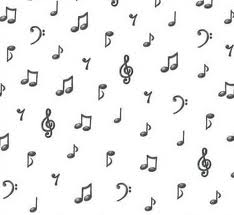
***\* Cecelia’s Kids* \***



***The Spheres of Music***

***Arthur Chapin***

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***P r e l u d e***

***Listen to the mockingbird***

**♫**

***singing the cadenza***

**♫**

***that never endza***

**♫**

***Musicians***

Ruled paper peeled fresh from the audible world

Like a temple rubbing.

Austere magnificence that consents to endure

A child’s artless flubbing.

A homely hymn played on the piano casting

Lawrence down “in a flood

Of remembrance,” thinking of his mother’s playing,

How it was sweet and good.

Schubert’s petition, in a major key,

To the Eternal Powers

At the end of *Die Schöne Mullerin*,

Declined, with tears, by the Hours.

Pale strains of Palestrina. Liszt’s chromatics.

Heartstrings twanged, slapped or bent.

A leering clarinet, blue rhapsody,

Klezmer’s laughing lament.

Thumb down the keys, tickle your Telecaster,

Let brassy trumpets blare.

Strike, stroke, strum, breathe, freshly invoke young Jubal

Out of the ancient air.

***Cadenza***

Time-beaten, flesh fades like a bruise.

But there is a survival made of music.

Against the cadence—*Here is the end*—

Rise up extravagant waves of a cadenza.

Shostakovich, a frightened wretch

Dying, still under State surveillance, stretches

His hand out, painfully grasps his pen

And sparks a few last startling dissonances

Out of his crippled finger bones.

Beyond all violence now, the notes are dancing

Through open fields of listening, dexterously balancing.

Beethoven *sees* the acclaiming thunder.

Schumann, ears stuck to a single note, goes wandering

To the Rhine. Time closes in like winter

And the coda takes on a desperate interest,

Pushing against the the tightening mesh,

The final finale, its iron bars of measure.

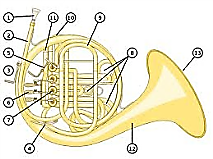
The bones of hearing scatter in dust.

But in the *Requiem*, stamping a vastness

Of power on the fragile ear,

The pauper Mozart is the Holy Spirit:

Enter the Capital of the Composer’s Paradise.

***The Bony Labyrinth***

***Or: The Spiral of Listening***

*J'aime le son du Cor, le soir, au fond des bois.*

*—Alfred de Vigny*

Hermetic is the ear’s musician,

Obscure the winding passage of

The hearing we give songs we love

Down birth canals of an audition.

A tap upon the tympanum:

Audience granted. Pass the tones

Through a bureaucracy of bones:

Into the spiral then they come.

Each segment of the spiral is

Assigned its frequency along

The curve: electrified, the song

Lights up the listening brain with bliss.

But what the brain perceives as *now*

Is slightly in the past, already

Over, or soon to be. Those heady

Glissandos, they remember how

Their patterns are supposed to sound:

Present, accounted-for and savoured,

Darkling or glistening, game-flavoured

Or sweet. Faint overtones abound,

Fan out among the neural cells

As complicated connotations

Too recondite for our notations.

The music is a force that wells

Up out of silence like a geyser

And falls back to the stillness whence

It burst, and the enchanted sense

Hears echoes, echoes, none the wiser.

Think how entangled are the sounds-

In-themselves with the technical

Formalities through which they call

Us, and we hear! They make their rounds

Along the auditory prism,

And notes painstakingly put on

The uniform of unison

Or motley of chromaticism.

The French horn is a golden ear.

The ear is spiraled like a horn.

And where they intersect is born

The tune that we were born to hear.

Pursue into its inwardness

The spiral, down to its least curve:

Note how it flows from nerve to nerve

Into a tiny emptiness,

Or a phantasmagoria

Of leptons spinning in the ear,

Or a translation, dark or clear:

*Le son du Cor au fond des bois*.



***Horn Book***

***And the Number of his Name***

***is Fourteen***

**B ­-** **B**ellows: The lungs of the organ aloft ♫ Loud as the thunder, as distant and soft.

**B**ach: Brook, river, cascades from the mountain ♫ Flows into the sea, returns as a fountain.

**A ­-** **A**llemande: A dancer, German by birth ♫ Grace of the Suites, lightly touching the earth.

**C ­- C**ounterpoint:Each line flints off its brother ♫ Each Heaven-bent to outrace the other.

**C**ontinuo gives to the voice of the cello ♫ Harmony’s body, a chromatic halo.

**C**ircle of fifths, climbs straight as a rail ♫ Descends as a serpent devouring its tail.

**H -** **H**armonyflashes brief and resplendent♫ From fleeting consensus of parts independent.

**H**eld note: The violin halts in mid-threnody ♫ Letting the harpsichord take up the melody.

**H**orn calling deep from the forest to say ♫ The hunters are closing in on their prey.

**H**ornpipe: Is peasants, rude in their vigour ♫ Stomping the rounds of a simple dance figure.

**H**emidemisemiquavers’ quick little swirls ♫ Circle the flute stops like scampering squirrels.

**H**andel, whose secular operas taught a ♫ Colleague to ‘operate’ mass and cantata.

**H**ome key the citadel, watchtower the dominant ♫ Sly modulations sapping the monument.

**H**allelujah! Gratitude, joy and elation ♫ Tuning fork, tonic, and lungs of Creation!

♫

***A Letter to Oscar***

***from the Sphinx***

***\****

***Ada Leverson recounts***

***an interesting evening***

***with friends.***

******

***I suspect she is making all this up,***

***and I believe her implicitly.***

***—Oscar Wilde***

1.

Oscar, I dined last night with Browning

And Beardsley! Friend, I had a fine

Time of it. We drank so much wine!

What with arch Beardsley, and Browning frowning,

And dear Elizabeth *née* Barrett

Present to goad them on and play

Them off against each other, they

Were *quite* the experience: I shall share it.

2.

Aubrey’s a gifted young musician,

‘Mongst many other wicked things.

Robert, a musicolater, sings

Along when Aubrey plays magician

At the keys, and wrings teardrops of

Chopin, or strums a scandalous tango.

Elizabeth holds out a mango,

A blushing prize, to him whose love

Most sweetly tunes itself to smooth

 And voluble discourse of tongue

On matters musical: for young

She’s grown, and vigorous and, in truth,

Quite dangerous in her sorcerous beauty.

Robert, the Evangelically

Inclined, takes on most manfully

The challenge, thinking it his duty

To do the honours due to Beauty

And Beauty’s blazon in her eyes.

Aubrey, ah, wicked Aubrey! sighs.

He is ironical and snooty,

And yields his rival choice of theme.

*I have one. (Aubrey, do not mock!) Robert speaks in italics.*

*I shall describe the City of Bach.*

The architecture of a dream?

Asks Aubrey, silver-hatchet-faced,

His black hair parted in the middle,

His attitude an angle, a riddle,

His promise, ah, so soon erased,

So cruelly curtailed, dark-glowing *A second Keats, he, too, died at 25, and of*

In all its tragic anger in this *the same disease. I almost wish I had not*

Hollow-cheeked, acute face of his, *invented him, for such an end.*—[Oscar]

Those eyes so full of deathly knowing.

2. *The City of Bach*

*Fugueberg-of-a-thousand-streets*

*‘Tis called. On this I shall dilate.*

Where is it, then? In a ‘fugue state’? *(Aubrey, behave!)*

*The blueprint lays out on white sheets,*

*On grids of voice in four-part writing,*

*Intersection, circle, and square.*

*And through this place the travellers fare*

*Fleeing each other, or at times fighting,*

*And generally going their*

*Own ways down diverse avenues.*

*But all this counterpoint of views*

*Forms somehow a melodious air*

*Of a clean richness so precisely*

*Beautiful that one weeps for joy*

*To hear the jostling and annoy*

*Of voices drawing harmony*

*From clash of passing dissonance,*

*As textured layers of voice one voice*

*Make of complex assent that joys*

*In God as in a Sacred Dance.*

Aubrey:

The Book of Numerology!

Who knew the cold Masonic God he

Adored was so adorned and gaudy?

He sings Bel Cantor thrillingly.

4. *The Aleph*

*Into the darkness light shall enter!*

*Dark was the Void, without a sun.*

*All things slept their oblivion.*

*Circumference was there none, no centre.*

*Silence was King, things slept a slumber.*

*The Cantor trained a starry choir;*

*They knew no measure of desire*

*And so He said,* ‘Let there be Number’.

*And like the fundamental tone*

*Of things, before things were, There* is*.*

‘Let it be the Aleph’*—lo! ‘tis this. ‘Both tiny and vast: the Aleph-ant’,*

‘Be it infinity-plus-one’ *whispers Aubrey to Elisabeth, snickering.*

*And I am. I the Aleph am.*

What are you? *What am I?* ‘I’ is *Aubrey interjects a question.*

Another, is all the others. Bias

Is built into your Panogram

Towards a certain solipsism

Belied by the Pleroma’s loud

Downbeat into a riotous crowd

Of syncopated anarchism.

*I am the Aleph. I am what*

*I am. Fool! All that is, at all, Saith Rabbi ben Ezra.*

*Endures for ever, past recall.*

Time, saith Shakespeare, is a slut *Says Aubrey.*

Whose pox God wills our flesh to want,

A pampered punk, a Trojan strumpet,

Apocalypse that lips the trumpet

Of the end of all, this Aleph-Ant

Of More in Less and Less in More.

She is the sultry cigarette girl

In Space’s Cabaret, she’ll whirl

You for a tango on the floor

And lead you to a curtained garden,

One soft and flowery bed. She’ll turn

The gramophone crank, you will yearn

For her, and soften, and then harden

To watch her mince through scented gloom

In slow degrees of sweet undress

Whilst, singing of a heart’s distress,

Marie Lloyd’s clear voice fills the room.

