

A Twitcher's Delight

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate end time: 9.40pm including a 20 minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

Programme

Gabriel Fauré *Mirages*

1. Cygne sur l'eau (Swan on the water)
2. Reflets dans l'eau (Reflections on the water)
3. Jardin nocturne (Nocturnal garden)
4. Danseuse (Dancing girl)

Judith Weir *The Voice of Desire*

1. The Voice of Desire
2. White Eggs in the Bush
3. Written on Terrestrial Things
4. Sweet Little Red Feet

Maurice Ravel *Histoire Naturelles*

1. Le paon (The peacock)
2. Le grillon (The cricket)
3. Le cygne (The swan)
4. Le martin-pêcheur (The kingfisher)
5. La pintade (The guineafowl)

Ryan Wigglesworth *Vignettes de Jules Renard* (world premiere)

1. La Poule (The Hen)
2. Le Crapaud (The Toad)
3. La Sauterelle (The Grasshopper)

Ivor Gurney 'Spring' from *Five Elizabethan Songs*

Ivor Gurney *Walking Song*

Ina Boyle *The Joy of Earth*

EJ Moeran No 1 'When smoke stood up from Ludlow' from *Ludlow Town*

Benjamin Britten 'Proud Songsters' from *Winter Words*

Welsh Traditional *The Ash Grove* (arr Benjamin Britten)

Gerald Finzi 2. 'Before and After Summer' from *Before and After Summer*

Adrian Williams *Red Kite Flying*

According to the RSPB, two-thirds of the British public found solace in birdwatching during lockdown, writes Natasha Loges. Might this signal the birth of a new generation of twitchers?

If so, they will be delighted by tonight's affectionate and thought-provoking celebration of birds – and a few other creatures. The programme combines French and English song from the 20th into the 21st century. A composer himself, baritone Roderick Williams feels at home with this music. In his recitals, he always tries to strike a balance between the familiar and the new, the consoling and the challenging, and tonight's programme is no exception.

We begin with Gabriel Fauré's late cycle *Mirages*, four songs evoking natural themes. Fauré set these poems by Renée Bonnière, the Baronne Antoine de Brimont, in the aftermath of World War I. An idealisation of the soul as a swan launches our evening, followed by watery reflections, then a depiction of a nocturnal garden, and finally, a lilting, erotically tinged dance. The 74-year-old Fauré gave the first performance with his protégée Madeleine Grey, although he was, by then, completely deaf. The songs are a distillation of his spare, effortless late style.

Events take a darker turn with Judith Weir's cycle *The Voice of Desire*, composed for mezzo-soprano Alice Coote in 2003. Robert Bridges' poem 'The Voice of Desire' reveals the hidden undertones of the nightingales' song. Similarly, in 'White Eggs in the Bush', a translation from Hunter Poems of the Yoruba, the cuckoo and coucal foretell war and bloodshed in their song. 'Written on Terrestrial Things', a setting of Thomas Hardy's 'The Darkling Thrush', offers respite as the bird's cheery song emerges from the

barbican

bleak winter. In 'Sweet Little Red Feet', (John Keats's 'Song'), the poet wonders why his beloved dove has died. As Weir puts it, 'the nightingale lives in a darker emotional world than we can imagine; the blue cuckoo knows that the wars we blunder into will bring destruction; the thrush sings joyfully whilst we are mentally blank; the dove has died rather than face emotional suffocation from its adoring owner.'

Two cycles are at the heart of the rest of the programme: Ravel's *Histoires naturelles* and Ryan Wigglesworth's new cycle *Vignettes de Jules Renard*. *Histoires naturelles* is a 1906 cycle of settings of Jules Renard. We coolly observe a vain peacock, an obsessively tidy cricket, a swan baffled by his own reflection, a kingfisher (sung from the perspective of an admiring fisherman), and a belligerent guinea-fowl. Ravel dedicated 'The Swan' to the colourful saloniste Misia Godebska. Early listeners were outraged by the evocation of the popular style of the café concert in this music, but Roderick Williams loves the composer's 'dry, droll, farmyard language'.

