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VIEWS AND VISIONS by Claude Cahun

“THE ARRIVAL”

Le Croisic, 1912. -- Weary of the rumors from Paris, I am coming to Le Croisic to rest.

After a trip, however short, hot water, a clean bed, are precious things to you. I'm making use of them, and, the window open, I breathe the pure air; I am dreaming, and I wait for sleep. My head, filled with the noise of the city, will find delightful calm at the fishing port.

God! How noisy the sea birds are! and the seamen, it's frightful!

Disoriented, never have I slept so poorly.

Rome. August. -- Pollio is inviting me to Rome; alas! I must leave you, oh Mantua!

After a trip, however short, hot water, a clean bed, are precious things to you. I'm making use of them. Then, the window closed tight, I breathe an impure air, all perfumed. I am dreaming of my new life, and I fear insomnia. My mind, accustomed to the quiet of our fields, will ring in pain at the noisy fever of the queen of the world.

How thick these silk drapes are! I barely hear a muffled whisper that cradles me...

Disoriented, never have I slept so soundly.

“THE ENCOUNTER”

Le Croisic. -- Two boats are sailing toward each other, sails full. The white sky, the white sea, in full sun.

One is green, very pale, with her hull pale as yellowed ivory; her large pale blond yard seems a ray of dawn. She bends, quite frail, under the weighty burden of her golden masts; inert, she obeys the breath of wind that dominates her.

While she moves away from the port, too quickly for my liking, the other boat draws closer and I can make it out better. She is red, very dark, with her brown nets. Her dark hull, a bit tarnished, discolored by the burning sun, is, in the sunlight, strewn with flecks of gold. Her large

bright red yard seems a ray of sunset. Long and thin, she carries her full sails effortlessly, she gives herself completely to the breath of wind that she subjects to her will.

In full sail they approach one another, and despite the immensity of the deserted sea, they graze each other in passing; their reflections in the calm water commingle for a moment, for a moment they slow their course, then the breeze separates them and each regains her own reflection...

But my eye, seduced by this too brief vision, unites them without merging them.

Rome. Titus. -- Dressed in jewels and silk, two courtesans cross the Suburra. The white sky, the white stone, in full sun.

One of them is fully wrapped in green silk; her skin is pale as yellowed ivory; her eyes are two emeralds set in the gold of her long painted lashes. She seems to bend, quite frail, under the weighty burden of her golden hair which a crown of emeralds holds imprisoned.

While she moves away, too quickly for my liking, the other woman approaches and I can make her out better: she is fully wrapped in red silk, her brown skin, a bit darkened, bronzed by the burning sun is, in the sunlight, sprinkled with flecks of gold. Her slanted eyes are burnt topazes, set in the red copper of her long painted lashes. Tall and thin, she wears her fully spread curls effortlessly; she willingly abandons her hair to the disorder of the wind that makes it stand out.

Dressed in jewels and silk, they approach one another, and despite the immensity of the deserted square, they brush each other in passing; their bluish shadows commingle for a moment, for a moment they slow their walk, then separate and each regains her own reflection.

But my eye, seduced by this too brief vision, unites them without merging them.

“THE FIGHT”

Le Croisic. -- Everything is silent. I watch, and melancholy seizes my soul. I see only the sea, and I do not hear it. It brushes the dock without breaking. It is dark and has no definite color. Evening is falling...it is barely perceptible; it is perceptible in the melancholy that cuts through you along with the night. Yet the silent sea is restless. Short, regular ripples cover it out of sight. It's a continuous lapping that we think we hear and that we do not. This silence speaks louder than a hurricane. Looking at the sea, we hear its complaint that lulls and that hurts. Its waves are born and die. We would like to oppose it and we cannot. Time flows with regularity, death approaches slow and sure. I watch the sea, its vain efforts, and the monotony seizes my soul.

Awakened, without knowing how, everything brightens at the joy in my ears: the sea is no longer crying, it is singing.

Intrigued, I get up, I listen. It's a child's laughter. I understand: it's the cabin boys fighting at the harbor.

