Jean Delville's 'L'Allégorie de l'Enfer' (c. 1890)—or, *Azrael and the Death of Solomon*

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Abstract

Jean Delville was one of the most talented artists of his generation, producing a prolific body of paintings, drawings, poetry, and essays. This essay explores the relationship between a previously unknown drawing by the artist, recently come to light, and a long narrative-poem published in one of his earliest anthologies: *Les Horizons Hanté* (1892), titled 'Azrael'. These early works reveal themes that were to become a mainstay of the artist's *oeuvre* concerning the mystery of death, transcendence, and the path of the Initiate.

Keywords

Jean Delville – Symbolist art – Idealist Art – Solomon and Azrael

Drawing was always at the heart of Delville's artistic practice. His drawings were not all simply a means to an artistic end, in other words simply sketches and studies for finished paintings; he was also capable of creating highly detailed drawings that served as finished works of art in themselves. In this regard he followed a long tradition of artistic practice—which goes back to Michelangelo and Dürer—in which drawings served as independent works of art.

Delville was a highly skilled draughtsman and demonstrated a prodigious talent from the earliest point in his career when he enrolled as a full-time student at the Brussels Academy of Fine Art. As a very young student he was awarded the top drawing prizes, including those for 'drawing after nature' and 'drawing after the antique'.¹ Delville, in fact, placed special emphasis on draw-

¹ See Cole, *Jean Delville*, 22.

ing and the symbolic importance of line, which formed the philosophical foundation of his art, namely his *Esthétique Idéaliste*. He once wrote that 'Art began by Drawing, by line, and the Line is the soul of Equilibrium, it is the essence itself of Form ... Drawing is the most elevated part, the sole independent part of the pictorial technique where genius alone can prove itself'. For Delville, line was the basic element in the expression of the higher metaphysical ideal towards which he strove in his art, and it is the artistic line that mediates between the material world and the Ideal or Divine world. He wrote further that 'Line, in things of Nature, is the signature of God. Line, let us never forget, is the symbolic expression of the primordial affinities which exist between Spirit and Matter. Line, or Form, is the mystery of the physical world, the mystery of Art, the mystery of Beauty'.²

Delville's most well-known finished drawing is his finely detailed and highly articulate *L'Idole de la Perversité* (Fig. 1). This drawing expresses cogently the ambiguities between light and dark, eroticism and transcendence, the realms of the material and the spiritual—all captured in the image of a menacing, yet alluring and ambiguous female figure. Delville's *Idole* is something of an avatar for all the anxieties, fears, and desires of that era, but it also represents an important image that is connected to his hermetic worldview and the role of the feminine in initiation and the spiritual evolution of the individual.³

During the 1890s, Delville produced several other enigmatic finished drawings including his (perhaps incorrectly titled) *Parsifal* (Fig. 2), which is a striking contemporary articulation of an Initiate. As far as can be determined, this work was never exhibited by Delville in public. It seems that many of these finished drawings—some only recently coming to light—were never intended for public display but, rather, were produced for the interest of his own private circle of fellow artists who shared an interest in the esoteric and the hermetic traditions generally.

One of the most startling finished drawings by Delville—and perhaps one of his most articulate amongst these works of art—which recently came up for sale is titled *L'Allégorie de l'Enfer* ('Allegory of Hell', Fig. 3). There is no known record of this work in contemporary catalogues and no description of it amongst inventories of Delville's known works of art. The title itself was probably (like so many of his works from this early period) applied in retrospect. The work is signed and dated, but the dating is not clear and could be from 1890 or 1893—certainly the date of 1899, often ascribed to this work, is incorrect.

2 Quoted in Delville, 'Le Discours de Jean Delville', 4.

3 See Cole, *Jean Delville*, 245–267, for a highly detailed analysis of this work.

The subject of the drawing is enigmatic. My purpose here is to shed light on its content and to show that it relates directly to a poem Delville published in his first anthology, *Les Horizons Hantés* (1892), titled 'Azraël'. In fact, Delville's drawing shares many iconographical motifs with the poem, and it is almost certain that the drawing is an illustration of the poem, or perhaps *vice versa*.

The drawing is dominated by a dazzling figure that entirely fills the central part of the frame; this angelic figure rises above what appears to be a brazier, and five tongues of fire lap at the base of the figure's robe (Fig. 4). The figure blazes light in all directions, giving the impression that it is not a physical being but, rather, an extraordinary creature from another order of reality—a light-bearer, god-like and angelic at the same time. There is a minimal use of outline and shading to articulate the figure; instead, its form is delineated through radiating bright white shard-like shapes that appear out of the deep surrounding darkness. In fact, there is very little articulation of the figure—most of which is simply delineated by leaving the underlying white paper exposed, creating a white silhouette against the dark surrounding ground (Fig. 5). The features of its head and face are lightly outlined with barely any modeling. The edges of its form fade into the surroundings to give an effect of transparency; it lacks, in other words, any solidity and tangible volume. The overall effect is of a figure that consists entirely of blazing, incandescent light, which is emphasized by the contrasting dark and gloomy surroundings in which it is set.

