep these last two as precious reminders to scare the others stiff; they're actually the nicest of all. — The rest are of a kind: twelve American whalers for the two whaleboats; a hunchback who serves as cabin-boy, cook, dog and mascot; and a six-month old tiger serving as cat.

In this motley band though I do have loyal creatures: four bull-headed Bretons, four brothers, all four baptised when still in the cradle as *Fanch'* and wanting to stick with it. They are the salt of the earth, and with them aboard, as first mate, bosun, helmsman and captain of arms, I can sleep easy.

There's no uniform; they're dressed in what they stand up in. Only, they all have my cipher permanently tattooed on their left wrist: a crossed T.

Sometimes, to while away the time on a fine day in port, I let this pack of red-blooded hounds loose ashore. — For a one-night fling! — Ah! that's a night to get the gendarmes going!... And they all come rolling back at dawn, battered and bruised, shagged out, bleeding, but blissfully happy.

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‡ *in par-tibus*: short for *in partibus infidelium* i.e. in the lands of the unbelievers (said of titular bishops in countries with no Catholic hierarchy)

L'autre jour, pendant un coup d'équinoxe, et bordaillant par le travers de Douvres, il me prit idée de laisser porter sur Saint-N... Arrivé en vue, la passe était presque impraticable, comme il arrive souvent là, et le navire pas mal désemparé. La jetée était couverte d'un monde avide d'émotions et cette entrée pitoyable fut, pour nous, comme un succès de théâtre.

J'allai le soir au Casino où je trouvai quelques connaissances et tout le *high-life* flottant des yachts de la Manche. (Il y avait eu la veille un *match* important.) Je fus présenté comme le patron du *Lougre* qui avait intrigué tout le monde. J'exposai, au milieu d'un groupe enthousiaste, ma théorie de navigation de plaisance. Je fus le *champion* du jour. Le grand Chose, un corsaire d'Argenteuil, me pilotait par le bras et je faisais assez mon Zampa de Casino.

Une jeune fille nous arrêta brusquement au passage, et, s'adressant à mon pilote:

“Ce gentleman, dit-elle, en me montrant du doigt, voudrait-il se faire présenter à mon père, pour moi?”

Je m'inclinai, et la présentation se fit au père, personnage muet du reste; on causa... C'était une Américaine, libre comme l'Amérique, jolie comme vos goëlettes, gentlemen, et blonde, mais blonde!... Le père s'appelait... Au fait que vous importe leur nom?

“Monsieur, me dit-elle, je vous trouve excentrique, vraiment.

— Moi aussi.

— Je trouve que vous ressemblez à votre bateau.

— Il est couvert d'avaries, miss...

— Splendid!... dites-moi, j'oserais vous solliciter de le visiter demain?

— C'est qu'il est bien triste à voir...

— Cela lui sied.

— Eh bien, barque et patron seront très-heureux de votre gracieuse visite, avec Monsieur votre père, à l'heure qu'il vous plaira demain...

— L'heure du lunch; mais mon père n'aime pas. Votre ami Chose plutôt?”

Cela fut fait le lendemain; l'Américaine se prit d'une grande passion pour le *Lougre*.

— “Quel nom a-t-il?”

— Un nom de femme, miss.

— Joli?

— Joli.

— Jolie?

— Jolie.

— Je ne le vois pas écrit là?...

The other day, during an equinoctial storm, and tacking slowly through the Straits of Dover, I had the idea of letting the boat drift towards Saint-N... When in sight of it, the channel was almost impassable as is often the case there, and the ship somewhat crippled. The jetty was crowded with folk eager for something to get excited about and this pitiable entrance of ours was as though we'd come through with flying colours — a theatrical triumph.

In the evening I went to the Casino where I found a few acquaintances and all the floating élite from the Channel yachts. (The previous day there'd been a regatta.) I was introduced as skipper of the *Lugger* that had intrigued everyone. I put forward my theory about pleasure-sailing to an enthusiastic audience. I was champion of the day. The great What's-his-name, a pirate from Argenteuil, led me by the arm and I performed my Casino Zampa passably well.

A young lady stopped us in our tracks, and, addressing my pilot: "Would this gentleman", she said, pointing to me, "like to be introduced to my father, so he can give me his blessing?"

I nodded, was introduced to the father, a silent figure in the main; and we talked... She was American, as liberated as America, as pretty as your schooners, gentlemen†, and blonde, some blonde!... The father was called... but what's their name matter to you?

"Sir," she said, "I think you're eccentric, I really do."

"So do I."

"I think you're like your boat."

"Pretty damaged, miss†..."

"Splendid!... now tell me, dare I ask if I can look over her tomorrow?"

"She's a sorry sight!"

"That suits her."

"Well, boat and captain will be delighted to receive your gracious visit, along with your good father, at any time to suit you tomorrow..."

"Lunch time; but my father won't. How about your friend What's-his-name instead?"

And this is what happened the following day; the American girl fell in love with the *Lugger*.

"What's her name?"

"A woman's, miss†."

"A pretty one?"

"A pretty one."

"Is she pretty?"



— On a passé une couche de peinture noire par-dessus.”

Elle voulut parler à tous les hommes de l'équipage, et je lui présentai le chat-tigre qui, tout en *flirtant*, lui enleva d'un coup de griffe un morceau de la main.

“Oh l'amour! dit-elle.

— Miss, vous voilà comme mes gens, tatouée au poignet: vous êtes des nôtres...

— Je le veux, en vérité, *my captain!*”

Et, dans un élan tout marin, elle me fit promettre de l'emmener un peu faire la course, un jour de nuit, par un joli petit temps de sinistres.

J'hésitai...

“Vous avez peur, monsieur?

— Mais votre père?

— Content toujours.”

On en parla au père, qui dit: *All right!*

Les avaries réparées, je fis donc mettre le *Lougre* en grande rade, l'équipage consigné, en appareillage enfin. Mais un calme implacable. J'allais chaque soir coucher à bord. L'Américaine m'accompagnait à regret jusqu'à la baleinière, me reprochant durement de ne pas savoir commander un peu de tempête pour deux.

Toute la plage était au courant; on pariait: Ils iront. Ils n'iront pas! Et toujours calme plat! Ma position devenait ridicule.

Enfin, le quatrième matin, belle apparence: une houle sourde, du ressac, des risées et des *haubans au soleil*. Le baromètre sautant à une hauteur stupide.

Je vins à terre:

“Miss, faites votre sac.”

Elle faillit me sauter au cou, et courut se mettre en *blue jacket*. Ce n'était pas un travesti de fantaisie, mais bien le paletot et le pantalon d'ordonnance achetés à un matelot en congé et appropriés à la hâte.

Dix heures. — Le baromètre baisse, l'enthousiasme monte. Le vent joue; on fait des paris au déjeuner: Ils iront! — n'iront pas!

Onze heures. — Le thé. Les paris se corsent, la brise aussi. Le sémaphore est à tempête. On chante:

*Ami, la ma-tiné-e-est-belle...*

“She’s pretty.”

“I can’t see any name on it?...”

“It’s been painted over in black.”

She wanted to talk with all the members of crew, and I introduced her to the tiger-cat, who, flirting with her, scratched out a bit of her hand.

“Oh, the little love!” she exclaimed.

“Miss<sup>†</sup>, you’re like my men now, tattooed on the wrist: you’re one of us...”

“That’s what I want to be, I really do, *my captain!*!”

And, in a burst of very seaworthy emotion, she made me promise to take her on a little outing, on a day like night, in a lovely spell of grim weather only fit for disasters.

I hesitated...

“You afraid then, sir?”

“But your father?”

“Never objects.”

We spoke to her father, who said: “*All right!*!”

Once the damage was repaired, I had the *Lugger* taken out into the roads, the crew at their stations, set to sail at last. But an implacable calm. Each night I slept on board. The American girl would accompany me regretfully out to the whaleboat, reproaching me sternly for not knowing how to order a bit of storm for two.

All the local population was in on it; they were even laying bets: They’re going! No they’re not! Still dead calm! My position was becoming ridiculous.

At last, on the fourth morning, everything looked fine: a gentle swell and undertow, light breezes and shrouds in the sunlight. The barometer leaping to a stupid height.

I came ashore.

“Pack your bag, miss<sup>†</sup>.”

She almost threw herself round my neck, and ran to don a *blue jacket*<sup>†</sup>. It wasn’t fancy dress, but the proper guernsey and regulation breeches bought from a sailor on leave and cleaned up in haste.

Ten o’clock. — The barometer falls, enthusiasm rises. The breeze livens up, bets are laid at breakfast: They’re going! no they’re not!

Eleven o’clock. — Tea-break. The bets are more pronounced, so is the wind. The semaphore gets frenzied. Voices are raised in song:

*It’s a beau-ti-ful-mor-ning, one and all...*

MIDI. À bord!... Le vent n'attend pas. Le père, devant le Casino assemblé, remet solennellement sa fille à mon bon plaisir de gentleman et à ma délicatesse de matelot. Il a parié pour.

“Maintenant, mesdames et messieurs, si quelqu'un désire être des nôtres... Personne ne dit mot?...”

Et nos amis nous accompagnent de leurs paris et de leurs *hurrah!*

L'Américaine saute dans la baleinière et:

“Avant partout!”

La mer brisait déjà dans la passe; il fallait parer chaque lame, et du premier coup nous étions, malgré nos capotes cirées, traversés jusqu'aux os. Ce jeu dura bien deux heures avant d'atteindre le mouillage. Il était temps. Le *Lougre* fatiguait abominablement. La chaîne de la maîtresse ancre venait de se casser dans un coup de tangage en démontant le guindeau. Impossible de ravoïr l'autre.

“Attrape à appareiller en double. — Pare trois ris dans la misaine, deux ris dans le taillevent. — Le tourmentin à demi-bâton. — Voilà la toilette.

— Démaille la chaîne et file par le bout. Les ancres au fond, c'est plus simple.

— Hisse, étarque et borde partout.”

La lourde brise prend dans la toile avec un bruit de canon, la coque se gîte dans la lame, et nous voilà saillant de l'avant, piquant à quatre quarts dans le lit du vent avec un sillage de huit à neuf nœuds.

Le Casino a disparu dans une *grainasse*.

“Vous êtes toute mouillée, miss.

— Bah! est-ce que la mer mouille!”

Un de mes Bretons, Fanch', le plus fin timonier du bord, est à la barre; elle le regardait effrontément.

“Homme beau!” lui dit-elle en face.

L'autre ne sourcilla pas.

La brise fusillait maintenant; le navire charroyait trop de toile et donnait de la bande ferme; il fallait se cramponner aux haubans. L'avant *mettait le nez dans la plume* et se relevait à peine. Un paquet de mer nous couvrit de bout en bout.

“Vous êtes contente?”

— Tout plein!”

Fanch', le maître d'équipage, vint à moi:

— Faut-il mollir, patron? Nous encombrons à la douce...

— Quoi c'est *mollir*, monsieur?

— Diminuer de voile, miss.

MIDDAY. All aboard!... The wind won't wait. Before the assembled Casino crowd, the girl's father solemnly hands his daughter into my good offices as a gentleman† and my scrupulous seamanship. He's betted we'll go.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen†, if anyone else would like to join us... All lost your tongues?..."

And our friends keep us company with their bets and *hur-rays!*

The American girl leaps into the whale-boat and:

"Full steam ahead!"

The sea was already lively in the straits; we had to fend off every wave, and from the outset we were, despite our oilskins, soaked to the skin. This inconvenience lasted for a good two hours until we reached the anchorage. Not a moment too soon. The *Lugger* was labouring abominably. The chain of the main anchor had just snapped with a sudden pitching that dislodged the windlass, which was then impossible to recover.

"Let's get under way double quick. — Have three reef-points clear in the forelug, two in the lug mainsail. — The storm jib half-boom. — Here comes the swill-out."

"Unshackle the cable and slip the end. Anchors to the bottom is easier."

"Set sails, hoist home and harden up."

The heavy wind whips into the canvas with the sound of a cannon shot, the hull lists in the waves and here we are surging ahead directly into the wind with a wake of eight to nine knots.

The Casino has disappeared in a mother of squalls.

"You're wet through, miss†."

"Nonsense! call this wet!"

One of my Bretons, Fanch†, the ablest helmsman aboard, is at the helm and she was quite brazenly staring at him.

"Gorgeous hunk of a man!" she said to his face.

He didn't bat an eyelid.

The stiff wind was firing volleys now, the boat was carrying too much sail and was heeling; we all had to cling to the shrouds. The bow was dipping its nose in the swell and hardly coming back up. We were shipping a green sea that covered us from stem to stern.

"You happy now?"

"I sure am!"

Fanch†, the bosun, came up to me:

"Should we slack off, skipper? We're slowly foundering..."

"What's slack off, sir?"

"Ease the sails, miss†."

— Alors, je vous prie... Non... quoi c'est *encombrer*?

— Ceci.”

Et je lui montrai le *beaupré* qui venait de se casser au ras, et le *tourmentin*, emporté au diable, comme un cerf volant...

“*Oh! splendid sport!*” fit-elle.

Ni peur, ni étonnement. J'en étais même quelque peu vexé.

“Faut-il mollir, patron?”

— La dame ne veut pas, tiens bon.

— *Captain*, j'ai faim.

— Bossu, sers le lunch dans la chambre. Vous miss, tenez-moi bien pour descendre. Vous allez toujours changer vos vêtements.”

Il faut vous dire que j'étais assez vain de mes petits préparatifs: dans la soute aux voiles, toute une petite boutique de lingerie dévalisée en ville et arrimée par le Bossu, ma meilleure camériste. Il m'avait même rapporté triomphalement deux corsets hygiéniques de neuf francs. J'avais préparé moi-même un grand peignoir, pris en Orient, et des bas à coins brodés, souvenir oublié chez moi autrefois... bien autrefois.

On avait improvisé au fond du carré un sanctuaire discret avec un hunier de rechange tendu de haut en bas.

Elle ne fut pas longue à sa toilette! Elle sortit de là grée de ma vareuse de corvée et d'un pantalon à Fanch', le capitaine d'armes. Et jolie!...

Et ça allait toujours, là-haut; on entendait les grosses bottes talonner sur nos têtes. L'Américaine mangeait solidement. La nuit tombait vite. Je pris la carte pour pointer la route. Elle suivait des yeux en fumant une cigarette.

À présent, *captain*, allons prendre le frais.

— Impossible pour vous, miss, on vient d'amarrer les hommes de quart sur le pont.

— Eh bien! il faut me faire aussi...

— Oui, dans votre hamac. Voyez le bel ours qui vous attend là.

— Oui, superbe peau. Mais je ne veux pas dormir chez un homme; chez mon époux seulement, plus tard. Maintenant, je veux mettre ces grandes bottes qui sont là et monter avec sur le pont. Allons, aidez-moi.”

Il fallut bien. Étendue sur un caisson, elle tendait sa jambe. Heurtée, meurtrie par le roulis, elle m'avait empoigné le cou, et je travaillais de mon mieux. Le gros pantalon ne pouvait entrer dans les tiges; il fallut le couper au-dessus du genou avec mon couteau, qui ne coupait pas. Les damnées bottes montaient tou-

“Well, please do... No... what’s foundering?”

“This is.”

And I showed her the bowsprit which had just snapped at the water-line, and the storm jib, whisked away, like a kite...

“Oh what splendid sport!” said she.

No fear, no astonishment. I was even somewhat peeved that she felt neither.

“Should we ease up, skipper.”

“Madam doesn’t want us to, so keep going.”

“Captain†, I’m hungry.”

“Hunchback, serve lunch in the cabin. You, miss†, keep tight hold of me to go below. You’re going to need a change of clothes.”

I must admit to being quite vain about the detailed preparations I’d made: in the sail locker, a whole store of linen shop-lifted in town and stowed away by the Hunchback, easily my best chambermaid. He had even brought me back in triumph two pairs of nine franc sanitary corsets. For my part I had assembled a large dressing gown, obtained in the Far East, and stockings with embroidered heels, a souvenir I’d brought home and forgotten some time ago... a long time ago.

A discreet sanctuary had been improvised at the back of the wardrobe and a spare topsail stretched to cover it completely.

She wasn’t long getting changed! She came up rigged out in my workaday Guernsey and a pair of trousers belonging to Fanch’, the master-at-arms. A sight for sore eyes!

And up above, things were constantly on the move; we could hear big boots thumping over our heads. The American girl ate solidly. Night was falling fast. I reached for the chart to show her our route. She smoked a cigarette, following me with her eyes.

“And now, captain, let’s go and get some fresh air...”

“Impossible for you, miss†, we’ve just had to tether the men on watch to the deck.”

“Well! you’ll just have to tether me too...”

“Yes, to your hammock. See the handsome bear waiting for you there.”

“Yes a gorgeous hunk. But I don’t want to sleep in a man’s cabin with a man there; unless he’s my husband, when I have one. Right now, I want to put those big boots on, those there, and go up on deck in them. Come on now, give me a hand.”

I had to. Stretched out on a locker, she held up a leg. Bumped, bruised by the roll, she had grabbed me by the neck, and I was working as hard as I could. The thick trousers couldn’t be squeezed into the legs, they had to be cut off above the knee with my knife, which wouldn’t cut. The blasted boots were going up

jours; elle se livrait avec une innocence de quartier-maître. Elle riait!... Je ne riais pas. Quel métier!

“Ne craignez pas, *captain*, je suis un matelot.”

Oui, j'étais bien amateloté! Elle m'étranglait, et j'étranglais, en conscience; le sang me montait à la gorge... Des scrupules!... Allons donc!... Seuls, au diable... roulés au hasard dans cette nuit perdue... Des scrupules!... et trois ris dans la misaine!... Sombrier pour sombrer...

“Je vous fais mal, monsieur!

— Un peu, miss.”

Ça ne fait rien, les bottes y sont!... De l'amour?... Allons donc! de l'amour à moi?... Elle est là-haut, mon amoureuse!... L'entendez-vous qui hurle après son amant, battant les flancs, secouant les mâts, écharpant la toile... On couchera peut-être ensemble ce soir... et la petite aussi, alors.

Montons, miss.”

Elle ne pouvait tenir debout, vous pensez. Je la fis saisir par deux hommes et placer près de moi, amarrée.

“Tenez-moi bien!”

Et je lui passai mon bras comme une ceinture.

La tourmente était dans son plein. Nuit aveugle, une pluie cinglée, pas de ciel. Le pont noyé, la carène geignant lamentablement, et les cris de poulies, les craquements...

Sur l'avant, quelqu'un chante. C'est la voix du Bossu. Elle nous arrive sanglotée, par lambeaux...

*Adieu, la belle, je m'en vas;*

*Adieu, la belle, je m'en vas...*

Et les sifflements des rafales et le ronflement des manœuvres, le claquement des voiles...