Sleeper awake! The sweet thief’s gone,

And you an elephant of wrinkled

Memory on sheets, think how it twinkled,

The ring she need no longer pawn. *E.B.B. looks on amused as the*

*two rivals glare at one another.*

*Robert resumes, dactylically rhapsodic.*

5.  *Tetra-Anagrammaton*

*Bach: A brook flowing down from the mountain.*

*Bellows: The lungs of the organ aloft,*

*Booming like thunder, now distant and soft.*

*Bach: Flows to the sea and returns as a fountain.*

*Anna his sweet Magdalena, the singer.*

*Allemande: dancer, and German by birth,*

*Andante it moves, lightly touching the earth.*

*Appoggiatura, the discord-bringer.*

*Clavichord thirds embellish the cello.*

*Circle of fifths its own tail devours.*

*Clef unto clef calls, and it showers*

*Chords misted with a chromatic halo.*

*H: Pronounced ‘asch’, a German ‘B’.*

*Harmony’s honey is bittersweet:*

*Hear how in One all the bird-songs meet,*

*Harps, how they’re plucked of their melody!*

6.

*High on the senses’ crest, the ear*

*Is hungry and deep, a shadowy hollow*

*Harmony-hallowed. Troubles follow:*

*Cursing and tears are all we hear.*

*Evil visits us in our dreams.*

*When the Physician comes, we are too sick*

*To drink the potion of His music.*

*When shall we enter a house whose beams*

*Are stronger than the winds of time?*

*How low they lie among the stones,*

*The scattered staves of human bones!*

*They would in stepwise sureness climb*

*To sopranino heights of Heaven*

*And descant sweetly on the Word*

*Melismas round the tonic chord*

*With every dissonance forgiven.*

**7.

*Each part is made of many parts:*

*A single heart, faithful and true.*

*Two hearts in love. One, broken in two.*

*Each heart is made of many hearts.*

*The heart of pride, sickly and cold.*

*The Queen of Hearts, upon her throne,*

*Wears a gold crown, but sits alone,*

*Her heart worn out in have and hold.*

*The heart of hate, baffled and wild.*

*And that miraculous red bird*

*That beats in the hand of the Word*

*Of God is the heart of a child.*

8.

*Follow one street through all the towns,*

*Cross the one town by myriad streets:*

*Such the complexity that meets*

*The ear with wiles to thread these sounds.*

*Every listening reveals*

*A unique city; say, therefore,*

*Infinite cities to explore,*

*And ne’er the same one twice unreels*

*Itself before the venturing ears.*

*As often as they listen, these*

*Will always hear a different piece,*

*No road is royal, each path veers*

*Off on its own course, no twin brother*

*It has among the ways to get*

*From end to end of town, and yet*

*Each path’s as good as any other.*

*Such is the infinitely complex*

*Bach fugue: complex yet clear, and thus*

*Infinitely perspicuous*

*As the eye of the* regorum Rex*.*

*So every work of Bach’s contains*

*More music than the ear can hear,*

*Though asymptotically we near*

*The whole towards which our hearing strains.*

*His music is pure* in excelsis

Deo gloria, *the infinite*

*Dwells in the ringing shrine of it*

*More than in anybody else’s.*

9. *Cantata and Mass*

*Cantata, a pew filled with voices*

*Diversely joined in one devotion*

*Spending itself in sound like ocean*

*Waves on the altar. Grief rejoices.*

*But dissonance comes like a sword*

*Amongst the tones, with ills and evils*

*The tonic major heals—but, Devil’s*

*Interval, you baffle the chord!*

*The hearts’ tritones prevaricate.*

*Sweet distant voices fall and rise.*

*We hear the tunes of Paradise*

*But swordsman Michael guards the gate.*

*The heart’s a furtive, darkling coast,*

*Tough muscle, Lord, perversely soft,*

*Made whole when the priest holds aloft*

*The consubstantiated Host.*

*Robert knocks back a glass of wine*

*and turns storytelling balladeer.*

10. *A Prince and a Subject*

*He is the Prince, a man of pallid*

*Visage, and pride unlimited*

*Inside a small and narrow head.*

*I am the subject of the ballad.*

*As vast as a great fugue it was,*

*This Prince’s grandiosity.*

*Once, as his coach-and-six rolled by,*

*What every loyal subject does*

*I failed to do: I would not raise*

*My cap, when duty bid me show*

*The Christian virtue of a low*

*Obsequiousness. In those days*

*High Worldliness decreed that even*

*Our music should wear livery,*

*Though only true Divinity*

*It ought to serve, and highest Heaven.*

*Fetters and a floor strewn with straw*

*Would be the fugitive’s if caught—*

*Though freedom in this place meant naught*

*But wearing lighter chains. I saw*

*My chance, and leaping on my horse,*

*Broke through the guards’ ranks and attained*

*The open road. How my horse strained*

*To outstrip the advancing force!*

*She plunges on in a dust cloud,*

*Presto, and her hooves on the ground*

*In demisemiquavers pound,*

*Whilst gaining hooves beat fast and loud.*

*I turn at a remote byway*

*And somehow narrowly escape.*

*I try to modulate my shape.*

*(Such are the games subjects must play.)*

*I change the angle of my figure,*

*And backwards, even upside-down*

*I walk at times, from town to town,*

*Now seeming smaller and now bigger,*

*Disguise myself, almost become*

*Another subject altogether,*

*Darting hither in stealth and thither,*

*Hotly pursued. My nightly home*

*I make in taverns, wayside inns.*

*The crashing entry of his men*

*Awakens me, again, again,*

*Come in the name of the great Prince.*

*Only an open window gapes*

*At them when they burst through the door.*

*Another night: we play once more*

*This stretto of entries and escapes.*

*It ends with capture, but a finer*

*End than the gallows waits for me.*

*My crime was thinking I was free.*

*My life concludes in sad B minor.*

*‘Im finstern Tal, fürchte ich kein From the Lutheran Bible, Psalm 23*

*Unglück‘. I pray here, in my prison, (‘Yea, though I walk through the*

*Waiting to die. For He is risen.* *Valley of Death, I shall fear no evil‘).*

*His tomb empty; so shall be mine.*

11.

*We go about our business, friend*

*To enemy and enemy*

*To friend. The town hall clock strikes three.*

*Around the clock stiff figures wend*

*The circle of fallen Man and end*

*Where they began, as in a prison*

*Exercise yard. Soul’s prayer-gears (listen!)*

*Chime: ‘Bury your clocks and ascend’.*

12.

*Out in the yard, bread, cheese, and beer.*

*Anna my wife, the gifted singer,*

*At our wild children wags a finger*

*Smiling in daylight soft and clear.*

*They scramble over bench and board. Thomasskirche, Leipzig.*

*Smoking my Meerschaum pipe, I am lost*

*In thought. The beer tastes stale. The cost*

*To fix the roof I can’t afford!*

*A sort of fugue, those scampering cats…*

*That post in Leipzig… I review*

*My awkward speech: the interview,*

*The sacred, stupid bureaucrats!*

*Can rules be followed so far that*

*You break them? Do you then become*

*The leader? Leading where? God, home?*

*Meanwhile, cat runs away from cat.*

13*. The Passion According to St. Matthew*

*O Christ our Lord and living Word,*

*This music is your beating pulse.*

*As through these dissonant intervals*

*Lines journey towards the tonic chord,*

*And as the chosen tribe of Moses*

*Walked forty years through desert sand*

*Until they reached the Promised Land,*

*Rose made of thorns composed of roses,*

*So up a path of flails and curses*

*You strove, to crown our exaltation*

*From the tower of humiliation,*

*As it is writ in Matthew’s verses.*

*And in this Passion, in this pity*

*Let sound the tolling bell, for dun*

*Will grow the day ere long: the sun*

*Is setting on the human city.*

14. *Aubrey’s Palinode*

Two subjects scraping, now and then,

Against each other, blade on blade

In spark and clash, then retrograde

Going their separate ways again:

Yes, that’s what counterpoint is all

About. Bach is its master—and

Its slave. The structure is quite grand

But such formality may pall.

I prefer madness in my music.

Thor-hammering Wagner. Poetry, *By Walter Sickert.*

Too, Schubert’s sweet melancholy.

Or the dark side of Mozart, too sick

To finish his last masterpiece, The *Requiem.*

Coughing up genius in a garret.

(Sometimes I simply cannot bear it,

This dying. Where shall I find peace?)

[*Aubrey improvises mockingly on some favourite themes*

*and anathemas of the* *Evangelically-minded Robert,*

*including his* *hated Calibanesque natural theology.*]

15.

Galuppi, give us a toccata

On themes as wild as the Galapagos,

Or Guinean shores, where anthropophagus

Natives are chanting a cantata

In praise of Nature (God, or Book

Of Darwin, Devil’s script?) They praise

The Vulcan-Spark that in a blaze

Makes oily missionaries cook.

They dance around the fire and shout

Hosannas to a tikki god,

This Gnostic cargo cult of fraud-

Shamans and tribal odd-men-out.

Mutations on the theme of apes

Ever-evolving into angels

As an idea in the brain gels

They sing, and praise all protean shapes.



16. *Another Venetian Toccata*

Galapagan Galuppi sings

The faded beauty of the feather

That on a belle, in heady weather

Of Carnivale, adorned the wings

Of gold, the Cupid guise in which

She revelled in the Doge’s Palace,

Quaffing the moment in its chalice

At the masked ball where all the rich

And haughty nobles of Poseidon’s

Cherished old harlot City go

To see and be seen, ‘mid the flow

Of champagne, and the smile that widens

On Lady Cupid’s face, the fire

Of all the prostituted splendour

Of her fine face when they attend her,

Her beaux, the Knights of her Desire,

*As she becomes, in all her glory, Robert interjects.*

*A vision of Venus, clam-shell borne,*

*Stroking the tumid Unicorn* ‘*Under the Hill’, detailing the erotic*

*In Aubrey’s filthy little story. adventures of Venus and Tannhäuser.*

And your Porphyria? Her hair

You twined into a strangling cord.