The seed for Wigglesworth's *Vignettes de Jules Renard* was planted when Williams encountered his dazzling vocal writing in the 2017 opera *The Winter's Tale*. The cycle builds on the Renard texts Ravel set and shares the earlier composer's pictorial approach. We take a detailed look at the humble chicken as she pecks, drinks and eats. The squat, sedate Toad is dismissed as ugly, but instantly returns the insult. The grasshopper is the focus of the final song; we admire his fearlessness and impressive leaps but recall his fragility when he detaches a leg whilst escaping.

Williams's lifelong relationship with English song is showcased in the second half of this evening's programme. He is deeply committed to communicating with English-speaking audiences. 'It is my intention to be understood, in real time, as I sing'. Musical appeal also matters; Williams champions the British songwriters of the twentieth century, many of whom wrote beautiful melodies which Williams finds 'great to sing and relax into.'

A cuckoo's song threads through Gurney's ebullient 'Spring', from his *Five Elizabethan Songs*. In 'Walking Song', the poet strides through London, but longs to be a rook flying over his Gloucestershire village; he settles for loud cawing! Irish composer Ina Boyle follows with her lavish 'The Joy of Earth' before Moeran's gently melancholy 'When smoke stood up from Ludlow', recounting an exchange with a wise blackbird. Britten's 'Proud Songsters' muses on the miracle of new life, as the poet contemplates the young birds who did not exist a year ago. It contrasts with the beautiful Welsh folk-song arrangement, 'The Ash Grove', a tale of grief accompanied by the fluting blackbird. But in Finzi's melancholy 'Before and After Summer', the bird is unnamed – and mute. We close with Adrian Williams's *Red Kite Flying*; this setting of the composer's own text captures the quicksilver energy of the kite as it soars above earthly suffering.

A Twitcher's Delight seeks to draw us back into a close relationship with nature, offering loving observations of the details and quirks of the creatures with whom we share the world.

© Natasha Loges

Performers

Roderick Williams baritone

Andrew West piano

Produced by the Barbican



The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre

1. Cygne sur l'eau

Ma pensée est un cygne harmonieux et sage
qui glisse lentement aux rivages d'ennui
sur les ondes sans fond du rêve, du mirage,
de l'écho, du brouillard, de l'ombre, de la nuit.

Il glisse, roi hautain fendait un libre espace,
poursuit un reflet vain, précieux et changeant,
et les roseaux nombreux s'inclinent quand il passe,
sombre et muet, au seuil d'une lune d'argent;

et des blancs nénuphars chaque corolle ronde
tour-à-tour a fleuri de désir et d'espoir...
Mais plus avant toujours, sur la brume et sur l'onde,
vers l'inconnu fuyant, glisse le cygne noir.

Or j'ai dit, <Renoncez, beau cygne chimérique,
à ce voyage lent vers de troubles destins;
nul miracle chinois, nul étrange Amérique
ne vous accueilleront en des havres certains;

les golfes embaumés, les îles immortelles
ont pour vous, cygne noir, des récifs périlleux;
demeurez sur les lacs où se mirent, fidèles,
ces nuages, ces fleurs, ces astres, et ces yeux.>

2. Reflets dans l'eau

Étendue au seuil du bassin,
dans l'eau plus froide que le sein
des vierges sages,
j'ai reflété mon vague ennui,
mes yeux profonds couleur de nuit
et mon visage.

Et dans ce miroir incertain
j'ai vu de merveilleux matins...
J'ai vu des choses
pâles comme des souvenirs
sur l'eau que ne saurait ternir
nul vent morose.

Alors au fond du Passé bleu,
mon corps mince n'était qu'un peu
d'ombre mouvante,
sous les lauriers et les cyprès
j'aimais la brise au souffle frais
qui nous éventa...

