

Les nuits d'été (Summer Nights), H. 81
Poems by Théophile Gautier (1811-1872)

1. Villanelle (H. 82)

1. Quand viendra la saison nouvelle,
Quand auront disparu les froids,
Tous les deux nous irons, ma belle,
Pour cueillir le muguet aux bois.
Sous nos pieds égrenant les perles
Que l'on voit au matin trembler,
Nous irons écouter les merles
Siffler.

2. Le printemps est venu, ma belle,
C'est le mois des amants bénis;
Et l'oiseau, satinant son aile,
Dit des vers au rebord du nid.
Oh, viens donc, sur ce banc de mousse
Pour parler de nos beaux amours,
Et dis-moi de ta voix si douce:
Toujours!

3. Loin, bien loin, égarant nos courses,
Faisons fuir le lapin caché,
Et le daim au miroir des sources
Admirant son grand bois penché,
Puis chez nous, tout heureux, tout aises,
En paniers enlaçant nos bras,
Revenons, rapportant des fraises
Des bois.

1. Villanelle

1. When spring comes anew
and the cold weather thaws,
we will go together, my love,
to pick lily-of-the-valley in the woods.
Scattering the morning pearls
we see trembling underfoot
we will go and hear the blackbirds
sing.

2. Spring has come, my love,
it is the blessed season for lovers;
and the bird, preening its wings,
sings songs from the edge of its nest.
Oh come and sit on this mossy bank
and talk of our happy love,
and say to me in your soft voice:
forever!

3. Far, far away, our footsteps wandering,
we'll startle the rabbit from its hiding,
and the deer admiring its great antlers
mirrored bending in the stream;
then happy and content, our arms
entwined, we'll come home
bearing baskets of wild
strawberries.

– Translation by David Cairns
and Katherine Kolb

Note: A villanelle was a poetic form established in 16th-century France, popular again in the 19th. Its name implies a peasant song, but this one's diction betrays aristocrats playing at country life: the metaphoric dew-pearls of the first stanza; the satin of the bird's wings in the second. We translate "satin," used as a verb, with "preening," related to the mirror of the third stanza in which the elegant deer admires himself. Gautier takes liberties with the form: technically, it admits only two rhymes. – KK

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