“THE KISS”

Rome. Nero. -- Nothing is moving. We listen; and the melancholy takes hold of my soul. I hear the flute player and I do not see him. The music is sweet, intoxicating, sad without passion. Evening is falling... is it barely perceptible. It is perceptible in the melancholy that cuts through you along with the night. Everything is quiet as after an orgy, everything is weary. The notes follow each other, short and regular. The harmony of rapid sounds evokes changing visions within me. Eyes wide open, I imagine the child who sheds light or darkness upon me at will. His vague shadow becomes clearer, and his pale face changes with the sounds of the magic flute. Blond, ashen and dreary, his sad eyes hurt me. The song seems to die out at every moment, at every moment to be reborn. I would like to stop it and I cannot. Time flows with regularity, death approaches slow and sure. I listen, and the monotony takes hold of my soul.

Awakened, without knowing how, everything brightens in my eyes; the expressive features of the child are embellished with the smile of his age, mocking and tender.

Intrigued, I get up and look: it's a lovers' kiss. Two shadows that I recognize well are standing, entwined in the union of lips and souls.

“SEA GAMES”

Le Croisic. -- The sea is calm, too calm, covered with ugly blackish spots: the sky is calm, the horizon all foggy.

Brown dinghies are anchored over there and form a semi-circle. In the middle, gulls are flying and gleaming, sometimes black, sometimes white. One of them, wings folded in, falls from the sky. I follow his slow fall attentively, but suddenly he disappears...

This is no game! The sea buries him beneath her dirty dress.

“SAILOR GAMES”

Rome. Caesar's Consulat. -- The slum is quiet, too quiet. The old rug, on the ground, is covered with ugly blackish stains. The room is all smoky.

Sailors dressed in brown, sitting on their heels, form a semi-circle over there. In the middle, five dice are flying and gleaming, sometimes black, sometimes white. One of them accidentally falls before its turn. I follow its fast fall, but it suddenly disappears.

This is no game! a cheater buries it beneath his dirty robe.

“UNDECIDED AND PRECISE”

Le Croisic. -- In the foreground, clear and precise, it's a dinghy; a dinghy, you know, with a sail: it couldn't be called a boat, it's so small. It is bedecked in blue, a bright, artificial blue, and here and there, pink-yellow spots suggest a previous coat of paint. The red sail is tinged with pink, fully transparent as a halo, like a light surrounded by a diadem.

The landscape is vague, foggy; the dinghy launches clear, with the narrow sandbar beside it, long, precise, warm and golden with light. Barely distinguishable, in the distance, is the pink glow of the sun, which forms orchid shapes in the mist.

But as clear as the dinghy, bitter and sweet to my awakening senses, is the marine scent of invisible seaweed.

Paris. Greek Revival. -- In the foreground, clear and precise, it's a child; a child, you know, with a shadow on his lip; he couldn't be called a young man, he is so small. Thin and supple, dressed in a translucent, artificial bright blue, which his protruding hip stains with a pinkish yellow; his light red hair is tinged with pink; a halo of light gives it diadem.

The room is vague, filled with smoke; the child breaks clear away, with the delicate, ambiguous statuette near him, golden with light. Barely distinguishable, in the distance, is the strange pink glow of a crystal orchid.

But as clear as the child, as sweet to my awakening senses, is the childish odor of Château Yquem with a touch of ether.

"HOLIDAY"

Le Croisic. -- The sun rises radiant, from my open window, I breathe joyfully the fresh morning air, quite happy with my Sunday rest. A knock at the door: it's the mail. There's a phone call for me; the bell rings for lunch, like at school; the church bells call the faithful back to forgotten prayer; the fishmonger proudly announces the fish market: the clock chimes with repeated strokes, yet with a slam of the door I'm being asked what time it is.

A car whistles and passes by -- out for a drive, no doubt; for these folks, whose ceaseless activity invades even pleasures, rest is speed, and this very short life is too long for their fancy.

Rome. Nero. -- It is raining. It is not raining hard; this morning the weather is not in a hurry. Quiet, the storm is transformed drop by drop into slow, heavy weeping. It is raining for the feast of Adonis and the women are wailing. Their long, distant cries are barely perceptible: the doors are discreet, the streets are peaceful, our way is clear!

