

MAURICE CHAPPAZ

"Ten Poems"

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Translated from the French by Richard L. Hewitt

<http://chessflower.org>

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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