*Puisque mon bâtiment s'en va...*

“Ouvre l'œil au bossoir!

— Ouvre l'œil...”

On ne s'entendait pas; nous avions la respiration coupée.

*Puisque mon bâtiment s'en va,*

*Je m'en vas faire un tour à Nantes,*

*Puisque la loi me le commande...*

and up; she was offering herself with all the innocence of an experienced seaman. She was laughing!... But I wasn't. What a job!

"Don't worry, captain, I'm a sailor."

Yes, and I was well and truly scuppered. She was strangling me, and I was being strangled, in more ways than one, the blood rising to my throat... And I've got scruples!... Come on now!... Here we are, the two of us alone, in a devil of a mess..., lost in this night and swept along at the whim of the waves... Scruples!... and three reefs in the foresail!... drowning for drowning's sake...

"Am I hurting you?"

"Just a little, miss!"

Never mind, the boots are on now!... If this is some sort of love... Come off it! me in love?... The one I love is up there!... Can't you hear her howling for her lover, slapping her flanks, shaking the masts, slashing the canvas to pieces... Perhaps we'll sleep together tonight... and this little love as well, maybe.

"Let's go up, miss!"

She couldn't stand upright, which is hardly surprising. I got two men to take hold of her and stand her next to me, braced against me for support.

"Hold really tight!"

And I wrapped my arm round her like a belt.

The tempest was at its height. Blackest night, lashing rain, no sky to be seen. The deck under water, the hull groaning horrendously, and the screech of the blocks, the creakings...

On the bow, someone is singing. It's the Hunchback. His voice reaches us in torn-off scraps of sobbing...

*Bye, my beauty, I'm on my way;  
Bye, my beauty, I'm on my way...*

And the whistling of the wild flurries of wind and the loud throbbing of the rigging, the snapping of the sails...

*Since my ship is sailing today...*

"Eyes skinned on the cathead!"

"Eyes skinned..."

No one could hear anyone else; and we could hardly breathe.

*Since my ship is sailing today...  
I'll go for a last look round Nantes,  
As that's what we're meant to do...*



“Ouvre l’œil au bossoir!...”

Rien. Les hommes de bossoir, amarrés à leur poste, se sont endormis sous les coups de mer, accablés. On les fait revenir à coup de gargettes.

“Un quart de rhum au monde.”

L’Américaine, collée contre moi, ne bougeait pas.

“Moi aussi, murmura-t-elle, un quart de rhum?”

— Oh!...

— En vérité!”

Elle but dans mon *quart*.

“Fanch! fais sonder aux pompes...”

— Deux pieds d’eau, patron.

— Bon!”

À ce moment, nous vîmes, ou plutôt nous sentîmes passer une forme noire, monstrueuse. Tout le navire eut comme un frisson. L’Américaine fit:

“Ah!...”

Elle m’avait serré jusqu’au sang.

“Connu!... grogna le timonier.

— Vous dites “Connu!” vous, l’homme?

— Pardié!... le *Voltigeur hollandais*.

— Quoi c’est ça, *captain*?

— Le vaisseau fantôme, miss.

— Il n’y a pas de meilleur baromètre, ajouta Fanch!

— C’est signe de quoi, l’homme?

— Un trou dans l’eau, mademoiselle.

— *Aoh! very charming! very very!... Charming!...*”

Ah! ça... est-ce qu’elle serait bête?

Nous étions mangés par la mer. Je tenais toujours l’Américaine, qui se laissait aller sur mon épaule endolorie; j’entendais, contre mon oreille, ses dents, comme des pierres de meule, broyant un biscuit de ration. Ses cheveux mouillés fouettaient ma joue en feu; j’en avais plein la bouche, et je les mordais; ils étaient tout salés de poudrin, et je buvais... Ce poison, l’odeur de femme, m’emplissait les narines. Plus rien... L’abîme, c’était ses yeux; la tempête, c’était son haleine. La lampe d’habacle jetait par instant sur nous un éclair tremblotant, tout le reste me semblait de l’autre monde. Je sentis passer en moi comme un souffle de beauté, et je mis sur sa bouche un baiser léger, bien léger...

Elle dormait, parbleu.

“Quoi? fit-elle en sursaut.

“Eyes skinned on the cathead!...”

Nothing happens. The men on the cathead, tethered to their posts, have fallen asleep with the huge surges of the sea, overwhelmed. They are hauled back to consciousness by someone tugging on the gaskets.

“A tot of rum for everyone.”

The American girl, still clinging to me, didn’t stir.

“One for me too?” she gasped, almost in a whisper.

“Oh!...”

“I really would...!”

She drank from my tot.

“Fanch, take a sounding at the pumps...”

“Two foot of water, boss.”

“Right!”

At that moment we saw a monstrous black shape, or rather, we sensed it passing. The whole ship seemed to shiver. The American girl went:

“Ah!...”

She’d squeezed me so hard she’d drawn blood.

“Seeing’s believing!... has to be!” muttered the helmsman.

“What do you mean, fellow?”

“Ye gods!... it’s *The Flying Dutchman*.”

“Who’s that, captain?”

“The phantom ship, miss†.”

“There’s no better barometer,” added Fanch.

“As a sign of what?”

“A hole in the water, miss†.”

“Oh no! very charming†! very very!... Charming†!...”

Now, how silly can you get?

We were being devoured by the sea... I was still holding the girl, who had gone limp, leaning heavily against my painful shoulder; I could hear, right up against my ear, her teeth, like grindstones, scrunching a ship’s biscuit. Her soaking wet hair was whipping my cheek which was on fire, I had my mouth full of it and I was biting it, all salty with sea-spray, and I was drinking it in... This poison, the smell of a woman, filled my nostrils. There was nothing else. The abyss was her eyes; the storm was her breathing. From time to time the binnacle lamp cast a flickering light upon us, everything else seemed to belong in another world. I sensed something like a breath of true beauty pass right into my very being and I placed a light kiss on her mouth, such a light kiss...

She was asleep, for heaven’s sake.

“What was that?” she said with a start.

— Rien: le taille-vent enlevé.”

Ç'avait été comme un coup de fouet sur nous, puis un frou-frou de soie là-haut.

“Le taille-vent enlevé!... Barre dessous toute!...” Le timonier tomba sur nous comme une masse.

“Tu es sot!!”

Il était mort; l'écoute, en partant, l'avait cinglé. C'était fini de rire. Je sautai sur la barre avec le maître. Heureusement le navire tenait bien la cape sous sa misaine seule.

— Tiens bon toujours.

“Miss, il faut descendre dans la chambre.

— Non.

— Je suis le maître.

— Je suis libre.

— Je vais vous faire coucher par le Bossu.

— Oh!...”

Elle était indignée.

“Hô, Bossu, ici.

— Vous êtes un lâche, monsieur!”

Et elle descendit sans vouloir se laisser aider.

Il était cinq heures du matin. Cette dernière saute de vent était l'agonie de la tourmente qui tomba à plat comme tuée. Le jour tardait, seulement la nuit devenait grise et plus épaisse. De la brume, il ne manquait plus que ça! Cela ne manqua pas; et du calme, ce calme atroce qui succède aux grandes crises. Le navire, ne sentant plus sa voilure ni sa barre, roulait bord sur bord à tout arracher, souffrant dans toutes ses coutures et faisant de l'eau comme un panier. Les voiles et les agrès flasques battaient lourdement sur les mâts secoués.

Nous étions jolis! Sur le pont, les deux baleinières aplaties et crevées, les bastingages rasés. Les hommes, rendus, couchés en vache comme des cadavres, heurtant partout au roulis; l'autre aussi, le mort, parmi les autres, la moitié de la tête enlevée, et promenant ses petites flaques d'eau rosée.

“Fanch', faisons-nous de l'eau toujours?”

— Joliment, patron.

— Fais gréer les pompes.”

Et alors ce bruit monotone et sinistre...

“Attrape à laver le pont! Un quart d'eau-de-vie au monde!”

Personne ne bougea.

“Attends un peu, dit Fanch', je vas te prendre la mesure d'une robe de chambre avec une trique. Hop, les amoureux!”

“Nothing: the lug mainsail’s gone.”

There’d been like a whiplash above us, then a swish-swish of silk up there.

“The lug mainsail gone!... Lower the helm!” The helmsman came hurtling down on us like a ton of bricks.

“You’re drunk!”

He was dead; the sheet, as it came away, had slashed him. The fun was well and truly over. I leapt onto the helm with the skipper. Fortunately the boat held its course under its single forelug.

“Keep it like that.”

“Miss<sup>1</sup>, you must go down to the cabin.”

“I won’t.”

“I’m the skipper.”

“I’m a free woman.”

“I’ll get the Hunchback to put you to bed.”

“Oh!...”

She was indignant.

“Hey, Hunchback, over here.”

“You are a coward, sir!”

But down she went unwilling to be helped.

It was five in the morning. This last flurry of wind was the death throes of the tempest which fell flat as if shot dead. Daylight was slow coming, was more like night turning grey and denser. Thick mist, that’s all we needed! So that’s what we got; and a calm, the atrocious calm that succeeds great crises. The ship, no longer sensing its sails or its helm, rolled from side to side strongly enough to heave everything off, suffering at all its seams and letting in water like a wicker basket. The sails and the flaccid tackle beat heavily against the shaken masts.

We were in a fine pickle! On deck, the two whalers flattened and shattered, the ship’s rails swept away. The crew, completely exhausted, lay flat out like corpses, being bumped and thrown about with the roll; the dead man too, in their midst, half his head gone, oozing little puddles of pinkish water.

“Fanch! are we still letting in?”

“And how, boss.”

“Get the pumps going.”

And then this monotonous and sinister noise...

“Swill the deck! A tot of brandy for everyone!”

Not a soul moved.

“Hold on a bit,” said Fanch’ “I’m gonna cudgel them out of their lethargy. On your feet, you softies.”

On commença la toilette. Dégager le pont, réparer le gréement et enverguer des voiles de rechange.

Je descendis rendre visite à ma passagère. Elle était couchée, tout habillée, dans un cadre, avec le tigre-chat qui me montra les dents. Elle avait pris un petit air de galérien tout à fait angélique.

“Monsieur, me dit-elle, où sommes-nous?”

— Dans la brume.

— Pour retourner, j’espère?

— Nous attendons; pas de brise et pas de vue.

— Ah!”

Ce *Ah* était d’une insolence!...

“Voulez-vous déjeuner, miss?”

— Merci, je veux m’en aller.

— Soit: débarquez. Libre à vous.”

J’étais énervé à la fin.

“Monsieur, assez, je vous prie; je vous dis, je veux être à terre.

— Et moi donc!”

Je remontai sur le pont, mécontent et quelque peu inquiet, ne pouvant reconnaître notre position, et le navire ne gouvernant pas. Je voyais seulement, au compas affolé, que nous étions dressés par un courant. La Mer hachée et affreusement dure. Tout souffrait à bord.

L’Américaine ne donna pas signe de vie. Un novice était chargé de son service. Elle avait outrageusement renvoyé le pauvre Bossu, ma plus fine soubrette pourtant... J’évitai d’aller la voir; je lui en voulais de n’avoir pas trouvé un bon mouvement dans tout cela. Intrépide et bête... et trop jolie pour elle, cette Yankee. C’était de la beauté perdue.

Vers midi, dans une éclaircie, nous aperçûmes la silhouette démesurée d’un cotre; il était presque sur nous et nous héla:

“Ship, ohé?”

— Hô?

— A pilot?

— Yes. Accoste.

— French?

— Oui. Et vous?

— Guernsey. Pour où, vous?

— Saint-N...

— Combien?

— Dites.

— Quinze livres.

They began the clean-up. Clearing the deck, repairing the rigging and hoisting the spare sails.

I went below to see my passenger. She was lying, fully clothed, in a recess, with the tiger-cat baring its teeth at me. She had assumed the look of a totally angelic galley-slave.

“Sir,” she asked, “where are we?”

“In a fog.”

“On our way back, I hope?”

“We’re waiting; there’s no breeze and no view.”

“Ah!”

The *Ah!* was insolence itself!...

“Would you like lunch, miss’?”

“No thank you, I want to leave.”

“OK: you disembark. It’s up to you.”

I was worked up by now.

“Sir, I’ve had enough of this, please see to me being put on dry land.”

“And what do you think I want!”

I went back up on deck, discontented and quite disturbed, unable to work out our position, and the ship out of control. All I could see, from the crazed compass, was that we were being driven by a current. The sea cut up and dreadfully harsh. Every-one and everything on board in a very bad way.

The American girl gave no sign of life. A novice was instructed to look after her. Outrageously she had sent the poor Hunchback packing, despite his being my best soubrette. I avoided going to see her; I begrudged her finding nothing positive in all that had happened. Intrepid but silly... and too pretty for her own good, this Yankee. Beauty not worth its salt.

About noon, in a break in the thick mist, we caught sight of the outsize silhouette of a cutter; it was almost on top of us and hailing us:

“Ship<sup>†</sup> ahoy?”

“Ahoy?”

“Need a pilot<sup>†</sup>?”

“Yes<sup>†</sup>. Come alongside.”

“French<sup>†</sup>?”

“Yes. And you?”

“From Guernsey. Where you heading?”

“Saint N...”

“How much?”

“You say.”

“Fifteen pound.”

“No.”

- Non.
- Good night!
- Dix livres.
- All right.”

Cinq minutes après, le pilote accosta dans son *yoyou* et sauta à bord.

- “*Good morning, captain.* Navire de guerre?
- Aventurier.
- Connaissez-vous votre position?
- Non.

Il était temps. Heureusement la brise se fait. Nous allons pouvoir orienter.

- Un grog, pilote?
- Hein, captain, je parie que, dans ce moment, je fais plus de plaisir qu’une belle fille?”

L’animal, il ne savait pas dire si vrai, avec sa bonne grosse figure en jambon d’York.

Enfin, sur le soir, la brise se leva, une brise carabinée.

Nous pûmes prendre connaissance des feux et faire route en forçant de toile. Le lendemain matin, nous attrapions Saint N... et nos bouées d’ancres.

J’avais oublié l’Américaine. Elle me fit demander de la mettre de suite à terre avec le pilote. Je demandai la permission de l’accompagner; elle me fit répondre que *j’étais le maître*.

C’était l’heure du bain sur la plage. Nous avions été signalés. On nous entourait, on avait eu des inquiétudes, etc. Le père sembla ne pas avoir remarqué nos deux jours de retard. Il me remercia solennellement, avec une nuance de bénédiction, et, me prenant la main, il cherchait celle de sa fille. Elle était montée chez elle.

Je me retirai aussi. Ce bonhomme avait déjà presque l’air de vouloir me traiter de Turc à More, de beau-père à gendre!

Voilà pourquoi, au soleil couchant, on put voir le *Lougre* à voiles noires appareiller silencieusement et se perdre dans l’ombre comme le *Voltigeur Hollandais*. Un véritable enlèvement! Je m’enlevais moi-même...

... Et dans l’effort de la lutte, — vous pensez si je me défendais! — je m’éveillai...

Car tout ceci n’était qu’un rêve, un abominable cauchemar.

Trist.

“Good night!!”

“Ten pound.”

“All right.”

Five minutes after, the pilot drew alongside in his dinghy and jumped aboard.

“Good morning<sup>†</sup>, captain<sup>†</sup>. Man of war?”

“Adventurer”.

“You know your position?”

“No.”

“High time you did. Luckily the breeze is getting up. We’ll be able to guide you.”

“Want a tot, pilot?”

“Well, captain<sup>†</sup>, reckon right now I’m giving you more pleasure ’n a sexy wench could?”

The critter couldn’t have been closer to the truth, standing there with his round fat York ham of a face.

At last, come evening, the breeze did get up, and a very stiff one at that.

We were able to distinguish the harbour lights and make our way with a big push from the sails. The next morning, we reached St N... and our anchor buoys.

I had forgotten the American girl. She asked to be put ashore immediately with the pilot. I asked permission to accompany her; she replied that *I was the skipper*.

It was bathing time on the beach. We had been sighted. A crowd gathered round us, people had been worried, etc. Her father seemed not to have noticed that we were two days late. He solemnly thanked me, almost as if he were blessing us and, taking me by the hand, reached for his daughter’s. She’d gone off home.

I withdrew as well. For the good fellow already seemed to be treating me as a Turk would a Moor, or as a father-in-law would a son-in-law!

That’s why, at sunset, the *Lugger* with black sails could be seen silently weighing anchor and vanishing into the shadows like the *Flying Dutchman*. A veritable abduction! I was taking myself hostage too...

And in the effort of that struggle, — you can just imagine how I was standing up for myself! — I woke...

For all this was only a dream, an abominable nightmare.

Trist.



## L'atelier

Un atelier de peintre sans peinture. Les [murs] quatre murs se renvoient un découragement innommable [ou immuable]. Il n'y a rien, mais il y a du désordre et des clous [?].

On frappe à la porte depuis cinq minutes. On crie... Il est une heure ou une autre d'une journée quelconque, témoin un coucou sans aiguilles, accroché au mur contre une porte. [Eh bien, quoi] Il y a une [Eh bien ouvre] soupente à côté, avec un lit et, dedans, un jeune homme [qui méd] dans une pose de méditation avec une chaussette d'une main. Il n'est pas beau, mais il est [très] fièrement laid. Il songe pourtant qu'il est trop laid pour se lever. Le soleil [, qui est beau, n'est pas levé non plus] ne se lèvera pas non plus aujourd'hui. À quoi bon?

On frappe, du reste, [depuis] activement.

“Eh bien, entrez!

— Mais c'est fermé...

[— Ah!] Le jeune homme à la chaussette se lève et va ouvrir.

— Bonjour, cousin.

— Tiens! c'est toi?

— Tu me laisses frapper comme tes créanciers! — Mon ami, M. de L.

— Monsieur...

— Monsieur... Asseyez-vous, je vous prie.

— Où?

— Mais... partout!

— Il n'y a pas seulement une chaise...

— Tu étais encore au lit: est-ce que...?

— Ma foi, non. Je couche, comme ça, pour moi seul... Enfin...

[— Ah! c'est que vous]

— Ne te défends pas! On sait, vous autres, les artistes... Les modèles, les actrices...

— Pourquoi pas les acteurs?

— C'est [ça, vous vous imaginez donc] que c'est votre métier d'être toujours comme ça; et vous croyez ça, vous autres jeunes hommes vierges...

— Vierges? Oh, oh, dites donc!

— Monsieur!

— Monsieur! Oui, vierges! — Voyons! Parce que tu as été raccroché par une fille ou deux, tu t'imagines n'être plus vierge? Mais il y a d'honnêtes pères de famille qui seront toujours vierges.