I will go rest at Nero's thermal baths; I will meet my friends there. Discussing philosophy, we will spend long, quiet hours together heedless of the time; and this very slow life will be short in my opinion.

“THE MISCONCEPTION”

Le Croisic. -- The sky is pale, barely nuanced: the sandbars are pale, scarcely gilded by a pale sun.

The tide is out from the Traict, leaving behind it only a narrow pale green canal; and it is on this perilous pathway that a fishing boat ventures out.

Quite pale, her green hull blends with her green sails half spread out like two thin wings. I see her moving forward and I predict the inevitable running aground. This narrow green creek will not lead her to port, that I know! It is dried up. Where does she intend to go, then? The breeze fills her thin sails; she is approaching so slowly that in truth she seems not to be moving.

The last ray of the setting sun enlightens me. I make out a rope, the only clear feature in this pale painting: the boat is anchored in the middle of the canal.

Arcadie. -- The child is pale, his skin barely nuanced; his short light hair is pale, scarcely gilded by a pale sun.

He is seated and holding a blade of pale green grass between his clenched fingers; and it is on this perilous pathway that ventures forth a grasshopper, caught in flight in a nearby field.

Quite pale, its green body blends with its green wings that quiver like delicate leaves. I see it moving forward and I predict the inevitable downfall. This narrow green path does not lead to freedom, that I know! the child will hold it back. Where does it intend to go, then? The breeze rustles its thin wings; it is approaching so slowly that in truth it seems not to be moving.

The last ray of the setting sun enlightens me. I make out a silk thread, the only clear feature in this pale painting: the nimble grasshopper is tethered by its leg in the middle of the blade of grass.

“PLAY OF LIGHT”

Le Croisic. -- A late spring makes me languish; stretched out amid the fallen leaves, I lounge luxuriously. Like a game, the wind brushes my face with little branches of tamarisk.

I open my eyes, ready with an answer. But the wind, more clever than me, pushes aside the branch I wanted to grab to chastise for its audacity. It is too far from me, and I am too lazy to reach out. I wait, but nothing moves, and to while away the time, I observe the ocean which appears purple through the fine green gauze of the tamarisk.

Purple, in effect; but dissimilar bright spots, that vary in different lights, combine to give them this changing tone.

Corinthe. -- A late rest becomes languid; stretched out among the red cushions, I lounge luxuriously.

Like a game, she wraps my head in her perfumed veil.

I open my eyes, ready with an answer. Smarter than me, she pushes aside her dress that I wanted to grab to chastise her for her audacity. She is too far from me, and I am too lazy to reach out. I wait, but she remains motionless, and to while away the time, I observe her eyes which appear purple through the thin gauze she veils them with to tease me.

Purple, in effect; but dissimilar bright spots, that vary in different lights, combine to give them this changing tone.

“CARVINGS”

Le Croisic. -- The sea is a finely chiseled silver. The clouds are reflected in this quiet, polished mirror.

We think we see combats, horses, warriors: it is Achilles avenging the death of Patroclus, it is Hercules and Nessus the Centaur, Athis and Lycabas dying next to each other. A seagull brushes the water and flaps its wings: it is Jupiter, the tawny eagle; and over there, that long thin shaft evokes a child's body.

The damp brown sand also reflects the sky, but the drawings that decorate it are more rough-hewn.

A red sail crosses a narrow, long, dark canal, dragging red nets behind it.

And today the sea smells like wines from Italy.

Rome. Domitian. -- The cup is of finely chiseled silver. An unknown sculptor engraved the lives of heroes and gods upon it. His genius was hardly inferior, no doubt, to that of Praxiteles or Myron, but his name, perhaps too barbarian, was forgotten by ungrateful peoples.

