

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 8 May 2022 3.00pm

**Theodore Platt** baritone

**Malcolm Martineau** piano

CLASSIC *f*M

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**Franz Schubert** (1797-1828)

Auf der Donau D553 (1817)

Abendstern D806 (1824)

Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren D360 (1816)

Fahrt zum Hades D526 (1817)

Der Schiffer D536 (1817)

Gondelfahrer D808 (1824)

Sehnsucht D516 (?1816)

Auflösung D807 (1824)

**Hugo Wolf** (1860-1903)

From *Mörike Lieder* (1888)

Der Genesene an die Hoffnung • Auf einer Wanderung •

Um Mitternacht • Auf ein altes Bild • Der Knabe und das Immllein

**Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937)

Histoires naturelles (1906)

*Le paon • Le grillon • Le cygne • Le martin-pêcheur • La pintade*

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Each composer in this afternoon's programme is represented by settings of a single poet; in two cases, musician and writer were near-contemporaries, and in that of **Schubert** and **Mayrhofer**, they were also close friends. Johann Baptist Mayrhofer was probably the most distinguished poet in Schubert's circle, and Schubert made 47 settings of his work, more than from any other poet except Goethe. Mayrhofer also wrote libretti for two of Schubert's stage works, and Schubert shared his friend's lodgings on Vienna's Wipplingerstrasse between autumn 1818 and early 1821, longer than he spent anywhere other than his parental home.

Schubert's fascination with his friend's work reached its zenith in 1817, a year that generated no fewer than 20 Mayrhofer settings, including four heard today. 'Auf der Donau', 'Fahrt zum Hades' and 'Der Schiffer' share their theme of travel by water with 'Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren', probably composed the previous year. While the boatman in the strophic 'Der Schiffer' expresses exhilaration at the adverse weather he encounters, and the protagonist of the hymn-like 'Lied eines Schiffers' draws confidence from the stars that guide him, the other travellers are more fearful. The serene river scene that opens 'Auf der Donau' quickly gives way to a sense of foreboding, while 'Fahrt zum Hades' portrays the underworld in grandly dramatic fashion. 'Sehnsucht', meanwhile, moves from appreciation of earthly beauty to longing for the release that only death can bring, its text revealing the pessimism that eventually drove the poet to suicide.

Mayrhofer spent most of his working life as a civil servant and book censor, and it was not until 1824 that his poetry was published. By this point his personal relations with Schubert had cooled, but they continued to influence each other's work. The remaining Mayrhofer songs heard today were all composed in March 1824. The melancholy 'Abendstern' displays some of the fingerprints that make Schubert's 'late style' so haunting: obsessive repetition of a single rhythm, equivocation between major and minor tonalities. 'Gondelfahrer' evocatively depicts the waters of Venice: its piano part includes 12 rolled chords that conjure up the midnight chimes from the campanile of St Mark's. Nothing among Schubert's previous Mayrhofer settings, however, prepared his listeners for 'Auflösung', the extraordinary climax to the sequence, its piano part teeming with activity, its vocal line constantly drawn to the summit of the arpeggios of which it is formed.

**Wolf** composed over 40 settings of Eduard Mörike – including those performed this afternoon – in a miraculous spell between February and May 1888. He had been familiar with the work of Mörike – a clergyman and teacher whose life was outwardly uneventful – for some time, and had already set four of his poems. It was a volume of Mörike that he chose to accompany him when he withdrew from Vienna to rural retreat in

Perchtoldsdorf after his father's death in 1887, and the poet seems to have unlocked his creativity after years of frustration. Wolf expresses his new-found faith in his own abilities in the prayerful melodic line and warm harmonies of 'Der Genesene an die Hoffnung', and in the 'Amen' cadence in the piano that ends this hymn of gratitude. This song is tellingly placed at the start of Wolf's Mörike songbook, but by no means is the whole collection so introspective. 'Auf einer Wanderung', like much of Mörike's work, celebrates the joys of rural life, and Wolf responds exuberantly in a song whose highly independent voice and piano parts reveal the unmistakable influence of Wagner. 'Um Mitternacht', by contrast, is an exquisite nocturne, whose vocal line floats magically above the piano's muted triplets. 'Auf ein altes Bild' clothes Mörike's description of the religious painting with modal harmony that gives it a mysterious, other-worldly quality: in the aftermath of this song's creation Wolf described it as 'the crown of my work so far ... there is still a green summery haze shimmering around me'. In 'Der Knabe und das Imlein', meanwhile, the piano part delicately evokes both the buzzing of the bee described in the first line of the text and the sensual pleasures that await the young lovers.