The next most important figure is placed in the foreground at bottom left. This male figure reclines at the top of a stairway, wears a pointed Oriental-style headpiece, and holds a wand or staff. He is dressed in a white flowing robe and sports a dark, full pointed beard. He seems passive and withdrawn, his eyes are closed in an aspect of contemplative meditation, and he seems momentarily unperturbed by the dazzling vision of the Angel that appears at the entrance of the Hall (Fig. 6). His dress and demeanor suggest that he is some kind of pontiff or king. He is surrounded by figures in white robes whose gestures strongly suggest that they are in a state of grief, with their hands clasping their heads, one bending down as if in agony.

Near the feet of this pontiff are five cat-like creatures (Fig. 7). One stares at the viewer with white glowing eyes, another howls with his eyes closed, and the remaining three gaze into the Hall before them towards the crowd below. Immediately next to the cats is a bowl supported on tall tapering legs with a plume of smoke drifting towards the viewer. This object is most certainly a tripod, familiar to ancient cultures and used in divination, much like the tripod found in classical mythology. Delville would depict a similar object in his *Women of Eleusis*.⁴

4 *Les Femmes d'Eleusis* (1931), oil on canvas, 110 × 140 cm. Tournai: Musée des Beaux-Arts.

Immediately below the cats one sees an indistinctly articulated crowd of people surrounding a fountain. Only those closest to the pontiff can be made out, and one sees veiled women and a group of bearded men talking amongst one another (Fig. 8). Behind this group, in a clearing, one sees several serpents crossing the floor (Fig. 9).

The scene is set in a vast interior lined with thin figurative columns on either side that then rise towards the arched ceiling. The entrance—largely blocked by the blazing angel—is marked by a high-arched open portal supported on either side by three columns. At the base of these columns, just outside, one can make out the silhouettes of two sphinxes facing each other. Beyond that one can detect the faint traces of a domed structure and a hilly landscape that disappears into the distance.

On the face of it, one cannot readily interpret the narrative of this drawing. The relationship between the incandescent angel and the indifferent, supine pontiff appears incongruent; one would expect surprise or shock, but certainly not indifference, at the appearance of such an apparition. The only clue offered here is in the figures surrounding the pontiff, who are clearly in states of agony or grief. The closed eyes of the pontiff might then suggest that he is either asleep, dead, or dying. However, there seems little that is 'allegorical' in this work, which instead strongly suggests a specific narrative.

In fact, there is an extremely close correlation between the motifs in this drawing and Delville's poem 'Azraël', mentioned earlier, and an understanding of this work has to rely on some familiarity with that poem.

Azrael is the Angel of Death. Delville's poem describes the arrival of Azrael in the court of the wise and powerful King Solomon at the hour of his death. Solomon is willing to die, and in his understanding of the higher orders of reality, in his capacity as Magus, he perceives death as a mystical transfiguration into the metaphysical dimension. The poem opens with the evocative lines describing the king's anticipation of death: 'C' était par un soir de symbole et de fatalité/ où les hauts firmaments hallucinaient la terre,/ tandis que le Roi-Mage, pâli dans sa prière,/ entrevoyait son Âme en immortalité' (It was a symbolic evening of destiny/ where high vaults of heaven envisioned the Earth,/ while the Magus-King, pale in prayer,/ glimpsed his soul's immortality).⁵

5 Text quoted from Delville, 'Azraël', 101–111. All translations by the author. Delville's source for the story he narrates in his poem is obscure. However, the Islamic story of Solomon and Azrael was well known in the nineteenth century, particularly amongst English-speaking poets. Whether Delville was aware of these translations and any Western retelling of the story is uncertain. See Al-Garrallah, 'The Islamic Tale of Solomon and the Angel of Death'.

Delville then sets the scene for the arrival of the radiant and dazzling Angel of Death, Azrael, and in the process includes the description of many of the features of the drawing, not only of the Angel itself so vividly evoked in terms that resemble identically the figure in the drawing but also including incidental details such as the lynxes besides the tripod and the sphinxes at the doorway⁶—details (amongst others) that connect incontrovertibly the drawing with the poem:

L'infini des sommeils plane sur l'acropole
comme aux nuits primitives le sommeil de la vie.
- Mais, là-bas, en l'effroi de la nuit envahie,
un Être fabuleux vibre en son auréole!

Le Roi l'a vu surgir des horizons bibliques
et venir comme un souffle occulte que reluit
et grandir en l'espace et grandir en la nuit
dans une épouvante d'ailes prophétiques!

Aux grands Palais magiques d'or et de cristal
réfléchissant en eux les lumières du monde,
voici qui transparait à la voûte profonde
l'Archange de la Mort au signe sacerdotal!