— Oh! Monsieur est paradoxal!

## The studio

An artist's studio empty of paintings. The four walls perpetually reflect an awful despondency back to one another. There's nothing there but muddle and nails.

Someone's been knocking at the door for a good five minutes. They're shouting... It's one o'clock or another on an inauspicious day, as witnessed by a cuckoo clock with no hands, hanging on the wall against a door. Next to it there's a boxroom under the stairs with a bed in, and in the bed there's a young man positioned with a sock in one hand so you think he's meditating. He isn't good looking, but he takes a pride in his ugliness. He thinks though that he's too ugly to get up. The sun won't be rising today either. Why should he?

Anyway, someone's knocking, assiduously.

"Well, come in then!

—But it's locked...

The young man with the sock gets up and goes to open the door...

— Hello, cousin.

— Heavens! Well well well, it's you?

— You let me go on knocking like your creditors!

— My friend, Mr de L.

— Mr...

— Mr... Please sit down.

— Where?

— Well... anywhere!

— There's no chair, not one...

— You were still in bed: do you...?

— Good God, no. I go to bed when I feel like it, it's up to me... In any case...

— Don't try to defend yourself! Everyone knows, you lot, you artists... Models, actresses...

— Why not actors?

— So it's your job to be like that all the time; and you believe that's o.k., you pack of male virgins...

— Virgins? Oh, oh, I say!

— Sir! Yes, virgins!

— Come on! Because you've been picked up by a girl or two, you imagine you've stopped being a virgin? There are even good husbands and fathers who will always be virgins...

— Oh! you're talking in paradoxes!

— Oui, Monsieur, j'ai beaucoup d'esprit, mais je ne le sers, du reste, que très peu.

— Et vous faites des beaux-arts, m'a dit Monsieur?

— Oui... De la peinture contemplative.

— Peut-on voir quelque...

— Oh! c'est bien simple: regardez par la fenêtre. Je ne fais guère autre chose.

— Alors, vous n'êtes pas au Salon cette année?

— Non, Monsieur, j'étais au lit.

— Il paraît que le jury a été très sévère cette année.

— [Je] [Sévère, mais juste; mais, juste, il ne l'était que l'année dernière] J'ai pourtant plusieurs de mes amis qui ont tous été acquittés."

— Pendant ce temps, le cousin fouille partout, essaye des cigarettes, retourne des cartons et se pique avec [une flèche] un criss malais.

"Diable! Est-ce que c'est empoisonné?

— Ma foi, je ne sais pas!

— Diable! — Voyons... Viens-tu déjeuner? [*illisible*] Habille-toi. Tu dîneras à la maison; puis nous irons au théâtre, dans les coulisses, dis?

— Ma foi, pour le moment, je ne connais pas de coulisses.

— Allons donc! toi?

— Ah, oui: les modèles, les actrices... Vierge, va! [n'importe,... tu... viens donc, tu n'as rien à faire qui te retient]. Ce sont tes nombreuses occupations qui te retiennent.

— Je n'en ai qu'une, qui me prend tout mon temps: *ne rien faire*.

— Eh bien, bonsoir.

— Bonne nuit."

Il referme la porte un moment, pour la forme.

"Crétins! — Voyons... Il est une heure. Elle vient vers deux heures. Habillons-nous. On frappe encore: tiens, elle avance.

Ouvrant la porte et tendant les bras:

"Viens, toi!..."

[— Pardon excuse...votre...chercher (?) avant-hier pour être pieds nus. Croyez-moi, Monsieur Schmit [?]...]

Oui, je...

[— Permettez...]

— Je viens pour cette petite note...

— Ah, très bien ! Je vous attendais presque. Asseyez-vous donc. — C'est si haut!

— Oui, mais je cherche une chaise.

— Ah! je n'en ai pas: je reçois si peu!

— Mais, vous?

- Yes, Sir, I've quite a wit; I barely use it though.
- And you're in the arts, as I've been told? This gentleman told me.
- Yes... Contemplative painting.
- May I see a...
- Oh! that's quite simple: look out of the window. I do little else.
- So, you're not showing in the Salon this year?
- No, sir, I was in bed.
- Apparently the jury has been very severe this year.
- Yet I've several friends who've all got in."

During these exchanges, the cousin roots around everywhere, tries cigarettes, turns up cardboard boxes and pricks himself on a Malayan *kris*.

"Hell! Is it poisoned?

— Heavens, I don't know!

— Hell! Let's see... Are you coming for lunch? [*illegible*] Get dressed. You can dine at my house; then we'll go to the theatre, in the wings, alright?

— Heavens, at the moment, I don't know anyone with wings — and I'm not ready for flight.

— Come on now! you're not?

— Ah, yes: I'm with you now: models, actresses... Go on, you virgin you! It's your numerous occupations that hold you back.

— I only have one, and it takes me all my time: *doing nothing*.

— Well then, good evening.

— Good night."

He closes the door a moment, for form's sake.

— "Cretins! Let's see... It's one o'clock. She comes about two. Let's get dressed. Someone's knocking again: she'll be getting nearer."

Opening the door and holding his arms wide open:

"Come here, you!...

— Yes I...

— I've come for that little bill you owe...

— Ah, very good! I've been sort of waiting for you. Do sit down. — It's so high!

— Yes, but I'm trying to see a chair.

— Ah! I don't actually have any, I have so few visitors!

— What, you?

— Oh, moi, je me couche à l'antique. Voulez-vous faire comme moi, Monsieur?

— Non, Monsieur. Mais, je viens pour ma petite facture...

— Allons, bon! l'immortelle scène de Monsieur Dimanche!

— Allez, Don Juan!

— Avez-vous lu Murger, Monsieur?

— Non, Monsieur.

— Eh bien, je vous le prêterai.”

- Oh, me, I sleep as they did of yore. Would you like to do likewise, Sir?
- No, Sir. But I've come for you to settle up...
- Right, OK Mr Sunday's immortal scene that is.
- Pull the other one, Don Juan!
- Have you read Murger, Sir?
- No, Sir.
- Well, I'll lend you a copy.

## Ébauche de nouvelle

[ . . . . ] le monde envers sa femme. Le temps passe aussi. J'ai cent sous. Et je vois à travers les vitres des gens qui mangent [ça a l'air très bien, c'est engageant]. J'entre avec mon argent. On me met à la porte. C'était une famille de lampiste dînant dans son arrière-boutique.

[ . . . . . ] pourquoi ne serais-je pas lampiste [?] Je saurais dîner!

De ces gens qui n'ont jamais le sou, et qui, réunis quelque part font de l'argent et s'asseyant sur le velours crient: un bock! et commencent une partie de piquet au bruit assourdissant de 10 billards. Elle restait là, rêvant [à l'atelier] à ces bonnes soirées des mauvais jours dans l'atelier parmi les [jolis] bohèmes de Murger, sa bohème à elle, si fine [?] dans le malheur, sa philosophie dans leur abrutissement, si [particulière dans leur débraillé] légère dans leur cynisme

## Fragment en prose

que d'air, que [d'oubli] de vide là-dedans [et aussi que de souvenir...] toujours l'autre.

jetons-y des pierres qui ne feront pas même un rond.

hier une jolie fille m'a regardé d'un air drôle. Si je lui offre ma vie elle me demanderait pour quoi faire...

### Sketch for a short story

[ . . . . ] towards one's wife. Time passes too. I've very little money. And through the windows I see people eating. I go in, but am thrown out. Those there were a family of dogsbodies, I mean maintenance men, folk who keep the world turning, dining in the backroom of their shop.

[ . . . . . ] why shouldn't I be a dogsbody? I'd know how to dine!

Of those people who are always penniless, and who, when gathered together somewhere, make money and, sitting themselves down on velvet, shout for: a pint! and start a game of piquet in the deafening noise from 10 pool tables. She stayed there, dreaming of the good evenings of the bad old days in the studio among Murger-style bohemians, her very own bohemia, so elegant in misfortune, her philosophy in their mindlessness, so delicate in their cynicism.

### Prose fragment (transmogrified)

What a lot of air, what a void inside,  
and memories too, never the bride.  
Let's throw stones in to make a splash...  
but they won't. Yesterday a pretty lass  
gave me a funny look. If I offer  
her my life she'd ask me what for.





VERS DE JEUNESSE  
JUVENILIA

## Ode au chapeau...

*Ode au chapeau (système gibus) de M. Lamare, professeur  
d'histoire  
au lycée impérial de Saint-Brieuc (Musée et Bibliothèque),  
archiviste  
et antiquaire de la ville, agrégé de la faculté des..., officier  
d'académie  
inventeur de la chaîne de montre en or des gens qui n'ont pas  
les moyens  
de se procurer des chaînes en cuivre.*

## INVOCATION

Venez, Muses, venez neuf sœurs  
accorder ma cythare  
Je chante le taf à Lamare  
le plus cruel de tous mes professeurs  
Et puissent mes vers si faibles par eux-mêmes  
être grandis par le noble sujet  
Que j'embrasse en chantant ce couvre-chef suprême  
ce respectable objet

## AU CHAPEAU

Noble débris (j'allais dire sans tache)  
De la gloire de nos ayeux  
Toi qui jadis bravas la francisque et la hache  
Du sarrazin audacieux  
Qui suivant de Clovis la vagabonde course  
vis le Rhône effrayé remonter vers sa source  
Du bruit de ses exploits  
Viens et que ma lyre  
Oubliant la satyre  
Chante la splendeur d'autrefois  
Oui ton nom est inscrit au temple de mémoire  
ô féodal gibus  
Oui ton nom est inscrit à l'autel de la gloire  
parmi ceux des Romains en US.

## Ode to the hat

*Ode to the hat (opera-hat collapsible) of M. Lamare, history teacher at the Imperial Grammar School of Saint Brieuc (Museum and Library), archivist and antiquary of the town, with a master's degree from the Faculty of ....., academician, inventor of the gold watch-chain for those who cannot afford brass ones.*

## Invocation

Come, Muses nine, sisters in cahoots,  
 And tune my cithara (they're like lutes),  
 I sing the topknot,  
 Or rather the topper, of a certain Monsieur Lamare  
 By far  
 The cruellest teacher I have got.  
 May my verses, so feeble in themselves, become  
 more delectable  
 Enhanced by their noble subject matter.  
 And as I sing this distinguished headgear let me kiss  
 the respectable  
 Object, showpiece of any hatter.

## To the hat

Noble remnant (I nearly said none could match it)  
 Of our ancestors' capacity  
 For renown, you who, braving battleaxe and hatchet  
 Of Saracen audacity  
 In the wake of Clovis winding his way ahorse  
 Saw the Rhône startled back up to its source,  
 Of such exploits should you hear  
 Come and may my lyre  
 Dispensing with barbs of satire  
 Sing the splendour of yesteryear.  
 Yes your name's engraved in the temple of memory  
 O opera hat of feudal fame  
 Yes your name's engraved on the altar of glory  
 Along with every *-us* Roman name.

### Trois quatrains

I

sous les griffes d'un professeur  
ma muse reste emprisonnée  
mais elle paraîtra dans toute sa splendeur  
une fois sorti (*sic*) du Lycée.

II

Bonsoir ô purs plaisirs où mon âme ravie  
Aimait à s'élever vers Dieu  
Et vous ô bons dîners le soutien de ma vie  
Un dernier et suprême adieu.

III

À eux le latin de cuisine  
Qu'ils courent après pauvres fous  
À eux la version latine  
Mais la narration est à nous.

## Three quatrains

### I

in a certain teacher's claws my tender  
 muse remains imprisoned, a tool,  
 but she will appear in all her splendour  
 once I'm clear of this Grammar school.

### II

O purest pleasures, my soul's delight,  
 My way up to God, I wish you goodnight;  
 And you life-sustainers, scrumptious dinners, to you  
 A last supreme adieu.

### III

Let them, poor fools, keep the dog Latin prizes  
 They're chasing after, barking in chorus...  
 Let them keep translation exercises,  
 Narrative's the thing for us.



### Video 7: *Trois quatrains / Three quatrains*

Watch a reading of this poem at <https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.7> or scan the QR code.

## Véritable complainte d'Auguste Berthelon

MORT À L'ART FIN COURANT SUR L'AIR DE...  
DANS SA VILLA SAN CREPINA (ROUTE DE PARIS)

Ah! Chantons à perdre haleine,  
Chantons à cris et à cors  
Le dernier hymne du cor-  
Donnier brisant son alène!  
Pleurons avec des oignons  
Le néant de Berthelon.

Il marche dans la carrière,  
D'un glorieux vernis couvert,  
Dans le soulier découvert  
Et la botte à l'écuyère;  
Ayant tant fait dans les peaux,  
Il va perdre du repos!

Ah! voyez suinter les larmes  
Dans tous les œils-de-perdrix:  
On en sent bien tout le prix  
Car la botte d'un gendarme  
Reçoit comme un bénié  
Le pleur coulant de nos pieds.

Souvenez-vous de sa porte  
Où brillait la botte d'or.  
Aujourd'hui la botte dort;  
On la dirait presque morte:  
Aurait-elle, hélas! si tôt  
Un pied dedans le tombeau?

Berthelon avait une âme,  
Une âme d'artiste en fin  
Et pour la chaussure enfin  
Était bien aimé des dames,  
Et même pour les semell(es)  
Plus fort que feu Raphaël.

## Auguste Berthelon: his Veritable Complaint

DEATH TO POSTMODERN ART TO THE TUNE OF...  
IN HIS SAN CREPINA VILLA (ROUTE DE PARIS)

Ah! Let's sing ourselves hoarse  
With the *last* song of the shoe-  
Maker snapping his awl in two!  
At the top of our voices of course.  
Then, with onions, let's weep on  
For Mr Berthelon's *Erewhon*.

He goes down the quarry on foot  
In any shoes he could wish  
(Covered in glorious polish):  
Sandal, mule or riding boot;  
Being so active with skins  
He's losing the time for lie-ins.

Aha! seeing that tears are seeping  
From all the soft corns on earth:  
He'll be getting his money's worth  
To have real tears weeping  
From our feet and collected as if in a stoup  
By a gendarme's great big boot.

Remember how he would keep  
A golden boot that shone hello?  
These days the boot is asleep;  
You'd think it was dying to go:  
Could it have got, alas! so soon,  
One foot in the grave by noon?

Now Berthelon had a soul  
— The soul of an artist to boot —  
And when it came to his shoes  
The ladies were keen to extol  
His uppers and fall for his soles  
Even more than old Plimsoll's.



Mais ce n'est pas de lierre  
Qu'il faut lui ceindre le front:  
La palme et le laurier sont  
Des plantes trop éphémères;  
Seule la plante des pieds  
À son front serein sied.

Va verdir sur les pelouses  
De Villa San Crepina!  
Là peut-être te suivra  
Quelque fin pied d'Andalouse,  
Avec l'Andalouse au bout  
Et... et le pied mène à tout.

Plus n'iront filles mutines  
Au cœur pur de Berthelon  
Mesurer à l'étalon  
Les talons de leurs bottines  
Aux talons de Berthelon  
Qui trouve son état long!

Ah, quand la barque horridique  
D'un dernier coup de tranchet  
Tranchera son cordonnet,  
Dieu donnera sa pratique  
En disant dans sa tendress(e):  
"Berthelon, *vide pedes.*"

Que l'encens de nos chaussures  
S'exhale avec Saint-Crépin  
Emportant contre son sein  
Cette âme à juste mesure  
Qui n'aura jamais souillé,  
Jamais, l'âme d'un soulier.

On salera dans une urne  
Sa peau, le plus doux des cuirs.  
Les grâces de l'avenir  
S'en feront faire un cothurne  
Pour aller danser au son  
De l'hymne de Berthelon!

But ivy isn't the plant you  
 Will want to circle his brow,  
 And laurel and palm are now  
 Far too ephemeral too;  
 It's only by planting his feet  
 That things for him stay sweet.

Go and turn green on the lawns  
 Of Villa San Crepina!  
 There the delicate foot of Athena  
 Might be the end of one who fawns  
 On you when you're spinning a yarn.  
 But you may have her socks to darn.

Berthelon's pure heart is heartsick:  
 Rebellious girls just freeze,  
 Can't measure by the yardstick  
 The heels of their bootees  
 Against the heels of Berthelon  
 Inching away when *they're* so long!

Ah! when the horrid boat  
 Cuts off its mooring rope  
 With a final slicing move —  
 God will slide into the groove  
 Saying in his tenderness:  
 "Berthelon, *vide pedes*."

Let the incense from our shoes  
 Be exhaled when Saint Crispin  
 Bears off on his chest a wisp  
 Of esparto he isn't likely to lose;  
 And it will never have soiled  
 The soul of a shoe that's soled.

They'll salt his skin in an urn  
 — It's the softest of leathers.  
 The graces of future weathers  
 Will cause a buskin to turn  
 To go and dance to the sound  
 Of Berthelon's hymn-cum-round!

## Ode aux Déperrier

par M. de Malherbe

SUR LES ÉMANATIONS DE L'ÉCURIE DU REZ-DE-CHAUSSÉE  
ET LES TUYAUX DU SECOND, MAISON CORBIÈRE N<sup>o</sup> 38

*Et le flot montait toujours.*

Cette odeur, Déperrier, sera donc éternelle!

Le purin de nos cours

À côté du caca de tes commis ruisselle

Et ruisselle toujours!

L'ordure du second, au premier descendue

Par le canal d'en bas

Et du rez-de-chaussée à l'étage rendue,

Ne s'évapore pas.

La fiente a son odeur à nulle autre pareille:

Une odeur de fumier,

Si vous bouchez le nez, elle entre par l'oreille,

Ô messieurs du Premier!

Le pauvre en sa cabane où le chaume le couvre

La garde sous ses toits;

Et l'empereur se pince en ses closets du Louvre

Le nez avec ses doigts.

## Ode to the Déperriers

by Monsieur de Malherbe

ON THE EMANATIONS FROM THE STABLE ON THE  
GROUND FLOOR AND THE PIPES ON THE SECOND  
FLOOR OF THE CORBIÈRES' HOUSE N<sup>o</sup> 38

*And the waves kept rising.*

So this stench, Déperrier, will last to eternity!  
The manure that's gunning  
Through our yards, will, with your stable-hands'  
shite, be  
Eternally running!

The filth from the second floor, having burst  
Down the fall-pipe at a rate  
And shot back up from ground floor to first,  
Does not evaporate.

Such crap has a pong like nothing else, I fear:  
It's a dung-heap aroma —  
If you hold your nose, it enters through the ear,  
Putting first-floor folk in a coma!

The poor man's in his thatched-over doss: it  
Harbours a niff that lingers  
And the emperor in his Louvre water-closet  
Pinches his nose with his fingers.