**Ravel** began work on the set of five *Histoires naturelles* in October 1906, by which time he was already well known for chamber works such as the String Quartet and *Introduction and Allegro*, and piano pieces such as *Jeux d'eau* and *Miroirs*, as well as for his repeated failure to win the Prix de Rome. Success in this competition, which brought with it the opportunity for a stay of several years in the Italian capital, was viewed as a crucial rite of passage for aspiring young French musicians and artists; if Ravel's rejection was perceived as a punishment for his disrespectful attitude to the musical establishment, then his new set of songs would do nothing to change that reputation for iconoclasm. Jules Renard published *Histoires naturelles*, a collection of prose poems and short verses imagining the interior lives of animals and birds, in 1896. Their informal idiom and avoidance of traditional metrical structures made them a controversial choice for musical setting, and Ravel compounded this with his dissonant piano parts and his frequent disregard for long-established conventions such as giving the mute 'e' at the end of a word its own note. As a result, the première, given in January 1907 by Ravel and the mezzo-soprano Jane Bathori in the hallowed surroundings of Paris's Salle Erard, caused a scandal, with some critics believing that the composer was deliberately mocking them. Today, however, free from the expectations that conditioned the reactions of the first audiences, we can appreciate the wonderful vividness and spontaneity of Ravel's five animal portraits, from the preening peacock to the pecking guinea-fowl.

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## Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

### Auf der Donau D553

(1817)

*Johann Baptist Mayrhofer*

Auf der Wellen Spiegel  
Schwimmt der Kahn.  
Alte Burgen ragen  
Himmelan;  
Tannenwälder rauschen  
Geistergleich –  
Und das Herz im Busen  
Wird uns weich.

Denn der Menschen Werke  
Sinken all';  
Wo ist Turm, wo Pforte,  
Wo der Wall,  
Wo sie selbst, die Starken?  
Erzgeschirmt,  
Die in Krieg und Jagden  
Hingestürmt.

Trauriges Gestrüppe  
Wuchert fort,  
Während frommer Sage  
Kraft verdorrt.  
Und im kleinen Kahne  
Wird uns bang –  
Wellen droh'n, wie Zeiten,  
Untergang.

### Abendstern D806 (1824)

*Johann Baptist Mayrhofer*

Was weilst du einsam an dem  
Himmel,  
O schöner Stern? und bist so  
mild;  
Warum entfernt das funkelnde  
Gewimmel  
Der Brüder sich von deinem Bild?  
„Ich bin der Liebe treuer Stern,  
Sie halten sich von Liebe fern.“

So solltest du zu ihnen gehen,  
Bist du der Liebe, zaudre  
nicht!  
Wer möchte denn dir widerstehen?  
Du süßes eigensinnig Licht.  
„Ich säe, schaue keinen Keim,  
Und bleibe trauernd still  
daheim.“

### On the Danube

The boat glides  
on the waves' surface.  
Old castles soar  
heavenward;  
pine-forests stir  
like ghosts –  
and our hearts grow  
faint within us.

For the works of man  
all perish;  
where are towers, where gates,  
where ramparts,  
where are the mighty themselves?  
Who, clad in bronze armour,  
stormed into wars  
and hunts.

Melancholy briars  
grow rank and rampant,  
while the power  
of pious myth withers.  
And in our small boat  
we grow afraid –  
waves, like time, threaten  
destruction.

### Evening star

Why do you linger lonely in the  
sky,  
O lovely star? and are yet so  
gentle;  
why do all your glittering  
brothers  
shun your sight?  
'I am the faithful star of love,  
they keep aloof from love.'

If you are love's messenger,  
you should seek them out, do  
not delay!  
For who could resist you,  
O sweet and wayward light.  
'I sow no seed, I see no fruit,  
and in silent sorrow stay at  
home.'

### Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren D360 (1816)

*Johann Baptist Mayrhofer*

Dioskuren, Zwillingsterne,  
Die ihr leuchtet meinem Nachen,  
Mich beruhigt auf dem Meere  
Eure Milde, euer Wachen.

Wer auch, fest in sich  
begründet,  
Unverzagt dem Sturm begegnet;  
Fühlt sich doch in euren  
Strahlen  
Doppelt mutig und gesegnet.

Dieses Ruder, das ich schwinde,  
Meeresfluten zu zerteilen;  
Hänge ich, so ich geborgen,  
Auf an eures Tempels Säulen.

### Fahrt zum Hades D526

(1817)

*Johann Baptist Mayrhofer*

Der Nachen dröhnt, Cypressen  
flüstern –  
Horch, Geister reden schaurig  
drein;  
Bald werd' ich am Gestad', dem  
düstern,  
Weit von der schönen Erde sein.

Da leuchten Sonne nicht, noch  
Sterne,  
Da tönt kein Lied, da ist kein  
Freund.  
Empfang die letzte Träne, o  
Ferne!  
Die dieses müde Auge weint.

Schon schau' ich die blassen  
Danaiden,  
Den fluchbeladnen Tantalus;  
Es murmelt todesschwangern  
Frieden,  
Vergessenheit, dein alter Fluss.

Vergessen nenn' ich zwiefach  
Sterben.  
Was ich mit höchster Kraft  
gewann,  
Verlieren – wieder es  
erwerben –  
Wann enden diese Qualen?  
Wann?

### Seafarer's song to the Dioscuri

Dioscuri, twin stars,  
you who light my vessel's way,  
your gentle vigilance  
consoles me on the seas.

Though a man, full of  
confidence,  
stands intrepid against the storm,  
he feels doubly valiant and  
blessed  
when you shine on him.

This oar that I ply  
to part the ocean's waves,  
I shall hang on your temple's pillar,  
once I am safely ashore.

### Journey to Hades

The boat creaks, cypresses  
whisper  
hark, spirits utter their chilling  
cries;  
soon I shall reach the gloomy  
shore,  
far from the lovely world.

Neither sun nor stars shine  
there,  
no song is heard, no friend is  
found.  
O distant earth, accept this last  
tear  
shed by my weary eyes.

Already I see the pale  
Danaiides,  
and curse-laden Tantalus;  
your ancient river, O  
Oblivion,  
murmurs of death-swollen peace.

Oblivion to me is a double  
death.  
To lose that which needed all  
my strength  
to win, and to strive for it once  
more –  
when will these torments  
cease? When?

**Der Schiffer D536** (1817)*Johann Baptist Mayrhofer*

Im Winde, im Sturme befahr' ich  
den Fluss,  
Die Kleider durchweicht der  
Regen im Guss;  
Ich peitsche die Wellen mit  
mächtigem Schlag,  
Erhoffend, erhoffend mir  
heiteren Tag.

Die Wellen, sie jagen das  
ächzende Schiff,  
Es drohet der Strudel, es drohet  
das Riff,  
Gesteine entkollern den felsigen  
Höh'n,  
Und Tannen erseufzen wie  
Geistergestöh'n.

So musste es kommen – ich hab  
es gewollt,  
Ich hasse ein Leben behaglich  
entrollt;  
Und schlängen die Wellen den  
ächzenden Kahn,  
Ich priese doch immer die  
eigene Bahn.

Drum tose des Wassers  
ohnmächtiger Zorn,  
Dem Herzen entquillet ein  
seliger Born,  
Die Nerven erfrischend – o  
himmlische Lust!  
Dem Sturme zu trotzen mit  
männlicher Brust.

**Gondelfahrer D808** (1824)*Johann Baptist Mayrhofer*

Es tanzen Mond und Sterne  
Den flücht'gen Geisterreih'n:  
Wer wird von Erdensorgen  
Befangen immer sein!  
Du kannst in Mondesstrahlen  
Nun, meine Barke, wallen;  
Und aller Schranken los,  
Wiegt dich des Meeres Schoss.  
Vom Markusturme tönte  
Der Spruch der Mitternacht:  
Sie schlummern friedlich Alle,  
Und nur der Schiffer wacht.