His art traced combats, horses, warriors upon it: Achilles avenging the death of Patroclus, Hercules and Nessus the Centaur, Athis and Lycabas dying next to each other. Jupiter who, putting down his lightning bolt, carries away a sweet child, the glory of Mount Ida. The young cupbearer who pours us the Massique has the long thin body of a Phrygian shepherd. He holds the brown earth amphora against his hip ; it too is embellished but like the material, the drawing on it is more unrefined. Through its narrow neck flows a dark Falerne, old and red. Its liquor-like thread fills the cup that I bring to my lips.

It is the acrid smell, the bitter, salty taste that I knew at the baths of Baia.

“THE STAIRS”

Le Croisic. -- I hear only the sea, I see only its waves. All white with foam, of different heights, these are the immense steps of the marine temple of Aphrodite.

Knidos. -- I hear only the sacred music; I see only the whiteness of the temple. And the immense, immaculate steps are a visual reminder that Cyprus was carried on waves of foam.

“THE ICE”

Le Croisic. -- He is driving standing up, legs apart; his daring demeanor inspires me with confidence.

The cart and the horse are red; the man is yellow. Behind him shines a white spot, inexplicable.

At full speed, they go down toward the port. The daring driver is no doubt dressed in an old boat sail that gives a golden luster to his flying curls.

At full speed, they overtake me in a silvery mist: they are rush baskets filled with crushed ice. It comes from the factory, and will conserve the sole and the mackerel shipped to Paris. Under a white coat of ice mixed with salt, their freshness, reserved for the tables of the wealthy, will reach the city intact.

I smile at the words of an old fisherman, remembered by chance:

“In Paris, ma’boy, it’s like in the sea, the big fish eat the little ones.”

“THE SNOW”

Rome. Nero. -- He is driving standing up, legs apart; his daring demeanor inspires me with confidence.

The chariot and the horse are red; the man is yellow. Behind him shines a white spot, inexplicable.

At full speed, they go down toward the city. The daring driver, a shepherd from the mountains, is no doubt dressed in wool from his own sheep. His saffron-died tunic gives a golden lustre to his flying curls.

At full speed, they overtake me in a silvery mist: they are rush baskets filled with snow from Monte Soratte. In Rome, it will serve as a summer heat remedy : at Caesar’s palace, it will filter into the burning thermal baths. It is very welcomed at banquets, where the jaded enjoy observing contrasts that delight them:

Under an artificial sun, the snow mixed with honey wine burns, softens and chills.

“THE CHURCH”

Le Croisic. -- The church is deserted and seems abandoned. It is dark. An old woman lights the bottom of the pillars with difficulty, and this brilliant stained glass window where Saint John kisses the hands of his mortal god. Under the light, a votive of gray stone bears witness to a long since disappeared zeal.

A new religion erases the one falling asleep, as the changing heart of man requires. The stained glass window shines and reminds me of pagan legends...The human heart is unchanging. The new religions are merely different expressions of similar feelings: Saint John ardently kisses

the cold hands of Christ, in his verses Plato mourns Dion of Syracuse, and our modern materialists preach friendship out of interest.

“THE TEMPLE”

Athens. Constantine. -- A lover of old legends, I am fleeing the new religion; it is even invading Greece.

I go to take refuge in a temple consecrated to the divine Plato. Totally deserted, it seems abandoned. Night is falling. An old woman lights the bottom of the columns with difficulty, and this golden mosaic which the christians, alas! have introduced here... but I smile: the Master has not disavowed it; it adorns his home with an image befitting his most cherished doctrines. I smile: this religion, so new, could not possibly change the unchanging feelings of the human heart: John kisses ardently the cold hands of the prophet of the Jews, in his verses Plato mourns Dion the Syracusan, and our eternal skeptics praise along with Socrates the value of friendship.

“THE PUDDLE”

Le Croisic. -- The ocean is receding, with little polished golden swells dragging the fog in short waves.

The sky is stretched with gray silk, the sand gray-brown, velvety, soft. A lustrous line, in the distance, seems a blue metal bar. It is the sea passing through the depths of the Traict.

Is this also the sea, this blue spot, shining and round, as if embedded in the velvet of the sand?

No; it is an aquamarine, on which the sun draws a thousand facets, an aquamarine, token of friendship from Neptune to Phœbus.

