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PIUS SERVIEN

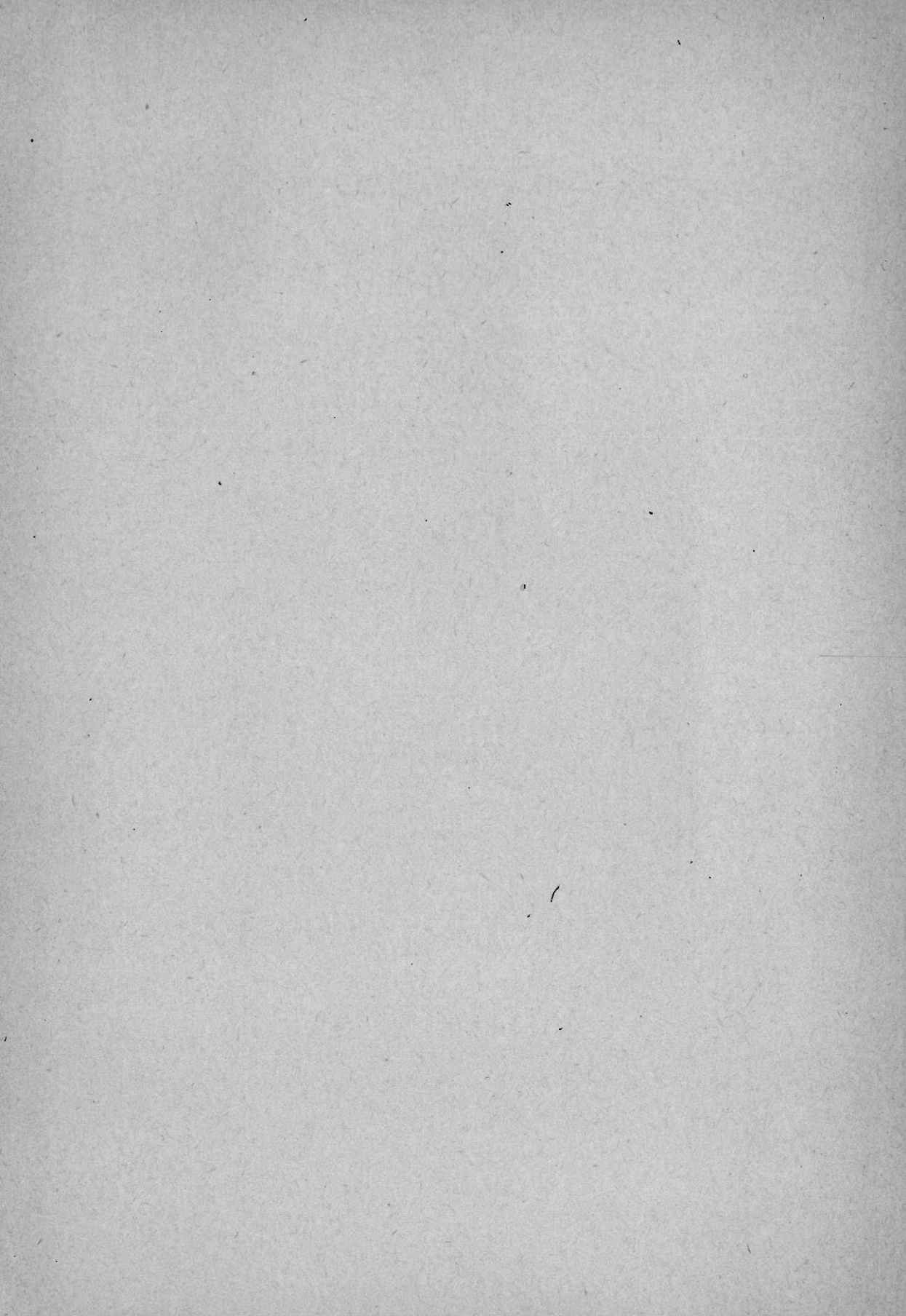
THE
SITTING SCRIBE'S
LETTERS

Sold by
EDWARD W. TITUS
at the Sign of the Black Mannikin
4, Rue Delambre, Montparnasse
PARIS

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Translated by
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BY PIUS SERVIEN COCULESCO

Clepsydra (épuisé).