**The boatman**

I ply the river in wind and  
storm,  
my garments soaked by teeming  
rain,  
I lash the waves with powerful  
strokes,  
filled with hopes for a bright  
day.

The waves drive on the creaking  
boat,  
whirlpool and reef loom  
threateningly,  
rocks roll down the towering  
cliffs,  
and fir-trees sigh like groaning  
ghosts.

It had to come – I willed it  
so,  
I hate a snugly unfolding  
life,  
and were waves to engulf the  
creaking boat,  
I should still extol my chosen  
course.

So – let waters roar in impotent  
rage,  
a fountain of bliss spurts from  
my breast,  
renewing my courage, O  
heavenly joy!  
To brave the storm with a  
manly heart.

**The gondolier**

Moon and stars are dancing  
the fleeting spirits' round:  
who would be forever fettered  
by earthly cares!  
Now, my boat, you can drift  
in the moonlight;  
and freed from all restraints,  
be rocked by the lapping sea.  
From the tower of St Mark's  
midnight's decree tolled forth:  
everyone sleeps in peace,  
and only the boatman's awake.

**Sehnsucht D516** (?1816)*Johann Baptist Mayrhofer*

Der Lerche wolkennahe Lieder  
Erschmettern zu des Winters  
Flucht,  
Die Erde hüllt in Samt die  
Glieder,  
Und Blüten bilden rote  
Frucht.  
Nur du, o sturmbewegte Seele,  
Nur du bist blütenlos, in dich  
gekehrt,  
Und wirst in goldner  
Frühlingshelle  
Von tiefer Sehnsucht aufgezehrt.

Nie wird, was du verlangst,  
entkeimen  
Dem Boden, Idealen fremd;  
Der trotzig deinen schönsten  
Träumen  
Die rohe Kraft entgegenstemmt.  
Du ringst dich matt mit seiner  
Härte,  
Vom Wunsche heftiger  
entbrannt:  
Mit Kranichen ein strebender  
Gefährte,  
Zu wandern in ein milder  
Land.

**Auflösung D807** (1824)*Johann Baptist Mayrhofer*

Verbirg dich, Sonne,  
Denn die Gluten der Wonne  
Versengen mein Gebein;  
Verstummet Töne,  
Frühlings Schöne  
Flüchte dich, und lass mich allein!

Quillen doch aus allen Falten  
Meiner Seele liebliche Gewalten;  
Die mich umschlingen,  
Himmlisch singen –  
Geh' unter Welt, und störe  
Nimmer die süßen ätherischen  
Chöre!

**Longing**

The songs of the cloud-soaring lark  
ring out as winter  
flees;  
the earth wraps her limbs in  
velvet,  
and red fruit forms from the  
blossoms.  
You alone, storm-tossed soul,  
do not flower; turned in on  
yourself,  
you are consumed by deep  
longing  
amid spring's golden radiance.

What you crave will never  
burgeon  
from this earth, alien to ideals,  
which defiantly opposes its raw  
strength  
to your fairest dreams.  
You grow weary struggling with  
its harshness,  
ever more inflamed by the  
desire  
to journey to a kinder  
land,  
an aspiring companion to the  
cranes.

**Dissolution**

Conceal yourself, sun,  
for the fires of rapture  
scorch my whole being;  
fall silent, sounds,  
spring beauty  
flee, and leave me to myself!

For sweet powers well up  
from every recess of my soul,  
and envelop me  
with celestial song –  
dissolve, world, and never more  
disturb the sweet ethereal  
choirs!

**Hugo Wolf** (1860-1903)

From *Mörrike Lieder* (1888)

*Eduard Mörike*

### Der Genesene an die Hoffnung

Tödlich graute mir der Morgen:  
Doch schon lag mein Haupt, wie  
süss!  
Hoffnung, dir im Schoss  
verborgen,  
Bis der Sieg gewonnen hiess.  
Opfer bracht' ich allen  
Göttern,  
Doch vergessen warest du;  
Seitwärts von den ew'gen Rettern  
Sahest du dem Feste zu.