“THE AQUAMARINE”

Rome. Dictatorship of Caesar. -- A child's hand, with painted and polished nails and soft golden skin, opens a turtle shell box, leaving exposed:

The gray silk like an autumn sky, the gray-brown velvet, soft as wet sand. The blue metal hinge seems a distant water line.

Is this also the sea, this blue spot, shining and round, as if embedded in the sand-colored velvet?

Yes, it is a drop of water, and these thousands of facets are merely reflections of the sun; a drop of crystal clear water, token of friendship from the king of Bithynia to triumphant Caesar.

“THE MIST”

Le Croisic.-- Will the weather be good? Will it be bad? The thick fog conceals it from us. It's already broad daylight, and, no doubt, the sun has just risen.

“The weather will be good”, a fisherman reveals to me. “The mist, so early in the morning, is a good sign.” Dubious, thinking of the devilishness of things, I am suspicious.

The veil of fog is so heavy the end of the bay is barely distinguishable. It is so light that it floats and cuts through everywhere; it fills my hair and caresses my skin with its damp kiss. On the high seas side the horizon is visible, for the sky is pink-gray and the sea blue-gray; the line that separates them is, fittingly, gray-purple.

I close my eyes a moment as they are beginning to blur; to adjust my vision I open them again.

He was right.

The veil of fog has suddenly lifted; the sun is shining in a glorious soft pink sky. The blue sea predicts the future sky : the weather is good.

In the middle of the Traict the all-white sail of a pleasure boat is unfurled. It too had predicted good weather.

“THE VEIL”

Alexandria. -- Are they beautiful or ugly? A rolled gauze veil conceals them from us. It is the Aphrodisia festival, and the temple has just opened.

“They are beautiful”, a young Cyrenian lover of courtesans reveals to me; “dressed this way, at the present moment, it's a good sign.” Dubious, thinking of the wickedness of women, I am suspicious.

Both women, under the same veil, are so hidden that the round contour of the hips is barely distinguishable; both, under the same veil, blend together, so different that entwined together they are easily recognized: one is pink-gray, the other blue-gray, and the shadow that joins them is, as you would have guessed, purple-gray. I close my eyes a moment as they are beginning to blur; to adjust my vision I open them again.

My philosopher, incidentally, was not mistaken. Dedicated to Cyprus, the veil that entwined them has suddenly been lifted: they are beautiful.

In the middle of the temple the white marble goddess offers itself to our gaze. Little courtesans, she will favor you: she too knew you were beautiful and tender.

“PARTIAL IMPARTIALITY”

Le Croisic. -- The gray pier separates the two horizons, the gray pier along with, at the very end, the yellow glow of the lighthouse.

So as to be more objective, setting aside my personal tastes, first I admire the muted shades:

The sea is silvery; the sky midnight blue, that blue of a more modest and sincere purity than white.

The light grows dim, the waters become leaden, and I spy the foamy wake of an unknown boat.

To compare, I turn around, and the splendor of the sunset draws me in, incorrigible. The sun fascinates me, immense and luminous orange, but I love to distraction the strange, false tones that delicate dark clouds bring out. Over there is a charming soft green that no one could reproach; next to it, the reds take on a somber, severe aspect, but their eccentricity betrays them. A golden saffron mist blends with the sun's rays to sparkle with a thousand lights. The purple is especially prominent, and even pales the sun. With real relief my tired eyes find rest in the calm, dull sea.

And while the setting sun little by little loses its allure, the other horizon becomes more beautiful and bright: glimmers in the night appear one by one; green lights are lit on the black boom.

Rome, Domitian. -- A double curtain of gray silk separates the atrium from the triclinium; a double curtain of gray silk, along with, at the very top, the yellow glow of a copper lamp.

So as to be more objective, setting aside my personal tastes, first I admire the muted shades.

The pool water like a polished silver cup, the sky midnight blue, that blue of a more modest and sincere purity than white. The light outside dims, the waters become leaden, and I spy on the darkened marble the white wool coat of an unknown host.