**Video 8:** *Ode aux Déperrier par M. de Malherbe / Ode to the Déperriers by M. de Malherbe* Watch a reading of this poem at <https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.8> or scan the QR code.

Nous sommes en ce monde où porte chaque chose  
L'odeur de son destin.  
Vous le sentez, messieurs, la rose sent la rose,  
Le purin, le purin!

In this world, before everything decomposes,  
    Each thing has a stink to fit.  
You sniff them, gentlemen: the rose smells like roses,  
    And the shit like shit!

## À Madame Millet

(Air de *Maître Corbeau*.)

Pour répondre, madame, à vos gracieux vers,  
Que ne me pousse-t-il des plumes de Guilmers!  
Dans mon estime encor si vous faites un bond,  
Ma foi, vous risquez bien de crever le plafond!

Comme on mène à la foire un vieux bouc embêté  
Je mène mon Panneau vers l'immortalité;  
Et quand des plats débris d'un jaunissant greffier  
Je fabrique une lyre, il doit être très fier!

Mais j'ai hurlé mes vers dans tous les caboulots  
À la lune, au soleil, aux ondes, aux échos.  
Huîtres et rossignols, marmites, violon  
Répètent à l'envi: "Voici le greffillon!"

Et que me font, morbleu, les cris et les cancans,  
Les Panneaux, les Baquet, leurs femmes, leurs enfants?  
Il me faut un greffier par jour à seriner:  
Ça m'est indispensable autant que mon dîner.

Je n'ai peur de rien, moi!... pas peur du choléra,  
Pas peur de la trichine, et même... et cætera!  
Qu'on déchaîne sur moi le greffe et le barreau,  
Je ne me cacherai derrière aucun Panneau!

Sachez que dans la peau d'un fils, quoique souffrant,  
Loge un gremlin de cœur cloué solidement,  
Je n'ai pas peur de l'eau, je n'ai pas peur des cieux.  
... Ah! si! pourtant: j'ai peur de deux grands coquins d'yeux!

De deux grands coquins d'yeux!... vous n'en saurez pas plus.  
Agréez, s'il vous plaît, mes très humbles saluts,  
Et quand voudra ma muse entonner sa chanson,  
Le Panneau vibrera!... C'est lui le diapason!

## To Madame Millet

(to the tune of *Maître Corbeau*)

To reply, Ma'm, to your gracious lines, which rebound  
 On me, I must say straight away and with feeling:  
 If you go up in my esteem with another bound,  
 Heavens, you'll very likely go through the ceiling!

Like they drag a cross old billy-goat to the fair,  
 I hoick my Bill Board towards immortality where  
 I fashion a guitar from his remains — he's cowed  
 And flat, a yellowing clerk — He must be very proud!

But I have bellowed my verses in seedy bistros,  
 Howled at the moon, at the sun, at waves, at echoes.  
 Oysters and nightingales, cooking pots, a violin  
 Vie in repeating "Hey here comes the scribbler-in!"

And how do they affect me, the shouts and ad-libs  
 Of the Bill Boards, the Tub-thumpers, their wives, their kids?  
 I need a Recorder by day to graft 'em on my ribs:  
 They're as indispensable to me as dinner is.

I'm not afraid of anything, me!... not cholera,  
 Not diddling or fiddling, and *not* ... et cetera!  
 Let 'em unleash on me the Recorder recording,  
 You won't find me hiding behind any Hoarding!

Know that in the skin of someone's son, though it aches,  
 There lodges a knave of hearts who is firmly staked,  
 I don't fear water, I'm not afraid of the skies.  
 — Ah! but I am afraid of two big cheeky eyes!

Two cheeky big eyes!... I won't mention them again.  
 Please accept my humblest greetings and then  
 When my muse is wanting to break into song,  
 Bill Board will vibrate!... He's the diapason!



Sous une photographie  
de Corbière

Aïe aïe aïe, aïe aïe aïe  
Aïe aïe aïe qu'il est laid!  
V'là c'que c'est  
C'est bien fait  
fallait pas qu'y aille (*bis*)  
fair'son portrait

## On a photo of Corbière

Oh no no no, what a sight!  
He's so ugly, such a fright!  
    It's a swiz  
    But there it is  
Never should 've had it taken (*repeat*)  
That phiz of his



**Video 9:** *Sous une photographie de Corbière*  
/ *On a photo of Corbière* Watch a reading  
of this poem at [https://doi.org/10.22599/  
Corbiere.9](https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.9) or scan the QR code.

## Légende Incomprise de l'Apothicaire Danet

### I

Maître Danet dans sa louche officine  
Cherchait un soir,  
Non pas non pas sa longue carabine,  
Mais son Clysoir!...  
Il s'agissait pour notre vieux nain-jaune  
de dégraver  
Lanus soufflé d'une pleine matrone  
près de crever,  
Oui, près de crever.

### II

En la pointant droit au bas de l'échine  
Danet crut voir  
Un animal qui lui faisait la mine  
Dans son trou noir!...  
C'était un chat que la grosse cochonne  
prise de faim  
Avait lappé dans sa rage gloutonne,  
Comme un lapin  
Oui comme un lapin!

### III

Jamais encor, se dit l'apothicaire  
Courbant son front  
non je n'ai bu dans ma vaste carrière  
pareil affront!  
J'ai bien tiré sur plus d'une gouttière  
Des chats tout frais...  
Mais un vieux chat au fond d'un vieux derrière  
Jamais jamais  
Non jamais jamais!

### IV

Sur le devant de ma chère boutique  
Dont j'étais fou!  
Qu'on place au lieu du serpent symbolique  
ce vil matou!  
Ah! dit l'artiste en dévorant ses larmes  
J'ai trop vécu!  
Je mèn punis et... je brise mes armes  
sur ce vieux cu  
Oui sur ce vieux cu!

## Misunderstood legend of Danet the apothecary

## I

Maitre Danet — in his dispensary at dusk — it  
 's a shady-looking dump —  
 Was searching high and low, no not for his musket,  
 But his Enema-pump!...  
 For what our sallow-faced old dwarf had to do first  
 Was unclag  
 The overfull anus, about to burst,  
 Of an overblown hag,  
 Yes, an overblown hag.

## II

On aiming this pump below the base of her spine  
 Danet thought he saw  
 A dirty great beast giving him the evil eye  
 From inside her black maw!...  
 It was a cat that the enormous fat slut,  
 Racked by her habit  
 Of lapping things up, had lapped up, out to glut  
 Herself like a rabbit,  
 Yes like a rabbit!

## III

Never before, swore the apothecary, with a hollow  
 Voice — he was bearing the brunt —  
 No never in my whole career have I had to swallow  
 Such an affront!  
 I've pulled cats out of gutters times out of mind,  
 Blind drunk? or run over?...  
 But one old moggy from the depths of an ancient behind,  
 Never never never  
 No not ever!

## IV

As a sign for my shop whose praises I've sung  
 So often, and one that  
 Can replace the symbolic snake, let there be hung  
 This hideous tom-cat!  
 Ah! said the artist, as he choked back his tears,  
 I just can't cope — it's a farce!  
 I've lived too long to see you tug it by its ears  
 From this old arse,  
 Yes this old arse!

## La Complaincte Morlaisienne

*Ousque sont habillés [sic] en grande tenue les édilités et autres  
et mis sur l'air de Fualdès par le sieur Corbière Édouard et  
ousque sont apostillées et surlignées les plus spirituelles  
choses pour le plus grand esbastement des obstus d'esprit —*

### I

Ciel quel est ce commissaire  
Qu'on voit surgir sur nos bords,  
Parmi sêtrons et rats morts,  
*Du sein doux* de notre maire?!  
Pour ce qui est des pieds des mains,  
Il a la forme d'un humain.

### II

Mais son cœur est anathème!!  
... Pour tous ses administrés  
Il fait vœu de chasteté  
sortant du quarant'huitième,  
Et sans pitié il défend  
Aux femmes de fair' des enfants.

### III

Ce bipède vraiment inique,  
(Qui n'a pas d'larmes dans les yeux?)  
Envoie à des hommes vertueux  
des brevets de filles publiques!  
Ce qui est très inouï  
Oh oui, pour très inouï, oui!

### IV

Pour comble de désespérance  
savez-vous ce qu'il advint?  
Un' déconfitur' d'adjoints!  
Pauvre, pauvre, pauvre France!  
... Et pourtant le soleil par-  
courait le ciel sur son char.

## The Morlaisian Lament

*In which are dressed in fine array the aediles and their ilk  
and set to the tune of Fualdès by sire Corbière Édouard and  
in which are added apostillations and addendata, the most  
witty matters for the greatest diversion of the obtuse in spirit —*

### I

Heavens who's this prefect  
Of police just emerging from our river  
Among dead rats and slivers  
Of the soft soap of our mayor-elect?!  
It looks from his feet and hands  
That he's human, and like a human stands.

### II

But his heart is anathema!!  
... For the sake of the community  
He takes a vow of chastity  
On reaching his 49<sup>th</sup> summer,  
And showing no pity, he forbids  
All women to have kids.

### III

This diabolical biped  
(With never a tear in his eyes?)  
Sends to men of virtue prize  
Certificates for whoring in bed!  
That's unheard-of, a cock-up,  
A right mock of living it up!

### IV

To add to the depths of despair  
D' you know what came about?  
A bunch of deputy mayors in rout!  
That's poor, poor France down there!  
... And yet his Lord the Sun scut-  
tled through the sky in his chariot.

V

Pharaon ce commissaire  
de police des hébreux  
Les fricassait comm' des œufs  
ce qui était un'grande misère  
Mais près d'çui çï Pharaon  
n'était qu'un petit polisson.

VI

Hélas il avait prestance  
D'un Thug ou même de deux,  
Ce qui partout faisait que  
il portait l'horrifiscence,  
tel que l'vieillard le plus vieil  
ne vit rien jamais d'pareil.

VII

Il était très délétère,  
Mais Dieu qu'est fort comme il faut  
voulut mettre fin à nos maux  
sans mettre fin au commissaire;  
Enfant j'vas vous dire c'qu'il fit  
dedans le couplet qui suit —

VIII

Vite il expectore un ange  
sous l'espèce d'un sous-préfet  
Pour redresser tant d'forfaits,  
avec des galons aux manches  
Et même je crois qu'il en  
avait sur l'tempérament

IX

très pareil aux alouettes  
qu'on attire par le miroir  
Le peuple est sorti pour voir  
Le sous-préfet en lunettes.  
C'qui fait qu'on pleurra (*sic*) longtemps  
dans tout l'arrondissement.

## V

This Pharaoh boss-at-any-price,  
 Chief Chef of the Hebrews,  
 Fricasséed them like egg stews  
 — Which wasn't very nice...  
 Beside him the real Pharaoh bod  
 Was nothing more than little sod.

## VI

Alas he had th' imposing presence  
 Of a Thug or even a couple  
 Which means that he caused trouble  
 Everywhere, and horrifiscence,  
 So much so that the oldest old tyke  
 Had never seen anything like.

## VII

With him perniciousness was rife  
 But God who's strong as everyone knows  
 Wanted to put an end to our woes  
 Without ending the prefect's life;  
 Child I'll tell what he went on to do  
 In the ensuing verse or two —

## VIII

Quickly he spits out an angel  
 Dressed as a sub-prefect who might  
 Put so many ills to rights,  
 He'd braid on his sleeves as well;  
 Even had braid I believe  
 On his moods as well as his sleeve,

## IX

Very like skylarks, masses  
 Of which can be mirror-attracted.  
 Locals came out to see how he acted  
 When he (sub-prefect) put on his glasses.  
 Which is why they wept for ages  
 In all local parochial places.



X

Mais voilà ce peuple impie  
Qui, ne le comprenant pas,  
le prend, oui le prend hélas  
Pour l'caissier d' la gendarmerie,  
N'avait-il donc pas au front  
une auréole oui-t-ou non

XI

La canaill' piaille et criaille  
En braillant des braillements.  
Par derrière et par devant,  
on dirait que le cri aille  
en tel rut que sire écho  
En prit mal dans les boyaux:

XII

"Accourez à ma revanche  
"avec vos bottes et vos pieds  
"vous portant jaunes baudriers  
"vous portant sardines blanches  
"Et coupez-leur le sifflet  
"avec votre grand sabre et — ...

XIII

... cætera!" v'là l' sang qui coule-  
ra tout à l'heur' dans l' bassin  
car l'on va mettre *bas cinq*  
des têtes de cette foule!  
les ventres vont être décousis  
avec tout ce qui s'en suit.

XIV

Le commissaire, fils de chienne  
Et crocodile ennuyeux  
comme *feu* Néron mit le *feu*  
à un' lanterne vénitienne  
qu'il avait, de par ma foy,  
prise à crédit chez Leroy.

## X

But these impious people, see,  
 Not grasping what he's about,  
 Take him, yes they make him out  
 To be cashier of the *gendarmerie*,  
 Hadn't he over his head a halo,  
 Well, hadn't he, yes or no?

## XI

The squawking and bawling rabble  
 Do nothing but squeal and screech  
 From every quarter and each to each  
 So loud that their hyper-babble  
 Is on heat and Sir Echo's guts  
 Feel churned up so much that it hurts:

## XII

"Take a run at all these types  
 To avenge me with boots and kicks,  
 Wearing your yellow baldrick,  
 Wearing your sergeant's stripes  
 And cut them off mid-word  
 With your super whopping sword..."

## XIII

Etcetera!" And blood in due  
 Time will flow into the wet-dock  
 For five of them will be hacked off —  
 Five of the heads of this crew!  
 Their bellies will then be slit  
 And whatever follows from it.

## XIV

Our detective, son of a bitch  
 And his boring old crocodile sire,  
 Like once fiery Nero, set fire  
 To a Venetian lantern which  
 He had bought, well, no, I swear...  
 He got it on tick at Leclerc.

XV

Mais v'là Leroy qu'est un ange  
(g'na des anges qui sont pompiers)  
d'un *nez fort* embrasse les pieds  
des gens d'armes en phalanges  
On ne dégainera jamais  
Devant l'peuple de Morlaix!!

XVI

Cela est si mirifique  
Pour les générations  
Futures, qu'il est question  
de mettre Leroy en musique;  
musique de *violon...*  
gens subtils me comprendront.

XVII

V'là l'tribunal dans la salle,  
Un président d'*enfer naït*  
mais pour ce qui est du nez  
vraiment Collinet l'a sâle [*sic*]  
l'yant fourré trop avant  
Dans le cas des délinquants! —

XVIII

Bien vite instruisent l'affaire  
Collinet et D'amphernet  
Car ils avaient tous des *nez*  
pour espionner nos derrières  
et des nez qu'ils déguénaient [*sic*]  
contre le peuple de Morlaix.

XIX

L'procureur lève sur la troupe  
Une noble tête à cheveux blancs  
que les coupables doivent souvent  
voir se dresser dans leur soupe...!  
Un' belle tête de vieillard  
qu'est très éloquente, car...

## XV

But Leclerc who's really angelic  
 (Some angels extinguish fires, some *eat*)  
 With an effort kisses the feet  
 Of phalanxes of military dicks.  
 Unsheathing would be a joke  
 When faced with Morlaix folk!!

## XVI

It's absolutely terrific  
 For future generations  
 That there are deliberations  
 On setting Leclerc to music;  
 Sing Sing for violin, with a twist...  
 Subtle folk will get my gist.

## XVII

When the case comes up in court  
 A presiding president is born  
 But when it comes to being sworn,  
 Peabody who's the swearing sort  
 Has stuck his nose up to his chin  
 In the delinquents' swearing-in! —

## XVIII

Peabody and de Netherparts,  
 Quick at adopting poses,  
 Have such practised noses  
 For sniffing out old farts  
 And noses that they've thumbed to say  
 Nuts to the folk of old Morlaix.

## XIX

The prosecutor raises his pate  
 Above the culprits there in a troupe  
 — A white-haired head they must hate  
 To see now that they're in the soup...!  
 A handsome old man then  
 Who's eloquence itself, when...

XX

Il les condamne à la peine  
Pour cause de châtimeut  
et sans plus de sacrement  
En prison on les rengaine!  
On ne dégainera jamais  
Contre le peuple de Morlaix.

## XX

He sentences them — fate sealed,  
Punishment assigned and  
Last rites being out of hand  
'Tis to prison they are wheeled!  
No one must ever put a spoke  
In the wheels of good Morlaix folk.

## L'hymne nuptial

*(Air: Partant pour la Syrie.)*

Fixée en Algérie  
La smala des Guéguen  
Pensait coucher Marie  
En mâle marocain.  
Tous étaient dans l'attente  
D'un turco vert-de-gris.  
La voici sous la tente  
D'un blanc... le blanc Legris.

Il faut un dromadaire  
Dans ce désert du cœur  
Et ce tendre homme adhère  
Ce jour à ce bonheur.  
Il vit les sauterelles  
Dans son lit sans effroi  
Et cependant près d'elle  
Il se sent plein d'émoi.

Il lui dit: "De mon âme  
Vous êtes l'oasis,  
À vos genoux, ma flamme..."  
— "Oh! monsieur, oh! assis."  
Assis, il dit: "Gazelle,  
Je demande ta main!"  
Soupirant au gaz elle  
Lui répond: "Oh! demain!"

— "J'habite l'Algérie  
Et c'est Oran où tend  
Ici, dans ma partie  
L'espoir d'avancement."  
À ces mots chacun pousse  
Au sein du Sirocco  
Une larme si douce  
Que c'est plus sirop qu'eau.

## Nuptial hymn

(to the tune of *Off to Syria by sea*)

In an Algerian marquee  
 The tribe known as Guéguen  
 Thought they'd bed Marie  
 As a Moroccan Jaeger.  
 All, on tenterhooks, went  
 The turco verdigris way  
 But she slipped into the tent  
 Of a white... no, a livid grey.

A dromedary, being called for  
 In this desert of the heart,  
 A soft-hearted hump-back's all for  
 Taking the amorous part.  
 He spots bed-bugs and cicadas  
 But they do not irk him;  
 Not one to cause her ardours,  
 He fears that she might shirk him.

He said to her: "I adore you,  
 You're the oasis of my soul.  
 On my knees I implore you,  
 Sweetheart..." "Oh! you are too bold,  
 Sir! please sit." He sat. Then said:  
 "If you wed anyone, my baby  
 Belling, my gazelle, if you wed,  
 Let it be me..." "Tomorrow, maybe."

"As I am from Algeria,  
 Oran is where I'll look  
 For advancement, my ulterior  
 Aim is... to suit my book."  
 At which words the seers  
 Are swimming like a guppy  
 In a gentle flood of tears  
 With salt water in but syrupy.