O vergib, du Vielgetreue!  
Tritt aus deinem Dämmerlicht,  
Dass ich dir in's ewig neue,  
Mondenhelle Angesicht  
Einmal schaue, recht von  
Herzen,  
Wie ein Kind und sonder Harm;  
Ach, nur Einmal ohne Schmerzen  
Schliesse mich in deinen Arm!

### Auf einer Wanderung

In ein freundliches Städtchen  
tret' ich ein,  
In den Strassen liegt roter  
Abendschein.  
Aus einem offenen Fenster eben,  
Über den reichsten Blumenflor  
Hinweg, hört man  
Goldglockentöne schweben,  
Und Eine Stimme scheint ein  
Nachtigallenchor,  
Dass die Blüten beben,  
Dass die Lüfte leben,  
Dass in höherem Rot die Rosen  
leuchten vor.

Lang hielt ich staunend,  
lustbeklommen.  
Wie ich hinaus vor's Tor  
gekommen,  
Ich weiss es wahrlich selber nicht.  
Ach hier, wie liegt die Welt so  
licht!  
Der Himmel wogt in purpurnem  
Gewühle,  
Rückwärts die Stadt in goldnem  
Rauch;

### He who has recovered addresses hope

Day dawned deathly grey:  
yet my head lay, how  
sweetly!  
O Hope, safely hidden in your  
lap,  
till victory was reckoned won.  
I had made sacrifices to all the  
gods,  
but you I had forgotten;  
aside from the eternal saviours  
you gazed on at the feast.

Oh forgive, most true one!  
Step forth from your twilight  
that I, just once, might gaze  
with all my heart  
at your eternally new and  
moonbright face,  
like a child and without sorrow;  
ah, just *once*, without pain,  
enfold me in your arms!

### On a walk

I arrive in a friendly little  
town,  
the streets glow in red evening  
light.  
From an open window,  
across the richest array of flowers  
and beyond, golden bell-chimes  
come floating,  
and *one* voice seems a choir of  
nightingales,  
causing blossoms to quiver,  
bringing breezes to life,  
making roses glow a richer  
red.

Long I halted, oppressed by  
joy.  
How I came out through the  
gate,  
I cannot in truth remember.  
Ah, how bright the world is  
here!  
The sky billows in a crimson  
whirl,  
the town lies behind in a golden  
haze;

Wie rauscht der Erlenbach, wie  
rauscht im Grund die Mühle!  
Ich bin wie trunken, irr'geführt –  
O Muse, du hast mein Herz  
berührt  
Mit einem Liebeshauch!

### Um Mitternacht

Gelassen stieg die Nacht an's Land,  
Lehnt träumend an der Berge  
Wand,  
Ihr Auge sieht die goldne Wage  
nun  
Der Zeit in gleichen Schalen  
stille ruhn;  
Und kecker rauschen die  
Quellen hervor,  
Sie singen der Mutter, der  
Nacht, in's Ohr  
Vom Tage,  
Vom heute gewesenem Tage.

Das uralt alte Schlummerlied,  
Sie achtet's nicht, sie ist es  
müd;  
Ihr klingt des Himmels Bläue  
süßter noch,  
Der flücht'gen Stunden  
gleichgeschwung'nes Joch.  
Doch immer behalten die  
Quellen das Wort,  
Es singen die Wasser im Schlafe  
noch fort  
Vom Tage,  
Vom heute gewesenem Tage.

### Auf ein altes Bild

In grüner Landschaft  
Sommerflor,  
Bei kühlem Wasser, Schilf und  
Rohr,  
Schau, wie das Knäblein  
Sündelos  
Frei spielt auf der Jungfrau  
Schoss!  
Und dort im Walde wonnesam,  
Ach, grünet schon des Kreuzes  
Stamm!

### Der Knabe und das Immlein

Im Weinberg auf der Höhe  
Ein Häuslein steht so  
windebang;

how the alder brook chatters,  
and the mill below!  
I am as if drunk, led astray  
O muse, you have touched my  
heart  
with a breath of love!

