

**MAURICE CHAPPAZ**

**"Ten Poems"**

**Selected by LyrikLine**

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**Translated from the French by Richard L. Hewitt**

**<http://chessflower.org>**

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**I. Alleluia**

Abandon your dwellings,  
abandon your places of work!  
Death is like the dew of morning.  
It is the breath of the Eternal God,  
if you place your trust in Him.  
Death rises in my heart  
like a lark.  
Death is like the breath of a child  
in winter.  
I tell him: You provide me with joy.

## **II. Later, there comes a bird**

Later, there comes a bird  
whose beak taps ever at the window's edge,  
and Samuel says:

"I could have taken flight with him."  
All the men at the edge of the grave  
have parted this winter,  
for long they listened to the clock,  
for long they licked spoonfuls of honey  
and the hollows of cups  
where is painted a flower.  
Then came a great wind,  
shivering the branches of trees.  
Or else, the light in the room dimmed,  
but without, blinded the snow.  
It melted close to the bed.  
One could hear the ticking of hearts.

The ditty of my life – ever too late.

## **III. Ready to serve**

What is my fatherland? It is nothing other  
than the country of my childhood, and for this country  
I would betray, vomit out, this fatherland that calls itself new,  
and in perfect innocence too, if that could have given it back,  
I would have killed and stolen, offered up all my estate.  
Oh! would that my ink could make the blood flow!  
That is to be a poet.  
Take up your rifle, Grégoire.  
Take aim at the pheasants.

#### **IV. Desert capital**

The birds of prey divide  
the field of battle like businessmen,  
having crossed the desert  
where debate the new blades of grass.  
If I were there, I would listen to the silence.  
And there are eggs in their millions  
just like little heavens  
in the caves that are cool.  
Why am I happy?  
I am also a beast,  
I am also a paradise.  
The files of men entering the factory  
as if in a noose  
tried to catch the last young people  
– those with the long hair.  
And the workers perched on their counters  
like tamed falcons  
with a hood that fell over their eyes.  
It is then that there came the great crisis  
for which I wished:  
these disasters, these famines,  
times of plenty and confusions.  
As the decided sponsor of the blue heaven,  
one of the courtliest raptors of the Middle Age,  
on a water fountain,  
says to a cat  
who was strolling in the town  
poisoned by work:  
“Without religion have they all perished.”  
The mountains are at midday  
like blue mud, air turned to stone.  
I hear souls that jingle.  
Gospel of the desert  
where the corn poppies pray.

#### **V. Lament of the Christians, who killed Christ on the Col de Collon**

1

Soldier in a different war  
I was witness to a crime  
One of many thousands  
That today don't count at all

For the Passion, rats and neglect

In my field glasses I saw  
The man with a yellow star  
Who was begging for alms  
In his shadow his wife

For the Passion, seek him that is chosen

2

No more bread, no more shoes  
They were stripped and bare  
They longed for a country  
That stowed its honey and milk

For the Passion, a Promised Land

Coiffed in a helmet of grey  
I held watch on the pass  
God's wanderers touch silent  
Upon my fatherland

For the Passion, take my expression

3

Come – rest under my tent  
Mar Jacob, Gveret Sarah  
Blessed be your expectation  
And your great mystery

For the Passion, wander the world

They are now surrendered  
To Pilate the Red Cross  
The officers have said: Eat!  
The officers have said: Smoke!

For the Passion, present the bill

4

Sound then the mort  
At the end of the feast  
The Police were there  
You are in bed asleep

For the Passion, spit out all hope

It is the law of rebuff  
I see in clothes that are new  
Jacob, without heart, Sarah  
Climbing back up the pass

For the Passion, an evil laugh

5

The idiot of my village  
Bayonet on rifle  
In his hand the paper  
From the bureau of the Beast

For the Passion, the black lie

From Pilate to Herod  
On a path of stones  
They went to keep appointment  
With the German slaughter

For the Passion, fell the night

6

Officer where's the alibi?  
In my pocket sergeant!  
From one post to another  
The ground drunk up the blood

For the Passion, Christ was found

I left the same evening  
Refusing these duties  
For the cold Château d'Aigle  
And to accept justice

For the Passion, blow away the pall

## **VI. Say it with lilies!**

Life has bestowed on me a Judas kiss:  
On the one hand its brevity  
is a drink of bitterness,  
on the other its beauty,  
for that it seems better than bread,  
is got only by treachery.

## **VII. The Chalice and the Scythe**

Our lives are chalices,  
lives of nothing, an orgy of all;  
empty the chalice,  
it savours of muscat  
and panga knives.

Our lives become scythes  
on the fields and o'er the abyss;  
crush the rye,  
and for pudding  
the desert.

If you are not from here  
keep quiet;  
you cannot understand  
the black bread and the yellow wine.

Behold the chastisement,  
behold the songs of praise;  
the heavy ear,  
the drunken man,  
God who is crazy.

## **VIII. Gentle Landscapes IX**

The sun is crazy for a cool carafe.  
They envelop themselves with a bark of mist.  
As with your modesty,  
So with my gaze.

## **IX. Gentle Landscapes VIII**

My desire for her  
compels likeness to iced water in a carafe,  
which passes in the heat of midday  
around a café's khonde.

My desire sets her on the table  
like a cathedral, delicate and clear  
– the water and the glass.

But my lips quiver for thirst  
and I discover in this clarity only  
a night, in the middle of the day.

## X. The Valais as Sung by a Thrush

VI

Wives of pressers, of plowmen,  
crimped and ground,  
emptied of themselves as if by woodpeckers,  
possessing no more the life of young girls,  
since they slept with the sozzled Valais,  
by the sainted pig's face of a drunk,  
blowing the Foehn wind  
that is cigar and plain chant.  
Women with small myrtle eyes,  
discarded by bearded men,  
who since they said their first 'Yes'  
are walled up like Sphinxes under dark hoods.

Truth of truth:  
It will spring from their breast,  
It will conquer the world.

Receptacle of strength, animal,  
the smile of wisdom  
and their offspring, the word,  
like a grasshopper on the tongue of the deaf.  
The word, the leap across the horror and shame  
of crucifixions on the Rhône.  
Hey! Ludivine, Marguerite, Catherine,  
tell everything about yourself  
tell everything about the Valais, barren and dark,  
women of grapes,  
trees of the Passion,  
vessels of silence.

Here is life,  
saints of saints;  
swine or saint.  
It's all the same.

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