Essai sur les rythmes toniques du français (Presses Universitaires de France).

Les deux rimes (Rev. des Cours et Conférences, mars-mai 1927).

Introducere la un mod de a fi (Socec, Bucarest).

Sur les méthodes de critique textuelle du type Lachmann-Quentin
(extr. Rev. Instit. Philol. et folklore, *ibid*).

Introduction à une connaissance scientifique des faits musicaux (Coll. de Suggestions scientifiques, fasc. III, A. Blanchard).

Reprinted from
THE BULLETIN
BY HERBERT CLARKE, PARIS

ADDRESS

Secrets should not be told the living. They have a personality, so do not understand.

The living we do not know resemble the dead. They constitute the void, that is, in fact, the only exterior reality capable of receiving us.

Confide oneself to an existing being is wish, for a moment, to modify him. All confidence is thus a struggle. For it is a law of all beings to react so as to contradict what would modify them.

Voids whatever, receive my letters.

THE SITTING SCRIBE'S LETTERS

I.

Why be disturbed that masterpieces are multiplying? If all that is lovely in this world could be tasted by one alone, all the busy bees would end by having tasted the same things. It is better, for the diversity of the world, that our souls be honey of many different flowers.

The first book we open limits the knowledge we may have of others. All seem to be offered us, but time, which limits our short human lives, little by little lifts those we have not as yet asked for towards inaccessible shelves.

If the masterpieces to be known were limited in number, in relation to human life, man "the measure of all things" would feel time-encumbered science contract beneath him and would see it gradually swallowed up within him as a part in a whole. This would render him over-vain and sad.

According to the course of things, it is man, on the contrary, who shrinks as he appraises the wisdom of the centuries. Whilst he turns the pages, age approaches and seizes his hands in an ever-tightening grip. The beauties of the world are obliged to pass through his more and more hazy sight before reaching his tender soul. And thus, as his forces escape him, the sage, feeling the inexhaustible splendour of this world which he will never exhaust, also feels his soul lose itself in the goodness of all these beautiful things, and peacefully humiliate itself in the sight of a morning too full of gods. And he is without regret, he, so small a thing, to

become extinct and soon again return to dust and nourish the grasses upon which Helen slept, which Leonardo drew and upon which Saint Francis trod with his bare feet.

There is no more appeasing thought for a man who knows that he is about to die than to know how much he is nothing. To be god in everything except in the hands of death would be the worst of pains. But how shall we regret the obscurement of a glow-worm? Here lies a nothing which lived a few tender hours because he was curious of the beauties spreading out around him ; but little by little his look, tired from a too attentive contemplation, softly falls into a very calm sleep, destined here to put out a pale watch-light, to illumine others a little further on. And since he belittled himself in proportion as he loved nature, it was without regret that he yielded her his body that she might make of it box-wood and violets.

May our dust delicately gild the evening breeze, and may this fragile science which we sought day and night between the sacred pages of old wisdom disperse itself in the purples of the sunset like the parfumes of a still-panting autumn, like the last sounds, already silvered by the moon, of an opulent day which knew how to grain its pleasures and to bite without timidity its heavied fruit. Hitherto our loves, too, breathed in the delicate evening air, the perfumed souls of the dead, the fresh melancholy of Heraclitus, perhaps, the sadness transplendent like the Ionic sea, or a few warmer perfumed breaths, shaken by the pale rose-trees of Epicurus.

Old books, noisy worlds where the dead mix their lives with ours, where yesterday's suns softly unfurl upon the one which gives us light, like nuanced and very coaxing waves upon a desert beach, promises which the world, to-day makes but keeps not, the past sometimes engulfs it into our hearts in soft vapours. The friends we have not, the melodious Mitylene and Thebes who loved the constellations, send them to us all trembling to have slept on asphodels. They are happy to see again the light in our desires, and we to deform by means of their shadows this real world with its too concrete forms, its lives too hardened in an impassibility which knew not how to love us.