J'aimais vos caresses de sœur,
vos nuances, votre douceur,
aube opportune;
et votre pas souple et rythmé,
nymphes au rire parfumé,
au teint de lune;

et le galop des aegyptiens,
et la fontaine qui s'épand

Swan on the water

My thought is a harmonious and wise swan
which glides slowly to the shores of boredom
upon the bottomless waters of dreams, mirages,
of echoes, fogs, shadows, of the night.

It glides, haughty king cleaving a free space,
chases a vain, precious and changing reflection,
and the plentiful reeds bow when it passes by,
sombre and silent, at the threshold of a silver moon;

and one by one each round corolla of the white
water lilies has flowered with desire and hope...
But always in front of all, upon the mist and upon the water,
fleeing towards the unknown, glides the black swan.

And then I said, 'Handsome illusory swan, renounce,
this slow journey towards troubled destinies;
no Chinese miracle, no strange America
will welcome you in safe havens;

the fragrant gulfs, the immortal isles
hold for you, black swan, perilous reefs;
remain on the lakes in which, ever faithful,
these clouds, these flowers, these stars, and these eyes are
reflected.'

Reflections on the water

Stretched along the threshold of the pool,
in the water colder than the breast
of untarnished virgins
I reflected my vague boredom,
my profound eyes, colour of the night
and my face.

And in this uncertain mirror
I saw wondrous mornings...
I saw pale
things like memories
on the water which could not tarnish
any morose wind.

Then at the bottom of the blue past,
my slim body was nothing but a bit
of moving shadow,
beneath the laurels and the cypresses
I liked the breeze with the fresh breath
which lays us open...

I liked your sisterly caresses
your inflections, your gentleness,
opportune dawn;
and your supple and rhythmical step,
nymphs with perfumed smiles,
with the colour of the moon;

and the gallop of the aegyptians,
and the fountain which spreads

barbican

en larmes fades...
Par les bois secrets et divins
e'écoutais frissonner sans fin
l'hamadryade.

O cher Passé mystérieux
qui vous reflétez dans mes yeux
comme un nuage,
il me serait plaisant et doux,
Passé, d'essayer avec vous
le long voyage!...

Si je glisse, les eaux feront
un rond fluide... un autre rond,
un autre à peine...
Et puis le miroir enchanté
reprendra sa limpidité
froide et sereine.

3. Jardin nocturne

Nocturne jardin tout emplî de silence,
voici que la lune ouverte se balance
en des voiles d'or fluides et légers;
elle semble proche et cependant lointaine...
Son visage rit au cœur de la fontaine
et l'ombre pâlit sous les noirs orangers.

Nul bruit, si ce n'est le faible bruit de l'onde
fuyant goutte à goutte au bord des vasques rondes,
ou le bleu frisson d'une brise d'été,
furtive parmi des palmes invisibles...
Je sais, ô jardin, vos caresses sensibles,
et votre languide et chaude volupté!

Je sais votre paix délectable et morose,
vos parfums d'iris, de jasmins et de roses,
vos charmes troublés de désir et d'ennui...
O jardin muet! _ L'eau des vasques s'égoutte
avec un bruit faible et magique... J'écoute
ce baiser qui chante aux lèvres de la Nuit.

Danseuse

Sœur des Sœurs tisseuses de voilettes,
une ardente veille blémit tes joues...
Danse! et que les rythmes aigus dénouent
tes bandelettes.
Vase svelte, fresque mouvante et souple,
danse, danse, paumes vers nous tendues,
pieds étroits fuyant, tels des ailes nues
qu'Eros découple...
Sois la fleur multiple un peu balancée,
sois l'écharpe offerte au désir qui change,
sois la lampe chaste, la flamme étrange,
sois la pensée!
Danse, danse au chant de ma flûte creuse,
sœur des Sœurs divines. _ La moiteur glisse,
baiser vain, le long de ta hanche lisse...
Vaine danseuse!

in bland tears...
Through the secret and divine woods
I listened to the hamadryade
quivering endlessly.

