Texts and translations

Rameau: Viens, Hymen

Viens, hymen, viens m'unir au vainqueur que j'adore 1 Forme tes nœuds, enchaîne-moi ! Dans ces tendres instants où ma flamme t'implore, L'amour même n'est pas plus aimable que toi.

Come, Hymen, come to join me with the conqueror Tie your knots, bind me ! [I adore ! In these tender moments when my ardour implores you, Love itself is not more desirable than you.

Debussy: La romance d’Ariel, poem of Paul Bourget

Au long de ces montagnes douces,  
Dis! viendras-tu pas à l’appel  
De ton délicat Ariel  
Qui veloute à tes pieds les mousses?  
Suave Miranda, je veux  
Qu’il fasse juste assez de brise  
Pour que ce souffle tiède frise  
Les pointes d’or de tes cheveux!

Les clochettes des digitales  
Sur ton passage tinteront;  
Les églantines sur ton front  
Effeuilleront leurs blancs pétales.

Sous le feuillage du bouleau  
Blondira ta tête bouclée;  
Et dans le creux de la vallée  
Tu regarderas bleuir l’eau,  
L’eau du lac lumineux ou sombre,  
Miroir changeant du ciel d’été,  
Qui sourit avec sa gaîté  
Et qui s’attriste avec son ombre;

Symbole, hélas! du cœur aimant,  
Où le chagrin, où le sourire  
De l’être trop aimé, se mire  
Gaîment ou douloureusement …

Come, will you not cross these fair mountains,  
When summoned by  
Your fair Ariel,  
Who velvets the moss at your feet?  
Sweet Miranda, I would wish  
For just enough breeze  
For its warm breath to ruffle  
The golden tips of your hair!

The foxglove bells  
Will chime as you pass;  
The eglantine will shed on your brow  
Its white petals.  
  
Beneath the birch leaves  
Your curly head will turn blond;  
And in the depths of the valley  
You will see the water turn blue,  
The water of the luminous or dark lake,  
A changing mirror of the summer sky,  
Which smiles in merriment  
And grows sad in its shadow;

Symbol, alas, of the loving heart,  
Where the sorrow, where the smile  
Of one too well loved, is reflected  
Merrily or sadly…

Debussy: Pantomime, poem of Paul Verlaine

Pierrot, qui n’a rien d’un Clitandre,  
Vide un flacon sans plus attendre,  
Et, pratique, entame un pâté.  
Cassandre, au fond de l’avenue,  
Verse une larme méconnue  
Sur son neveu déshérité.  
Ce faquin d’Arlequin combine  
L’enlèvement de Colombine  
Et pirouette quatre fois.  
Colombine rêve, surprise  
De sentir un coeur dans la brise  
Et d’entendre en son coeur des voix.

Pierrot, who is no Clitandre,  
Gulps down a bottle without delay  
And, being practical, starts on a pie.  
Cassandre, at the end of the avenue,  
Sheds an unnoticed tear  
For his disinherited nephew.  
That rogue of a Harlequin schemes  
How to abduct Colombine  
And pirouettes four times.  
Colombine dreams, amazed  
To sense a heart in the breeze  
And hear voices in her heart.

Debussy: Romance (Silence ineffable), poem of Paul Bourget)

Silence ineffable de l’heure  
Où le cœur aimant sur un cœur  
Se laisse en aller et s’endort,  
—Sur un cœur aimant qui l’adore! …  
Musique tendre des paroles,  
Comme un sanglot de rossignols,  
Si tendre qu’on voudrait mourir,  
—Sur la bouche qui les soupire! …  
L’ivresse ardente de la vie  
Fait défaillir l’amant ravi,  
Et l’on n’entend battre qu’un cœur,  
—Musique et silence de l’heure! …

Ineffable silence of the hour  
When the loving heart abandons itself  
And sleeps on a loving heart  
—Which adores it! …  
Tender music of the words,  
Like a sobbing nightingale,  
So tender one would wish to die  
—On the mouth that sighs them! …  
Ardent intoxication of life  
Makes the enraptured lover swoon,  
And one hears the beating of a single heart,  
—Music, and the silence of the hour!...