Among them, at one moment, the peplum of Athena will

brush us with its dazzling whiteness, glistening with snow-white gulls. Shepherds will sing among the box-trees, near the glazed sea of morning. And then, probably, we shall long have been dead, our soul will err without constraint from one century to another-as a rich and learned descendant of Solon, who possesses many gardens and rose-trees of many kinds. He stops, breathes a lilac, walks slowly on, his soul tender and thoughtful hardly fringed by delicate sadness.

On the Mode of Books

II.

As a result of wandering among the centuries we end by no longer finding our own. The ages become unexpectedly symmetrical. Once we have stepped off from this privileged year 19..., we are obliged to wander and to oscillate a long time before being able to alight upon the same year again.

Thus, this afternoon, I was sad like the man who has lost his century. There was sun upon my shoulders, but it was not heavy enough to keep me fast to the earth. And, amidst the crowd content with its Sunday, undiscernible and less and less visible, the lace of Notre Dame acquired a very particular reality, as if contemporary, to the point of veiling the space run. Yet, notwithstanding, nothing in me was changed; I did not have the desolation of feeling myself lost. In some gone day this would have signified the existence of a home, but we know very well that none exists.

Sad, we adhere imperfectly to this century. Then there are times when we separate entirely from it. We err freely in time, like those flabby, vaguely phosphorescent medusas which throb in the transparency of the sea. Be sad, voluptuously, does not mean to renounce holding joy as a noble good; it does not mean being a weakling without a keen will to do. It is to feel oneself poor, with the desire of at least squeezing this poverty with the audaciousness of enjoying it, as a good.

Nature has offered you in disorder her most generous clusters; she has poured upon you her garnets and her sun. Do you think it such a merit, the grapes falling by themselves into your half-open mouth, to simply crush the joy upon your lips? I have been given a sterile branch of mint, bitter and thin, whose dryness is like the dreaming of sharp perfumes. This is my sadness, parching and oft stifling. This is my sadness dipped in bitter dew: but this I shall enjoy and get drunk on if I will.

I heartily agree with the happy poet who was able to say: "He who has enjoyed much is far wiser than he who has suffered much." I do not even disdain him for having been lulled by

circumstances according to his own particular rhythm. I enjoy the phenomenon of sound which amplified the vibrations to the point of rendering them audible to several continents. But if the world has not my rhythm, dear singer with the pomegranates, if my words at birth are smothered and if I do not complain and do not bear a grudge against this deadening felt, should I, on the other hand, disdain myself for that?

We don't yet know very well from where these souls rain. We only see, afterwards, that some fell upon the roots of flowers and became petals; others, drops burned by the sun, upon some rock which made of them so many little Prometheuses, lie there unable to move, unable to serve, until the sky absorbs them to try again, tomorrow or never, another essay with perhaps the same results. The sage may be a witness, most sensitive to these phenomena; he may even entangle them in the meshes of the laws of probability, but it is better not to judge individuals, in order not to risk an increase of injustice.

Thus it is normal that such and such a soul fall easily into a given epoch, as, in those boxes where the game is to replace the marbles in the holes of a box, one arrives at seeing them all at rest, almost fixed, in their appointed places. But if the marble were too large, or too small? It would wander longer, or the least shock would displace it.

That is why, in spite of my respect for who ever feels himself quite of the year 19.., and there reposes like a good judge in his chair—in spite of my respect for these good people in place, I almost, in seeing the stones of Notre Dame dismiss their crowd, believed myself one of Guillaume de Champeaux's students. I find in my soul enough pointed arches; Villon or the Maréchal de Romanie whisper enough old-fashioned things to it, so that, arching my back like a gargoyle, I am tempted to look upon Paris with an eye of stone. The Seine flows, carrying along the loaves of Sainte Geneviève, the hills are bare and of a hazy blue; then it is the factory smoke and the noise which makes the despondency of great cities, that buzzing of hives which yield not the honey of thyme and eglantine but a grey honey with a taste of mortar and painful sweat; the wailings of sufferings being born, malaxating a moment the fog; then, little by little the stones disappear, the moving mass

of ants spreads out and remakes the plain, and the Seine flows on between the blueish hills.