### At midnight

Night has serenely come ashore,  
leans dreaming against the  
mountain wall,  
she watches now the golden  
scales of time  
quietly at rest in  
equipoise;  
and the spring babble more  
boldly,  
they sing in the ear of their  
mother, the night,  
of the day,  
of the day now ended.

That old, that age-old lullaby,  
she disregards, she is weary of  
it;  
the blue of the sky sounds  
sweeter to her,  
the evenly curved yoke of the  
fleeting hours.  
But still the springs murmur  
on,  
still the waters sing in their  
sleep  
of the day,  
of the day now ended.

### On an old painting

In the summer haze of a green  
landscape,  
By cool water, rushes and  
reeds,  
See how the Child, born without  
sin,  
Plays freely on the Virgin's  
lap!  
And there blissfully in the wood  
The Cross is already, alas, in  
leaf!

### The boy and the bee

On the hill-top vineyard  
there stands a hut so wind-  
afraid,

Hat weder Tür noch Fenster,  
Die Weile wird ihm lang.

it has neither door nor window  
and feels time dragging by.

Und ist der Tag so schwüle,  
Sind all' verstummt die Vögelein,  
Summt an der Sonnenblume  
Ein Immelein ganz allein.

And when the day's so sultry  
and every little bird is silent,  
a solitary bee  
buzzes round the sunflower.

Mein Lieb hat einen Garten,  
Da steht ein hübsches Immenhaus:  
Kommst du daher geflogen?  
Schickt sie dich nach mir aus?

My sweetheart has a garden  
with a pretty beehive in it:  
is that where you've flown from?  
Did she send you to me?

„O nein, du feiner Knabe,  
Es hiess mich niemand Boten gehn;  
Dies Kind weiss nichts von Lieben,  
Hat dich noch kaum gesehn.

'Oh no, you handsome boy,  
no one bade me bear messages;  
this child knows nothing of love,  
has scarcely even noticed you.

Was wüssten auch die Mädchen,  
Wenn sie kaum aus der Schule  
sind!  
Dein herzallerliebstes Schätzchen  
Ist noch ein Mutterkind.

And what can girls know  
when hardly out of  
school!  
Your beloved sweetheart  
is still her mother's child.

Ich bring' ihm Wachs und Honig;  
Ade! – ich hab' ein ganzes  
Pfund;  
Wie wird das Schätzchen lachen,  
Ihm wässert schon der Mund.“

I bring her wax and honey;  
farewell! I've gathered a whole  
pound.  
How your beloved will laugh,  
her mouth's already watering.'

Ach, wolltest du ihr sagen,  
Ich wüsste, was viel süsser ist:  
Nichts Lieblichers auf Erden  
Als wenn man herzt und küsst!

Ah, if you'd be so kind to tell her,  
I know of something much sweeter:  
there's nothing lovelier on earth  
than when one hugs and kisses!

## Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

### Histoires naturelles (1906)

*Jules Renard*

#### Le paon

Il va sûrement se marier  
aujourd'hui.

Ce devait être pour hier. En  
habit de gala, il était prêt. Il  
n'attendait que sa fiancée. Elle  
n'est pas venue. Elle ne peut  
tarder.

Glorieux, il se promène avec  
une allure de prince indien et  
porte sur lui les riches présents  
d'usage. L'amour avive l'éclat  
de ses couleurs et son aigrette  
tremble comme une lyre.

La fiancée n'arrive pas.

#### The peacock

He will surely get married  
today.

It was to have been  
yesterday. In full regalia he was  
ready. It was only his bride he  
was waiting for. She has not  
come. She cannot be long.

Proudly he processes with the  
air of an Indian prince, bearing  
about his person the customary  
lavish gifts. Love burnishes the  
brilliance of his colours, and his  
crest quivers like a lyre.

His bride does not appear.

Il monte au haut du toit et  
regarde du côté du soleil. Il jette  
son cri diabolique:

Léon! Léon!

C'est ainsi qu'il appelle sa  
fiancée. Il ne voit rien venir et  
personne ne répond. Les  
volailles habituées ne lèvent  
même point la tête. Elles  
sont lassées de l'admirer. Il  
redescend dans la cour, si sûr  
d'être beau qu'il est incapable  
de rancune.

Son mariage sera pour  
demain.