I turn around, and the light of the banquet draws me in, incorrigible. The chandelier fascinates me, immense and luminous orange, but I love to distraction the strange and false tones of the silky togas, which the brown wool of the philosophers brings out. Over there is a debauched youth whose soft green tunic enchants, and whom no one could reproach. On the same bed, a stoic philosopher is draped in a red toga meant to be severe, but whose eccentricity betrays him. A veil the color of saffron caresses the charming head of Callistratus; it blends with the golden dishes to sparkle with a thousand lights. Tyrian purple is especially favored, and the robe of Afer, the happy husband, pales even the chandelier.

My rather weary gaze rests a moment upon the matte white toga of the poet Martial. Long live Hymenaeus, god of Hymena! Reluctantly impartial, after this orgy of colors I look away. But while the banquet room comes alive and lights up, the atrium little by little loses its allure: the sky fades, the pool water blackens, and for lack of oil, the green lamps go out one by one.

“INVOLUNTARY FISHING”

Le Croisic. -- The fishing boats have returned to port. The sailors spread out their blue and red fishing nets in the sun to dry them.

Barely perceptible, through the fine mesh, is the sea hiding herself with a flirtatious modesty. Irony... in the fishing nets intended for the loss of the brightest fish, a poor gull has just been caught.

Baia. Domitian. -- Lalage is strolling in Baia. She spreads out her bright blue dress and her beautiful red hair into the sun to make them shine. Barely perceptible, through the fine gauze of Cyprus, is her white body hiding with a flirtatious modesty. Irony... in the diaphanous fabric destined for the loss of the wealthiest lovers, a poor boy has just been caught.

“HIEROGLYPHS”

Le Croisic. -- The gray sea is stained with black markings of different shapes and importance.

Shipwrecks, in the distance, criss-cross the Traict with clear parallel lines; the dinghies look like egyptian scarabs, and the boats as well, sails lowered, with their masts and their lines, are monstrous beetles deprived of their antennae; the buoy evokes the idea of an obelisk; a double-mast, which I see obliquely, resembles images of Apis the bull, that horned head sacred to the people of Egypt.

An idea surprises me today, unforeseen, clear, strange:

Inanimate objects nonetheless have their obscure soul, unknown to humans, and on this calm gray sea, the black stains, purposefully arranged, form a mysterious language that the gods alone understand.

Verona. The Renaissance. -- The gray stone is stained with black markings of different forms and importance. It is a very old stone which was, it seems, brought back from Egypt during Caesar's consulat. I like to dream before its various drawings; the simple horizontal dashes, the scarabs, the ibis and the cats. In this marking I believe I recognize one of their obelisks; and that horned head, I like to think I see Apis in it, that strange, ugly god that the Egyptians, brothers of Pasiphae, adore.

An idea surprises me today, unforeseen, clear, strange:

On the gray stone, these black stains, purposefully arranged, formed a language known to our forebears, whose dead secret will perhaps be reborn out of their ravaged tombs.

“THE SHOTS”

Le Croisic. -- The dark sea, the opaque sky, my heavy head. Large black birds in flight beat their wings; a dinghy, vague and gray, along with shadows, in the distance...

The thunder rumbles, deaf, imprecise, lightningless. Then, clear, rapid and regular, six shots: it's the death knell of gulls...and I think of Christ, of his pointless sacrifice, of his empty talk of goodness.

“THE BEATINGS”

Lake Garda. Hadrian. -- The pale lake, the pale sky, my head filled with the sound of flutes.

A marble palace stands on slender columns; white sails swell with the light breeze.

A child is seated at the water's edge, half naked; his blond hair is golden in the sun...but, on his back, those red marks...and those plaintive sobs...I caress his round head softly, and I think of Plato, of his pointless work, of his rhetoric of beauty.

“EPITAPHS”

Le Croisic. -- This is a long-abandoned corner of the port. The fallen stones are covered with a soft grass that gives them a new youth, and there, on the sand, two dinghies are beached. Their dilapidated hulls are now similar, and I can hardly distinguish one from the other.

In the back, white letters attract my gaze. I try to read...the half-faded inscription tells me nothing, if not that Le Croisic is the home port for both.