Alternative version of  
Nuptial hymn

(to the tune of *Off to Syria by sea*)

In an Algerian marquee  
A tribe known as Guéguen  
Thought they'd bed Marie  
As a Moroccan pagan.  
Everyone on tenterhooks,  
With a no-one's-to-blame air,  
Awaited khaki pasty cooks  
And the livid grey mayor.

A dromedary being needed  
In this desert of the heart,  
One hump-back man is weeded  
Out for the amorous part.  
He spotted bed-bugs and hoppers  
But they didn't irk him;  
Not one of your heart-stoppers  
— Yet she didn't shirk him.

He says to her: "I've come to claim  
The oasis of my soul."  
"You'd whore us!" "My blue flame,  
O Isis!" "O mice hole  
— From which you'd gnaw the veil!"  
He blows a kiss: "My baby  
Belling, my gazelle, if you fail  
To marry me..." "Tomorrow, maybe."

"As I am from Algeria,  
Oran is where I'll look  
For a career that is cheerier  
Than the ones I forsook."  
"Who's crying now? Have no fears!  
You're swimming like a guppy  
In a gentle flood of tears  
Less watery than syrupy."

## Les Pannoïdes

OU LES TROIS MYSTÈRES  
DU GREFFIER PANNEAU  
SAVOIR: 1° LES FIANÇAILLES  
2° LA CONCEPTION — 3° L ENFANTEMMENT

### 1<sup>er</sup> MYSTÈRE

*Arrivée à Château-Gonthier [sic]  
chez le mélophage et beau-père Parisot*

Un beau jour sur Château-Gonthier [*sic*]  
Se posait un jeune greffier.  
Il était frais, svelte et volage  
Comme l'est un greffier à l'âge  
De vingt à cinquante-cinq ans,  
Et par un matin de printemps.

Bien longtems [*sic*] des maux d'estomac  
Le berçaient dans le célibat.  
Aujourd'hui qu'il a le corps libre,  
L'amour a fait vibrer sa fibre  
dans l'appareil de digestion...  
Enfin c'est un vrai papillon.

Que peut faire à Château-Gonthier [*sic*]  
ce pa pa papillon-greffier?  
Parbleu! s'annexer Adrienne,  
(Grand bien lui advienne)  
Sous la baguette de l'amour  
Son cœur bat comme un doux tambour.

Il sonne, il entre... il est entré!  
En plein dans l'asile adoré...  
Il voit son amante accroupie  
virant l'orgue de Barbarie  
Et le vieux papa Parisot  
Clapottant [*sic*] sur son bon piano.

## Pannic Days

OR THE THREE MYSTERIES OF  
 THE CLERK OF COURT NAMED PANNEAU  
 THAT IS 1° THE ENGAGEMENT  
 2° THE CONCEPTION 3° THE CHILDBIRTH

1<sup>st</sup> MYSTERY

## THE ENGAGEMENT

*Arrival at Chateau-Gonthier  
 residence of the melophile melomaniac  
 and father-in-law Parisot alias Parisilly.*

One fine day a young clerk of court  
 Landed at Chateau-Gonthier. By report  
 Fresh-faced, fickle and svelt  
 As court clerks are — they're dealt  
 Such traits aged twenty to fifty-five  
 In Spring when it's good to be alive.

For a very long time his stomach aches  
 Kept him out of the marital stakes.  
 Now that his body can ignore his liver  
 Love has made his very fibre quiver  
 Down his digestive apparatus...  
 Granting it special butterfly status.

What can this bub-bub-butterfly clerk  
 Do in Chateau-Gonthier's park?  
 Dammit! annex Adrienne to himself,  
 (May such an act bring him great wealth)  
 Conducted by love's baton tum tum  
 His heart beats like a muffled drum.

He rings, he enters... now he's inside!  
 Fully ensconced where he loves to hide...  
 He sees his sweetheart crouching, sturdy  
 At winding up the hurdy gurdy  
 And dear old daddy Parisot  
 Tinkling away on his pi-an-o.

Les voilà tous trois dans les bras  
De l'un de l'autre... Et cætera...  
"Panneau, qu'une union si chère  
"Te rende un jour Père,  
"Adrienne mère,  
"Parisot grand-père,  
"Dessus la tête d'un enfant  
"Paraphé bien légalement."

2<sup>e</sup> MYSTÈRE

LA CONCEPTION

AY PANNEAU

*imitado de l'Español Ay Chiquitá*

L'on dit, Panneau, que ta femme  
(Ici, bien mon compliment)  
Va bientôt greffer ta flamme  
Sur la tête d'un enfant!...  
En passant devant ta porte,  
Me promenant à l'œil nu,  
J'ai vu (le Diable m'emporte!)  
Quelque chose de... cornu!

Mais qui voudrait, si l'infidèle  
Voulait te percher le front,  
Collaborer avec elle,  
Avec elle! ah quelle [*sic*] affront!  
Qui pourrait avec la rebelle  
Ay Panneau ô ô ô ô ô  
Qui voudrait?... Ah, greffier modèle  
Tu peux porter le front haut.

Ces cornes c'est une biche  
Qui pour la maternité  
A partagé... mais je m'en fiche.  
Quant à la paternité,  
Lorsque l'épouse est volage,  
Il faut avoir sous la main,  
pour les cornes du ménage,  
une chèvre, c'est tres sain.

There all the three of them are  
 In each other's arms... Et cætera...  
 "Panneau, from such a union may  
 You become a father one day,  
 Adrienne a mother-to-be,  
 And Parisot a granddad and see  
 Everything sworn on the head of a child,  
 Everything legally signed and filed."

2<sup>nd</sup> mystery

THE CONCEPTION

Ay Panneau

imitado de l'Español Ay Chiquitâ

They say, Panneau, that your wife  
 (Here I'm being complimentary)  
 Will shortly be grafting your love-life  
 Onto the head of a baby!...  
 As I was passing your entry  
 And keeping my eyes skinned  
 I happened to sniff (the Devil take me)  
 Something... horny in the wind!

But who'd like it if the deceiver  
 Wanted you to try out a stunt,  
 That is: collaborate with her,  
 With *her!* ah what an affront!  
 Who could with such a spark  
 Aye Panneau oh with an oh to spare  
 Who'd want it?... Ah, model clerk,  
 You can carry your head in the air.

These horns belong to a hind  
 Who for maternity to occur  
 Shared her with ... Well never mind.  
 As for paternity (from *päter*)  
 When the spouse is flighty and supple  
 It's best to have, so there's no fuss,  
 As the horns for such a couple  
 A goat's, 'tis healthier thus.

Mais, bon-Jésus! si l'infidèle  
 Rêvait d'ombrager ton front  
 Qui voudrait rêver avec Elle?  
 Pas moi! non non quel affront!  
 Qui voudrait hélas avec celle  
 Ay Panneau ô ô ô ô ô.  
 Tu n'as pas besoin d'ombrelle  
 Tu peux tenir ton chapeau.

Mais, prends garde dans l'église  
 En portant le nourrisson  
 De l'appeler Artémise  
 (Surtout si c'est un garçon)  
 Pour le sexe des familles  
 Il faut voir les médecins  
 Sans quoi l'on verrait des filles  
 gendarmes et capucins!

Quand j'ai fait cette plainte  
 Ma Muse avait mal aux reins.  
 Elle aussi se trouvait enceinte  
 il me fallut un parrain.  
 Et c'est toi, greffier lyrique,  
 Ay Panneau ô ô ô ô ô  
 Toi que j'ai mis en musique  
 Pour violon et Pariseau!

3<sup>e</sup> ET DERNIER MYSTÈRE  
 L'ENFANTEMENT DU GREFFIER  
 (pot-pourri)

1<sup>o</sup> *Air du Noël d'Adam*

Minuit! greffier, c'est l'heure solennelle,  
 Ouvrez-moi l'œil, ô Muses d'alentour!  
 Panneau, debout! allume la chandelle,  
 À ton enfant il faut donner le jour.  
 Vois Adrienne en travail, en souffrance.  
 Je crois qu'il faut lui chauffer un bouillon —  
 — Pointu! Voici l'heure de délivrance!  
 Noël, Noël, voici le greffillon!  
 Noël, voici le greffillon!

But, Jesus! if the deceiver  
 Dreamt that you should bear the brunt,  
 Who'd want to dream with Her?  
 Not me! no no, what an affront!  
 Who'd want alas to come to her aid  
 Aye Panneau oh but what's it matter?  
 You won't be needing a sunshade  
 You can rely on the hatter.

Do make sure, please oh please,  
 When you bring your pride and joy  
 To church to call it Artemise  
 (Especially if it's a boy).  
 Regarding sex in family trees  
 You'll need to see the doctors  
 Or you might get women priests  
 Or gendarmes and holy proctors!

When I'd written this complaint  
 My Muse had aches in her back.  
 She found she too was pregnant  
 A godfather was what I lacked.  
 And it's you, clerk, as you're lyrical,  
 Aye Panneau oh I'll be pally!  
 I've written you in a musical  
 For violin and Tin Pan Alley!

3<sup>rd</sup> and last mystery

THE CLERK OF COURT'S BIRTH (medley)

1° to the tune of *Adam's Carol*

Midnight! clerk, it's the solemn hour,  
 Open your eyes, O Muses of hereabout!  
 Get up, Panneau, light the candle now,  
 It's time to give birth, to let your baby out.  
 See Adrienne in travail, she's started to suffer,  
 I think we should warm up some broth for her —  
 — It's time for deliverance from the dark!  
 Noël, Noël, here comes the baby clerk!  
     Noël, here comes the baby clerk!



2° Air sérénade de Gounod

Parisot calme et pure  
Ronflant, rêvant basson...  
Il entend un murmure  
Et passe un caleçon,

Son contour se révèle  
Sans apprêt, sans atour.  
Portez de la flanelle (bis  
La nuit comme le jour )

3° Air de Gastibelza

Panneau lui dit en degainant [*sic*] sa bourse  
D'un de ses flancs:  
"Va me louer une bonne à la course,  
"Voici deux francs!  
"Chez le docteur pousse-la ventre à terre,  
"Docteur Bozec  
"Et lui, qu'il vogue en chemise légère:  
"Le baromètre est à Beau-sec!  
"Oui, à Beau-sec!"

4° Air de la Retraite

Bozec se lève, il vole, mais sans aile,  
Sous son aisselle,  
Oui, mais il prend  
Sous l' bras un instrument,  
Un instrument,  
Oh mais un instrument  
Beaucoup plus grand  
q'pour extirper un'dent.

5° Air de St Roch

Il vole donc, pas au vol, mais en nage  
Et, sur le sein des Panneaux aux abois...  
... (ma Muse ici s'est voilé le visage,  
De ses deux mains,... pour voir entre ses doigts)  
"Voyons, cocotte,  
"Qu'est-c'qu'on tripotte [*sic*]  
"Mais un Panneau  
"Nous bouche le tableau."

2° to the tune of Gounod's *Serenade*

Parisot, not in a jumble,  
 Snoring, dreams bassoon...  
 Hears his tummy rumble  
 Slips on his pantaloon!

His outline is plain to see —  
 No finery, no fine array.  
 Wear your flannel nightie (*repeat*  
 Both night and day! )

3° to the tune of *Gastibelza*

Panneau said to him on unsheathing his purse  
 From one of his shanks:  
 "Go and hire me a maid at the shops and disburse  
 These two new francs!  
 Push her then to the doctor's, belly to the ground...  
 As for Doctor Bozec,  
 Let him sail off in the light shirt he's found:  
 The barometer reads Fine and dry!  
 Which, in French, is Beau-sec!"

4° to the tune of *The Retreat*

Bozec stands, flies, without any wings  
 In his armpits,  
 Yes, but he fits  
 Under his arm an instrument,  
 An instrument,  
 Oh it's some instrument,  
 A much bigger factor  
 Than a tooth-root extractor.

5° to the tune of *St Roch*

He's running, in a sweat, not the tide race  
 And, on the Panneaux' bosom lingers...  
 ... (here my Muse has veiled her face  
 With both hands,... to peep between her fingers)  
 "Now then, cottonsocks,  
 What are they pawing,  
 But a Panneau  
 Has blocked out the drawing."

6° *Air du jeune greffier*

Crac le v'là! qui? parbleu, l'enfant!  
Tout au bout du grand instrument  
Grand Dieu, si c'est là ton image  
T'as un' drôl' de ball' pour ton âge,  
Pardonne aux Panneau cet affront,  
Ils ne savent plus ce qu'ils font!

7° *et dernier*

*Air des Montagnes dans la Dame blanche*

Sonnez, sonnez, sonnez, forceps et serinette!  
Tous les Panneau et Pariseau sont réunis  
Un gréfillon c'est une fête  
Pour le greffier qui l'a commis!

Sonnez, sonnez, cordons de sonnette  
Tout ahuri, Bozec s'enfuit,  
Un gréfillon ce n'est pas fête  
Pour un docteur surtout la nuit.

Sonnez [...] Etc.

6° to *The young clerk of court's* tune

Hell! there he is! who? the nipper!  
 Right on the big instrument's tip.  
 Cripes, if that's meant to be you he's skewing it,  
 Giving you that funny old face as a stunt.  
 Forgive the Panneaux kids this affront,  
 They're not aware that they're doing it!

7° and last

Mountain tune from *The White Lady*

Ring, ring, ring, forceps and canary voice!  
 All Panneaux and Parisots have convened.  
     A baby clerk's a call to rejoice  
     For the clerk who did the deed, the fiend!

Ring, ring, with strings of the bell-pull — quite  
 Flabbergasted, Bozec takes flight,  
 A baby clerk is not a delight  
 For a doctor especially at night.

Ring [...] Etc.



**Earlier versions of poems in**  
*Les Amours jaunes*  
**with significant variants**

## Sonnet

Je vais faire un sonnet; des vers en uniforme  
Emboitant bien le pas, par quatre, en peloton.  
Sur du papier réglé, pour conserver la forme  
Je sais ranger les vers et les soldats de plomb.

Je vais faire un sonnet; jadis, sans que je dorme,  
J'ai mis des dominos en file, tout au long.  
J'ai suivi mainte allée épinglée où chaque orme  
Rêvait être de zinc et posait en jalon.

Je vais faire un sonnet; et toi, viens à mon aide,  
Que ton compas m'inspire, ô muse d'Archimède,  
Car l'âme d'un sonnet c'est une addition

1, 2, 3, 4, et puis 4 : 8 — je procède  
Ensuite 3 par 3 — tenons Pégase raide,  
Ô lyre! ô délire! oh! assez! attention.

## Sonnet

I'm going to write a sonnet, with regular feet,  
 Falling into perfect step, by fours, in a squad.  
 On four-squared paper so that they can keep  
 In file, I stand them up like soldiers of lead.

I'm going to write a sonnet; I'd stay awake  
 When younger, putting dominoes in a line.  
 Then many a hairpin route was the one to take  
 And all elms dreamed they were zinc-plated road-sign.

I'm going to write a sonnet; to answer this need,  
 May your compass inspire me, Archimedes' Muse,  
 For the soul of a sonnet is in the addition —

1, 2, 3, 4, then 4 makes 8 — and I'll proceed  
 By adding 3 and 3! — Don't let Pegasus loose.  
 O lyre! O delirium! oh ... Stop! — Attention!



### A mon chien Pope

Toi: ne pas suivre en domestique,  
Ni lécher en fille publique,  
N'être pas traité comme un chien,  
Tu le veux! — Je te comprends bien —  
*Chien et tu fais bien*

Chien, il ne faut pas connaître  
Ta jatte-à-soupe ni ton maître.  
Ne marche jamais sur les mains  
Chien, c'est bon pour les humains!

Pour l'amour, qu'à cela ne tienne,  
Aime plusieurs, pas *une* chienne  
Mords tant que ça t'amusera,  
Car demain peut-être sera  
Une balle en plein dans *La Bête*.  
Jusque-là, m'entends-tu, fais tête  
Aux fouets qu'on te montrera. —

Garde vierge ton chic sauvage:  
Hurler nager. —  
Et, si l'on te fait enrager,  
Enrage!

## To my dog Pope

Not to come to heel like a helot,  
 Not to lick a bone like a harlot!  
 Not to be treated like a dog,  
 That's your wish! — And I'd go along

With that. And don't get to know  
 Either your master or your soup bowl.  
 Never try walking on your hands,  
 Dog, that's only fit for humans!

As for love, that needn't cause a hitch,  
 Love several, but definitely no bitch.  
 Bite as often as you'd love to  
 For tomorrow maybe you're due  
 A bullet in your very *Dogdom*.  
 Till then, do you hear me, come  
 At the whips that'll be cracked at you. —

Let your dog-decorum do its work:  
     Howl then bite your lip. —  
 But if you're goaded to let rip,  
     Go berserk!

## La scie d'un sourd

Le médecin lui dit: “Très bien restons-en là,  
Le traitement est fait: vous êtes sourd — voilà  
Comme quoi vous avez cet organe de perdu.”  
Et Lui comprit trop bien; n'ayant rien entendu.

“C'est très drôle, mon Dieu, vous daignez donc me rendre  
Le cerveau comme un bon cercueil,  
Par raccroc, à credit, je vais pouvoir entendre  
Comme je fais le reste: — à l'œil —

“Mais gare à l'œil. Alors! jaloux, gardant la place  
De l'oreille au clou... Non, à quoi sert de braver,  
Moi qui sifflais si haut le ridicule en face?  
En face et bassement, il pourra me baver.

“Je suis un mannequin à fil banal. — Demain  
Dans la rue un ami peut me prendre la main,  
En me disant: “Vieux pot!... vieille huître!” En radouci,  
Et je lui répondrai: “Pas mal et vous, merci!”

“C'est un bonnet de laine enfoncé sur mon âme  
Et (coup de pied de l'âne, hue!) une bonne femme  
Sous mon nez peut me plaindre à pleins cris, à pleins cors,  
Sans que je puisse au moins lui marcher sur ses cors.

“Bête comme une vierge et fier comme un lépreux,  
Quand je suis dans le monde, on dit: “Est-ce un gâteux,  
Est-ce un anthropophobe, un poète à rebours?”  
Et en haussant l'épaulé: “Ah! ça non, c'est un sourd.”

“Ridicule tourment d'un Tantale acoustique!  
Il voit voler des mots que je voudrais manger  
Comme un crève-de-faim reluque la boutique  
D'un restaurant *chicard*, au lieu d'un boulanger.

“Oh que ne puis-je encore entendre, sur du plâtre  
Une coquille d'huître; un rasoir, un couteau  
Grinçant dans un bouchon ou limant de l'albâtre,  
Un os vivant qu'on scie, un discours, un piano!

## A deaf man's saw

The doctor says to him: "We've done what we can, near  
Enough. The treatment's over: you're deaf. What's occurred  
Is proof incontrovertible you've lost your ear."  
He grasped that all too well, not having caught a word.