You killed the one that you adored.

Porphyria, at least the rare *The power of suggestion! Robert’s skin*

*turns purple, blisters appear, he feels*

Variety you suffer from, *stomach ains, becomes depressed, and*

Brings seizures and delusions, brings *begins to sweat profusely as Aubrey looks*

Depression, anxious thoughts, and things, *on gloatingly… But with a great effort of*

Bump-in-the-night things, oh! they come. *will he shakes off the curse. Aubrey, having*

*made his point, resumes the singing match.*

17.

Now let her walk her along the Lido

Alone and lovelorn, for of all

The beaux the one she chose to fall

In love with is the faithless Guido!

And let the sands she walks be changed

To shores Galapagan, or better,

Of Easter Island, yes, there set her

Down in a barren and estranged

Marooning, let my lady pace

Among the cold and brooding heads

Of gone gods underneath the reds

And purples of her dusky days,

Her Knights of Stone, and every breath

She takes their breathless faces mock.

And let them join, as flesh and rock,

The petrified and living death.

18. *Abt Vogler and Improvisation*

*Praise on the instrument your own Robert’s turn.*

*Hands made the God whose own Hands made*

*Your hands His instrument, and bade*

*Abt Vogler find the proper tone,*

*As of each thing its Final Cause,*

*For each hue of the rainbow’s blazon*

*And, in a mighty Diapason,*

*Sound all the Stations of the Cross.*

*Fell Time, that makes the roses wilt,*

*Hath laid low, with his envious malice,*

*Another Solomonic palace*

*Bad angels and good devils built.*

19. *A Hand of Tarot Cards A sort-of run-off election or elimination*

*round, as narrated by my dear Sphinx.*

Now they are playing with the cards, *The loser must gradually disappear, like*

The Twin Arcana of the Tarot *the grin, turned* moue*, of the Cheshire Cat.*

Goddess, a Gipsy nomad, narrow-

Eyed and sly, who picks crystal shards

Of questionable epiphany

From the seamed rock-face of the random.

 She has a partner: they in tandem

Can raise the dead, for a small fee.

*Browning, with a touch*

*Alas, the lightning-stricken Tower, of* Schadenfreude.

*From which two men fall to their death! Beardsley looks stricken.*

*Ah, numbered is your every breath.*

*How soon it comes, your Hour, your Hour.*

[*Things get confusing here, Oscar, so let me summarise the Pantomime costume- and*

*scene- changes that ensue, the detailed chronicling of which will have to wait till the next*

*post, or if you prefer, chapter: Elizabeth Browning becomes Lizzie Siddal with a strong dose*

*of Lilith. Robert Browning becomes Gabriel Rossetti, Beardsley withers away, and much else*

*besides takes place, all of it deliciously decadent. Be patient, friend, the sequel followeth anon!*]

I must go now: we are invited

To the Asquiths for a late supper.

My next has things that Martin Tupper

Would cough at; *you* will be delighted.

***Sphinx***

***Further Revelations of Oscar Wilde***

***From ‘Jim and I Drink Too Much’***

*Jim Joyce speaks in italics.*

Soon I shall start to slur *your* words.

*That would be slander, labial libel!*

Shall we go home and read the Bible?

*I think that I shall stroke some chords! Plays snatches of* Tristan

*\** und Isolde *on his guitar.*

*Isolde incarnates before us.*

*Mein irisch’ Kind, wo weilest du?*

*Woo-woo, moo-moo, mein Kind so irisch, Isolde is transformed from*

*So Io, that it makes me tear-ish, a beautiful young queen*

*O meine irisch’, irisch’ Kuh! into a mythological cow.*

*This Wagner* Typpuzzo di sesse*.*— *He speaks Italo-Anglo-German,*

He stinks of sex? Who doesn’t, after…? *this polyglutton for pun-ishment.*

Although he *does* excite my…laughter,

His Siegfried. One could write an essay



On his stupidity and find,

In the end, nothing to say. (Though on his

Teutonically blond Adonis

Looks one could heap praise.) And his ‘mind’?

He is no village idiot,

He’s a whole village full of them.

A ‘hardy’, we’d say. *So would Shem*.

*From schlimm to wurst he goes, this Brat.*

\*

*Mavrone! Sure, Ireland was born knowing*

*What hunger is! There’s those that do*

*Not know it; but they will.* How true!

*Me, I never got used to going*

*Without food, studying medicine*

*In Paris as ah! young man.* Hunger

Is *La Bohème* when we are younger

And a youth cannot be too thin;

At forty it is simply *real*.

Ugliness, suffering, obscene.

The grumbling void, the pangs how keen!

*Quick now, let’s order us a meal!*

*Boiled potatoes are ordered:*

*They bring us but the* one*!*

[*He sings and plays at the piano a medley of Bellini*

*and Donizetti,* Una furtiva lagrima *wells in the eye*

*of the listener, who is apparently Oscar Wilde.*]

How nice to hear you *Casta diva*

Upon the waters! *Diva-gation*

*Of rivers from their derivation.*

The snippy castanets of Shiva.

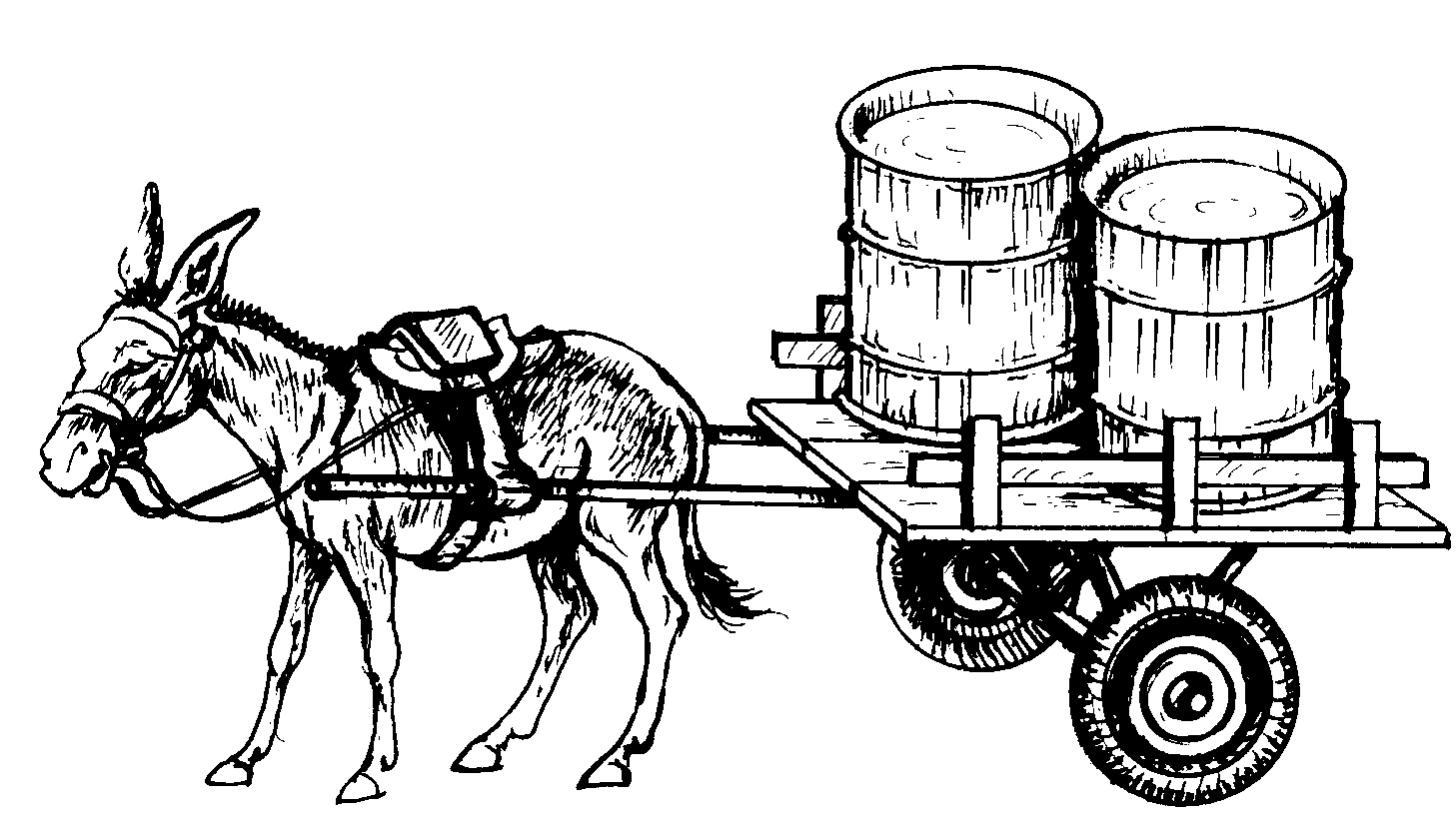
*Jim mocks Thomas Mann’s description*

*The donkey draws the cart to Heaven, of the slow movement of Beethoven’s*

*F\*rting freely in his \*rse-scent. last piano sonata, in C minor, op. 111.*

*Let hands be clasped, let knees be bent: (‘The donkey-cart that goes to Heaven’.)*

*Rise, incest smoke: the Heavens are Seven! —*[Mr V]

******

***From Sweet Wormwood***

***The Gramophone***

*Narcisse and Oscar Wilde are listening to Marie Lloyd on the new-fangled gramophone, which has*

*lately replaced the phonogram, or wax cylinder.*

Cruel, almost, My Love, how deep

The needle cuts into the grooves

To free this melody that moves

Our hearts so strongly that they leap

Into our throats and sing along.