On eût dit son corps de tous les astres pénétré!
Les rayons, jaillissant des cils et des regards,
absorbent les bijoux et rendent les ors blafards
sous leur rayonnement effroyable et sacré!

On eût dit son front, fait d'éclats de foudre ardente,
et des aurores d'or flamboyer en ses cheveux,
et des splendeurs de glace et des splendeurs de feux
fulgurer dans le vol de sa robe éclatante!

L'éclat de sa présence était si surhumain
que les sphinx des portails en avaient le vertige;
les trésors de Scéba ont perdu leur prestige,
au seul geste magnétique et divin de sa main!

Les lynx prostrés sous les trépieds kabbalistiques
répercutent, parmi les vestibules vermeils
les épouvantements soudains de leurs réveils,
car un Éclair fatal brûle leurs yeux mystiques!

Sleep's infinity glides above the acropolis
like the sleep of life in nights more primitive.
- But, down below, in the dread of the overwhelming
night,
a spectacular Being resonates in his radiance!

The King saw him suddenly appear from biblical
horizons
and arrive like a shining secret breath
and growing bigger in space and in the night
in a terror of prophetic wings!

In the great magical Palaces of crystal and gold
Wherein the light of the world is reflected,
this is who appeared through the deep vault
The Archangel of Death with the sacerdotal sign.

It seemed his body penetrated every star!
With rays spurting lashes and eyes,
absorbing every jewel and rendering dull the gold
beneath their frightening and sacred radiance!

It seemed that his brow was made of intense flashes
of lightning,
and that a golden daybreak blazed in his hair,
and the splendors of fire and ice
flash in the flight of his dazzling robe!

The brightness of his presence was so superhuman
that the sphinxes at the gateway were with vertigo
overcome;
the treasures of Sheba lost their prestige
in the single magnetic and divine gesture of his
hand!

Lynxes prostrated beneath the Kabbalistic tripods
reverberating, amongst the gilded halls
the sudden terrors of their awakening,
for a fatal Thunderbolt burnt their mystical eyes.

6 Observed during a discussion with Miriam Delville, private correspondence.

En les bassins les eaux lustrales se sont tues,
et les colonnes d'or ont tressailli d'effroi;
le dieu a éteint tous les luxes du Roi
et les flambeaux de myrrhe aux bras d'or des stat-
ues.

Nul diamant solitaire ne flamboie encor
parmi les ombres pâles de la Maison royale;
Salomon est là, dressant dans la haute Salle
les mille pierreries de sa tiare d'or.

Un frisson d'Au-delà pénètre au cœur du Mage
qui comprend que c'est l'heure divine de mourir,
car la céleste vision va entr'ouvrir
le sépulcre radieux destiné au Sage.

The Lustral Waters were silenced in their bowls
and the golden columns trembled with fear;
the god extinguished all the King's luxuries
so too the torches of myrrh with gilded statue's
arms.

No solitary diamond would ever blaze up again
among the pale shadows of the Royal House;
Behold Solomon, laying out in the high Hall
the thousand precious stones of his golden tiara.

A shudder of the Beyond penetrated the Initiate's
heart
who understood that it was the divine hour to die
since the celestial vision would partially open
the radiant sepulcher destined for the Sage.

In the poem, Solomon eagerly anticipates death. He is weary of his world crowded, as it is, with the glories of his material wealth. But he is also the 'Magus-King' who knows of the mysteries of the beyond and willingly anticipates entering this more glorious realm in the afterlife: 'Chercheur d'Absolu en une gloire de hauts rêves/ qu'aux soirs d'infini et de magie éblouissants,/ je faisais jaillir sous mes sceptres puissants,/—je veux dormir loin des hommes et leurs glaives' (Quester for the Absolute in a glory of high dreams/ of night's infinity and dazzling magic,/ that I have spouted beneath my powerful scepters,/—I wish to sleep far from men and their swords).

Solomon reminisces about his earthly achievements, his mystical Canticles that 'ont dit que la chair est devine/ pour que le corps soit pur et que l'amour devine, que le désir humain doit se diviniser' (my Canticles spoke of the flesh as divine/ for the body is pure, and love divine,/ and that human love is made divine). He also recalls the temple he built, the 'Maison de Dieu avec les pierres du Ciel,/ et vois comme pâlisent ces dômes en leurs fastes' (this House of God with Heavenly stones,/ and see now how these domes pale in their splendor).

But all the gilded splendor of his palace pales in the radiant light of the Angel of Death and the glorious afterlife he promises. Solomon is impatient for death to come:

'Ma pensée est claire telle un grand clair de lune,
et les yeux de mon âme sont des mondes transpar-
ents;
je sens fluer en moi tes regards de firmaments
tels des mers de clartés.—innombrables et Une.