"Good Lord, it's strange how you deign to make my head it  
Feels like a coffin, brainsick.  
By some fluke, I'll be hearing everything on credit  
Like I do everything else: — on tick —

"I'll do things by sight — But watch for the jealous eye  
Clapped where the ear should be! ... No, why the do-or-die,  
I who hissed so loud in the face of ridicule?  
It may spit in my face, make me look a soft fool.

"I'm a dumb dummy, a puppet on a string, a *Guy!*  
— Tomorrow, in the street, a friend may shake my hand  
And say: You old crock! ..., you clot!" To mollify  
I shall answer — Not bad thanks, and you? That's grand! —

"There's a grey balaclava over my head, the ass!  
And (unkindest kick of all, Gee up!) a canny lass,  
Under my very nose may pity me, in a pretty pass,  
With a hue and a cry, with a blast of her horn,  
And not even a chance to tread on her corns!

"Silly as a virgin and proud as a leper,  
When I'm in society, they say: "Is he a crone,  
An anthropophobe, a prickly poet?" And they pepper  
Their words with shrugs: "Oh no, he's deaf as a stone."

"The anguish an acoustic Tantalus undergoes!  
He sees words fly away that I'd love to snap up  
Like a down-and-out covets canapés in windows  
Of posh restaurants more than a baker's bap.

"If only I could hear someone scraping plaster  
With an oyster shell; a cut-throat razor, a knife blade  
Squinging in a cork or filing alabaster;  
Living bone sawn through! a piano! a tirade!

“Mon revolver, encor, me pourrait à l'oreille  
Cracher un demi-mot, comme un vague écho lourd  
Dans la suite à demain. Mais demain ne s'éveille  
Jamais... jamais, demain est encor bien plus sourd.

“Va donc, balancier soûl affolé dans ma tête,  
Bats, en pantenne, à faux, ce vieux tam-tam fêlé  
Pour qui la voix de femme est comme une sonnette  
Ou, si le timbre est doux, un moucheron ailé.

“Je lâche ma pensée en mots qu'en l'air je jette  
De chic et sans savoir si je parle en *Indou*  
Ou peut-être en *Canard* comme la clarinette  
D'un aveugle trop bu qui se trompe de trou.”

“And then there’s the half a word my revolver  
Could spit in my ear, like a vague and heavy  
Echo postponed till tomorrow. But tomorrow never  
Wakes ... not ever, tomorrow is even deafer.

“Drunk and demented pendulum in my head, swing,  
Set this tom-tom throbbing, this cracked pot, this hon-  
ky-tonk  
That makes the voice of a woman sound like a honk  
Or, if the buzz is soft, a midge on the wing.

“I let my thoughts fly free in words which I bowl  
Off the cuff, not knowing whether they’re in Greek  
Or perhaps, like a blind man on clarinet, in Squeak  
When, being high as a kite, he mistakes the hole.”

## Vieux frère et sœur jumeaux

Ils étaient tous deux — seuls — oubliés là par l'âge...  
Ils cheminaient toujours, tous les deux, à longs pas,  
Longs et poilus tous deux, l'air piteux et sauvage,  
Et deux pauvres regards qui ne regardaient pas.

Ils avaient tous les deux servi dans les gendarmes:  
La sœur à la marmite et l'Autre sous les armes,  
Sa sœur le débottait, astiquait les boutons.  
Elle avait la moustache et l'Autre les chevrons.

Un dimanche de mai que tout avait une âme,  
Qu'un Dieu bon respirait dans le paradis bleu,  
Je flânaï dans les bois — seul — seul avec la femme  
Que j'aimais — pauvre diable — et qui s'en doutait peu.

De sa manche le vieux tirant une musette,  
Soufflait comme un sourd et sa sœur dans un sillon,  
Grelottant au soleil, écoutait un grillon  
Et remerciait Dieu de son beau jour de fête.

Pauvre virginité! — ô retour dans l'enfance,  
Tenant chaud l'un à l'autre ils attendaient le jour,  
Ensemble pour la Mort, comme pour la naissance...  
Dites-moi, vieux jumeaux, cela vaut bien l'amour?

Mais celle que j'avais à mon bras voulut rire,  
Et moi, pour rire aussi de mon émotion,  
J'eus le cœur d'appeler les vieux jumeaux: — Tityre!

-----

Et j'ai fait ces vieux vers en expiation!

## Old brother and sister: twins

They were both there — alone — forgotten by the years ...  
 And both of them still cut, out walking as a pair,  
 Wild and sorry figures; both tall and hairy, they feared  
 To look up, were crestfallen, with unseeing stare.

Both of them had served in the mounted gendarmes:  
 The sister in the mess, the brother under arms;  
 His sister took his boots off and polished his buttons.  
 She had a moustache and he military chevrons.

One Sunday in May when all creatures had a Soul  
 (The breath of a good God in the blue of the air),  
 I was strolling through the woods, alone — but also  
 With the woman I loved — poor devil, she wasn't aware.

From his sleeve the old man pulled a musette  
 And blew it like a deaf man, while in a dip his sister,  
 Shivering in the sunlight, listened to a cricket  
 And gave thanks to God for her fine birthday weather.

Poor virginity! — In their second infancy,  
 Keeping each other warm, they awaited the day  
 Of their death together as they had been for birth...  
 Tell me, old twins, is that equivalent to love on earth?

But the woman on my arm wanted to titter as  
 I, wanting to laugh out loud at my emotion,  
 Had the nerve to call the old twins: — Tityrus!

-----

And I've made up these old lines in expiation!



*Vedere Napoli e morire!*

Ici l'on peut mourir, c'est Naples, l'Italie!  
O caisse d'orangers qui sont des citronniers!  
Ah! sur ton sein l'artiste en tous genres oublie  
— De déclarer sa malle. — Ah! voici les douaniers...

Ô madame de Staël!... Qu'ont-ils fait de ma malle?  
*Lasciate speranza*, mes cigares dedans!  
Ô Mignon! ils ont tout éclos mon linge sale!  
Pour le passer au bleu de l'éternel printemps.

Ah! voici mes amis, les seigneurs *Lazzarones*  
Riches d'un doux ventre au soleil,  
Des poètes sans vers et des rois sans couronnes  
Clyso-pompant l'azur qui bâille dans leur ciel.

Oh! leur *Farniente*... — Non c'est encor ma malle!  
Non; c'est mon sac de nuit qu'à trente ils ont crevé.  
Ils grouillent tout autour comme poux sur la gale;  
Ils ne l'enlèvent pas, è (sic) *pur si muove*!

Ne les ruolze plus, va, grand soleil stupide,  
Tas de jaunes voyous, ça cherche à se nourrir —  
Ce n'est plus le lézard, c'est la sangsue à vide —  
Va, *povero*, ne pas voir Naples et dormir!

*Vedere Napoli e morire*

Here you can die, it's Naples, Italy's the place!  
 O O packing case of orange trees, actually lemons!  
 Artists of any style forget in your embrace  
 — To declare their luggage. Ah! here come the customs...

— O Madame de Staël! ... My trunk, what are they doing?  
*Lasciate speranza*, my cheroots are inside!  
 — O Mignon! ... they've fished my dirty linen from its hide  
 To rinse it in the blue of an everlasting Spring!

Ah! here they are, my pals, *Lazzarone* Lords every one,  
 Rich with flab bellies in the sun!  
 Poets without lines or wrinkles, kings without crowns  
 Clyster-piping the blues that yawn over their town.

Oh! their *Farniente!* ... — No, my trunk's still in range!  
 No; it's my sleeping bag that thirty of them have splayed.  
 They're crawling all over it like sucking lice on mange;  
 They're not taking it away, *è pur si muove!*

You great clottish sun, now stop ruolzing those creeps,  
 That pile of yellow yobbos out to stuff their guts —  
 They're not the basking lizard, they're the leech that sucks —  
 So, *povero*, don't see Naples and get some sleeps!

## LA PASTORALE DE CONLIE

*Dédié à Maître Gambetta  
par un mobilisé du Morbihan.*

Puisque, de renouveau, vous faites la Bretagne,  
Moins par plaisir que par état,  
Vous n'avez pas le temps d'aller à la campagne...  
N'est-ce pas, maître Gambetta?...

Et vous avez brûlé la plaine de Conlie  
Où votre rappel a battu!...  
Où l'écho vous eût dit le passé qu'on oublie,  
Sur l'air: *Soldat, t'en souviens-tu?*

---

Qui nous avait levés dans le mois noir, Novembre,  
Et parqués comme des troupeaux  
Pour laisser dans la boue, au mois plus noir, Décembre,  
Des peaux de chèvre, avec nos peaux?

Qui nous a lâchés là, vides, sans espérance,  
Sans un levain de désespoir,  
Nous entre-regardant, comme cherchant la France...  
Comiques, faisant peur à voir?

Soldats tant qu'on voudra!... Soldat est donc un être  
Fait pour perdre le goût du pain?...  
Nous allions mendier; on nous envoyait paître,  
Et... nous passions à la fin!

S'il vous plaît: Quelque chose à mettre dans nos bouches...  
— Héros et bêtes à moitié —  
Ou quelque chose là: du cœur, ou des cartouehes!  
On nous a laissé la pitié!

L'aumône, on nous la fit. Qu'elle leur soit rendue  
À ces bienheureux uhlands soûls  
Qui venaient nous jeter une balle perdue...  
Et pour rire... — comme des sous.

## THE PASTORAL OF CONLIE

*To Maestro Gambetta  
by a conscript from morbihan.*

Since you are back *doing* Brittany — it's your beat,  
More a job of work than pleasure —  
You haven't time to see the province at your feet,  
Have you, Maestro Gambetta?...

And you have set them burning, the plains of Conlie  
Where a recall to arms landed you,  
Where the echoes might have retold the past (that's only  
Forgotten) with a soldier's tune?

-----

Who had levied us in the *Black-Month* — November —  
And like flocks had penned us in  
Only to leave, in the *Blacker-Month* — December —  
And the mud, goatskins and our skin!

Who just dumped us there: with no hope and empty hands,  
Without a leaven of despair!  
Eyeing one another, as if in search of France ...  
So comical-fearsome our air!

Soldiers to our bootstraps! ... if soldier means an ass  
Born for losing the taste for bread! ...  
We were about to beg some; they put us out to grass:  
And ... we were grazing to be fed!

Please, we must have a bite to eat, say sausages ...  
— We're half-animal, half-hero! —  
... Or something else in here: courage or cartridges:  
All that we've been left with's woe!

Alms: we were given them — But let's give back the lot  
To those blissful, drunken Uhlans!  
Who kept coming to take pot-shots at us — crackpots —  
... Pfennigs from heaven: spent for fun!

On eût dit un radeau de naufragés... Misère!  
 Nous crevions devant l'horizon.  
 Nos yeux troubles restaient tendus vers une terre;  
 Un cri nous montait: Trahison!

Trahison?... Non! En guerre on trouve à qui l'on crie!...  
 Nous, pas besoin. Pourquoi trahis?...  
 Sans coup férir, chez nous, sur la terre Patrie  
 On mourait du mal du pays.

Un grand enfant nous vint, aidé par deux gendarmes.  
 Celui-là ne comprenait pas.  
 Tout barbouillé de vin, de sueur et de larmes,  
 Avec un *biniou* sous son bras,

Il s'assit dans la neige en disant: — Ça m'amuse  
 De jouer mes airs; laissez-moi.  
 Et le surlendemain, avec sa cornemuse,  
 Nous l'avons enterré. — Pourquoi!...

Pourquoi?... Dites-leur donc, vous du Quatre-Septembre,  
 À ces vingt mille croupissants,  
 Citoyens-décréteurs de victoires en chambre,  
 Tyrans forains impuissants!

Ah! que Bordeaux, messieurs, est une riche ville!...  
 Encore en France, n'est-ce pas?  
 Elle avait chaud partout, votre garde-mobile,  
 Sous les balcons marquant le pas!

Quels chefs! Ils faisaient bien de se trouver malades!  
 Armés en faux Turcs-Espagnols,  
 On en vit quelques-uns essayer des parades  
 Avec la troupe des Guignols.

Mais à nous qui mourions, bayant à la bataille,  
 Gibier de morgue sans nom,  
 Attendant que l'un d'eux vînt nous crier: Canaille!  
 Au canon la chair à canon!

Picture a raft of shipwrecked sailors — Blood and sand —  
 Dying for the sight of a sail.  
 Our bleary eyes were straining for the sight of dry land ...  
 A cry rose from us: Betrayal!

Betrayal! ... No! In war you learn who's in command! ...  
 For us, there's no need ... — Why betrayed? ...  
 With no opposition they're there on their own land,  
 So homesick they've a foot in the grave.

A stripling appeared, helped along by two gendarmes,  
 He couldn't comprehend our fears —  
 With a *biniou* — Breton bagpipes — under his arm,  
 And all smeared with wine, sweat and tears.

He sat down in the snow and said: I do enjoy  
 Playing my tunes; just leave me be. —  
 In a couple of days, with his bagpipes deployed,  
 We buried him — Why precisely! ...

Yes, why?... Tell me then, you Fourth of Septemberites!  
 Tell those twenty thousand wallowers! ...  
 You armchair-decreers of how to win dogfights,  
 Alien tyrants, camp followers!

Now! Bordeaux, gentlemen, is a very rich town ...  
 Still part of France? what's the old rhyme? ...  
 They kept their all warm, your militia of renown,  
 Under the balconies marking time!

What chiefs! They did well to find that they were ailing!  
 Armed to the teeth like *Spanish-Turks*,  
 Some did try out parades in full regalia  
 With the Punchinello squad: the jerks.

But for those of us dying, mouths open, in battle,  
 Prey for the morgue, nobodies,  
 In hopes that one of them would come and shout: You rabble!  
 To the cannons, cannon-fodder! ...

On donnait l'abattoir. Bestiaux galeux qu'on rosse,  
On nous fournit aux Prussiens;  
Et de loin, nous voyant plats sous les coups de crosse,  
Ces messieurs criaient: Bons chiens!

Hallali! ramenés! — Les perdus, Dieu les compte!...  
Abreuvés d'un banal dédain,  
Poussés, traînant au pied la savate et la honte,  
Crachons sur notre honneur éteint!

---

Et toi, tiède encore, ô fosse de Conlie,  
De nos jeunes sangs appauvris,  
Qu'en voyant regermer tes blés gras on oublie  
Nos os qui végétaient pourris,

La chair plaquée après nos blouses en guenilles,  
Ce fumier tout seul rassemblé!...  
Ne mangez pas ce pain, mères et jeunes filles:  
L'odeur de mort est dans le blé. TRISTAN.

Mangy, belaboured cattle: there was the abattoir!  
 We were provisions for the Prussians;  
 And, those distant gentlemen were shouting: What good  
 dogs they are!  
 Seeing us flattened by the butts of guns.

The mort! reined off! — Lost souls ... God counts them all  
 the same, —  
 Watered with contempt, we goners  
 Egged each other on, slipshod in worn slippers and shame,  
 To spit on our extinguished honour!

-----

And you, still warm, our Conlie midden, weighted  
 With the blood of many a poor son,  
 Let folk forget, when your plump ears have germinated,  
 Our bones, vegetating, rotten,

The flesh that was caked on our ragged dungarees,  
 This dung-heap amassed in its own sweet  
 Way!... — Don't eat the bread though, mothers and brides-  
 to-be:  
 The stink of death is in the wheat. TRISTAN



## AURORA

### AQUARELLE

Le matin. — Effet de printemps  
Appareillage de corsaire. De la rade de Binic  
Roul' ta boss', tout est payé,  
Hiss' le grand foc, hiss' le grand foc!

Quatre-vingts corsairiens, des corsairiens de proie  
Avaient leur chique à bord de la *Fille de joie*,  
Une belle goélette, écumeuse d'Anglais.  
... Et l'on appareillait — un tout petit vent frais  
Soulevait doucement la chemise d'Aurore.  
L'écho des cabarets hurlait à terre encore  
Et tous à bord chantaient, en larguant les huniers  
Comme des perroquets perchés dans des palmiers.  
Ils avaient passé là quatre nuits de liesse  
La moitié sous la table et moitié sur l'hôtesse.  
Adieu, la belle, adieu! — Va pour courir bon bord,  
Va, la *Fille de joie!* au nord-est-quart de nord!  
Et la *Fille de joie* en frisottant l'écume,  
Comme un fantôme blanc se couchant dans la brume,  
Et le grand flot du large en sursaut égayé  
Mugissait en courant déferler sur le roc:

“Hisse le grand foc, hisse le grand foc,  
“Roule ta bosse, tout est payé,  
“Hiss' le grand foc!!!...”

## AURORA

## WATERCOLOUR

One morning — with Spring in the air  
 The weighing of a corsair brig. In the roads at Binic  
*Roll on, all's paid, sweetheart,*  
*Hoist home the main jib! Hoist home the jib!*

Eighty pirateers, not birds but pirateers of prey,  
 Were all aboard the *Good Time Girl* and well away,  
 She's a lovely schooner, let your Englishmen quail.  
 ... And they were weighing anchor — quite a fresh gale  
 Gently lifted the skirts of Dawn. An echoing roar  
 From *The Sailors Arms* still sounded from the shore  
 And all on board were singing, to those on the yardarms,  
 To let out the sails... perched they were like parrots in date  
 palms.

They'd spent four nights on land in such joyous excess,  
 Half under the table and half on mine hostess...  
 Farewell, my beauty! — Off you go, and stand well off...  
 Tack on, my *Good Time Girl!* — steering nor'east by north.—  
 And the *Good Time Girl* curls the billows till they're frizzed  
 Like a white-sheeted ghost bedding down in the mist.  
 The waves of the open sea, come to with a start,  
 Boomed as they raced to break on a rocky rib:

“Hoist it home! Hoist home the jib!  
 “Roll on, all's paid, sweetheart,  
 “Hoist home the jib!!...”

## Barcarolle des Kerlouans naufrageurs

Et je rôderai, seul oiseau d'épave  
Sur la grève que la mer lave  
Oiseau de malheur à poil roux  
J'ai vu dans mon rêve  
La bonne vierge des Brisans  
Qui jetait à ses pauvres gens  
Un gros navire sur leur grève  
Sur la grève des Kerlouans  
Aussi goélands que les goélands.