They hardly skip a beat, do they?

Although the needle sometimes may.

But so well do we know the song

We can fill in the interim

Or gently prompt the stumbler. Watch!

The small sore spot that made it catch

I lift it over. Should it skim

Whole bars to which it should attend,

O’er which it might prefer to glide,

Note the finesse with which I guide

It back to what was skipped, to mend

Its ways and heal the indecorous breaches

In the offended melody.

Sometimes the pitch sinks, key by key,

To Mephistophelian reaches,

*Basso profundo*, and the platter

Slows down to silence, motionless.

A fear sets in, and heart’s distress:

To calm the anxious pitter-patter

I rouse myself from where we lie

And give the handle several turns,

Till back into its fullness yearns

The voice, and with a weary sigh

I sink back down beside you, Dear.

We drink in through our ears the song

That heals, because it knows, the wrong.

It makes one shed a harmless tear

That art so artless as this singer’s

Could catch our suffering in notes

Through which the soul so freely floats,

Caressed by ghostly Orphic fingers

Like granted mercies long beseeched,

Until the needle’s Odyssey

Stops at a tranquil inland sea,

And the end never sought is reached:

The nowhere going round and round

The smooth black circle at the centre

Which you and I will one day enter,

Who were always for that stillness bound.

******

***Notes of a Concert-Goer***

***dans le Neuvième Arrondissement***

*Speaking as a Parisian ghost-about-town as well as a somewhat dingy ‘Inn-*

*Spectre’. In the Afterlife, partly under the influence of Mr V, I have become*

*much more interested in music than I was in life, Dears. One could say my*

*‘I’ has become ‘all ears’, but perhaps one shouldn’t. Here are some reviews.*

1.

Not the arts only, all of life

Aspires to the condition of

Music, where all the passions love

Themselves, yes, even pain and strife.

As Nietzsche tells us in *The Birth*

*Of Tragedy*, in dissonances

The very soul of suffering dances,

Exulting o’er its trials on earth.

On a blind giant’s shoulders rides

(In Schopenhauer’s allegory)

The lame man who can only see,

Beset by instincts on all sides.

But that poor crippled, seeing mind

Finds fleeting Heaven in the ear

When the Will, imageless and clear,

Sings Passion purified and kind.

Music in which mere repetition

Holds sway narcotically but serves

To soothe or stimulate the nerves;

While that of genius, with a ‘vision’—

And yes, I mix my metaphors

Advisedly: every ‘aesthetic’

Is, on some level, *synaesthetic*—

Such melody as Mozart pours

Over our heads like sacred oil,

Anointing us with happiness

That brings us close to gods (they bless

That angel resting from his toil):

Such music is our sacred bread,

Or should be consecrated thus,

Estranging and enlarging us,

Joining the living and the dead

In tentative and secular

Communion, so intense, so clear,

Tuned to the inner eye and ear,

It sings in candles like a star,

Shines like brass fanfares! Though the bliss

Of the young dancer fades, alas!

In *moments musicaux*, the ‘was’

Is momentarily an *is*.

2. *After an Evening of Mahler*

Suppose that music, audible,

Is only writing in the ear;

Then writing, it is equally clear,

Is music intellectual,

The melody that thinking makes,

Or rather the polyphony

Of its conflicted symphony,

Mahler-esque, dark, where lightning breaks

Only at times on the overbearing

And rather sophomoric Storm

And Stress at the loose edge of form.

Ah, best when all the pompous blaring

Of brassy fanfares and the dense

Black Nietzschean moustachioes

Of Nihilist dissonance find repose

In the Slow Movement, where the tense,

Brow-beating histrionics and

Heroics give way to a free,

Pure flow of complex reverie

And thought with thought walks hand in hand

Through Alpine glades in bracing air,

Crisp vistas of nostalgia,

With cow-bells tinkling, and ah!

*Lieb’ Gott der Vater* with us there!

2. *Chopin*

Recently I heard Rubinstein’s

Chopin (Arthur’s, I mean):It is *As distinct from the Russian*

Chopin’s Chopin. Strange, how in his *composer-pianist Anton Rubinstein.*

Hands a brief nocturne redefines

The world, and modulates its key.

One’s hearing grows chromatic: birds

In the trees trill in minor thirds,

Full of Polish melancholy.

Refined, and yet through Marsyas’ throat

Your pain at times forced melody.

For resolution endlessly

Deferred is the true modern note.

Chopin, whose music is a mythos,

A strange and beautiful disease,

You breathed your life into the keys

Till none was left to keep you with us!



4. *Richard Strauss*

But, Beecham’s *Rosenkavalier*!

At Covent Garden I was present

And through the ears of a quite pleasant

Young man heard all, and shed a tear

For the great Marschallin, and scoffed

At Baron Ochs when Mariandel,

Whom on his knee he tries to dandle,

Proves, when the sly disguise is doffed,

To be the man who steals his catch.

Margarethe Siems *lived* the rôle

With her clear notes and tender soul,

And what a queenly She to watch!

And ah, the splendid final scene, *The duet,* ‘*Est ist ein Traum’.*

As the celesta silvers over

The rose-red fire that burns ‘twixt lover

And lover when the Marschallin

Leaves Sophie and Octavian

Alone together, is a dream’s

Dream-consummation. And those gleams

Of dissonance? They are the wan

Smile of Princess Marie, resigning

Her claims with an *auf Wiedersehn*

To youth we shall not see again.

Clouds with them take their silver lining

When into nothingness they fade,

Leaving in memory a rack,

At most. She thinks (and turns her back),

*Es ist vorbei!* But, how well-played!



5. *Fauré*

Last night I went to hear Fauré:

*Piano Quartet in C Minor*.

In chamber music there’s no finer

Expression of Provençal *gai*

*Saber* (save in the *Violin*

*Sonata*, also wrought when he

Was a young man passionately

In love). The scherzo, sparkling in

The mind as Keats’s beaded bubbles

Brim full the cup of vintage wine,

Moves in an agile, elfin line

Through that love’s dark and gathering troubles:

Rebuffed proposal, heart’s wound, rage

And sorrow, the dispiriting chore

Of running the Conservatoire,

The politics… The War. Old age.

6. *Debussy*

Now the mysterious *L’Après*

*Midi d’un Faune* wafts through the gloom

And like a poisonous flower in bloom

Nijinsky with himself doth play! *Théâtre du Châtelet, May 29, 1912.*

*Ah, quel succès de scandale!*

(His leaps are such miraculous things:

He seems to hover in mid-air

Before descending; one could swear

Hermes had lent the boy his wings!)

7. *Ravel and l’Enfant et les Sortilèges*

And as for those svelte ear machines

Of the Swiss-Basque Maurice Ravel,

That *paradis artificiel*

Of pastoral wallpaper scenes

Torn by a child in petulant rage,

Where shepherds beating on a tabor

Make soft lament for love’s lost labour,

And innocence must turn the page



And hear the woodwinds’ mortal quavers:

I rode in one, vicariously,

Through a young lady named Marie

At the Opéra last month. One savours

The rich, expressive ether of this

Precise nostalgia of the ear

In an aloof child engineer

Who prizes a frail, guarded bliss,

The benediction falling on

Him softly in the shadowy garden,

When, hurt, he gains the creatures’ pardon

And he and innocence are one.

8. *Vaughan Williams A pupil of Ravel’s. I astral-travelled to Gloucester*

*Cathedral to hear the premiere, September 1910.*

*Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas*

*Tallis:* haunted as an old chapel,

The strings sound. The old story, apple

And fall and death, and distant promise…



**9. *Young Turks*

But in a way that makes one wince, key *I attended the second, placidly received per-*

Relationships are savagely *formance of* The Rite of Spring. *Since its*

Distorted, the ears rhythmically *raucous debut it had quietly metamorphosed*

Assaulted by the mad Stravinsky! *into a cornerstone of the Repertoire, Dears!*

(Diaghilew’s a man of charm

And money. Gawkers stand on chairs

To watch pariah and *homme d’affaires An impresario and art-collecter, interested in*

Walk by the cafés arm in arm.) *acquiring some of Aubrey’s erotic drawings.*

\*



S*prechstimme*, a glissando, shrill,

 Death-pale expressionist nightmare,

Mad-clowning of ***Pierrot Lunaire***…

The twentieth century is ill.

 **\***

But when the gate of light’s unlocked

And I walk home into the Vast,

Let it be to the mystic last

Strains of Schoenberg’s

***Verklärte Nacht.***

**\***



***The Serialist Schoenberg***

***and his Disciples***

[*A screed against Serialism and the ‘Emancipation*

*of the Dissonance’, by the amateur musician, Mr V.*]

Beyond the highest tessitura

Of an Expressionist soprano

The high, thin keys of the piano

Make a cold *musica obscura*,

Sound of the interstellar void,

A black noise as of some dark matter

Whose hymns to itself make glass shatter:

This is the music I avoid—

That is, of the twelve-tone variety.

In dodeco-cacophony

Of an affective palette free

Of every affect save anxiety,

It blandly ignores the nature of

The intervals. So dissonance

Must be freed? What, freed of nuance?

Insults to hearing win no love.

Theory’s Pyrrhic victory

Over the ear only accents

The split ‘twixt intellect and sense

In fractional overtones so high

That they amount to a dog-whistle

Music for dogs, and the dogs do

Not like it. And our poor ears, too,

Feel they are suffering a dismissal.

The hexachord is universal,

An aural grammar Nature ingrains

In foetal ears and foetal brains.

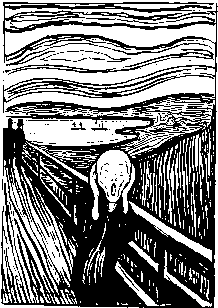
By a mechanical reversal

To embitter music, scorn the natal

Hunger for consonance, and blame

Ears for not relishing the game,

Will to this music prove quite fatal.