You who live in 19.., you are right, for happiness lasts but a day, and if you watch the time pass, pleasures sum upon one another and little by little annul each other. Marble which has found its hole, which, softly cushioned, constructs concentric universes so convenient because they resemble you, you also are right, and joy, concentric, envelopes you. But when that is no longer possible, when space has bones and time seems a mist where we no longer find ourselves, tenacious souls need not lose courage. They will fly in the night as they soared in full sunlight, without aim if there be none, without rest or resting-place if all be voids, without hope if the void be homogeneous, content only to feel their wings flutter, to feel themselves as much alive as their pains.

A great cold has cracked the appearances. All these gay tints have rotted and have crumbled into dust. There is nothing behind these walls which held us in a gay room. But why should there have been something else? You might have been born into a world deprived of these settings the very first day.

On the Mode of Time

III.

It rains, stubbornly, as destiny concrete.

Near the sea, at this moment, there are plains which no man sees. Innumerable stars watch them with their pale sounds. There are some where the stars have come down in dew over the little heathers, and the morning air is a softened gold.

In the regions of open sky where the very light azure caresses its image on the waves, no one.

The earth sends its image to the spaces, yellowish planet of peaceful lights. I watch, desolate, the humid and dirty hollow of this sky whose convexity must be so beautiful.

Without this faculty of dreams, which offers you a cup of vapours, each time you feel thirsty for limpid water ! They come softly clothing the horizon, as soon as the decision would spring up to flee, to forget the hopes knowingly constructed for the sweet things of a day ; to seek, bent over the tropics, the peaceful hours which congeal in constellations.

The sun used to embrace us when we were children, long ago, upon the flag-stones of Nineveh, upon the silky beaches of Phalera. We have for it the nostalgia which old men sometimes feel for maternal kisses. But each time it becomes too painful and would break space, would take us out of our mists, the illusions condense and their dew softens all effort. And we take to painting the wall of our cell.

The world we live in, console yourself, is but the memory of the world one has lived in—sometimes tinted, when the obscurity is too heavy, by the velvet of those one might have lived in. The real world remains exterior, or absorbs us ; indifference or *tat twam asi*. And perhaps you have never possessed the immensity of the sea agitated in its meshes of constellations, as on this narrow morning when all opacities are bent upon putting out your sky.

Almond blossoms besprinkle the waves, like poor frail little thoughts which weighed too much upon the same branch. But at the cooled glimmer of the stars, distant like the dead who preceded our dead, these miniscule snowy dramas pass unperceived.

On the Mode of Space

IV.

As a sumptuous cloth which one lets drag in a stream, the veil of appearances, little by little soaked by time, becomes dull and grows heavy. The patterns continue to seem as rich and as diverse—life seems embroidered with the same voluptuousness; but the humidity of time has penetrated into all that. Where is the freshness of old, the soft and caressing suppleness of their indefinite unfoldings?

Our old age of course still feels, about itself, as the more muffled step of the same shadows, the same dances. The torso of Aphrodites still makes its breasts shine, the hips are like an uneasiness of clouds, the world is full, divinely full of sweet appearances, and one can nowhere turn one's head without meeting the quiver of some star, or the hot sunning dullness of some half-purple, half silver stone. And waves of joy also invade us. Like breaths of perfumes reflowing from neighbouring hedges, an anguish of happiness arouses us. All is still there and this evening even you could go near the Aegean, contemplate the Parthenon's columns, still standing.

O rich world, o inexhaustible treasures, you possess without end the wherewithal of overwhelming all the senses. If a new sense should suddenly awake in me, you would already possess, from time out of mind, infinite worlds to drown it in delights. To the least bit of my skin correspond bits of the world, at which it would tremble like a virgin learning to what delights she can give birth. There is nothing, nothing in me which you cannot, o dear world, caress with infinite delicateness and infinite langours. I know what you have already given me and I feel delightfully beforehand, in bathing in the morning air and in the lights made of reflections upon the waters and the flowers, I divine your still implicit goodnesses and all you dissimulate of possible pleasure in the least corolla balanced in the wind.

What I have already tasted was only the fragrance of an intoxicating wine, of a wine old as stars, filled with the bouquet of their spectres and the eternity which bathes them. This

intoxicating wine spurts out in dew upon the flowers of your fields ; it fills the all-humid mouths of your women ; it rains upon us among the splendid summer lightnings, when oaks are shaken like leafy souls. This wine lets its droplets fall everywhere and its vapours are in each good swallow of air we breathe. And its flow is so inexhaustible that I have already but smelled the fragrance, like the bouquet of a distant orgy poked by torches.