'My thought is as clear as bright moonlight,
and my soul's eyes are transparent worlds;
I sense your celestial gaze flowing in me
such oceans of clarity.—innumerable and One.

'Oh! mourir sous tes regards comme meurent les choses
et s'infiniser en les lumières du néant
Tes regards sont pareils à un soleil béant,
absorbours de la Vie en leurs apothéoses!

'O toi, la plus infinie des âmes infinies,
glaçant sur les sommeils les mirages de la Mort,
éternise mon rêve en le Rêve où tu m'endors
ô précurseur surnaturel des agonies!

'Oh! To die beneath your gaze as all things must die
and to become infinite in the wisdom of nothingness!

Your looks are like a cavernous sun,
absorbing life into their apotheosis!

'Oh thou, the most infinite of infinite souls,
freezing in sleep the mirage of Death,
draw out my dream in the Dream where you will
send me to sleep
Oh spiritual precursor of the throes of death!

In the remainder of the poem, Azrael conjures the afterlife for Solomon with a voice lighting up the darkness with its, 'ineffables promesses d'éternité' (ineffable promises of eternity). Azrael promises Solomon an afterlife that is more resplendent than his earthly life of power and luxury: 'Je viens dire à ton Ame d'entrer dans la Lumière! Et à ta chair de reflourir aux Edens futurs, car la Mort t'a élu pour des règnes plus purs/ que les Lys immaculés de l'Aube-Première!' (I come to instruct your Soul to enter the Light! And your flesh to bloom again in Edens of the future, for Death has elected you for reigns purer/ than the immaculate Lily of the First Dawn!). He assures Solomon that his life on earth was not in vain and that his achievements were celebrated in heaven; the Seraphim themselves transcribed his verses that exalted their praise, and conjure a paradise that will take him far from his weariness in this world: 'Tes yeux mourants verront sous mes flambeaux en fleur/ s'éclairer par delà les temps et les espaces, les univers d'extase où sommeillent des races/ que ne hantent jamais le Mal, ni la Douleur' (Your dying eyes will see beneath my flowering torch/ illuminated beyond all time and space, a world of ecstasy where all races slumber/ which is never haunted by Evil nor by Sorrow). In death, Solomon will be mightier than he was on earth, and his influence will extend across all peoples whom he leaves behind: The Angel of Death assures Solomon that his soul will make the world sublime ('l'Ame de Salomon sublimisa le Monde!').

Both the poem and the drawing are enigmatic. The poem conjures a mystical event set in ancient times in poetic language that is passionate and powerful. It evokes many of the themes that found their way into his paintings and other works of art at the time while he was in the early stages of forging a more transcendental aesthetic as he strove to move away from the strictures of contemporary realism that dominated avant-garde practice—themes including the notion of the mysticism of death, transcendence, spiritual evolution and initiation, the evocation of the transcendental dimension, and the realm of the Ideal; and, finally, the theme of the Magus or Initi-

ate.⁷ Incidentally, this poem also demonstrates, rather cogently, Delville's gift for narrative poetry, in other words evoking a fictional episode based on historical facts to narrate a story in a compelling poetical format. This is one instance of several throughout his anthologies that demonstrates his gift for long-format narrative poetry and is an aspect of his artistic achievement, as a writer, that deserves more attention.

It is further worth noting that the central theme of transfiguration through death in his poem 'Azraël' is evident in his early great drawing, *Tristan et Yseult* (1887, Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Belgium), based on the *Liebestod* of Wagner's eponymous opera. There the fated lovers collapse together in an arching pile as the hint of their souls ascending to a transcendent heaven are conjured visually in the flight of butterflies at their feet. Solomon's transcendence is more direct, more forceful, and a purer escape from the spiritual liminations of earthly reality. He is a Magus, an initiate in other words; someone whose earthly powers are equal to his spiritual capabilities that will come into their own after death. Delville probably had Joséphin Péladan in mind when he envisioned the figure of Solomon in the drawing—with whom he bears some physical resemblance if only in the striking Assyrian beard that was a hallmark of Péladan's self-styled persona as 'Sâr' or Magus.⁸

From the preceding discussion it is evident that the correlation between Delville's poem 'Azraël' and the drawing that is currently titled 'L'Allegory d'Enfer' is compelling. This is evident not only in the incidental details that they share—such as the enigmatic lynxes in the foreground, the sphinxes at the entrance to the great hall, and the serpents—but also in the description of the two main figures in both works, as well as the relationship between this luminous and dazzling Angel and the introspective, dying King-Mage. In other words, there is much to argue for the case that the representation of the supine figure at the lower left in the drawing must be that of Solomon, following the poem. His oriental features and clothing suggest as much, and he carries a staff or wand, symbol of the earthly and divine power of the Magus. His eyes are closed as if he is in meditation or a dream, entirely unperturbed by the presence of the impressive angelic figure. His posture and demeanor suggest at the same time the notion that Solomon is dying as well as the idea that he perhaps sees the Angel in his mind's eye—it is a personal, interior vision of the Angel of Death. Moreover, the technically skillful way in which Delville drew the incandescent Angel with his bright, luminous features that lack solidity and appear