O dear mysterious Past
which you reflect in my eyes
like a cloud,
it would be pleasant and sweet,
past, to attempt
the long journey with you!...

If I glide, the waters will form
a fluid sphere... another sphere,
hardly another...
And then the enchanted mirror
will regain its cold
and serene limpidity.

Nocturnal garden

Nocturnal garden full of silence,
here now is the open moon balancing
in fluid and light veils of gold;
it seems close and yet distant...
Its face laughs in the heart of the fountain
and the shade grows pale under the black orange-trees.

No noise, other than the faint sound of the water
flowing away drop by drop over the edge of the circular basins,
where the blue flutter of a summer breeze,
furtive amidst invisible palms...
I know, o garden, your delicate caresses,
and you languid and warm voluptuousness!

I know your delectable and morose peace,
your perfumes of irises, of jasmines and of roses,
your charms troubled by desires and boredom...
O silent garden! _ The water of the basins drain
with a weak and magical sound... I listen
to this kiss which sings on the lips of the Night.

Dancing girl

Sister of the Sisters weavers of little veils,
an ardent vigil soils your cheeks...
Dance! And may the high pitched rhythms untie
your bandelets.
Slim vase, moving and supple fresco,
dance, dance, palms stretched out towards us,
narrow fleeing feet, like naked wings
which Eros unharnesses...
Be the multiple flowers slightly swaying,
be the scarf offered to the changing desire,
be the chaste lamp, the strange flame,
be the thought!
Dance, dance to the song of my hollow flute,
Sister of the divine Sisters. _ The dampness flows,
vain kiss, along your smooth hip...
Vain dancing girl!

1. The Voice of Desire

Beautiful must be the mountains whence ye come,
And bright in the fruitful valleys the streams, wherefrom
Ye learn your song:
Where are those starry woods? O might I wander there,
Among the flowers, which in that heavenly air
Bloom the year long!
Barren are those mountains and spent the streams:
Our song is the voice of desire, that haunts our dreams,
A throe of the heart,
Whose pining visions dim, forbidden hopes profound,
No dying cadence nor long sigh can sound,
For all our art.
Alone, aloud in the raptured ear of men
We pour our dark nocturnal secret; and then,
As night is withdrawn
Dream, while the innumerable choir of day
Welcome the dawn.

2. White Eggs in the Bush

The blue cuckoo
lays white eggs in the bush.
When war captures the town
the blue cuckoo cries:
'Kill twenty, kill twenty!'
The red-bellied coucal cries:
'Kill thirty, kill thirty!'
Then death will not fail to come,
then death will not fail to come.
When men begin war,
the blue cuckoo cries:
'Fools, fools!'
The red-bellied coucal cries:
'The world is spoiled,
the world is spoiled!'
Then death cannot fail to come,
then death cannot fail to come.

3. Written on Terrestrial Things

I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.
The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.
At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead,
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.
So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy goodnight air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

4. Sweet Little Red Feet

I had a dove and the sweet dove died;
And I have thought it died of grieving:
Oh, what could it grieve for? Its feet were tied,
With a silken thread of my own hand's weaving;
Sweet little red feet! why should you die —
Why should you leave me, sweet dove! Why?
You liv'd alone on the forest-tree,
Why, pretty thing! Could you not live with me?
I kiss'd you oft and gave you white peas;
Why not live sweetly, as in the green trees?

1. Le paon

Il va sûrement se marier aujourd'hui.
Ce devait être pour hier. En habit de gala, il était prêt.
Il n'attendait que sa fiancée. Elle n'est pas venue.
Elle ne peut tarder.
Glorieux, il se promène avec une allure de prince indien et porte sur lui les riches présents d'usage.
L'amour avive l'éclat de ses couleurs et son aigrette tremble comme une lyre.
La finacée n'arrive pas.
Il monte au haut du toit et regarde du côté du soleil.
Il jette son cri diabolique:
Léon! Léon!
C'est ainsi qu'il appelle sa fiancée. Il ne voit rien venir et personne ne répond.
Les volailles habituées ne lèvent même point la tête.
Elles sont lasses de l'admirer.
Il redescend dans la cour, si sûr d'être beau qu'il est incapable de rancune.
Son mariage sera pour demain.
Et, ne sachant que faire du reste de la journée, il se dirige vers le perron.
Il gravit les marches, comme des marches de temple, d'un pas officiel.
Il relève sa robe à queue toute lourde des yeux qui n'ont pu se détacher d'elle.
Il répète encore une fois la cérémonie.