Samuel Barber: Knoxville: Summer of 1915, poem by James Agee

It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds' hung havens, hangars. People go by; things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt; a loud auto; a quiet auto; people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually, the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard and starched milk, the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squared with clowns in hueless amber  
  
A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping, belling and starting; stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and past and past, the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter, fainting, lifting, lifts, faints foregone: forgotten. Now is the night one blue dew  
  
Now is the night one blue dew, my father has drained, he has coiled the hose  
  
Low on the length of lawns, a frailing of fire who breathes....  
Parents on porches: rock and rock. From damp strings morning glories hang their ancient faces  
  
The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air at once enchants my eardrums  
  
On the rough wet grass of the back yard my father and mother have spread quilts. We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and I too am lying there....They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet, of nothing in particular, of nothing at all. The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of great sweetness, and they seem very near. All my people are larger bodies than mine,...with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of the night. May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away  
  
After a little I am taken in and put to bed. Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am.

Benjamin C.S. Boyle: Zelda’s Dream

Text excerpted from a letter from Zelda to F. Scott Fitzgerald, circa April 15, 1919 from Montgomery, Alabama.

Everything seems so smooth and restful, like this yellow dusk. Something in me vibrates to a dusky, dream smell - a smell of dying moons and shadows. I've spent today in a graveyard. Why should graves make people feel in vain? I can't find anything hopeless in having lived. All the broken columns and clasped hands and doves and angels mean romances - in a hundred years I shall like having people speculate on whether my eyes were blue or brown - of course they are neither. Isn't it funny how, out of a row of Confederate soldiers, two or three will make you think of dead loves and dead lovers, when they're exactly like the others, even to the yellowish moss? Old death is so beautiful, so very beautiful - We will die together - I know.

Philip Lasser: In Colors of Feelings, poems of Wynelle Carson

1. Death of a Muse

My pen is dry—there's no ink to spread a-long the lines. It coughs and gags from lack of fuel and words that were left behind. Once my muse still singing, my pen dashed across the page. The ink caught fire as it spilled from the shaft leaving words a-blaze. The fire is out which lit the heart that spawned those heavy tones. My muse is gone to sing elsewhere and left my words alone.

1. Dream

Hold on tightly and sail with blue breezes, up and up until you reach the unreachable. Let the wind carry you to where you've never been. Fear will only hold you back -- back and down. The dusk creeps up and night comes surprisingly, though it seems the sun will shine for hours yet, soon it may be too dark to fly. Let go and soar to dreamed-of places. Don't be disappointed if colors aren't as bright as those you painted. Think of those you left -- the gray ones on the ground. I've been looking towards the sky even though you warn me, It may not be so blue once we reach it. Rain will come with clouds of sadness. Yes it must. But we can fly and still be prepared for rain. So even if the human race should tie you down with ropes of doubt, I'll still believe dreams can come true -- and I will cut you loose.

1. You Sing for Me

You sing to me of tears and love and smiles, your strong hands flow over ivory keys, spilling haunting tunes to the air. Your voice spreads like soaring wings, in colors of feeling shaded hazy, enveloping my soul. I drowned in the tide of your song, oh, I could listen for long. So long that I should never know the tears had fallen from my eyes And filled the valley with a river flowing to the sea. You sing for me in concertos born within your soul, which pluck the strands of the heart in me

1. When Our Hearts Were Young

Under the shade of the willow tree, t’was there you first kissed me. When our hearts were young, and the taste of love was sweet on our tongue We sat under skies of blue in the cool and fresh morning dew. When our hearts were young, and the taste of love was sweet on our tongue. You caressed my soul and kissed my heart, and we vowed to one another we'd never part. When our hearts were young, and the taste of love was sweet on our tongue. I know now, as I knew then, our love for one another would never end. Underneath the willow tree, the time you first kissed me. When our hearts were young, and the taste of love was sweet on our tongue.