7 See Cole, *Jean Delville*, 207 ff., for a detailed discussion of these themes in Delville's work.

8 Delville created an iconic portrait of Péladan in full hermetic garb. See Jean Delville, *Portrait de Joséphin Péladan*, 1894, oil on canvas, Nîmes, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

to consist entirely of light is, without doubt, one of the most original visual inventions in his *oeuvre*. The description of the Angel Azrael in the poem is perfectly re-envisioned in the drawing, in almost every detail, which certainly strengthens the argument here that these two works are closely related to each other.

It is worth observing that the figure of the Mage or Initiate, occurs widely in Delville's poetry and paintings during the 1890s, and there is little surprise that he should invoke this theme in this enigmatic drawing. His representation of initiatory figures can also be seen in his *Orphée aux enfers* (c. 1895, private collection) and the central figure in *l'Ecole de Platon* (1898, Paris, Musée d'Orsay).⁹ His interest in the notion of the Initiate stemmed from his growing association with esoteric groups during that time. Throughout his life, Delville directed his art and writings to the idea of the spiritual evolution of the individual and the reality of a higher, hidden, dimension that directs one's life on earth—in other words, the path of the Initiate. The expression of this Ideal dimension, of light and Beauty, was a fundamental goal in his art and writings throughout his life.

The drawing and poem also evoke a theme central to Delville's later writings and art concerning the importance of death. Many of his poems throughout his four published anthologies are meditations on the nature of death. In most of these, Delville took a positive and optimistic attitude towards death—not as a final extinction of being but, rather, as the beginning of a fulfilled spiritual life.

It should be emphasized, finally, that it is highly unusual in the *oeuvre* of Delville to find such a close correlation between his poems and paintings. There are, of course, instances where one finds an overlap in the theme or specific imagery, which is expected. However, there is no other known instance in his work where such a close correlation exists between a work of art and one of his poems. This does raise questions regarding Delville's practice as a poet and as an artist—something he regarded as distinct throughout his life. But it also suggests that the themes he dealt with in these respective works were important to him and that the impact of the narrative of these works was powerful and deeply felt.

Regarding the title of the work, one could make a strong suggestion, in the light of the above discussion, that it needs to be retitled; there is no 'allegory' here, and the theme is certainly the opposite of anything to do with 'hell'. The work concerns the spiritual transfiguration of an initiate in death. Perhaps the drawing should simply be re-titled 'Azrael', or 'The Death of Solomon'.

⁹ See Cole, *Jean Delville*, 307 ff., for a detailed analysis of this work.

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FIGURE 1
Jean Delville, *l'Idole de la Perversité*, 1891,
lead pencil on paper, 98.5×56.5 cm
PRIVATE COLLECTION

FIGURE 2
Jean Delville, *Parsifal* (detail) 1890,
charcoal on paper, 70.7×56 cm
PRIVATE COLLECTION

FIGURE 3
Jean Delville, *L'Allégorie de l'Enfer*
(c. 1890), pencil and black chalk on
paper, 77.9×53.5 cm
PRIVATE COLLECTION

FIGURE 4 Jean Delville, *L'Allégorie de l'Enfer*, detail of the tongues of flame

FIGURE 5 Jean Delville, *L'Allégorie de l'Enfer*, detail of the angelic figure

FIGURE 6 Jean Delville, *L'Allégorie de l'Enfer*, detail of King Solomon

FIGURE 7 Jean Delville, *L'Allégorie de l'Enfer*, detail of the cats and tripod

FIGURE 8 Jean Delville, *L'Allégorie de l'Enfer*, detail of the crowd

FIGURE 9
Jean Delville, *L'Allégorie de l'Enfer*, detail of the serpents

Appendix: Jean Delville, 'Azraël'

From *Les Horizons Hantés* (Brussels, 1892).

(Translation: Brendan Cole)

A Joris-Karl Huysmans.

C'était par un soir de symbole et de fatalité
où les hauts firmaments hallucinaient la terre,
tandis que le Roi-Mage, pâli dans sa prière,
entrevoyait son Âme en immortalité.

Il est suprême parmi le rêve universel!
Et des immensités pâment ses grands yeux vagues
fermés aux splendeurs qu'irradient les bagues
de ses longs doigts d'extases éperdus vers le Ciel.

Et les villes muettes sont pleines des lueurs
qu'exhalent au loin les tragiques ciels nocturnes,
et sous les dômes d'or des temples taciturnes
le peuple de Salomon s'endort en ses splendeurs.

