Correspondences

Charles Baudelaire

Irene Spears

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Nature stands as a temple in which living columns
Will release now and then words’ confused interplay,
As through forests of symbols mankind makes his way
Which observe him with glances familiar and solemn.

Thin-drawn echoes from far interblending will reach
And through shadowy depths into oneness unite,
As immense as pure brightness, as vast as the night,
Colors, sounds and aromas respond each to each.

Some sweet odors there be cool as flesh of a babe,
Gentle as plaining oboes, with bright meadow green,
And still other corrupted, triumphant and brave,

Possessed of expansion of objects unseen,
Benjamin, amber light and music, incense,
That sing ecstasies of the spirit and sense.

Charles Baudelaire
Translated by Irene Spears*

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La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténèbreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d’enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
—Et d’autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,
Ayant l’expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l’ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l’encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l’esprit et des sens.

Charles Baudelaire

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