******

*****Swan Songs***

***Rossetti and Oscar Wilde***

*Scene: Rossetti’s house on Cheyne Walk.*

Quite a splendid menagerie! *Rossetti speaks in italics.*

But why not add a swan to your

Collection? They are going for

A swan song these days. *That would be*

*The mute swan, then,* Cygnus olor?

*Is that the one you have in mind?*

The *Agamemnon*’s where we find

The first use of the metaphor

Of the swan song, in that scene where

Cassandra, drawing her last breath,

Is likened to the swan whose death

Draws out both soul into the air

And sad lament. Chaucer writes of

‘The Ialous swan, ayens his deth

That syngeth’. *Deep, oh deep beneath*

*The earth, far from the songs of love,*

*The shouts of hate, circles a swan*

*Around the Isle Tuonela, Land*

*Of Death. Mysterious, pale and grand*

*Amid the gloom she glides upon*

*The water. Deathless is her song*

*As death is endless, and releasing.*

*Voice of an oboe sadly pleasing,* If Rossetti is referring to Sibelius’

*She pauses, sings again. Along* *The Swan of Tuonela*, this should

be an English horn, Oscar.—[Mr V]

*The shores the shades are listening, listening, A Finnish swan with the voice of an*

*Startled alive in hearing’s nerve. English horn! Really, Mr V, consider*

*As graceful as her neck the curve the exigencies of both sound and sense!*

*Of melody, and pale and glistening*

*In the mist is the sombre vision.*

*The music is a dying fall,*

*And sweetest at the close of all.*

*Orphic immortal, death’s musician!*

*Schubert’s publisher called his last*

*Songs* Schwanengesang. *How could Fate*

*Rob us so early of so great*

*A soul, of promise still more vast?*

***Oscar Wilde from Père Lachaise***

****Salomé *and* Der Rosenkavalier

A visitor:

*Did you know Richard Strauss has made*

*An opera of your* Salomé?—

Yes, and without, I’m pleased to say,

Changing a single word. It played

At the Opéra not long ago,

And through the unsuspecting ears

And eyes of a young man, my Dears,

This poor ghost witnessed all the show.

I found it splendid, on the whole,

Especially the orchestral writing.

Those mad ‘wrong’ notes, so harsh and biting,

Capture her wild young pagan soul.

But ah, Der *Rosenkavalier*’s

The silvery apotheosis

Of ‘The Harlot’s House’, where Lust’s red roses

Waltz with Love’s lilies, and one hears

Celestial dissonances ring

As they descend from Heaven, angels

Of bittersweet accord. Love dwells

Among us, but is on the wing.



***Oscar Wilde from Père Lachaise***

***Mozart Versus Wagner***

What tripped me up, my Dears? My own

Too-much futurity… The uncanny

Sense of it, so hard to make any

Sense of! *Alas, I should have known*,

I often thought, yet I *did* know—

Knew just enough to have known better

Than to send, ah, how many a letter!

Whose indiscretions caused me so

Much grief, for instance, later, in court.

The Sisters ply a witches’ craft,

They read palms, show you your life graphed

In the lines; hints of dark import

They give, flash you a Tarot card…

(‘He’ll be your death’, a friend once told me.

I laughed at him. And now, behold me!)

Ah, when they laugh, it is a hard

Laughter: To hear it and to bear it

May be the hardest labour of

Them all. And all for love, for love!

Ah, love, to what shall I compare it?

To fate itself, I think.—I’m tired,

My Dears, of talk. I recommend

That whilst in Paris you attend

The Opéra. I’ve much admired

Melchior’s turn as Parsifal.

Ah, how intently strain towards

A heavier Heaven Wagner’s chords!

Slain Viking blood dyes that high Hall.

Sooner to Mozart would I rise.

But if from earth I must look up

To Heaven, let my ears drink the cup

Of Wagner’s heady harmonies.

I’m sorry you’ve missed Melchior’s latest

Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung*.

His Tristan, too—divinely sung!

Music most morbid at its greatest.

Farewell, my Dears! Too brief, alas,

The pleasure! I must rest, perchance

To dream… May you all find romance

And joys to treasure as they pass.

***Oscar Ascends to Heaven***

*******A Brief ‘Retroscension’***

*From ‘Demi-Heaven’.*

That wingèd youth, *quel* *amuse-bouche*!—

Will the Lord strike me with his levin

For chasing cherubs into Heaven?

The Saints will find me somewhat *louche*,

I’m sure; they’ll turn away from me

And ask of God, with a pained face,

That He request I leave the place,

Like some old haughty maître-d’.

Ah, is there Grace enough to wipe

My sins away? Is not my type

One of a far-too curious stripe,

Ascending ere the time is ripe?

Down-at-heels Mephistopheles,

Turn back! The moon’s where you belong,

 Or listening to Casella’s song *See* Purgatorio*,* *ii*:

At Purgatory’s foot, at peace *to a poem by Dante.*

With all your selves… How threadbare seem

My splendid clothes now, shameful rags…

My gloves, pricked from sewing mail bags…

Is this another prison dream?

Penance lacks charm. At least to be

Belacqua, Dante’s idle friend, *See* Purgatorio*, iv.*

Would give me leisure-space to mend

My ways a bit more casually,

Not keen to make that arduous climb

To the Earthly Paradise. A breeze

Would fan me, head between my knees,

(For surely I have served my time!)

Sitting in shade—no, not to brood:

To daydream, perhaps gently jeering

My old friend’s strenuous mountaineering,

His fetish for sheer Altitude.

For what *I* crave is *Latitude*.—

Still, why not play along? The ride’s

Easy, the view, glorious. Besides,

I would not have them think me rude.

For surely it *is* a bit presumptuous

To criticise one’s own Ascension?

It would be graceless not to mention

The many lovely effects: how sumptuous

Yet chaste is the sky’s Giotto blue;

The angels, purest Raphael;

Music by Mozart—chosen well: Ave Verum Corpus*, perhaps? No,*

Wagnerian bombast will not do. *the chorus of lovely cherubim, those*

*angelic boys, in* Die Zauberflöte.

For through the psalms and scent of roses,

The smiling chords divinely blent,

Should run a thread of pure lament

To complicate Apotheosis.



***Lux Aeterna***

***The cello, whose song is grief***

***for the mother tree.—Linda Pastan***1.

*Dank duff on the forest floor*

*Steams in the slant-shine, rain’s after.*

*Perforated greencoat*

*Glimmers through its wounds*

*On the crawlspace, thick vigors*

*Writhe: pale grub bellies, leaf plaster,*

*Black sog, branches bending.*

*Toadstool’s soft head swells,*

*Cool pallor sprinkle with dirt specks.*

*Wood chips cling to their stray places,*

*Log, puddle, mud-patch.*

*Rot riots sweetly, quiet as the chigger bites.*

*The caterpillar chews, inching through loam.*

2.

In the center is a clearing.

Pine trees arrange a circle.

Tall stillnesses tense over you,

Raw, orchestral.

Dusk-robes, in their slow procession,

Trail over foliage their blackening length.

Listen.

*Requiem of Duruflé.*

Rosin-moted light sifts onto cellos,

Basses, string section, woodwinds, Requiem:

Killed trees reassembled as the *Lux Aeterna.*

Resinous haloes, scent of the Spirit rising

From the pith, vibrant

With sympathetic bones.

The fork that tunes the Crucifix

Hives its resonance

In the cells of cellos.

The wood is a secret hidden in the wood.

3.

*I was alive and I called in the forest:*

*‘I will nurse you with a thousand attentions’.*

*My breath was a clear, quick smoke.*

*Light, a granulating honey.*

*There were bitter densities I gave*

*Softer names. I named them shadow*

*Or shade, blue shadow, woodsmoke shade.*

*‘Why do the wasps torment themselves*

*In balls of fury?’ Said the dusk*

*That entered my mouth*

*That verpertine evening.*

*Dusk opened up my mouth, and Vespers sang.*

4.  
In a drift of leaves

Is vigil. In the the word, which

If you have forgotten, remember.

If you remember, say.

*It dwells. It grows.*

*It is and it is to be.*

*‘Yes’.*

***La Vallée des Cloches***

And I went walking through Ravel’s

Valley of the Bells.

I walked, and distant matins rang

With a muffled clang.

Slow green tones tolled far and low.

Rain refreshed the meadow,

Moistened the clover. A ghostly sound—

Light hoof-beats on the ground—

Rippled the mist. Tinkling noises,

Murmur of shepherds’ voices…

I looked out through a row of tall

White columns and watched all

The steeples crumble into dust

And the bells rust.

The echo of a minor third

Was all I heard.

*The steeples crumble into dust*

*And the bells rust.*

***Chopin, 24 Preludes, Op. 28, No. 1***

***(Student’s Edition by Alfred Cortot)***

The passion, the impatient ardor, with which this prelude

Sweeps all along, can only be rendered by the accurate

Punctuation of the syncopated figure which, from bar to bar,

Pantingly and feverishly carries the melodic line forward

To the exaltation of measures 21, 22, 23, and 24.

These form the culminating point of a curve

Afterwards modified by a brief diminuendo

During which there is a weakening of the tone only,

But not of the pressing and insistent rhythm

Now become like the beating of a heart exhausted by emotion.

**

***The Tomb of the Naïads***

***After Pierre Louÿs***

(*Les Chansons de Bilitis)* *Set to music by Debussy.*

I was walking through the frost-covered woods,

My hair across my mouth sprouting little icicles,

My sandals heavy with mud-spattered snow.

He said: *What are you looking for?—I am following*

*The tracks of the satyr. His little cleft footprints*

*Are like holes in a white cloak*.—*The satyrs are dead—*

*The satyrs, and the nymphs, as well. In thirty years*

*There has not been such a terrible winter. The tracks you see*

*Are those of a goat. But let us rest here. This is their tomb*.