L'infini des sommeils plane sur l'acropole
comme aux nuits primitives le sommeil de la vie.
—Mais, là-bas, en l'effroi de la nuit envahie,
un Être fabuleux vibre en son auréole!

Le Roi l'a vu surgir des horizons bibliques
et venir comme un souffle occulte que reluit
et grandir en l'espace et grandir en la nuit
dans une épouvante d'ailes prophétiques!

Aux grands Palais magiques d'or et de cristal
réfléchissant en eux les lumières du monde,
voici qui transparait à la voûte profonde
l'Archange de la Mort au signe sacerdotal!

On eût dit son corps de tous les astres pénétré!
Les rayons, jaillissant des cils et des regards,
absorbent les bijoux et rendent les ors blafards
sous leur rayonnement effroyable et sacré!

On eût dit son front, fait d'éclats de foudre ardente,
et des aurores d'or flamboyer en ses cheveux,
et des splendeurs de glace et des splendeurs de feux
fulgurer dans le vol de sa robe éclatante!

To Joris-Karl Huysmans.

It was in a symbolic evening of destiny
where the high heavens envisioned the Earth,
while the King-Initiate, pale in prayer,
glimpsed his soul's immortality.

He is supreme amongst the universal dream!
And his large vague eyes swoon in the vastness
closed to the splendors that radiate from the rings
on his long fingers of passionate ecstasies towards
Heaven.

And the mute towns are full of glimmerings
that distantly exhale the tragic nocturnal skies,
and beneath the gilded domes of reticent temples
Solomon's people fall sleep amongst his splendors.

Sleep's infinity glides above the acropolis
like the sleep of life in nights more primitive.
—But, down below, in the dread of the overwhelm-
ing night,
a spectacular Being resonates in his radiance!

The King saw him suddenly appear from biblical
horizons
and arrive like a shining secret breath
and growing bigger in space and in the night
in a terror of prophetic wings!

In the great magical Palaces of crystal and gold
Wherein the light of the world is reflected,
this is who appeared through the deep vault
The Archangel of Death with the sacerdotal sign.

It seemed his body penetrated every star!
With rays spurting lashes and eyes,
absorbing every jewel and rendering dull the gold
beneath their frightening and sacred radiance!

It seemed that his brow was made of intense flashed
of lightning,
and that a golden daybreak blazed in his hair,
and the splendors of fire and ice
flash in the flight of his dazzling robe!

L'éclat de sa présence était si surhumain
que les sphinx des portails en avaient le vertige;
les trésors de Sçéba ont perdu leur prestige,
au seul geste magnétique et divin de sa main!

Les lynx prostrés sous les trépieds kabbalistiques
répercutent, parmi les vestibules vermeils
les épouvantements soudains de leurs réveils,
car un Éclair fatal brûle leurs yeux mystiques!

En les bassins les eaux lustrales se sont tues,
et les colonnes d'or ont tressailli d'effroi;
le dieu a éteint tous les luxes du Roi
et les flambeaux de myrrhe aux bras d'or des statues.

Nul diamant solitaire ne flamboie encor
parmi les ombres pâles de la Maison royale;
Salomon est là, dressant dans la haute Salle
les mille pierreries de sa tiare d'or.

Un frisson d'Au-delà pénètre au cœur du Mage
qui comprend que c'est l'heure divine de mourir,
car la céleste vision va entr'ouvrir
le sépulcre radieux destiné au Sage.

'Oh! de quel lucide sommeil et de quel tombeau,
viens-tu illuminer ma blême chair humaine!
Je suis las d'Univers et de science valine,
et je ne veux plus voir avec les yeux de mon cerveau.

'Voilà des soirs et des soirs que j'espère la fin!
Et que j'attends venir dans les affres des nues,
tes Six Ailes et tes Six Faces absolues:
mortels miroirs de la mort où je me mire enfin!

'Chercheur d'Absolu en une gloire de hauts rêves
qu'aux soirs d'infini et de magie éblouissants,
je faisais jaillir sous mes sceptres puissants,
—je veux dormir loin des hommes et leurs glaives.

'Mes proverbes ont fait germer des lys éternels
sur le bournier des cœurs et le désert des âmes,
et j'ai fait, sur les charniers des combats infâmes,
fleurir les saintes fleurs des jardins immortels.

The brightness of his presence was so superhuman
that the sphinxes at the gateway were with vertigo
overcome;
the treasures of Sheba lost their prestige
in the single magnetic and divine gesture of his
hand!

Lynxes prostrated beneath the Kabbalistic tripods
reverberating, amongst the gilded halls
the sudden terrors of their awakening,
for a fatal Thunderbolt burnt their mystical eyes.

The Lustral Waters were silenced in their bowls
and the golden columns trembled with fear;
the god extinguished all the King's luxuries
so too the torches of myrrh with gilded statue's
arms.

No solitary diamond would ever blaze up again
among the pale shadows of the Royal House;
Behold Solomon, laying out in the high Hall
the thousand precious stones of his golden tiara.