Et, ne sachant que faire  
du reste de la journée, il se  
dirige vers le perron. Il gravit  
les marches, comme des  
marches de temple, d'un pas  
officiel.

Il relève sa robe à queue  
toute lourde des yeux qui n'ont  
pu se détacher d'elle.

Il répète encore une fois la  
cérémonie.

He ascends to the top of the  
roof and looks towards the sun.  
He utters his devilish cry:

Léon! Léon!

It is thus that he summons his  
bride. He can see nothing drawing  
near, and no one replies. The fowls  
are used to all this and do not even  
raise their heads. They are tired of  
admiring him. He descends once  
more to the yard, so sure of his  
beauty that he is incapable of  
resentment.

His marriage will take place  
tomorrow.

And, not knowing what to  
do for the rest of the day, he  
heads for the flight of steps. He  
ascends them, as though they  
were the steps of a temple, with  
a formal tread.

He lifts his train, heavy with  
eyes that have been unable to  
detach themselves.

Once more he repeats the  
ceremony.

#### Le grillon

C'est l'heure où, las d'errer,  
l'insecte nègre revient de  
promenade et répare avec soin  
le désordre de son domaine.

D'abord il ratisse ses  
étroites allées de sable.

Il fait du bran de scie  
qu'il écarte au seuil de sa  
retraite.

Il lime la racine de cette grande  
herbe propre à le harceler.

Il se repose.

Puis, il remonte sa  
minuscule montre.

A-t-il fini? Est-elle cassée?  
Il se repose encore un peu.

Il rentre chez lui et ferme sa  
porte.

Longtemps il tourne sa clef  
dans la serrure délicate.

Et il écoute: point d'alarme  
dehors.

Mais il ne se trouve pas en  
sûreté.

Et comme par une chaînette  
dont la poulie grince, il descend  
jusqu'au fond de la terre.

On n'entend plus rien.

#### The cricket

It is the hour when, weary of  
wandering, the black insect returns  
from his outing and carefully  
restores order to his estate.

First he rakes his narrow  
sandy paths.

He makes sawdust which he  
scatters on the threshold of his  
retreat.

He files the root of this tall  
grass likely to annoy him.

He rests.

Then he winds up his tiny  
watch.

Has he finished? Is it broken?  
He rests again for a while.

He goes inside and shuts  
the door.

For an age he turns his key  
in the delicate lock.

And he listens: nothing  
untoward outside.

But he does not feel  
safe.

And as if by a tiny chain on a  
creaking pulley, he lowers himself  
into the bowels of the earth.

Nothing more is heard.

Dans la campagne muette, les  
peupliers se dressent comme des  
doigts en l'air et désignent la lune.

In the silent countryside  
the poplars rise like fingers  
in the air, pointing to the moon.

## Le cygne

Il glisse sur le bassin,  
comme un traîneau blanc, de  
nuage en nuage. Car il n'a faim  
que des nuages floconneux qu'il  
voit naître, bouger, et se perdre  
dans l'eau. C'est l'un d'eux qu'il  
désire. Il le vise du bec, et il  
plonge tout à coup son col vêtu  
de neige.

Puis, tel un bras de  
femme sort d'une manche, il le  
retire.

Il n'a rien.

Il regarde: les nuages  
effarouchés ont disparu.

Il ne reste qu'un instant  
désabusé, car les nuages tardent  
peu à revenir, et, là-bas, où  
meurent les ondulations de l'eau, en  
voici un qui se reforme.

Doucement, sur son léger  
coussin de plumes, le cygne  
rame et s'approche ...

Il s'épuise à pêcher de vains  
reflets, et peut-être qu'il  
mourra, victime de cette  
illusion, avant d'attraper un seul  
morceau de nuage.

Mais qu'est-ce que je dis?

Chaque fois qu'il plonge, il  
fouille du bec la vase  
nourrissante et ramène un ver.

Il engraisse comme une oie.

## Le martin-pêcheur

Ça n'a pas mordu, ce soir, mais  
je rapporte une rare émotion.

Comme je tenais ma perche  
de ligne tendue, un martin-  
pêcheur est venu s'y poser.

Nous n'avons pas d'oiseau  
plus éclatant.