O beloved world, when we can bathe, so as to feel, by the delicious contact of your waves, all the quivering bits of our own being ! And little by little these bits are dispersed in your moving inquietudes, and our soul seems to become the soul of this whole sea. You are rich, o world, and you are generous like him who takes in giving. It is not of you I complain, intoxicating sea of all my senses.

If some new sense were born in me to-day, it would find like the child of kings, a cradle of lace awaiting it. It would feel itself master and powerful from its earliest glimpse of consciousness, and would be among the unnoticed phenomena like me in a Roman garden. Sunrise would burst in clusters of obscure rays, and I would be able to feel the swinging of atoms, or give my beloved new names... Have a mouth for new caresses, and still other mouths, all more new and more strange, you will not exhaust the kisses which the world would give you.

It remains the same, unsoundable with new pleasures, whose breath sometimes reaches me, midst my pain, in inexpressible puffs of joy.

But when the senses pale little by little, as though mist-covered by time, the decorations in delicate colours which I was looking at through these windows, become confused and turn smudgy greys. My house looked out over the splendid sea, upon the moon's enamel and little sails which are like the remorse for countries we have not seen. My window grew full of the image of the waves, and the foam seemed like the love of snowy divinities. The window grows misty, fogs form and disperse ; the transparency diminishes little by little, without possible return, before the only port-hole through which I shall ever see the world. Time which rolls like breakers more and more pale...

So was he talking when two intruders sat down near him, in the corner of leaves and mutilated statues, which he had chosen. The little garden of Cluny, so quiet, so far from the world, suddenly became again the square where the vulgar have the right to elbow you. Bodies are obliged to live even where dreams ravel out. He saw these tenuous images disappear, like a poor sleeper powerless to retain sweet sleep.

Fortunately, he had already spoken his joys, and only the page of his sorrows was torn—the page which wept the world's opulent permanence, when the senses to know it and embrace it become more feeble than the last leaves clinging to the birch-trees in autumn. This page will not be done over, and the intruders, like all beings without polish, came guided by divine wisdom.

For if one breathes from time to time upon the mouth of the world the drunken breath of its voluptuousness, let memory keep only these joys, and not complain of those which eternally escape us. For divinity did not owe them to us.

On the Mode of Images

V.

Moon so pure, soul-shaped, moon delicate, friendly soul-shaped, I would have illusions about you. I know we have nothing in common. But I am so lonesome, that it pleases me to see, suspended in the violet and transparent sky, like a second memory of the few moments which seem sweet to me. I would talk with you as when I was young. I never believed you were fairy. I have always known you as astronomers say you are. But to hang sometimes at your light, like impalpable clouds, Hellenic legends, or even all there was in me of caressing or unpeased, o moon, Phoebe, my soft and complacent friend, I have confided to you unknowingly the best there is in me, and I would that it speak to me when I meet you at the turning of the roads.

Young I should still be. Did the branch grow bare so quickly that the fruit might the longer ripen? But it is bare, I still feel about me the fallen petals and the rustle of its perfumes. Of what consists that which I knew not and what I no longer have? It is as if my secret floated on high among the palenesses which plunge into the clouds, and at intervals, became clear and peaceful as the airy light reposes on the horizon. I was neither more rich nor more attentive—I was I, owner of a marvelous toy, whose use I had not yet had and of which I had not yet learned the splendid and definitive inutility. I was happy and alas, almost vain—why, o fresh Diana?—over the voice so sweet that nature awakened in me... I try to find the words—I only shake as a dew, ready to be lost, of that goodness of other days.

Moon, sweet moon, insensible to men,—but who pity them and veil yourself with lies, my complaint is nothing but that of the crickets and frogs, and of any man who raises his head towards you, and is surprised not to see again what he thought to have left in heaven. Then, I knew I was going to live. Now I see life crumble and, of the castle which was to rise, there will remain nothing but the rubbish of a hut. Why does our morning fill us with hopes and could it not be beautiful without that?