And with the blade of his hoe he broke the ice over the spring

Where the Naïads used to play. He took large frozen pieces

And, holding them up against the pallid sky, peered through them.

*****King Rex the Tyrant Gives a Piano Recital***

Every Sunday, when with heart

high-sorrowful and cloyed

he rested from his day job,

you would not see him at his usual pasturage,

ripping meals from that great meat orchard

as he crashed his way down to a skyline luridly inflamed.

At times such as these, the whole world retired

to lick its wounds in silence, free

of those deafening shock waves throbbing from the swamp

when the thick-skinned King (who was also very thin-skinned)

pulled up short at his dinner to roar at his food:

DON’T LOOK AT MY HANDS!

On this day you would find him in his palace

entertaining guests, in a genial mood,

eating, at most, two servants, and passing up a canapé.

Sometimes he displayed, for connoisseurs,

the smeared botches of his "abstract expressionist" paintings,

or read with a suavely modulated growl

from his latest forays into the realms of Erato.

And when the great gilded grandfather clock

in the hallway banged the ineluctable hour,

his chorus of toadies knew what to say:

*Sire, won't you favor us with a little Debussy?*

And we shuffled through the double doors

into the auditorium.

Industrial-strength kettledrum footsteps

crescendo'd from stage right.

He squeezed into view, his head bedizened

with a dandruff of klieg light shards.

He landed on the piano bench, squared

his shoulders to put a little wallop into it,

and then it could not be denied

that the up-and-down Clonk Clank Clownking

had begun.

Fine lacquered rosewood flew into chunks

of lumber exploding toward the ceiling,

white keys scattering like broken teeth, snapped strings

flailed like riot hoses slipped from the grasp.

All this time he watched over his work

with huge satanic eagle eyes hooded

by the ancestral crests of his orbital bones.

But now and then those eyes

seemed to look out at us in perplexity,

as if to ask why destiny had appointed him

to level the lyrical to the literal

with such monstrous finesse—

like that dream of a pagoda poised

over its reflection in a lake

collapsing into splinters of the physical damage

he was inflicting with those pitiful, vestigial hands.

Ah, he could swallow a tank,

but an octave he could not span!

On and on the pounding softened us up

like the overture to a beach landing,

no place to hide in the inland of the ear,

he continued to torture Debussy

in blatant violation of the Geneva Conventions

and what could we do but pretend to listen

to what we would pretend we had never heard?



***Listen to the Mockingbird (II)***

Glib plagiarist, recite your myriad melismas,

In careless order mime the sober songs

Of all the venerable classical birds.

Play the familiar strophes, loved refrains,

The ditties and the snatches of old song,

The cautious hooting of Minerva’s pet,

So baleful when heard on evening’s rafters,

The roo-coo-cooing of the turtledove,

The efflorescent nightingale, such lofty

Twittering… Mingle all these noble strains

In medley, wring new music from the ripe

Decay, new vintage from the raisin: hybrid

And full of spurious, rainbow-like delights.

Mix and amass, as light unfurls its flags,

Your plural songs, improvize glib cadenzas,

You of the endless, perishable music.

***Sites Auriculaires***

*Maurice Ravel*

The silken hammer

and the fragile anvil.

World’s pinna. Thunder-blinded

radio eye.

Helical swirl, golden ratio.

Motionless cyclone. Still whirlpool.

\* \* \*

Thumping of drums against the tympanum.

Stirrup of the vanishing horseman.

\* \* \*

Shell that *listens*.

A cry: its sheltering grotto. *Daphnis and Chloe*

A whisper: white

Sibilance of surf. Melody

emerging from the sonic shadows.

Bone microphone.

Ambiguous tritones hesitate in the vestibule,

resolve to enter as the tonic chord.

\* \* \*

*Introduction and Allegro*

Harp arpeggios

superconduct the air,

saturate the labyrinth

and soothe the soul-beast

in his amygdalic lair.

Let us walk the autumn woods, come evening.

\* \* \*

Canal, and the melodious gondolas

floating up and down. A barcarolle*.*

*Une Barque sur l’Océan*

\* \* \*

Places of the ear.

Places for music to take hold.

***Hermes Argeiphontes***

 ***Slayer of Argos***

Io: how Heaven’s Queen despised her!

Zeus was clever: he bovinized her.

So Hera must prevent, somehow,

This assignation with a cow.

She hires one Argus as a keeper

(No-Doze, friends call him, Never-Sleeper)—

Panoptic, that is, many-eyed,

Behind, in front and to the side.

Hermes (it’s true, he is God’s pimp)

Has found a way around this crimp

She puts in father Zeus’s plans:

He’ll send the rube into a trance.

He’ll flute a tune for Io’s guardian,

Something genial, almost Mozartean—

And not in a somniferous way, no,

More like a cheeky Papageno.

For Hermes is a virtuoso;

The monster’s taste is merely so-so.

How *could* he make sense of this light,

Off-hand manner, this bevy of bright

Blue notes that flutter past his ears

Like “angels smiling through their tears”?

The thrilling trills, the highs and lows

Of saltatory arpeggios…

What he can’t follow only stuns

Him; his eyes shut (not all at once,

More like a city blacking out)—

And to his great relief, no doubt:

The visible is his reality,

An ineluctable modality

That bores him, on a hundred screens,

With replays of the same old scenes.

His eyes cry out: We want to close!

He whistles softly through his nose.

Argus, it was not wise to drowse and

Curtain your thousand eyes to a thousand

Dangers—were you killed with one blow

Or many? See? You’ll never know.

Zeus rolls aside, exhausted, sated.

The look on Io’s face? Frustrated.

For passion dies in brief elation;

Music’s the only consummation.



***The Sicilian Expedition***

*Thucydides,* The Peloponnesian War*, 6*

A minor god, despite my many aspects,

Essentially good-natured, almost more human

Than divine, and so I had a greater share

In the daily life of the people than the more austere

Or blustering deities, huge in their armor

Or unattainable in their sashed loveliness.

They evoked my name at crossroads—

All of these were haunted and accursed,

And I had power over the dead

Buried in wait there, in the motionless space

Where flows of traffic pass each other in their haste.

At the entrance to their houses they placed my bust

On a pedestal. I was the sentry, bluff and phallic.

I, and only I, blocked the approach of calamity.

And so it was more than untoward, it was an omen of disaster

When my images were smashed by unknown hands

On the eve of the Sicilian Expedition, as if to ensure

The beginning of the end of the Athenian Empire,

Greatness destroyed by demagogues in the name of that greatness.

And so, no minor god, after all, your friend Hermes,

But the most faithful and witty companion

Of the Athenians in the time of their ascendancy,

The first to feel the bitterness to come.

At war’s end, as the Spartans dismantled

The city walls, the work was accompanied

By the strains of my beloved instrument.

Citizens wept to hear—ghosting the curt percussion

Of hammer against stone—the music of flutes,

thin, cruel, hieratic, fit for a god’s departure.

***Fauré, Piano Trio in D Minor, Op. 120***

What was it that made Nadia Boulanger so revere it,

this testament of his old age when he could barely hear

the lower octaves and notes sounded higher or lower

than they were?—

The Great War has come and gone,

a shabby peace is taking hold. Memories of *la Belle Époque*

and the lyrical follies of a long-gone youth

shimmer fitfully beneath dissonances that trouble

the surface of this music like acid algae blooms on a lily pond.

Especially the slow movement, the way it revisits

the early phase—the *Berceuse*, for example, that Proustian lullaby—

bitterly enriched now by a lifetime’s accumulation

of disappointments: the thought that his piano scores

had been used by his publisher’s wife to seal jars of preserves,

that the petty politics of running the Conservatoire

had cost him so many compositions—and, oh-so long ago,

how his Betrothed had broken the engagement and his heart.

He climbs a staircase of sequences with effortful steps,

at a gingerly pace, as to the top of some unfinished tower,

and from there he sees all of sad and lovely and vanishing

Paris spread out beneath him like a floating dream.

Rain is falling past the mansard roofs and gothic spires:

Is it France weeping, is it notes falling from their staves?

The rain, merely the rain, pouring through gutters and freshening,

awhile, the sewer water rushing through the Catacombs.

***The Jupiter Symphony***

The city had taken every civil defense precaution

but it remained vulnerable to the music of Mozart.

The *Jupiter Symphony* reduced it to rubble.

Beauty is brutal.



*****The Royal Cemetery at Ur***

Root delicately into the pit. Work surgically with brush and trowel.

It is dense with the mothers-and-the-fathers-in-the-earth.

Help the earliness shed its tiers. Piece the tesserae, connect the bones.

Ur V.

Time of the lawgivers. It cost you five shekels to cut off a slave’s toe,

ten for an ear. A foreign power had carted off the word for canal.

Finally, the city was destroyed. Everywhere you looked you saw a canal.

Ur IV.  
Pictographs were slowly leeching out their pictures. Colorful, specious

religions were founded on a dare. They worshipped a goddess on a hook,

a martyr of meat. They splashed temple walls with a riot of vulgar clay cones.

Ur III.

Words were images of the halos around things. An oafish barbarian

reigned for fifty years. A rebarbative prude, he outlawed the lovely

erotic cylinder seals and poisoned the city dreamworks.

Ur II.

Fall of the tree gods: Their forked feet had tasted too much death. The substance

of deity was wedged in the grain of things. A branch grew from the word branch.

Day and night, furtive priests were gnawing away at the oracles flourishing there.

Ur I.

End here, at the beginning, where they who have most to bear bear it most lightly.

They eat dates. Princesses marry gods and make love to captains, patriarchs walk

about in woolen skirts. The soul has a tree-roots-and-barley smell… Canals carve

through the tongue’s moist clay and out among the palm gardens, weeping for Puabi

in her mineral robe. Here is the Goat God! Here is the Harp with a Gold Bull’s Head!