2. Le grillon

C'est l'heure où, las d'errer, l'insecte nègre revient de promenade et répare avec soin le désordre de son domaine.
D'abord il ratisse ses étroites allées de sable.
Il fait du bran de scie qu'il écarte au seuil de sa retraite.
Il lime la racine de cette grande herbe propre à le harceler.
Il se repose. Puis, il remonte sa minuscule montre.
A-t-il fini? Est-elle cassée? Il se repose encore un peu.
Il rentre chez lui et ferme sa porte.
Longtemps il tourne sa celf dans la serrure délicate.
Et il écoute: Point d'alarme dehors.
Mais il ne se trouve pas en sûreté.
Et comme par une chaînette dont la poulie grince, il descend jusqu'au fond de la terre.
On n'entend plus rien.
Dans la campagne muette, les peupliers se dressent comme des doigts en l'air et désignent la lune.

The peacock

He will surely get married today.
It was to have been yesterday. In full regalia, he was ready.
It was only his bride he was waiting for. She has not come.
She cannot be long.
Proudly he walks with the air of an Indian prince, bearing about his person the customary lavish gifts.
Love burnishes the brilliance of his colours, and his crest quivers like a lyre.
His bride does not appear.
He ascends to the top of the roof and looks towards the sun.
He utters his devilish cry:
Léon! Léon!
It is thus that he summons his bride. He can see nothing drawing near, and no one replies.
The fowls are used to this and do not even raise their heads.
They are tired of admiring him.
He descends once more to the yard, so sure of his beauty that he is incapable of resentment.
His marriage will take place tomorrow.
And, not knowing what to do for the rest of the day, he heads for the flight of steps.
He ascends them, as though they were the steps of a temple, with a formal tread.
He lifts his train, heavy with eyes that have been unable to detach themselves.
Once more he repeats the ceremony.

The cricket

It is the hour when, weary of wandering, the black insect returns from his outing and carefully restores order to his estate.
First he rakes his narrow sandy paths.
He makes sawdust which he scatters on the threshold of his retreat.
He files the root of this tall grass likely to annoy him.
He rests. Then he winds up his tiny watch.
Has he finished? Is it broken? He rests again for a while.
He goes inside and shuts the door.
For a long time he turns his key in the delicate lock.
And he listens: Nothing untoward outside.
But he does not feel safe.
And as if by a tiny chain on a creaking pulley, he lowers himself into the bowels of the earth.
Nothing more is heard.
In the silent countryside the poplars rise like fingers in the air, pointing to the moon.

3. Le cygne

Il glisse sur le bassin, comme un traîneau blanc, de nuage en nuage.

Car il n'a faim que des nuages floconneux qu'il voit naître, bouger, et se perdre dans l'eau.

C'est l'un d'eux qu'il désire. Il le vise du bec, et il plonge tout à coup son col vêtu de neige.

Puis, tel un bras de femme sort d'une manche, il le retire.

Il n'a rien.

Il regarde: les nuages effarouchés ont disparu.

Il ne reste qu'un instant désabusé, car les nuages tardent peu à revenir, et, là-bas, où meurent les ondulations de l'eau, en voici un qui se reforme.

Doucement, sur son léger coussin de plumes, le cygne rame et s'approche...

Il s'épuise à pêcher de vains reflets, et peut-être qu'il mourra, victime de cette illusion, avant d'attraper un seul morceau de nuage.

Mais qu'est-ce que je dis?