A shudder of the Beyond penetrated the Initiate's
heart
who understood that it was the divine hour to die
since the celestial vision would partially open
the radiant sepulcher destined for the Sage.

'Oh! with what lucid sleep and with what tomb,
have you come to illuminate my pale human flesh!
I am weary of the Universe and of valine science,
and I no longer want to see with my mortal eyes.

'these are the evenings, the evenings of which I wish
for the end!

That I await to enter into the throes of heaven,
the absolute of your Six Wings and your Six Faces:
mortal mirrors of death wherein I can upon my
reflection gaze!

Quester for the Absolute in a glory of high dreams
of night's infinity and dazzling magic,
that I have spouted beneath my powerful sceptres,
—I wish to sleep far from men and their swords.

'My proverbs germinated from eternal lilies
on the mire of hearts and the desert of souls,
and I decked the graveyards of infamous battles,
with the holy flowers from immortal gardens.

'En des verbes merveilleux d'amour et de baiser,
mes Cantiques ont dit que la chair est devine
pour que le corps soit pur et que l'amour devine,
que le désir humain doit se diviniser.

'En mes sabbats sacrés et les mystérieux soirs,
j'ai brûlé tant de parfums et d'encens et d'arômes
que leurs vastes vapeurs montent de mes royaumes
jusqu'à en faire pour Dieu d'immenses encensoirs.

'La terre est ivre encore de tout le Sang-Pascal
que j'ai fait ruisseler comme des fleuves rythmiques,
et les râles ont fait de si saintes musiques
qu'ils prosternaient les fronts sous l'autel holo-
caustal.

'Je suis las d'émerveiller les purs et les chastes
Vois: j'ai bâti, sur le peuple ébloui d'Israël,
cette Maison de Dieu avec les pierres du Ciel,
et vois comme pâlisent ces dômes en leurs fastes.

'Tout l'or immémorial est devenu sombre!
—Mais voici qu'a vibré sur mes Palais astrals,
ainsi que des levers de soleils idéals,
tout cet Esprit igné que tu répands en l'ombre!

'Ma pensée est claire telle un grand clair de lune,
et les yeux de mon âme sont des mondes transpar-
ents;
je sens fluer en moi tes regards de firmaments
tels des mers de clartés.—innombrables et Une.

'Oh! mourir sous tes regards comme meurent les
choses
et s'infiniser en les lumières du néant!
Tes regards sont pareils à un soleil béant,
absorbours de la Vie en leurs apothéoses!

'O toi, la plus infinie des âmes infinies,
glaçant sur les sommeils les mirages de la Mort,
éternise mon rêve en le Rêve où tu m'endors
ô précurseur surnaturel des agonies!

'In marvelous words of love and caressing
my Canticles spoke of the flesh as divine
so that the body is pure, and love divine,
and that human love is made divine.

'In my sacred Sabbaths and mysterious nights,
I burnt a great many perfumes, incense and scents
so that their immense vapors rose through my king-
doms
making a vast censer for God.

'The Earth is once again drunk on all the Paschal
Blood
that I caused to flow like rhythmic rivers,
and the rales were made of such holy music
that they prostrated their brows beneath the altars
of destruction.

'I am weary of being enthralled by the pure and the
chaste
Behold: I built upon the mesmerized people of
Israel,
this House of God with Heavenly stones,
and see now how these domes pale in their splen-
dor.

'All the age-old gold has become dark!
—But this is what trembled upon my celestial
Palaces,
as well as the ideal breaks of day,
all of this igneous Spirit that you scatter in the shad-
ows!

'My thought is as clear as bright moonlight,
and my soul's eyes are transparent worlds;
I sense your celestial gaze flowing in me
such oceans of clarity.—innumerable and One.

'Oh! To die beneath your gaze as all things must die
and to become infinite in the wisdom of nothing-
ness!
Your looks are like a cavernous sun,
absorbing life into their apotheosis!

'Oh thou, the most infinite of infinite souls,
freezing in sleep the mirage of Death,
draw out my dream in the Dream where you will
send me to sleep
Oh spiritual precursor of the throes of death!

—Alors, Azraël chanta par sa toute clarté
le verbe enchanteur des extases funèbres!
Et sa voix d'éther illuminant les ténèbres
avait d'ineffables promesses d'éternité:

'Je viens dire à ton Ame d'entrer dans la Lumière!
Et à ta chair de reflleurir aux Edens futurs,
car la Mort t'a élu pour des règnes plus purs
que les Lys immaculés de l'Aube-Première!

'Tes sceptres lumineux et tes trônes de nacres,
et tes trépieds d'onyx incantant les autels,
seront vains à côté des suaves rituels
où je célébrerai ton ange dans mes sacres.