Le sort est dans la mer, cormoran nage  
Le vent porte en côte... un coup de vent noir  
Moi, je sens en moi le naufrage  
Moi, j'entends corner le nuage  
Moi je vois dans la nuit sans voir  
Moi je chante quand la mer gronde  
Oiseau de malheur à poil roux  
J'ai promis aux douaniers de ronde  
Beaucoup de gin anglais pour rester dans leurs trous

### The Kerlouan wreckers' barcarolle

And I shall prowl, lone bird of wrecks,  
 On the sandbanks washed by the sea...  
 Bird of ill omen with red locks,  
 I have seen in my dream  
 The Blessed Virgin of the Breakers  
 Toss up for her penniless folk  
 A huge vessel onto their shores...  
 Onto the strand of the Kerlouans  
 As seagull-like as seagulls seem.

Fate is in the sea: the cormorant's  
 Swimming, the wind's black and loud.  
 Oh! I can sense the shipwreck in me,  
 I can hear the blaring cloud!  
 I see into the night, but cannot see.  
 I sing up when the sea is stormy!  
 Bird of ill omen with red locks,  
 I've promised the tidesmen due on watch  
 A stash of English gin to stay in their box...

## ÉPILOGUE

### La cigale et le poète

*Le poète ayant chanté,  
Déchanté,  
Vit sa muse, presque bue,  
Rouler en bas de sa nue  
De carton, sur des lambeaux  
De papiers et d'oripeaux.  
Il alla montrer sa mine  
à la ci-devant Voisine,  
La priant de lui prêter  
Quelques sous pour acheter  
Un acheteur à son livre;  
— "Mais vous étiez donc bien ivre? —  
— Ivre de vous ... — Animal  
À mettre dans un bocal!  
vous pouvez si bien le dire,  
et si bien ne pas l'écrire! —  
— J'y pensais, en revenant...  
On n'est pas parfait, Marcelle...  
C'est tout comme, dit la belle  
Si vous chantiez maintenant!"*

## EPILOGUE

## The cicada and the poet

*The poet, having lilted,  
 Wilted,  
 Seeing his muse, almost soused,  
 Roll to the bottom of her cloud  
 Of cardboard, onto shreds  
 Of paper and Lurex threads.  
 So he went to show his face  
 At his next-door Neighbour's place  
 Begging her to lend him  
 A few pence so Lucky Jim  
 Could buy a buyer for his book.  
 "Were you laced or fully cooked?"  
 "Half-stewed on you..." "Better by far  
 To have you pickled in a jar!  
 You might have used your wit...  
 And just not have written it!"  
 "I was thinking, as I came, how  
 One is far from perfect, Marcelle..."  
 "Oh!" said she, "it sounds as if, hell,  
 You're going for a song right now!"*



**Video 10:** *Épilogue: La cigale et le poète / Epilogue: The cicada and the poet* Watch a reading of this poem at <https://doi.org/10.22599/Corbiere.10> or scan the QR code.



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## Notes

Abbreviations of works by Tristan Corbière:

LAJ = *Les Amours jaunes*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Pierre-Olivier Walzer. Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1970)

TJL = *These Jaundiced Loves*, my translation of *Les Amours jaunes* (Calstock: Peterloo Poets, 1995)

All the original French poems are taken from the Pléiade edition unless indicated otherwise.

All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

### **Oysters, nightingales and cooking pots**

This book's title is from 'À Madame Millet' (LAJ, p. 862) where Tristan sees his alter ego as a yellowing clerk from Morlaix, name of Panneau, making a musical instrument (lyre, guitar, hurdy-gurdy, which he could play) to accompany several of his favourite subjects: 'oysters, nightingales and cooking pots'. Add to these a violin – he does and plays them to show they are as indispensable as his dinner. In 'À Madame Millet' he plays a La Fontaine tune ('Air de Maître Corbeau'). The crow, persuaded to sing by the canny fox, loses his dinner when he does.

### **Parade (oubliée)**

Tristan wrote these lines in his own copy of *Les Amours Jaunes* on the page facing the dedication 'to the author of *Le Négrier*'. He wrote 'Parade' on top of 'Préface' and 'oubliée' in the top corner of the page so it may have been a draft for an alternative to 'Ça?' (TJL pp. 14–17). I have tried to take it beyond the draft stage. 7f. 50 was the actual (quite expensive) price of the book.



**Építaphe pour Tristan Joachim-Édouard Corbière, philosophe, épave, mort-né**

An earlier version of 'Építaphe' (TJL pp. 29–33). See comments in my 'Postface masquerading as a preface' (TJL pp. ii–iv). I have placed it first as his 'Építaphe' in LAJ belongs to the first section where he is dying to live before living on his way to dying. In French 'mort-né' (still-born) has dead preceding born. He revives the Tristan of legend by reliving him, putting his own names back to front and his adopted name first.

**La balancelle**

A bilancella, 8 to 10 metres in length, the traditional fast boat from Liguria for lobster fishing off San Pietro Island and transporting goods between Sardinia and the mainland. Its main feature is its streamlined sleek bow called *amaltigana* (a violin). Written in 1867, 'La balancelle', rife with maritime slang, refers to an event in the war against the Turks for Greek independence (with Anglo-French support). *Le Panayoti*, a Greek pirate brig was captured off the Syrian coast by Henri de Rigny, then given a French crew under Hippolyte Magloire Bisson (1796–1827) and told to head for Smyrna. Bad weather caused it to seek shelter near the Greek island of Stampali (in the Aegean Sea), which was infested with pirates. On the night of 5–6 November 1827 it was attacked by two pirate ships each with sixty to seventy men against Bisson's fifteen. He made his pilot Trémintin swear to set light to the gunpowder if they were attacked. But when they were losing, he ordered his remaining men to jump in the sea and told his pilot he'd finish things off himself. He leapt into the powder with a lighted taper and the ship exploded. Bisson was drowned but Trémintin, badly wounded, survived. This event was so newsworthy that Vigny wrote of it in his *Journal d'un Poète* (1828). The king granted Bisson's wife a pension and awarded the Légion d'honneur to Trémintin. There is a commemorative stele in Astypaléa with this legend 'Attaque du *Panayotti*. Acte héroïque de Bisson'. Like the press of the time,

Tristan changed Greek pirates into Turkish ones as well as turning the brig (two masts) into a bilancella (only one).

The first line of the poem is from a sea shanty that appears in his father's *Le Négrier* as 'Un' tonnerre dans ton lit, un' fille dans ton hamac!' cf. 'Matelots' line 12 (TJL p. 296).

Ile de Batz: island off Roscoff.

Smyrna: ancient Greek city (now in Turkey and called Izmir) on the Aegean coast of Anatolia. The new city, Smyrna proper, was moved into in the fourth century BC.

Lorient: on the Breton coast between Quimper and Carnac.

### **Sous un portrait de Corbière**

1868 was the probable date of composition of poem as well as painting. René Martineau saw, in the family home in Morlaix, a self-portrait by Tristan with the first lines of this poem near his head and a streamer labelled UNE GUEULE (a frightful face) below his feet. He describes the picture thus: 'Corbière is shown sitting, knees almost touching his enormous nose; dressed in a sort-of red smock, a convict's headdress of the same colour; his thighs are bare, his legs disappear into knee-high boots. Above the poet's head there's a huge spider. It's painted in gouache on cardboard'. (LAJ pp. 1375–76) The painting does not go with this poem, but with the next. The spider is rather short of legs and Tristan's nose and knees are not close, but linked by a very long clay pipe. The sea boots concertina. He is chained to this image. Tristan also drew a quickfire self-sketch with TRISTAN written as a mirror image and a foot-rest labelled UNE GUEULE. (See *Tristan Corbière*, Rousselot p. 32 and self-portraits between pp. 20–21) The first four lines of the second verse resemble ones in 'Le poète contumace' (TJL p. 116) The first verse recalls the short-lined verse (p. 110). A spider's spun a web on his ceiling (p. 112). 'Elle' with a capital E is the 'Absente' (p. 110). Here, 'ELLE' fully in capitals and with a rhyme for 'aile' (wing) becomes death.

### **Une mort trop travaillée**

The first verse resembles one in 'Le poète contumace' (TJL p. 110).

bac: short for baccalauréat (in 1862 signs of TB and rheumatoid arthritis prevented him from taking this exam) and the gambling game baccarat.

Tûra is spelt thus in 'Un jeune qui s'en va' (TJL p. 82).

20 ans 20 francs cf. 'A la mémoire de Zulma et d'un louis' (TJL p. 70).

Amanda: L'amant d'Amanda – a popular catch, words by Émile Carré, music by Victor Robillard (See LAJ p. 1175, note 2), *à la mode* in 1877.

'Drôle de balle et drôle pistolet!' cf. last verse of final sonnet of Paris 'drôle de pistolet fini!' (TJL p. 26).

Châtelet: probably le Grand Châtelet: stronghold with law courts, police headquarters and prisons.

### ***Donc Madame, une nuit...***

(cf. 'Épithète') A possible dedicatory poem, similar in tone to 'La Cigale et le Poète' (according to Martineau).

### **Deux dédicaces**

*Mon blazon...*

Jean Vacher-Corbière, author of *Tristan Corbière, portrait de famille* was Tristan's brother-in-law, not his son-in-law. (See similar verse in 'Bohème de chic' TJL, p. 42)

*Nous sommes tous les deux...*

Written in the copy of *Les Amours Jaunes* for Le Gad, Tristan's friend and favourite restaurateur in Roscoff, as well as hand-written in his own copy.

### **Un distique**

An echo of the epigram by Ponce Denis Écouchard-Lebrun (1729–1807)

On vient de me voler. – Que je plains ton malheur!  
 — Tous mes vers manuscrits! – Que je plains le voleur!

Un album: sketch book: Tristan was artist as well as poet.

### **Paris diurne**

This extended sonnet and the following poem could have been prompted by Baudelaire's 'Tableaux Parisiens'. Arlequin, laridons, soiffards, marmiteux, pot-au-noir are slang, fam. or pop.

### **Paris nocturne**

Could T.S. Eliot, great admirer of Tristan 'but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbière. It affected the course of my life') have known line four with its 'crabes de la nuit'? (See TJL p. xiii for Eliot's praise of Corbière).

I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
 Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

The Styx: one of the rivers of Hades, across which Charon ferries the spirits of the dead.

Diogenes, the Cynic of Sinope (c. 412–323 BC), notorious for his provocative behaviour and philosophical stunts, exiled for defacing the currency, moved to Athens and made a virtue of extreme poverty, begging for a living and sleeping in a tub in the marketplace.

Les fils de Bondy: Bondy-sous-Merde was the nickname of a village with a rubbish tip.

### **Petit coucher**

Muse camarade: camard is pug-nosed, la Camarde is death as in 'Mirliton', one of the 'Rondels pour après' (TJL p. 388).

Le paroxysme ... This line recalls 'Chez lui la jouissance était un paroxysme' (For him orgasm was a paroxysm) in Musset's 'Namouna'.

### ***Moi ton amour?***

Manteau d'Arlequin: proscenium arch and Harlequin's costume.

### **Pierrot pendu**

Originally entitled 'Mirliton' (reed pipe, kazoo) or 'Prologue'.

La patraque: decrepit old watch, ticker, peaky, off-colour (person), old crock.

corneuse: neologism based on corner = to sound a horn, to blare out.

Faire porter des cornes: to cuckold.

### **Allons! Tristan!**

Originally published in the journal *Cahiers pour l'art*, 11, March–April 1950, pp. 10–13. Quoted in Jean-Luc Steinmetz's biography: Jean-Luc Steinmetz, *Tristan Corbière* (Paris: Fayard, 2011), p. 260.

### **Le bain de mer de Madame Xxxx**

This poem is part of the folder of manuscripts known as the *Album Louis Noir*, recently rediscovered by Benoît Houzé and published for the first time (Paris: Editions Française Livinec, 2013). It includes some early drafts of poems included in *Les Amours jaunes* and three previously unpublished poems, all translated here.

### **Petite Pouësie**

This poem is taken from the *Album Louis Noir*.

Œuvres en prose / Prose works

### **À mon Roscoff**

This prose poem is also taken from the *Album Louis Noir*.

**I Casino des trépassés** published in *La Vie Parisienne*. 26 September 1874.

Baie des Trépassés: an actual bay in Brittany near La Pointe du Raz, but there is no casino. His imaginary one has various similarities with the 'old nunnery' of 'Poet by default' ('Le poète contumace') which he would have us believe he wrote in Penmarc'h, where the Tristan of legend waited in vain for Yseut. Other poems in *Les Amours Jaunes* have parallels: 'Laisser-courré', 'Le novice en partance et sentimental', 'Cap'taine Ledoux', 'Veder Napoli poi mori', 'La rapsode foraine', and 'Le douanier'.

Chaloupe: when living in Roscoff he had a boat in the sitting room to sleep in beside his dog Tristan.

*Sabot aux allumettes*: Tristan had nailed up on the wall a sabot for matches, a custom in Breton farms.

*Revalessière*: Englishman's flour-based concoction with ultra-healthy properties. My dialectal equivalent tatie-pot is a Cumbrian specialty.

**II L'Américaine** published in *La Vie Parisienne* 28 November 1874. Cf. 'Steamboat' (TJL p. 54) and 'Bambine' (cf. TJL p. 340).

Count Rodolphe de Battine's mistress Armida was nicknamed l'Américaine by the Roscovites. Armida was blonde according to Martineau in his later book (1925) where he writes 'elle possédait une épaisse chevelure blonde', *Tristan Corbière*, p. 58) which tallies with Le Gad's comment 'belle femme blonde, mais assez vulgaire'. quoted by J. Vacher-Corbière in *Portrait de famille (Tristan Corbière)*, p. 47) but in his criticism of 1904 (*Tristan Corbière: essai de biographie et de bibliographie*, p. 75) he states that 'Marcelle était très brune'.

**L'Atelier** [square brackets indicate excisions]

L'immortelle scène de M. Dimanche: allusion to Molière's *Don Juan*, Act 4 Scene 3, where a naïve character comes for what he's owed.

*Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* by Henry Murger. Tristan had the idea of writing a series of bohemian scenes of his own, even made a list: Bohème dorée, triste bohème, etc. (LAJ pp. 1387–88) See 'Bohème de chic' (TJL pp. 40–43).

Vers de jeunesse

### **Ode au chapeau...**

Written at the age of fourteen. M. Lamare was Tristan's history teacher at the boarding school in Saint-Brieuc. He writes of him in letters home, in particular one to his sister Lucie, dated 20 January 1860:

My history teacher has just dished me out an imposition that's completely flattened me. I don't know how I'll manage to get it done. I've got to copy out just about a whole exercise book full like yours. So you see, this fine fellow doesn't mess about. He looks like a big gherkin, his face is all yellow and he's trying to grow a beard. He's half clown half wit. (LAI pp. 997–98)

Clovis: (c. 466–511) the first King of the Franks to unite all the Frankish tribes under one ruler. Also the first Catholic King to rule over Gaul (France). He reduced the power of the Romans in 486 by beating Syagrius in the battle of Soissons.

### **Trois quatrains**

Verses from his letters home from the Lycée Impérial de Saint-Brieuc, the first to his father in November 1859, the other two to his mother in March 1860.

### **Véritable complainte d'Auguste Berthelon**

Martineau got this, and the two following poems from Tristan's cousin, Dr Chenantais' son. (See LAJ p. 1367 for a very long version of the title plus a list of four drawings to accompany it.)

There is so much word play that it is impossible to translate without going off at tangents here and there. At least the first verse allows for a pun on 'last'. The onions needed for mourning show how much it is to be a fun obituary. My use of a modern term like 'lie-in' doesn't seem out of place, and the Plimsoll line was named after Corbière's death. Samuel Butler's Erewhon was contemporaneous though. Luckily in English there is the gift of the homonym soul/sole which does

not exist in French. Would he have known, I wonder, that 'l'âme d'un soulier' (a shoe's soul) contains it? The allusion to an Andalous (in a humorous poem by Musset) would be lost on many English readers, so I think it excusable to substitute a Greek goddess especially as she rhymes with Crepina. How I get from her via a pun on yarn to a sock, hence back on foot is another matter! I have not found a complete rhyme for the saint of shoemakers, Saint Crispin, and have brought in a wisp of esparto – more appropriate for him to carry away against his chest than 'cette âme' (this soul), as esparto could be used for making rope-soles.

**Ode aux Déperrier par M. de Malherbe** (François Malherbe – 1555–1625)

This mock ode is a parody of Malherbe's 'Consolation à Monsieur Du Perier, Gentilhomme d'Aix en Provence, sur la mort de sa fille,' whose opening verses run:

Ta douleur, Du Périer, sera donc éternelle,  
 Et les tristes discours  
 Que te met en l'esprit l'amitié paternelle  
 L'augmenteront tousjours!

Le malheur de ta fille au tombeau descenduë  
 Par un commun trespas,  
 Est-ce quelque dédale où ta raison perduë  
 Ne se retrouve pas?

Je sçay de quels appas son enfance estoit pleine,  
 Et n'ay pas entrepris,  
 Injurieux ami, de soulager ta peine  
 Avecque son mespris.

Mais elle estoit du monde, où les plus belles choses  
 Ont le pire destin,  
 Et rose elle a vescu ce que vivent les roses,  
 L'espace d'un matin.

Tristan kept Malherbe's –elle and –our rhyme sounds in the first verse as well as those in verses 2 and 4. To lift the actual words 'éternelle' and 'roses' from a poem



mourning the death of a beautiful daughter makes it a quite outrageous scatological parody. On a different manuscript of the same poem he quotes Boileau's famous couplet with sentir (to smell as well as to feel) in capitals!

Enfin Malherbe vint et le premier en France  
Fit SENTIR dans les vers une juste cadence.

### **À Madame Millet**

Maitre Corbeau: presumably a reference to La Fontaine's 'Le Corbeau et le Renard', but this poem is in alexandrines and quatrains so the tune might not fit! It is my theory that the Marcelle in the dedication to *Les Amours Jaunes* is most likely his aunt Christine-Louise Millet, with whom he had a good-humoured, warm relationship, and not the actress commonly thought to be Marcelle. Evidence can be found in this poem and in a letter to Christine which I have seen in the original and is quoted in Steinmetz's biography, Chapter 12. Hence the title of the collection *Oysters, nightingales and cooking pots* follows from this.

### **Sous une photographie de Corbière**

A facsimile of photo and text appear in Jean de Trigon's '*Tristan Corbière*' (p. 37). He would be sixteen or seventeen.

### **Légende inconnue de l'apothicaire Danet**

Le Dantec saw a copy of this parody of Victor Hugo's 'Guitare' (subtitle 'Traduction des sons d'une guitare') in concentrated vertical mirror-writing on condolence writing paper and followed by a sort of cul-de-lampe of an enema tube broken in the middle and lying between a shrub round which a serpent is twined, head up and tongue out and the 'black hole' from which the two pupils of a tomcat are shining.