Chaque fois qu'il plonge, il fouille du bec la vase nourissante et ramène en ver.

Il engraisse comme une oie.

4. Le martin-pêcheur

Ça n'a pas mordu, ce soir, mais je rapporte une rare émotion.

Comme je tenais ma perche de ligne tendue, un martin-pêcheur est venu s'y poser.

Nous n'avons pas d'oiseau plus éclatant.

Il semblait une grosse fleur bleue au bout d'une longue tige. La perche pliait sous le poids.

Je ne respirais plus, tout fier d'être pris pour un arbre par un martin-pêcheur.

Et je suis sûr qu'il ne s'est pas envolé de peur, mais qu'il a cru qu'il ne faisait que passer d'une branche à une autre.

5. La pintade

C'est la bossue de ma cour. Elle ne rêve que plaies à cause de sa bosse.

Les poules ne lui disent rien: brusquement, elle se précipite et les harcèle.

Puis elle baisse sa tête, penche le corps, et, de toute la vitesse de ses pattes maigres, elle court frapper, de son bec dur, juste au centre de la roue d'une dinde. Cette poseuse l'agaçait.

Ainsi, la tête bleuie, ses barbillons à vif, cocardière, elle rage du matin au soir.

Elle se bat sans motif, peut-être parce qu'elle s' imagine toujours qu'on se moque de sa taille, de son crâne chauve et de sa queue basse.

Et elle ne cesse de jeter un cri discordant qui perce l'air comme une pointe.

Parfois elle quitte la cour et disparaît. Elle laisse aux volailles pacifiques un moment de répit.

Mais elle revient plus turbulente et plus crierde. Et, frénétique, elle se vautre par terre.

Qu'a-t-elle donc?

La sournoise fait une farce.

Elle est allée pondre son œuf à la campagne.

Je peux le chercher si ça m'amuse.

Elle se roule dans la poussière, comme une bossue.

The swan

He glides on the pond like a white sled, from cloud to cloud.

For he is hungry only for the fleecy clouds that he sees forming, moving, dissolving in the water.

It is one of these that he wants. He takes aim with his beak and suddenly immerses his snow-clad neck.

Then, like a woman's arm emerging from a sleeve, he draws it back up.

He has caught nothing.

He looks about: the startled clouds have vanished.

Only for a second is he disappointed, for the clouds are not slow to return, and, over there, where the ripples fade, there is one reappearing.

Gently, on his soft cushion of down, the swan paddles and approaches...

He exhausts himself fishing for empty reflections, and perhaps he will die, a victim of that illusion, before catching a single shred of cloud.

But what am I saying?

Each time he dives, he burrows with his beak in the nourishing mud and brings up a worm.

He's getting as fat as a goose.

The kingfisher

Not a bite, this evening, but I had a rare experience.

As I was holding out my fishing rod, a kingfisher came and perched on it.

We have no bird more brilliant.

He was like a great blue flower at the tip of a long stem. The rod bent beneath the weight.

I held my breath, so proud to be taken for a tree by a kingfisher.

And I'm sure he did not fly off from fear, but thought he was simply flitting from one branch to another.

The guineafowl

She is the hunchback of my barnyard. She dreams only of wounding, because of her hump.

The hens say nothing to her: suddenly, she swoops and harries them.

Then she lowers her head, leans forward, and, with all the speed of her skinny legs, runs and strikes with her hard beak at the very centre of a turkey's tail.

This poseuse was provoking her.

Thus, with her bluish head and raw wattles, pugnaciously she rages from morn to night.

She fights for no reason, perhaps because she always thinks they are making fun of her figure, of her bald head and drooping tail.

And she never stops screaming her discordant cry, which pierces the air like a needle.

Sometimes she leaves the yard and vanishes. She gives the peace-loving poultry a moment's respite.

But she returns more rowdy and shrill. And, in a frenzy, she wallows in the earth.

Whatever's wrong with her?

The cunning creature is playing a trick.