Still in the hands of the one who sang and sings it all: the skeletal musician: the poet.



***Words for a Song***

***Friends We Have Known***

You think of them often

When you have the time

But too much has happened

Or you’re fresh out of dimes

Some of them wrote you

But you didn’t reply

And now it’s too late

To explain to them why

The ones who left town

The ones you’ve outgrown

The ones who have changed

And they won’t say hello

Here’s to the friends we have known

*O they come and they go*

*Over the ocean, under a stone*

*They flew high they fell low*

*And let’s drink to the friends we have known*

Some struck it rich

And some lost it all

Some just got busy

And no longer call

I mean Danny and Rosey

And Heather and Bill

Friends from the office

And wise guys like Phil

You married and moved

You stayed home alone

The war took your life

Or maybe you took your own

Here’s to the friends we have known

*O they come and they go*

*Over the ocean, under a stone*

*They flew high they fell low*

*And let’s drink to the friends we have known*

Here’s to the good times

The bad times, the bland

Your old high school sweetheart

And the guys in the band

We listened to records

That sang about love

And the things that get lost

When you have to grow up

The jokes that seem funny

Now strike you as sad

There’s pain in your heart

Where you ought to feel glad

When you think of the friends you once had

*Mmm mmm they come and they go*

*Mmm mmm under a stone*

*Mmm mmm such jolly good fellows*

*And here’s to the friends we have known*

***Serenade***

*The full moon, and the werewolves roam.*

*The plague moon, and an empty town.*

*The sickle moon, to cut you down!*

*The no-moon, and a broken home.*

That sliver of silver is the new

Moon rocking in the cradle of

The old, whose dying mother-love

Is fading slowly out of view.

The cycles turn, the church-bells ring

The Harvest and the Hunter’s Hunger,

That always-older, ever-younger

**Diminish-and-crescendo thing.

There’s nothing new beneath the moon

Except the moon. Or, its reflection.

There are reversals of direction.

Fresh as a daisy or a tune

Recently minted, and as cheaply

Dear, as if from one’s wonted stall

In a suburban music hall

One loved the empty music deeply:

Such is the new moon soon-to-be!

So interesting to speculate

What figure’s humming by the gate

A *Moon Song*, in that foreign key*?*

*Of Yum-Yum, or Rusalka?*

*Alas, we shall never know!*

**

***Marsyas***

In a spasm of pique

She threw it away,

Minerva of the Many Counsels.

Not from a stag

Or a red-crowned crane:

From the shin-bones of a human

Knotted into the vessel of a tune.

It wasn’t the ligature

Or the strain on her lungs

That screwed her face up into shrewdness:

It was the *song* she could not abide,

The one she awakened where

It sheltered in the hollows of the flute

Like a sorrowing thing in a cave.

The destitution of that mortal song

Cries and is lavish on the ear,

Wave on a sea conch,

Spindrift, spendthrift, spent.

Ending, and empty at the center,

Resonating, for a while,

In the vice of space and time.

And the flute fell to Marsyas.

He was nosing the leaves for berries.

Cleft-foot demi-goat.

Little gamboling man.

And he brought to bear on the bones

His breath, and the history

Of his breath—a freight

Of dirty jokes and garlic smells.

The flute fell to Marsyas,

Whose death lay inside him

Like the core of a fruit

Forbidden to gods.

If Apollo pulled him from himself,

It was for the secret he hungered to know—

*Where is it happening, the dying in you?*

*I want to taste it.*

Where does it happen?

The self, a nesting doll,

Eludes itself. The outside

Is in the inmost room inside it.

Apollo ordered his skin pinned down.

Nailed to a tree like a flag.

And the god withdrew.

\*

*Out of the satyr’s bones*

*Make instruments to sing*

*In memory of those bones*

*When they could sing themselves*

*In flesh-tones, blithe in Arcadian woods;*

*And of the flighty breath*

*That fluted and fluttered there,*

*A little fluting in the air,*

*Once, on a summer’s day.*

***Listening to Ravel’s String Quartet in F***

***on a Sunday Afternoon***

*Shall we get out of bed, Dear?*

*We could venture*

*Out into the rain:*

*The streets are mirrors,*

*The leaves are red and gold.*

But listen… Where

In the music is it falling

From, Love, this something

That is more like rain

Than rain itself?

*As if Orpheus*

*Invented melancholy*

*So that we could hear it*

*And be happy, because*

*We are so perfectly sad.*



***Head of Orpheus on the Water***

Become the note you sing.

Echo of the rising waters.

How the sea’s premonition sounds.

Sing where you will be

with the voice of where you were.

Essential now,

teach the water what water is,

a rashness lost and retrieved

in the mirrors of its motion.

Your voice is a bodiless honey.

Afloat on a buoyancy that is not hope.

Become the river.

Relax into your delta flats,

work out your intricate metaphors

for a vastness that swallows all qualities.

After the final cadence

the song sleeps in the arms of singing

under the moon, O vocative O!



***Credo***

Things felt became my credo, not mere feeling. *Rilke works as Rodin’s private secretary*.

Look, always look… So I told Pain and Pleasure: New Poems. *Later, the* Sonnets to

Your destiny is buttress, vault and ceiling. Orpheus, *a kind of palinode to these…*

Squeeze into silence under massive pressure.

Spread through these stained-glass shapes, be the still bliss

In martyrs’ eyes when sunbeams bruise them; coil

Your tumult deep inside the wafer’s kiss,

The cool, chromatic sheen on chrism oil—

Fling yourself out now, in convulsive waves,

And find, in Orpheus, your mouth, your breath.

Float down the river of a song no staves

Can hold—be one whole note that rings through death

And grows so vast and palpable and round

Earth dwells entirely in that single sound.

**

***Two Stanzas***

For the duration of two stanzas

They are doomed to live. A music hall,

A jaunty song, a curtain call,

The men and women clap their hands as

She curtsies, the applause dies, the crowd

Return to drinking—then, the gloom:

The chanteuse in her dressing room

Is weeping with her gold head bowed.



***Words to a Song (II)***

***Holiday Inn***

*Seeking after that sweet golden climb*

*Where the traveler's journey is done.*

[*Jaunty major key:*]

Holiday Inn is a great place to stay

Holiday Inn is just off the highway

Holiday Inn will make you feel OK

Holiday Inn is open 24 hours a day

Holiday Inn has a swimming pool

Holiday Inn will always keep you cool

Holiday Inn has a room for you

Holiday Inn's better than Howard Johnson's

Holiday Inn where the sheets are clean

Holiday Inn is like a traveler's dream

Holiday has excellent cuisine

And in addition, it has a really nice ice machine

[*Melancholy interlude in a minor key*]

But if you stay

Past check-out time

They'll make you pay

An extra $50 of more.

So you be sure

Check out before

A certain hour

It should be posted on your door

At Holiday Inn there's always free stationery

At Holiday Inn the toilets are sanitary

At Holiday Inn the rooms are bright and airy

And some locations have cable television

Holiday Inn in the middle of the night

Holiday Inn is like a shining light

Holiday Inn will always treat you right

Holiday Inn beats all the competition

Holiday Inn. A home away from home.

Holiday Inn. Complete with touchstone phone.

Holiday Inn. You'll never feel alone:

A Gideon Bible is in every room.

But if you stay

Past check-out time

They'll make you pay

An extra $50 of more.

So you be sure

Check out before

A certain hour

It should be posted on your door

[*Instrumental break: melancholy saxophone solo. A quiet*

*sound of steady rain, windshield  wipers whining, a car*

*honk, Doppler Effect glissando counterpointing saxophone riff.*]

Visit our lounge, relax in elegant surroundings

Get into the sounds of groovy soft-rock bands

Wander around, and while the beat is pounding

Play video pinball with a Daiquiri in your hands

Holiday Inn has a Magic Finger bed

Put 50 cents in and it will help your head

Holiday Inn and you'll sleep like the dead

Holiday Inn's color-coordinated

Bring up a friend, you both can stay in a single

Ask the desk clerk and she will give you a ring

She will make sure you get up in the morning

Hasn't Holiday Inn thought of just about everything?

Holiday Inn is everywhere

The people are friendly and they really care

Holiday Inn has comfortable chairs

Holiday Inn. Be sure to bring a bottle of gin.

[*Full choir:*]

Holiday Inn

Bottle of gin

Holiday Inn

Bottle of gin

[*Audience rises to their feet here*:]

Hallelujah

Hallelujah

Honolulu

***Blanch***

It was the sort of night when the moon—Nature’s

disco ball, poets say—the sort of night when the moon

presides with scrutinizing cool over the hound dogs’

blurted odes, the splashy sizzle of krill on the surface

of the waves… It was a feverish Saturday night,

as I recall… The moon—let’s call her Blanch—had set

aside her patch of cloud and was giving the world

the once-over…

It was the midnight hour, when Wolf Boy

was most likely to be seen striking his *contrapposto* pose,

stylishly pointing up at that swollen yellow eye.

(The hispid *sprezzatura* of the way he fist-pumped

in the spotlight, strafed with silvery ghosts of bullets!)

Me? As usual in a downstage corner of the scene,

white-faced and wistful as Pierrot if he wore a leather jacket,

fingering my slim-necked electric mandolin, crooning

*Blue Moon* with a back-up band, my hair slicked back,

smooth-talking with a twang in a cheesy voice-over:

*Nobody loves you like I do, little Queeny.*

*Nobody else knows how many moons you are.*

But Blanch?She only cared for Wolfie and his sexy moves,

the hounds vociferating in the woods, the krill percolating

on the surface of the sea— and oh! the way that sexy Boy

of hers twirled, fist-pumped in an instant freeze-pose,

fist-pumped and twirled and stamped out the Fever Dance,

glowing in the ogle of that greedy yellow eye!

It was *that* sort of night, as I recall.