No one will ever know their inglorious names, and yet I dream of their destiny which seems to me quiet and sweet: brothers, they sleep together, and death unites them forever.

Ravenna. Hadrian. -- This is a long-abandoned corner of the deserted temple. The fallen stones are covered with a soft grass that gives them a new youth, and there, on a tomb, two stone children fall asleep entwined. Their deformed bodies are now similar, and I can hardly distinguish one from the other.

On the marble, greek characters attract my gaze. I try to read...the half-faded epitaph tells me nothing, if not that they loved each other.

No one will ever know their inglorious names, and yet I dream of their destiny which seems to me quiet and sweet: brothers, they sleep together, and death unites them forever.

“THE ANSWER”

Le Croisic. -- Useless anger. Not in a day, fiery sea, will you be able to dispossess this granite boulder; not in a day, not in a century.

These painful efforts are in vain: a nascent boulder will replace the one that is crumbling, destroyed by thousands of years of hard work, and the ocean, still immense, will cover with its irritable waves always the same immensity.

Why then, fiery and frozen sea, these eddies, these upreared waves?

-- Because the white foam beautifies the black rock.

Rome. Caesar's Consulate. -- Vain oblation. This is not the first time, ardent young man, that the gods have been insensitive. This is not the first time, and it will not be the last.

Your hope is in vain, your prayers useless, they do not hear you; not without reason, sinful man erects their statues and their stone temples. But the gods do not care at all about mortals. You need only look at crime and unpunished sacrilege to convince yourself.

Why then, ardent young man, hang these ripe clusters, these scorched leaves, on the curved horns of a useless guardian? Why these offerings to the marble Priapus?

Because the black vine branches beautify the white god.

“HARMONY”

Le Croisic. -- A sail passes. She is a prisoner of the Traict. All gray, she is barely distinguishable from the gray sky, from the gray sea. On the horizon, the sandbars are tinted with a dull gold; but that color, the sail reminds me of it too, patched with a pale yellow.

She passes, and is no longer a sail, but a boat, for her hull intrudes upon my distracted gaze.

This pink spot is the only one mismatched to the landscape. Surprised at an unexpected lack of harmony, I search; and way over there lit by the sunset is the pink carriage of the chariot that Apollo drives.

Knidos. -- A turtledove takes flight. She is a prisoner of the temple. All gray, she almost blends with the gray marble walls, with the gray mosaic. In the shadow, the jewels that adorn the statue are barely tinted with gold. But that color, the turtledove reminds me of it too, nuanced with pale yellow under the wings.

She passes above me like a delicate gray cloud, and I see her pink feet folded against the down of her belly.

This pink spot holds my distracted gaze, mismatched with all that surrounds it.

Surprised at an unexpected lack of harmony, I search; and, near me, the priestess wrapped in gray, with a veiled gesture, spreads leafless roses at the foot of Aphrodite.

“A LEGEND”

Le Croisic. -- The marsh is in bloom. The piles of salt, an immaculate white, are floating water lilies, scented with violet, that decorate the marsh in the spring.

In the spring, in the middle of a torrent of snow, tiny salt-colored fairies descend from the sky. In their pale dresses they bring leafless white violets. Hidden in the daytime, in the dark clouds of April, they work at night, digging up the piles of salt. There they make their home; there they play and rest on a thick rug of sown flowers. They like it in these refreshed palaces, where their frail bodies are protected from the summer heat.

And throughout the whole summer, the marsh is sacred. New piles of salt rise uninhabited, but the floral palaces remain intact until fall.

In the fall, on moonlit nights, we see the little fairies, delicate white clouds rising back up toward the ether.

I have seen them. And I have tasted the sea salt scented with their white violets.

Tibur. Marcus-Aurelius. -- The pool is ablaze. Tiny flames sparkle upon her like so many stars. Water and fire, enemies not long ago, unite in the salt baths of Tibur. The sea water pool, frozen for the scorching heat of summer days, is ignited during cool nights.

For during the night, she delights her marble guardians. The gods, standing here and there in the deep water, are weary of serving as resting spots for lazy swimmers: at night, the cool waves belong to them.