She went to lay her egg in the open country.

I can look for it if I like.

And she rolls in the dust, like a hunchback.

Ryan Wigglesworth *Vignettes de Jules Renard*

1. La Poule

Pattes jointes, elle saute du poulailler, dès qu'on lui ouvre la porte.
C'est une poule commune, modestement parée et qui ne pond jamais d'œufs d'or.
Éblouie de lumière, elle fait quelques pas, indécise, dans la cour.
Elle voit d'abord le tas de cendres où, chaque matin, elle a coutume de s'ébattre.
Elle s'y roule, s'y trempe, et, d'une vive agitation d'ailes, les plumes gonflées, elle secoue ses puces de la nuit.
Puis elle va boire au plat creux que la dernière averse a rempli.
Elle ne boit que de l'eau.
Elle boit par petits coups et dresse le col, en équilibre sur le bord du plat.
Ensuite elle cherche sa nourriture éparse.
Les fines herbes sont à elle, et les insectes et les graines perdues.
Elle pique, elle pique, infatigable.
De temps en temps, elle s'arrête.
Droit sous son bonnet phrygien, l'œil vif, le jabot avantageux, elle écoute de l'une et de l'autre oreille.
Et, sûre qu'il n'y a rien de neuf, elle se remet en quête.

Elle lève haut ses pattes raides, comme ceux qui ont la goutte. Elle écarte les doigts et les pose avec précaution, sans bruit.
On dirait qu'elle marche pieds nus.

2. Le Crapaud

Né d'une pierre, il vit sous une pierre et s'y creusera un tombeau.
Je le visite fréquemment, et chaque fois que je lève sa pierre, j'ai peur de le retrouver et peur qu'il n'y soit plus.
Il y est.
Caché dans ce gîte sec, propre, étroit, bien à lui, il l'occupe pleinement, gonflé comme une bourse d'avare.
Qu'une pluie le fasse sortir, il vient au-devant de moi.
Quelques sauts lourds, et il me regarde de ses yeux rougis.
Si le monde injuste le traite en lépreux, je ne crains pas de m'accroupir près de lui et d'approcher du sien mon visage d'homme.
Puis je dompterai un reste de dégoût, et je te caresserai de ma main, crapaud !
On en avale dans la vie qui font plus mal au cœur.
Pourtant, hier, j'ai manqué de tact. Il fermentait et suintait, toutes ses verrues crevées.
« Mon pauvre ami, lui dis-je, je ne veux pas te faire de peine, mais, Dieu ! que tu es laid ! »
Il ouvrit sa bouche puérile et sans dents, à l'haleine chaude, et me répondit avec un léger accent anglais :
« Et toi ? »

The Hen

Feet together, she jumps down from the coop, as soon as the door is opened.
A common hen, modestly attired, she has never laid a golden egg.
Blinded by the light, she takes a few hesitant steps in the barnyard.
First of all she sees the heap of ashes, where each morning she frolics.
She rolls in it, wallows in it, and, with a swift flutter of wings, she puffs up her feathers and shakes off the night's fleas.
Then she goes and drinks from the shallow dish the shower has just filled.
Water is all she ever drinks.
She drinks in little sips, straightening her neck and balancing on the edge of the dish.
Then she hunts around for her scattered food.
Hers are the delicate herbs, the insects and the stray seeds.
Tirelessly, she pecks and pecks.
Occasionally, she stops.
Upright beneath her Phrygian cap, bright-eyed, jabot displayed to advantage, she listens, first with one ear, then the other.
And, convinced nothing has happened, she renews her search.
She raises her stiff feet high in the air, as though she had gout. She spreads her toes and sets them down carefully, without a sound.
As if she were walking barefoot.