### **La Complaincte Morlaisienne**

Lair de Fualdès: Morlaix events alluded to are not to be found in press reports, but the Fualdès affair (1817–1818) was so newsworthy that it was referred to by

many writers, for instance Balzac, Flaubert, Hugo, Leroux and Anatole France. *L'affaire Fualdès* was the title of a crime novel and a play. Géricault (1791–1824) painted 'Les assassins de Fualdès'. It was the subject of 'La Complainte de Fualdès', written by a Catalan dentist, sung to an eighteenth-century tune called 'Air du maréchal de Saxe'. Laments, plaintive songs telling of criminal happenings in such a way as to make them emotive were printed and sold as pamphlets. The most famous were about Mandrin, the eighteenth-century bandit, and Édouard Fualdès, a lawyer murdered at Rodez in 1817.

### L'hymne nuptial

Smala or Smalah is from the Arabic 'zmâla' meaning a group of tents, housing families of an itinerant clan with its chief. Algeria was officially part of the Ottoman Empire. Jules de Polignac sought to take it over for the France of Charles X, in July 1830. On 16 May 1843 during the conquest, the army of the duke of Aumale, Louis-Philippe I's son, captured the smala of the emir Abd el-Kader. This was the camp of a 30,000-strong tribe, largely composed of women, children and servants. From Morocco, where he had taken refuge, the emir continued a Jihâd against the army of the Second Empire to great acclaim. The sultan of Morocco Abd el-Rahman backed him up but he capitulated in 1847. The Emir was imprisoned in France (Amboise, Bordeaux, Marseille, then Toulon). The war went on under Napoleon for ten years until Algeria was completely won. The colonists were called *roumis* by the natives, from an Arabic word meaning Western Christians, descendants of the Romans who were called Pieds-Noirs by the metropolitan French.

Puns and plays on words abound: 'gris' – tipsy as well as grey or a grey horse, a horse being one of his dearest wishes while at boarding school. Legris was a supermarket too. After the nonsense of the first verse, his subconscious writes a serious self-portrait dressed as a dromedary. Elsewhere he's a toad. It is a love poem to Marie already called up in the first verse. He keeps up the North African picture with an oasis and alongside his dromedary he has her as

a gazelle. Was Marie here in Nuptial Hymn one of the sources for his choice of the name Marcelle, dedicatee of 'Le poète et la cigale' (TJL p. 10)? In the margin of the third stanza he noted 'Son père était directeur de la Compagnie du gaz à Morlaix' (her father was director of the gas company in Morlaix), which suggests that she was a definite person of his acquaintance. Gas (gaz) is combined with her (elle) to form gazelle, his beloved. From the grasslands and savannas of Africa! Similarly (perhaps unconsciously) he could well have combined the first three letters of Marie and a saddle for his hoped-for horse (selle) and made Marcelle. As with gazelle he wanted a rhyme with elle as he did in 'Le poète et la cigale'. There are grasshoppers in this nuptial hymn, a cicada, an industrious one, in the La Fontaine pastiche. Marie Quément worked for the Corbière family in Morlaix and then was sent to Roscoff where she cleaned, laundered and cooked for Tristan.

The incredible (often three syllable) rhymes: oasis / oh! assis; Sirocco / sirop qu'èau; and Oran où tend which hides an orang-outan could lead one to suppose that in dromadaire / tendre homme adhère he was conjuring himself up as this one-humped camel (as he surely does with le bossu Bitor) and the lady as a gazelle. (Cf. 'Mesurer à l'étalon / Les talons de leurs bottines / Aux talons de Berthelon / Qui trouve son état long!' in 'Véritable plainte d'Auguste Berthelon'.)

### Les Pannoïdes

Panneau was a Morlaix clerk of court (*greffier*); *greffillon* a diminutive who panicked?

Château-Gontier Bazouges is a small town in Haut-Anjou.

Noel d'Adam: Adolphe Adam (1803–1856) prolific composer of ballets, e.g. *Giselle* (1844) and *Le corsaire* (1856) and operas e.g. 'Si j'étais roi' (1852) and a Christmas carol 'Minuit, chrétiens!' ('O holy night') (1847).

Gounod's 'Sérénade': Charles Gounod (1818–1893) gave Mephistopheles a Sérénade in his opera *Faust* and, his only setting of the poetry of Victor Hugo,

'Sérénade' (from 1855–1857), is one of his few songs with virtuoso displays for the voice. 'Sérénade' is a barcarolle, with the swaying motion of the piano accompaniment for the gentle swaying of lovers in the poem.

Sérénade by Victor Hugo

Quand tu chantes, bercée  
 Le soir entre mes bras,  
 Entends-tu ma pensée  
 Qui te répond tout bas?  
 Ton doux chant me rappelle  
 Les plus beaux de mes jours.  
 Ah! chantez, chantez ma belle,  
 Chantez, chantez toujours!

Quand tu ris, sur ta bouche  
 L'amour s'épanouit,  
 Et soudain le farouche  
 Soupçon s'évanouit.  
 Ah! le rire fidèle  
 Prouve un cœur sans détours!  
 Ah! riez, ma belle,  
 Riez, riez toujours!

Quand tu dors, calme et pure,  
 A l'ombre, sous mes yeux,  
 Ton haleine murmure  
 Des mots harmonieux.  
 Ton beau corps se révèle  
 Sans voile et sans atours...  
 Ah! Dormez, dormez ma belle...  
 Dormez, dormez toujours!

Gounod also made arrangements of the song accompanied by harmonium and cello. Often known as 'Chantez, riez, dormez'.

Gastibelza is 'l'homme à la carabine' in Hugo's poem 'Guitare' from *Les Rayons et les ombres* where the alternating long and short lines are to represent a guitar's sounds. See note on 'Légende inconnue de l'apothicaire Danet'.

'Quelque chose de... cornu.' In the margin Tristan wrote 'Une chèvre nourricière.'

**Earlier versions of poems in *Les Amours jaunes* and significant variants:**

**À mon chien Pope** (cf. TJL p. 172)

This was an earlier version according to Jean de Trigon in *Tristan Corbière* (1950). The Morlaix motto was ‘Si Anglais te mordent, mords-les!’ (If the English bite you, bite them back).

**La scie d’un sourd** (cf. TJL p. 182)

*Une scie* is a saw, to bow or saw with, or a catchy tune; *un canard*, a false note or a duck.

**Frère et sœur jumeaux** (cf. TJL p. 186)

A version of this, with the same title, was published unsigned in *La Vie Parisienne* of 24 May 1873.

**Vedere Napoli e morire** (cf. ‘Veder Napoli poi mori’ in TJL p. 218)

Tristan went to Naples, Capri, Rome & Genoa with artist Jean-Louis Hamon (Dec 1869–Spring 1870).

Clyso-pompant: a popular literary jesting word of the time used also by Paulin Gagne, who proposed his own language Gagnemonopanglotte and appears in ‘Ça?’ (TJL p. 12), and Armand Sylvestre (made fun of by Arthur Rimbaud in ‘Lys’ in *Album Zutique*: ‘O balançoire! O lys! Clyso-pompes d’argent!’).

*Lazzarones*: an anonymous author in *Lettres sur l’Italie* writes: ‘The greatest good during the day is to do nothing and in the evening, to breathe... Most of the population work only enough not to die of hunger. They are called Lazaroni’ (LAJ p. 1311). Alfred de Musset rhymed it with macaroni (a word Tristan would use in his ‘Soneto a Napoli’) in ‘A mon frère revenant d’Italie’

Tu t'ès bercé sur ce flot pur  
 Oû Naple enchâsse dans l'azur  
 Sa mosaïque,  
 Oreiller des lazzaroni  
 Oû sont nés le macaroni  
 Et la musique.

*Povero*: poor fellow, beggar.

**La pastorale de Conlie** (cf. TJJ p. 284)

Transposition of the tale told by Tristan's brother-in-law Aimé Vacher, a volunteer, at a standstill with 50,000 Bretons in the mud of the camp at Conlie, near Le Mans, in October 1870, on the orders of Gambetta, for fear of a Royalist plot. The poem was first printed like this, in *La Vie Parisienne* (24 May 1873).

**Aurora** (cf. TJJ p. 324)

Binic: a commune in the Côtes-d'Armor department about 10 kilometres north of Saint-Brieuc.

René Martineau (*Types et prototypes*, Messein, 1931) quotes from a shanty 'Marion ma brunette' which Tristan knew and hummed and probably played. See the final version of 'Aurora' (TJJ pp. 324–27)

Je ne regrette pas la ville (bis)  
 Ni les bourgeois qui sont dedans,  
 Marion est ma brunette...

Je ne regrette qu'une fille (bis)  
 Qu'un' fill' de dix-huit vingt ans,  
 Marion est ma brunette...

**Barcarolle des Kerlouans naufrageurs** (cf. TJJL p. 360)

This is a draft of the start of 'Le Naufrageur' published in a facsimile by Jean Rousselot, in his *Tristan Corbière* near p. 17 (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1973); see LAJ p. 1358.

**Épilogue: La cigale et le poète** (cf. TJJL p. 394)

Marcelle: she could be one real person, but I see her as a multifaceted play on words and names.

## Other Works by Christopher Pilling

- Snakes & Girls* (1970)  
*In All the Spaces on All The Lines* (1971)  
*Foreign Bodies* (1992)  
*Cross Your Legs and Wish* (1994)  
*The Lobster Can Wait* (1998)  
*In the Pink* (1999)  
*Tree Time* (2003)  
*Life Classes* (2004)  
*Alive in Cumbria*, a collaboration with the photographer  
 Stuart Holmes (2005)  
*A Splendid Specimen: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (2009)  
*Coming Ready or Not: Selected and New Poems* (2009; second  
 edition 2013)

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- These Jaundiced Loves*, a translation of *Les Amours jaunes* by  
 Tristan Corbière (Peterloo Poets, 1995)  
*The Dice Cup*, a co-translation with David Kennedy of *Le  
 Cornet à dés* by Max Jacob (Atlas Press, 2000)  
*Love at the Full*, a translation of Lucien Becker's *Plein Amour*  
 (Flambard Press, 2004)  
*Defying Fate*, a translation of Maurice Carême's *Défier le  
 destin* (Arc Publications, 2009)  
*Springing from Catullus*, translations from Catullus  
 (Flambard Press, 2009)



## Praise for Christopher Pilling's Translations

### *Tristan Corbière, These Jaundiced Loves (Peterloo Poets, 1995)*

If anybody thinks translation is a dead duck, he or she should try... Christopher Pilling's Englishing of Corbière. It's work like this that redeems the whole concept of translating from one language into another.

Gavin Ewart (on *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation* in *The Observer* 5-10-80)

from **BOOKS OF THE YEAR 1995**

Of the books I have not seen reviewed anywhere, one deserves special mention: *These Jaundiced Loves* (Peterloo Poets), a new translation by Christopher Pilling of Tristan Corbière's *Les Amours jaunes*. These poems by the forgotten genius Corbière (1845–75), with their mix of fantastic symbolism and street-corner slang, are well-nigh untranslatable. But Pilling somehow manages it, with more than a touch of genius of his own.

Noel Malcolm (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 26-11-95)

Also chosen as a **BOOK OF THE YEAR 1995** on BBC World Service, December 1995

Christopher Pilling's superb translation of *Les Amours jaunes, These Jaundiced Loves* makes evident how right Pound was to call Corbière the greatest poet of his period. He brings to poetry something quite new: a mixture of raffish elegance, serious playfulness and an ability to switch vocal and metrical registers without ever losing poise. The wonder is that again and again his translator allows us not merely to glimpse these qualities but to take their full measure. ...a work which nobody who cares about poetry can afford to be without.

John Lucas (*Stand*, Spring 1996)

The translations heroically attempt to reproduce much of the quirky idiom and formal brilliance of the original.

William Scammell (*The Independent on Sunday*, 13-8-95)

There is a jocular dread in the French and Christopher Pilling transfers it marvellously to his English versification. Till now Corbière has enjoyed little of the renown due to him as the major poet he undoubtedly was. Hopefully with the advent of Pilling's wonderful book this will be rectified.

Anna Martin (*Outposts*, 182, 1996)

These are inventive and entertaining translations, impressive both in quality and quantity.

Anthony Rudolf (*Modern Poetry in Translation*, 8, French Issue, Autumn 1995)

Corbière is still one of the great unread classics, and in Pilling has found his best translator yet. Warmly recommended.

David Wheatley (*Metre*, Spring / Summer 1998)

Christopher Pilling is ... the first to offer a complete translation of *Les Amours jaunes*. He has a tenacious grasp of Corbière's puns, rhyme-games, archaisms, neologisms, barbarisms and slang. This is not another dictionary-haunted rendition but a serious and successful attempt to prove that Corbière is one of the trickiest and most rewarding of *Poètes maudits*.

Graham Robb (*Times Literary Supplement*, 6-3-98)

[These] superbly inventive translations. He is fortunate in having in Christopher Pilling a poet who responds with delight to the shocking vigour of the poetry, missing none of the excitement, none of the outrageousness, none of the fun. These translations are masterly. Any reader knowing no French will gain an immediate awareness of Corbière's importance – but those acquainted with the

French language can also read them with intense profit as well as deep pleasure, for Christopher Pilling's outstandingly fine versions actually increase, time and time again, one's awareness of Corbière's unique genius.

Harry Guest (*Modern Poetry in Translation*, No.13, 1998)

Christopher Pilling deserves, at the very least, to be made a freeman of Roscoff or Morlaix for so massive a gift of translations.

David Wheatley (*The Irish Times*, 12-9-98)

It's really the most wonderful book, [it] changes the reader. You have done something incalculably great.

Arnold Rattenbury (20-9-95)

On *Love at the Full*, a complete translation of *Plein Amour* by **Lucien Becker** (Flambard Press 2004 the Poetry Book Society's Recommended Translation for Autumn 2004 and shortlisted for the Corneliu M Popescu Prize for European Poetry Translation 2005)

Fortunately for those of us who admired Pilling's dazzling resourcefulness and virtuosity as translator of **Tristan Corbière's** *These Jaundiced Loves*, he remained faithful to his impulse to translate Becker. *Plein Amour*, a single Becker collection first published fifty years ago, presents love poems that are assuredly hot-blooded rather than jaundiced.

Dennis O'Driscoll (*The Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, No.202, 2004)

Christopher Pilling has already rightly earned our thanks for his superb versions of Corbière. Now this accomplished poet has come up with a quite thrilling set of translations of a twentieth-century French poet who is, I suspect, new to most of us. Here he is, in a bilingual edition beautifully produced, and without doubt one of the most intensely erotic poets of modern times. It would be impossible to praise too highly what Pilling has accomplished in making available the work

of this extraordinary poet. Surely nobody has written like this since Goethe published his Roman Elegies?

John Lucas (*The Critical Survey*, Vol. 16, No.3, 2004)

Christopher Pilling is one of our most consistently accomplished translators of French poetry, as evidenced by his version of Corbière's *Les Amours jaunes* (as *These Jaundiced Loves*). In *Love at the Full* his translation is essentially faithful to both matter and manner of the original.

Glyn Pursglove (*Acumen*, 52, May 2005)

On *Defying Fate*, a translation of *Défier le destin* by Maurice Carême

Christopher Pilling impressed some years ago with *These Jaundiced Loves*, his dazzling translation of **Tristan Corbière's** *Les Amours jaunes*. Altogether different poetry from Carême's, of course. Yet in the present volume he shows how sensitive is his ear to the nuances of a different kind of French, which he conveys in a different kind of English. He has rethought these poems in English, essential to do, paradoxically, if you're to be a faithful translator of the original *poem*.

Martin Sorrell (intro to *Defying Fate*, Arc Visible Poets)

On *Alive in Cumbria* by Christopher Pilling (with photos by Stuart Holmes)

As a book of poems it is alive with the exuberant and reckless playfulness (not to be confused with artlessness) which is Pilling's own and which he surely perfected in his wonderful translations of *Les Amours jaunes* by **Tristan Corbière** (Peterloo, 1995). He is in love with words, and it is infectious.

Josephine Dickinson (*Other Poetry*, II, May 2007)

from review of Katherine Lunn-Rockcliffe, *Tristan Corbière and the Poetics of Irony* (Oxford University Press, 2006)

Christopher Pilling's dazzlingly successful translations (of **Tristan Corbière's** *Les Amours Jaunes*)

Harry Guest (*Journal of European Studies*, No. 37, 2007)

I liked your **Corbière** very much. Congratulations on your many felicities. (21.5.76) Saint One or t'Other, Epitaph, Litany of Sleep & To a Sucking Juvenal – all grandly done, I thought. I liked your Poète Contumace very much. A really splendid job. (8.8.76) Compliments on (the complete) Litany of Sleep – this **very** enjoyable version. (29.11.76) What a splendid translator of that poet you are, invention always at the ready and never a dull moment or a fill-in of translatorese. It's all living verse with the full pleasure of poetry in every line. (1995) Charles Tomlinson (letters 1976–1995)

I have to take my hat off, and occasionally throw it in the air, in admiration for the indisputable energy and gutsiness of your work and in recognition of your ingenuity in finding idiomatic equivalents for some of Corbière's trickier formulations... It seems to me that, when one compares them with the originals, your poems have a rumbustious quality which they lack, but which may well represent the best method of rendering in our tongue Corbière's special brand of irony and raillery.

Christopher Reid (19.11.86)

Pilling's translations are lively and ingenious.

Val Warner (*P.N.Review*, 107, Jan/Feb 1996)

It's splendid!

Norma Rinsler (Managing Editor, *Modern Poetry in Translation*)

Tristan Corbière is a poet who tests language to the limits, dislocating normal syntax, revelling in self-contradictory affirmations, and piling up puns. Born in Brittany in 1845, he died at only 29, leaving to future readers a scattered assortment of texts. This collection brings together several less well-known pieces, some early versions of published poems, and others which were handwritten into his own copy of his only published collection, *Les Amours Jaunes*.

Presented as a bilingual edition, this volume offers the first English translations of many of these writings, all of which testify to Corbière's sly humour, linguistic glee, formal innovation and mordant self-irony. Playful and comic, Corbière's work is also experimental, subversive and moving.

The texts are translated by Christopher Pilling, an award-winning poet, playwright and translator. He is a founder of the Cumbrian Poets workshops, which he has hosted for 35 years, a convenor of Skiddaw U3A, and the organiser of translation days and readings in Keswick. He has translated the work of a number of poets, mainly from French but also from Latin. A beneficiary of the Royal Literary Fund, Christopher is also a member of Parkinson's UK.

*Oysters, nightingales and cooking pots* provides a fitting sequel to Christopher Pilling's translation of Tristan Corbière's *Les Amours Jaunes*, published as *These Jaundiced Loves* in 1995. The volume is edited by Richard Hibbitt and Katherine Lunn-Rockcliffe.