***Venus in Rhinestones***

I walk alone down Bitter Avenue.

I woke, and she was gone. I walk alone.

The Devil’s your friend till the bill falls due.

You pay for every pleasure you have known.

How long before the pavement’s overgrown

With weeds, guns crackle and rats run for cover?

In a bar somewhere in the red light zone

Venus is singing to her latest lover.

The dive’s bad breath, that’s the stale smell of brew. .

An ambulance keens by. Alley cats moan.

A hooker’s doing what a hooker do.

A stray dog snarls and bites his chicken bone.

Then there’s that clutch of paper cups, wind-blown

And scuffing past those shivering mugs that hover

In cubbyholes, and while the El-trains groan,

Venus is singing to her latest lover.

Pimp with right arm graced by a snake tattoo—

Finger fishing for change in a pay phone—

The moon, cheap earring moon, pinned to the blue

Bruise of the sky—three dusty pigeons, flown

To their roosts—shark collecting on a loan—

The dockside corpse those crazy bums discover:

All this, in the world’s weariest monotone,

Venus is singing to her latest lover.

Prince of this World, your heart is made of stone.

When the girl screams, it’s you who loom above her.

Put by your business, gather in your own:

Venus is singing to her latest lover.

***Our Lady of the Lonely***

*Lie by the fire, Love: guide me into you.*

Our bodies, at their animal devotions,

open their secret rooms, and love’s still there,

where we left it when we said good-bye this morning.

For this we thank Our Lady of the Lonely.

A muted trumpet solo haunts the speaker.

Cool sparks dance off a glimmer of rooftop jazz

Brooding over the city like the moon.

Lights quiver in the shadow of a blue note.

Tonight you are beautiful. Nothing else is certain.

It is the hour, O Lady of Consolations,

When hearts rise and demand their earthly share.

We’re small as children in each other’s arms.

Out in the streets, Love, it is shadow and wind.

On the windowpanes, moonlight melts into firelight.

**

***Lili Marleen***

Through a barrage of jeers

the pretty German girl

sings in a quavering voice

a song

that slowly makes the grown men cry,

melting, for a moment’s truce,

the barbed-wire barricade

between two warring powers.

This is where *Paths of Glory* ends.

No, *this* is the final shot:

Kirk Douglas, the Colonel, walking away

haunted and alone

with what he has heard, and what he saw:

the senseless execution of his men.

Let’s never have another fight, my Love.

\*

That other song, that icon of the ear,

words written in the Great War,

set to music in the sequel

and sung by Germans and Allies alike:

let’s scratch that platter

with a needle, dear, again.

Diastole and systole

the accordion compresses,

stretches, compresses

the squeeze-box of the heart.

There goes that little ghost of a march.

*Lili Marleen—*

the jaunty doomed refrain.

The voice of Marlene Dietrich

is worldly sorrow

following the tune to where it ends.

The tone arm lifts itself

from listening

like a salute.

With the stiff dutiful gesture

of a tomb-side sentry

it returns to the notch,

its resting place.

The Mädchen left behind

by wasted gallantry

is left behind again—

and so are we, with only

those interior echoes

that follow into silence

songs of love and war.



***Hendrix Plays London***

*You’ll never hear surf music again.*

*—*Third Stone from the Sun

Freaky distorted left-hand genius music:

This was the ecstasy of Something New.

I saw him play, this other-earthly mystic.

He pulled out an Old Glory hanky and blew

His nose: they cheered—the Union Jack made two.

The embassy we egged was Dad’s domain.—

But years pass, wars die, and as if on cue

I hear surf music. It’s the old refrain.

I search time’s rhymes, I run the old mnemonic

Until I reach the lonely name of Sue.

We snuck home, shared the hash pipe’s flimsy magic,

Made quiet love. What could my parents do

Next morning when they found us there, snafu

Of teenage nakedness, a small red stain

On the white sheets, your eyes, so wide and blue?

I hear surf music. It’s the old refrain.

The moon looked lost up there, eclipsed by manic

Soho light-shows. People we barely knew

Put blotters in our hands. Cut to mosaic

Mandala visions, soundtrack by the Who,

Where? When? Christ my g-g-generation grew

Repetitive. Demand put such a strain

On nickel and body bags. My mind’s askew,

I hear surf music. It’s the old refrain.

Prints of gone shoes fill when the tide rolls through,

And what it takes we’ll never see again.

Shsh. Listen, girl: you’ll hear me asking you

*How did that song go, what’s the old refrain?*

# *The Ancient Roadie*

Fragmentary as a flashback, this view,

Through the tall grass, of a tour bus

Brown-spotted and spoiling like a lemon—

Eyes looking up through two cartoon china-man slits,

Mind blown by the sunset’s vast psychedelia:

Blue air bleeding out its shine in streaks of ruby.

Corrugated clouds rippling motionless,

Transverse. Tawny vapor trails—flake, fluke, freak.

A bass line like a black light set to music throbs

Between his stage-amp-deafened ears. Silvery

Jangles of rhythm guitar punctuate smoky vocals.

What band of spirits is this, shaking jagged hips?

Hendrix and Morrison, Joplin and Jones:

They’re showing off their beautiful young skeletons.

The sky’s alive with flickering Bic lights.

That aging groupie is the moon.



***Words for a Song (III)***

***Down into the Valley***

Down into the Valley did I go,

The Valley where the daisies never grow.

Down into the Valley did I go

Where trees are shadows and the cold winds blow.

*Up into the mountains I climbed slow*

*Then down into the Valley did I go.*

*Up into the mountains I climbed high*

*But in the Valley I lay down to die.*

I walked along the level ground for miles.

I went down on my knees and prayed awhile

Then down into the Valley did I go.

You will find me sleeping in the snow.

*I thought I heard the Angel’s trumpet call.*

*Then down into the Valley did I fall.*

*I thought I heard the Angels singing loud.*

*Amen they said and wound me in a shroud.*

Down into the Valley did I go.

I watched them bear my body, walking slow.

Down into the Valley did I go.

O mother in the ground they laid me low.

*Oh up into the Heavens I was bound*

*Then step by step I climbed into the ground.*

*I could have sworn the Angels gave me wings.*

*And down I fell among the shady things.*

I walked along the level ground and cried.

I laid me down upon the ground and died.

Oh down into the Valley did I go.

Down into the Valley did I go.

Down into the Valley did I go.

The Valley where the daisies never grow.

****

***Raisin’ the Roof*  \ | /**

**-- Heaven --**

**/ | \**

Jazz

On

stepping to

stones of

up

our wrong notes

we stumble

***In the Forest of Listening***

*In the woods, in the forest of*

*Listening, fragile animals*

*Move. Can you hear their cries and calls?*

*They are the hymns of savage Love,*

*With obbligato of the humming-*

*Bird and the ponderous, heaving, grave*

*Sleep of the bear inside his cave,*

*And little feet on leaves snare-drumming.*

*The ear of which I am the listening*

*Is a deep wood of ancient trees.*

*Birds hop the branches. Moonbeams seize*

*On clutches of pale larvae, glistening.*

*Death is alive, and feeds on birds.*

*It crawls into their staring eyes*

*And feeds. The humming of the flies*

*Is a hymn, and I know the words.*

*\**

*I raise a temple in the ear*

*Where there was labyrinth. I found*

*The soul upon the crawling ground*

*Of what it moves beyond. I clear*

*A little clearing for the moon*

*To see alive the struggling wood*

*In motives snarled, and call it good,*

*Because it makes itself a tune.*

This is the burden of the song

That is the poem ORPHEUS,

The poem of Orpheus. What it does

It is. In darkness it is strong.

***Quieting the Eye***

1.

Be blind awhile, and listen, dear.

Your eye has done you much offence.

Lay black crepe on the hungry lens.

Let Beauty enter through the ear.

Let the acrobats of vision rest,

No more upon the retinas

To dance their hand-stands for applause.

Let colour drain into the West.

The prism that has broken light

A million ways to feed your eyes

Let break, that all the hues may rise

Back to their Heaven vague and white.

Accept the music of what is

Into the blind and cradling ark

Of listening, where Truth is dark

And sheltered from all images.

The music feels its way along

The labyrinth. By feel it knows

The furniture of nerves, it goes

The spiral journey of all song

That wants to build into the joy

And soft explosion of its power

To make a blossom of an hour.

It is not still, and does not cloy.

2. *Pythagorean Orpheus*

Vision finds sanctuary in time made rhythm.

The auricular nerve vibrates in unison

With Orphic strains, and ear and harp are one.

The spark of joy leaps the synaptic schism.

He tunes the music on his giant harp

Of myriad strings, each string a particle

Or wave, on staves multidimensional.

In neutron flat or in electron sharp

Through the star-eaten body of the dark

The fugue of matter and energy pursues

Its trillion courses, bent to split and fuse

And split again to fractions of a quark.

The lowest octave of a stone he plays;

And in the sopranino heights of space

In fiercest notes, each with a Shiva-face,

The furious descant of the gamma rays…

Everywhere wave-functions decohere

Symphonically in whispering, roaring, sobbing:

*Basso profundo* of the black hole throbbing.

Flute notes that keep their distance, although near.

Our lives and deaths vibrate across the strings.

Pythagorean Orpheus orchestrates

The Vast from its minutest quantum states:

He is the infinite part-song that he sings.

***The Music Ends***

The music ends too soon so that the ear

May ring with wishing it would never cease.

We learn to love by losing what is dear.

Just when with parting we have made our peace

The music ends

In a smoke sharp enough to sting a tear.

Those Odes to Joy are Heaven on a lease.

The Timeless briefly hovered and was near.

*Da capo*, then, beloved Masterpiece,

The only opus that we ever hear!

A rosin cloud drifts over the high C’s:

The music ends.

***Listen to the Mockingbird (III)***

**The cadenza that has no beginning**

**and reaches past its ending**

**as if it had no end**



****