I felt my sorrows, sweet moon, under the lindens of which you stripped the leaves with your wind-balanced rays. There neither was I alone. Generations of brilliant and obscure young heads have wept in your forests and have lost themselves under your roots. I go alone by unknown ways, I meet little children, who stop amazed to look and smile at me. All I have learned, they will have to learn it all. All I have played, they will play. And my litanies of silence, clear light of our illusions, you will hear them again from them, and from their sons, endlessly, if you were not fortunately a powdered dead, shaking its powder upon our heads.

Some embrace glory ; others come from countries so far they even ignore their names. But all, at certain fresh and silent hours, raise their heads and feel, at least for a second, the precipitous flight of I know not what that vanishes.

What was her name, of her I loved then ? And how could I love—still love—and not yet have emptied my soul ? When have I lied ? And why, if I can still love, am I heavy hearted ?

Thus with all things. The pleasure one has felt, if it can revive, revives as under the bandelets of dead pleasure. One wraps up his beloved, and preciously descends the mummy into a dungeon of forgetfulness ; and after, when one encounters new loves, it is as if one saw upon their arms the trace of knots tied about the other. So that one night—moon, moon, how near we also are to falling asleep—one night it is as if none came to caress us but the dead, so much has our past broken in violently upon what we love to-day.

So, we are old. What's the use of having steeped, like a cast-away linen, in this world seething with souls ?... All is spotted with forgetfulness and sorrow... Even these grays will soon seem precious, like the last warm smoke from a dying coal.

Pale moon, let your dream-shirt fall. Show your triple-faced one which impresses upon me how much my loss is nothing. Roam, emaciated earth, whose forests grazed embraced lips with their humid leaves. Roam and show your void blocks, and this dust from which even remembrance has evaporated. We, lichens of a second, moss to keep warm upon the flanks of planets, what does our sort matter, happy or not, since all roads lead to the

eternal void. I shall follow the remembrance of my effaced friends, in the overfall of the stars and among the winds which furrow their spaces. The freshness of my morning was the dream of my night. If I awaken disgusted to-day, and weary, and if I bathe with astonishment my shoulders in your light—patience, a little patience, tomorrow dreams and realities will be confounded in the same void ; I shall no longer weep over those I loved so much and whom time has forced me to abandon, to despise, to hate, to forget ; we shall roll pell-mell, I, my remembrances, their beautiful flanks, and even these rays of moonlight which seem to envelope the wind ; we shall roll as though all had been other, as though I had been the child found this evening along the road, or the sheep which grazed, or the stone I tread upon, or the happy ones who knew it not, or the unhappy who had but anguish,—we shall roll, we shall roll, and the wind will throw our remorse and our lights to the face of the stars, to make spurt from them new beings, who will bear, as we bore, the weight of an infinite past which they will not know.

On the Mode of the Moon

VI.

Happy they who suffer, for they accustom themselves to suffering.

Happy the poor in spirit, for they see but the minor iniquities.

Happy those persecuted for justice, for they believe themselves persecuted for some reason.

Happy the gods, for they create beautiful tragedies which move us to tears.

Stars rapidly precipitate themselves at the pursuit of stars. Forms of energy oscillate and interchange, and the universe propagates itself across states which it will never know again.

In the hollow anvil of space the hammer of time pounds a singular point, a grain which little by little is deformed and will soon be dust... Why am I there?

The race of the stars blows its draught in my face. The universe dilates and contracts, to the capricious rhythm of my pulse. The sky is blue as certain cyanides, and wheels round like sparrow-hawks. I am the measure of all things, but the measure is of aged rags, it tears and I mend it, it ravel and tears, and the universe flutters and swells like a foresail when the breeze has softened.

Sensation is not what it is. Sensation, for him who receives his daily mess entire, for those rosy individuals who walk the streets arm in arm at Eastertide, sensation is a staid little lady, the bourgeoisie one meets each evening between the armchair and the soup-tureen. Sensation is an unchangeable thing, upon which one counts, as upon the couch of one's wife. For these happy ones the macadam of the avenues always has the same degree of hardness, the houses always have five storeys, and the sun is not now a dismal baloon, then a hole on the infinite like a chimney by which, one by one, little papers burned, souls fly away.