To prevent access to it by the audacious ungodly they mix (harmless) flames of terrifying appearance with the sweet waters. And from that moment on the immortals enjoy, away from our fearful gaze, a luminous and quiet pool.

Yet, on moonless nights, sneaking like thieves around the darkened walls, we can glimpse their moving and clear shapes.

I have seen them. And I have felt on my aching back the marble winged shoes of a vengeful Mercury.

“THE PAINTER”

Le Croisic. -- White paper - a fine hand - a pencil. The port - boats. Which will be the chosen one?

If I knew how to paint, I would choose that half-hoisted blue sail and its ambiguous pose. A few gray lines: is it...? That unparalleled elegance! That's him, that's my little boat. Anxious, I follow the drawing as it develops, I marvel. But maybe the color is going to spoil it? This false tone of the sail is too natural...mistake!

I'll have this watercolor, when I should...

A sailor jumps, the sail is unfurled, and the boat takes off. Alas!

But the skillful artist was able to finish it without a model.

“THE SCULPTOR”

Athens. -- Formless clay - two white hands - a rough shaping. The banquet hall - dancers. Which will be the chosen one?

If I knew how to sculpt, I would choose that child, his floating gauze veil and his ambiguous pose. A sketched shape: is it... ? That unparalleled elegance! That's him, that's my young boy.

Anxious, I follow the modeling as it develops, I marvel. The rough-in is finished. But perhaps in detailing, the sculptor will spoil it? These primed folds are too natural... mistake!

I'll have this statue, when I should... The flute is silenced, the master calls, and the slave takes off. Alas!

But the skilled artist was able to finish it without a model.

“THE MODERN NIGHT”

Le Croisic. -- The black boom, all worn out; here and there a few green glimmers. The dark and heavy sky. On the horizon, a vague white light. Is it the sky, is it the sea, is it death, is it...? we don't know.

Leaning at the end of the boom, I am dreaming.

Toward the white luminance, the only hope, singular end of this dark night, along the dark path barely indicated by the flickering green lights, two shadows advance, entwined. They are going toward the sea whose waves collide and moan; perhaps they are going farther, toward the unknown, groping in the dark.

“THE ANCIENT LIGHT”

Piraeus. Pericles. -- The white pier, brand new; here and there a few shadow spots. The flaky white sky. On the horizon, a vague pink light. Is it the rising sun, is it an arrowless Eros, a new life, is it... ? we don't know.

Leaning at the end of the pier, I am dreaming.

Two white shapes pass and move away, blended into a golden mist. They are going toward the city, whose rooftops sparkle in the first rays of dawn, perhaps they are going farther, toward the unknown, in light and in joy.

“THE DEPARTURE”

Le Croisic. -- A letter calls me to Paris. I have a migraine headache and the strange desire for a trip at sea.

Yes, these waves, which I declared fickle and deceptive, are tempting me today. With my head heavy, here I am tossed about on this lapping sound, which would be enough to make me sick when I am well.

The fisherman takes pity on me:

--You are very pale. Lie down in the bottom of the boat, on the nets.

When you're suffering, you're like a child. I obey.

Spread out on the soft bed of the ocean, my head buried in the cool webbing, the rumors of the waves come to me muffled.

The pain subsides and changes into a beating of wings that slows and fades.

Ungrateful, I am going to leave this friend who sings to me and cradles me and puts me to sleep.

Rome. Trajan. -- These tablets call me to Spain. I have a migraine headache and the strange desire for a walk in Rome.

Yes, that city, which I declared vile and cruel, is tempting me today. With my head heavy, here I am pushed, unconscious, through these busy streets, whose tumult would be enough to make me sick when I am well.

Priscus passes; he takes pity on me:

-- You seem tired, Marcus; come rest at home with us.

When you're suffering, you're like a child. I obey.

Spread out on a soft bed near the open window, the rumors of Rome come to me muffled.

The pain subsides and changes into a beating of wings that slows and fades.

Ungrateful, I am going to leave this friend who sings to me and cradles me and puts me to sleep.