Il semblait une grosse fleur  
bleue au bout d'une longue tige.  
La perche pliait sous le poids.  
Je ne respirais plus, tout fier  
d'être pris pour un arbre par un  
martin-pêcheur.

Et je suis sûr qu'il ne s'est  
pas envolé de peur, mais qu'il a

## The swan

He glides on the pond like a  
white sledge, from cloud to  
cloud. For he is hungry only for  
the fleecy clouds that he sees  
forming, moving, dissolving in  
the water. It is one of these that  
he wants. He takes aim with his  
beak and suddenly immerses his  
snow-clad neck.

Then, like a woman's arm  
emerging from a sleeve, he  
draws it back up.

He has caught nothing.

He looks about: the startled  
clouds have vanished.

Only for a second is he  
disappointed, for the clouds are  
not slow to return, and, over  
there, where the ripples fade,  
there is one reappearing.

Gently, on his soft cushion  
of down, the swan paddles and  
approaches ...

He exhausts himself fishing  
for empty reflections, and  
perhaps he will die, a victim of  
that illusion, before catching a  
single shred of cloud.

But what am I saying?

Each time he dives, he burrows  
with his beak in the nourishing mud  
and brings up a worm.

He's getting as fat as a goose.

## The kingfisher

Not a bite, this evening, but  
I had a rare experience.

As I was holding out my  
fishing rod, a kingfisher came  
and perched on it.

We have no bird more  
brilliant.

He was like a great blue  
flower at the tip of a long stem.  
The rod bent beneath the  
weight. I held my breath, so  
proud to be taken for a tree by a  
kingfisher.

And I'm sure he did not fly  
off from fear, but thought he

cru qu'il ne faisait que passer  
d'une branche à une autre.

was simply flitting from one  
branch to another.

## La pintade

C'est la bossue da ma cour.  
Elle ne rêve que plaies à cause  
de sa bosse.

Les poules ne lui disent  
rien: brusquement, elle se  
précipite et les harcèle.

Puis elle baisse sa tête,  
penche le corps, et, de toute la  
vitesse de ses pattes maigres,  
elle court frapper, de son bec  
dur, juste au centre de la roue  
d'une dinde.

Cette poseuse  
l'agaçait.

Ainsi, la tête bleuie, ses  
barbillons à vif, cocardière, elle  
rage du matin au soir. Elle se  
bat sans motif, peut-être parce  
qu'elle s'imagine toujours qu'on  
se moque de sa taille, de son  
crâne chauve et de sa queue  
basse.

Et elle ne cesse de jeter un  
cri discordant qui perce l'air  
comme une pointe.

Parfois elle quitte la cour et  
disparaît. Elle laisse aux  
volailles pacifiques un moment  
de répit. Mais elle revient plus  
turbulente et plus criarde. Et,  
frénétique, elle se vautre par  
terre.

Qu'a-t-elle donc?

La sournoise fait une  
farce.

Elle est allée pondre son  
œuf à la campagne.

Je peux le chercher si ça  
m'amuse.

Elle se roule dans la  
poussière, comme une bossue.

## The guinea-fowl

She is the hunchback of my  
barnyard. She dreams only of  
wounding, because of her hump.

The hens say nothing to  
her: suddenly, she swoops and  
harries them.

Then she lowers her head,  
leans forward, and, with all the  
speed of her skinny legs, runs  
and strikes with her hard beak  
at the very centre of a turkey's  
tail.

This poseuse was provoking  
her.

Thus, with her bluish head  
and raw wattles, pugnaciously  
she rages from morn to night.  
She fights for no reason,  
perhaps because she always  
thinks they are making fun of  
her figure, of her bald head and  
drooping tail.

And she never stops screaming  
her discordant cry, which pierces  
the air like a needle.

Sometimes she leaves the  
yard and vanishes. She gives  
the peace-loving poultry a  
moment's respite. But she  
returns more rowdy and shrill.  
And in a frenzy she wallows in  
the earth.

Whatever's wrong with her?

The cunning creature is  
playing a trick.

She went to lay her egg in  
the open country.

I can look for it if I  
like.

And she rolls in the dust,  
like a hunchback.

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