Desperation twists the world as wind seizes yew-trees. And when you feel the walls of your chamber press everlastingly upon

your temples, the smoke of the same city upon your burning eyes, a burst as of powder which ignites dilates the appearances and sends our fetters and our habits to the stars.

The sky wheels about slowly like those great Egyptian hawks above a cactus and sands without end.

Happy the poor in spirit, for they resemble sparrows which hop, on a plateau of ground secure for sparrows which hop, and who never lift their little heads of sparrows which hop.

Time deforms in the present like waters engulfed under the arch of a bridge. The present time resembles, contractile, to my love, to my horror, to my sleep. I press it in my fist, or it shakes me in its embrace. Time can be cut in so many ways, that only the void is as malleable. It is elastic as unreality.

Time which passes is true as the rust it deposes upon me, as my old age and my memory ever more muddy. Real, like the undeformable : how should my hands seize it again to remodel it? All the rusts it has left are present, and nothing in the eternity of the worlds will longer furnish the wherewithal to efface them.

Happy they who let time escape like an object which was not ours. Happy those souls of polished ice which reflect fugitive images, and become transparent again by eternal oblivion.

Sometimes even the stars weigh. Who would assure me that I should find them tomorrow as delicate and trembling as the night I was fourteen? Where are the stars of those velvet nights, made of the immensity which then passed into my veins, of the sap of young saplings which I no longer conceive as interior effort? The sombered air was limpid, and the heights of the poplars swayed periodically between Cassiope and Andromeda. These stars were mine, as the warmest and softest of my blood.

The sky wheels about and sprinkles and dissipates the atmosphere in infinity. The sky is empty and vast as that which has no end, and blocks of material driven mad furrow luminous this absence.

My brothers are dead and my lovers are dead. All my bonds float, scattered breakings. And every bond was a prop.

Happy the poor in spirit because they are prisoners. And only he who has a chain feels his body and the couch where he will rest.

The blind may believe the world full of beautiful forms, and enjoy their hidden existence. But he who is operated for a cataract and who poses his look upon the unlimited void, how should he not feel its giddiness, like a bird condemned to fall forever?

You are God's wheat. But the God of whom you bear witness feels no pleasure. Even the beast who eats you takes no joy in it. Useless and bruised.

Constellations scintillate softly. Each blade of grass is like a small hope which pants timidly in the moist air, which bends and straightens up under the wind. The roads are soft, and lead into the night, among the wheatstacks without intelligible forms. An infantine spirit walks there, clinging to three truths.

I am what I am. The world too is what it is if it is not I. Nothing of all that could be anything else, for nothing could have two forms at the same time, and that the only one existing, hence possible, is what it is.

So, like the man who is delirious and waits, at the pleasure of unknown powers, that this subsist, cease, or grow worse, but does not react, for, to push dreams he should lean upon other dreams, to discuss his deliriousness, he should put into play other deliriousness—and his agitation would augment his fever—like the sick person who, under his ringing temples, still keeps a bit of wisdom—immobile, his eyes idling upon the calm of the constellations, where the shadow of the poplars sways—you shall endure.

You will wait, under the immobile flight of the stars, until their little blueish dew come perhaps to refresh your brow.

On the Mode of the Earth

VII.

Sadness is for human souls like the press from which spurts the wine. They have ripened gaily, goldened by the sun, drawing to them all the sweetness of the earth. But the moment is come ; by enjoying more they would have dried up uselessly. So nature bedecks herself for the sacrifice. She lets her golds and purples float among the tepidities of autumn. The ancient gods bring the great press from which will spring the world's intoxication. The souls swelled with joy and life are piled up beneath the moving ceiling of sorrows. The Ates come and sit upon them and their bodies, imbueing darkness, become more and more heavy. Then the tragedy begins, which transforms the joys of a day into eternal and rutilant life, in bacchic floods to reanimate the ardours of races. But the grapes left among the imperial leaves rejoice in their happy lot ; insensate, they see the world die, they wither watching the agony of autumn, and buy a feeble surplus of ephemeral and doubtful joys at the price of a light resembling the stars. Happy they who suffer.

Cadence for Children