'Je sais que ta parole fascinait les serpents
dont les enfants pervers enchevêtrant leur songe.
Tes parfums ont enivré l'azur qui prolonge
jusqu'aux paradis charmés leurs hauts enivrments.

'Oui, les flots de pourpre ont lavé les péchés noirs
qui maculaient le sol de la conscience humaine.
Et ta sagesse n'aura pas été vaine
aux enfants improfanés de ta tribu d'espoirs.

'Tu fus Roi sans orgueil sous ta couronne d'ange
dont les bijoux pensifs reflètent ton esprit.
Sache: là-Haut des séraphins pâmes ont transcrit
tes Cantiques ardents qu'exaltent leur louange.

'Et si tu es las de suprême lassitude,
c'est d'avoir construit sur ces féériques hauteurs
le resplendissement de ce Temple de Ferveurs,
ô doux magicien de la béatitude.

'Ta douleur est de celles qui grandissent les dieux
hiératisés en leur sagesse et leur souffrance
jusqu'à nier la vie et bannir la science
de leur cœur de voyants, originel des cieux.

'Je suis venu vers toi des limbes mortuaires
où flotte dans la clarté l'essence des mortels;
viens, tu trouveras, sous les reflets spirituels
de mes Ailes, de translucides suaires.

—Thus, Azrael sang out loud
the enchanting word of funereal ecstasies!
Et his ethereal voice lit up the darkness
having ineffable promises of eternity:

'I come to instruct your Soul to enter the Light!
And your flesh to bloom again in Edens of the
future,
for Death has elected you for reigns purer
than the immaculate Lily of the First Dawn!

'Your luminous scepters and your mother-of-pearl
thrones,
and the altars enchanted by your onyx tripods,
will all be vain alongside these dulcet rituals
where I will celebrate your angel in my rites.

'I know that serpents were enthralled by your word
in which perverse children entangle their dream.
Your perfumes intoxicated the sky that extended
their inebriations as far as the charmed heavens.

'Yes, the purple floods cleansed the black sins
that stained the soil of human conscience.
And your wisdom would not have been vain
for the pious children of your tribe of hope.

'You were a King without pride beneath your angelic
crown
whose pensive jewels reflected your spirit.
Know this: up Above the fainting Seraphim tran-
scribed
your fervent Canticles exalted by their praise.

'And if you are weary of the supreme weariness,
it is for having constructed in these enchanting
heights
the resplendence of this Temple of Ardor,
O gentle magician of bliss.

'Your sorrow is that which enhances the gods
hieratic in their wisdom and suffering
as far as denying life and banishing science
from their prophetic hearts, heavens' first

'I have come to you from funerary limbos
where the essence of mortals float in the brightness;
come, you will find, under the spiritual reflections
of my Wings, translucent shrouds.

'Tes yeux mourants verront sous mes flambeaux en fleur
s'éclairer par delà les temps et les espaces,
les univers d'extase où sommeillent des races
que ne hantent jamais le Mal, ni la Douleur.

'Hors ce monde et ses mornes horizons de pierre,
je connais pour ta douleur des empires d'oubli
où ton cerveau nimbé et ton corps aboli
s'immatérialiseront dans la poussière.

'Et je t'endormirai en ta sublimité!
Et tous ces diamants seront ta sépulture
Debout, en ta sidérale et vague stature,
prosterne ton front las au sceptre de royauté.

'Et plus tard, enfin, les races mystérieuses,
cherchant les traces sacrées du Roi Salomon,
seront ravies: car tes cendres se changeront
en purs diamants et en pierres précieuses.

—Et voici qu'en traversant la chair moribonde,
rallumant les pierreries et l'or du Palais,
en un vaste étincellement d'aube et de Paix,
l'Ame de Salomon sublimisa le Monde!

—C'était par un soir de symbole et de fatalité
où les hauts firmaments hallucinaient la terre,
tandis que le Roi-Mage, pâli dans sa prière,
entrevoyait son Ame en immortalité.

'Your dying eyes will see beneath my flowering torch
illuminated beyond all time and space,
a world of ecstasy where all races slumber
which is never haunted by Evil nor by Sorrow.

'Beyond this world with its bleak stone horizons,
I know empires of oblivion for your sorrow
where your haloed head and your abolished body
will become intangible in the dust.

'And I will lull you to sleep in your sublimity
and all these diamonds will be your tomb
Standing, in your celestial and vague stature,
bow your weary brow to the scepter of royalty.

'And later, finally, the mysterious races
searching for the sacred footprints of King Solomon,
will be delighted: for his ashes will transform
into pure diamonds and precious stones.

—And in traversing the dying flesh,
rekindle the Palace's precious stones and gold,
in an immense scintillation of dawn and Peace
The Soul of Solomon with make the World sublime!

—It was during a symbolic evening of destiny
where the high heavens comprehended the Earth,
while the King-Initiate, pale in prayer,
glimpsed his soul's immortality.