

SYMBOLISTS AND DECADENTS

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1865)

"Correspondances"

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observant avec des regard familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
---Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

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"Correspondences" (Translated by David Paul)

Nature is a temple where living columns rise,
Releasing at times a murmur of words half understood:
Within it man can wander as though within a wood
Of conscious symbols that watch him with familiar eyes.

Like prolonged echoes that distance mingles together
Into an obscure but endless unity,
Vast as light itself, or as the night sky,
Perfumes, colours and sounds all answer one another.

Some perfumes are cool as the flesh of young children,
Tender as oboes, or rainy prairies green
---And others overbearing, opulent, corrupt,

With the expansive power of things infinite,
Like amber and musk, benzoin and frankincense,
Singing the exaltation of the mind and senses.

Charles Algernon Swinburne (1837-1909)

"Rondel" (1866)

Kissing her hair I sat against her feet,
Wove and unwove it, wound and found it sweet;
Made fast therewith her hands, drew down her eyes,
Deep as deep flowers and dreamy like dim skies;
With her own tresses bound and found her fair,
 Kissing her hair.

Sleep were no sweeter than her face to me,
Sleep of cold sea-bloom under the cold sea;
What pain could get between my face and hers?
What new sweet thing would love not relish worse?
Unless, perhaps, white death had kissed me there,
 Kissing her hair?

Arthur Symons (1865-1945)

"In the Wood of Finvarra" (1896; 1900)

I have grown tired of sorrow and human tears;
Life is a dream in the night, a fear among fears,
A naked runner lost in a storm of spears.

I have grown tired of rapture and love's desire;
Love is a flaming heart, and its flames aspire
Till they cloud the soul in the smoke of a windy fire.

I would wash the dust of the world in a soft green flood;
Here, between sea and sea, in the fairy wood,
I have found a delicate, wave-green solitude.

Here, in a fairy wood, between sea and sea,
I have heard the song of a fairy bird in a tree,
And the peace that is not in the world has flown to me.

William Sharp ("Fiona Macleod") (1855-1905)

"The Rose of Flame" (1896)

Oh, fair immaculate rose of the world, rose of my dream, my Rose!
Beyond the ultimate gates of dream I have heard thy mystical call:
It is where the rainbow of hope suspends and the river of rapture flows--
And the cool sweet dew from the wells of peace forever fall.

And all my heart is aflame because of the rapture and peace,
And I dream, in my waking dreams and deep in the dreams of sleep,
Till the high sweet wonderful call that shall be the call of release
Shall ring in my ears as I sink from gulf to gulf and from deep to deep--

Sink deep, sink deep beyond the ultimate dreams of all desire--
Beyond the uttermost limit of all that the craving spirit knows;
Then, then, oh, then I shall be as the inner flame of thy fire,
O fair immaculate rose of the world, rose of my dream, my Rose!

"The Valley of Pale Blue Flowers" (1901)

In a hidden valley a pale blue flower grows.
It is so pale that in the moonshine it is dimmer than dim gold,
And in the starshine paler than the palest rose.

It is the flower of dream. Who holds it is never old.
It is the flower of forgetfulness--and oblivion is youth;
Breathing it, flame is not empty air, dust is not cold.

Lift it, and there is no memory of sorrow or any ruth;
The gray monotone of the low sky is filled with light;
The dim, terrible, impalpable lie wears the raiment of truth.

I lift it, now, for somewhat in the heart of the night
Fills me with dread. It may be that, as a tiger in his lair,
Memory, crouching, waits to spring into the light.

No, I will clasp it close to my heart, overdroop with my hair;
I will breathe thy frail faint breath, O pale blue flower,
And then . . . and then . . . nothing shall take me unaware!

Nothing: no thought; no fear; only the invisible power
Of the vast deeps of night, wherein down a shadowy stair
My soul slowly, slowly, will sink to its ultimate hour.

Lionel Johnson (1867-1902)--"To Morfydd" (1891)

A voice on the winds,
A voice by the waters,
 Wanders and cries:
Oh! what are the winds?
And what are the waters?
 Mine are your eyes!

Western the winds are,
And western the waters,
 Where the night lies:
Oh! what are the winds?
And what are the waters?
 Mine are your eyes!

Cold, cold, grow the winds,
And wild grow the waters,
 Where the sun dies:
Oh! what are the winds?
And what are the waters?
 Mine are your eyes!

And down the night winds,
And down the night waters,
 The music flies:
Oh! what are the winds?
And what are the waters?
Cold be the winds,
And wild be the waters,
 So mine be your eyes!

Ernest Dowson (1867-1900)

"Vitæ Summa Brevis Spem Nos Vetat Incohare Longam" (1896)

They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,
 Love and desire and hate;
I think they have no portion in us after
 We pass the gate.

They are not long, the days of wine and roses;
 Out of a misty dream

Our path emerges for a while, then closes
Within a dream.