The Toad

Born of a stone, he lives beneath a stone and will dig his grave there.
I visit him frequently, and each time I lift his stone I'm afraid of finding him and afraid he'll no longer be there.
He is.
Hidden in this refuge that is dry, clean, confined, all his own, he occupies it fully, bloated like a miser's purse.
If a downpour drives him out, he comes right up to me. After a few heavy jumps he rests on his haunches and looks at me with reddened eyes.
If an unjust world treats him like a leper, I'm not afraid of crouching close and lowering my human face to his.
I shall then overcome what's left of my revulsion and caress you, toad, with my hand!
Some things in life are more sickening.
Even so, yesterday I showed a lack of tact. He was fermenting and seeping from all his fissured warts.
'My poor friend,' I said to him, 'I don't wish to hurt your feelings, but my God you're ugly!'
He opened his childish toothless mouth with its warm breath, and replied with a faintly English accent:
'And you're not?'

3. La Sauterelle

Serait-ce le gendarme des insectes ?

Tout le jour, elle saute et s'acharne aux troussees
d'invisibles braconniers qu'elle n'attrape jamais.
Les plus hautes herbes ne l'arrêtent pas.

Rien ne lui fait peur, car elle a des bottes de sept
lieues, un cou de taureau, le front génial, le ventre
d'une carène, des ailes en celluloïd, des cornes
diaboliques et un grand sabre au derrière.

Comme on ne peut avoir les vertus d'un gendarme
sans les vices, il faut bien le dire,
la sauterelle chique.

Si je mens, poursuis-la de tes doigts, joue avec elle
à quatre coins, et quand tu l'auras saisie, entre
deux bonds, sur une feuille de luzerne, observe sa
bouche : par ses terribles mandibules, elle sécrète
une mousse noire comme du jus de tabac.

Mais déjà tu ne la tiens plus. Sa rage de sauter la
reprend. Le monstre vert t'échappe d'un brusque
effort et, fragile, démontable, te laisse une petite
cuisse dans la main.

The Grasshopper

Could he be the gendarme among insects?

All day long he leaps about in furious pursuit of
invisible poachers he never catches.
The tallest grasses fail to stop him.

Nothing frightens him, for he has seven-league boots,
a bull-neck, the brow of a genius, the belly of a ship's
hull, celluloid wings, devil's horns and a huge sabre
on his backside.

Since one cannot have the virtues of a gendarme
without his vices, the grasshopper, it has to be
admitted, chews tobacco.

If you think I'm lying, follow him with your fingers,
play puss-in-the-corner with him, and when you catch
him, between leaps, on a leaf of lucerne grass,
observe his mouth: he secretes through his mandibles
a black foam that looks like tobacco juice.

But you can't contain him any longer. His mania for
leaping takes hold of him again. With a sudden effort the
green monster escapes from your grasp and, fragile,
easily dismantled, leaves a tiny thigh in your hand.

Translations © Richard Stokes from the complete
Histoires Naturelles by Jules Renard in a parallel text
edition, published by Alma Classics (2017).

Ivor Gurney 'Spring' from *Five Elizabethan Songs*

Spring, the sweet Spring, is the year's pleasant king;
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring,
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing,
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!

The palm and may make country houses gay,
Lambs frisk and play, the [shepherds pipe] all day,
And we hear aye birds tune this merry lay,
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!

The fields breathe sweet, the daisies kiss our feet,
Young lovers meet, old wives a-sunning sit,
In every street these tunes our ears do greet,
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!
Spring! The sweet Spring!

Ivor Gurney *Walking Song*

O, Cranham ways are steep and green
And Cranham ways are high,
And if I was that black rook
It's there that I would fly.
But since I'm here in London town
A silly walking man;
I'll make this song and caw it
As loudly as I can.

Ina Boyle *The Joy of Earth*

OH, the sudden wings arising from the ploughed fields
brown
Showered aloft in spray of song the wild-bird
twitter floats
O'er the unseen fount awhile, and then comes
dropping down
Nigh the cool brown earth to hush enraptured notes.

Far within a dome of trembling opal throbs the fire,
Mistily its rain of diamond lances shed below
Touches eyes and brows and faces lit with wild desire
For the burning silence whither we would go.

Heart, be young; once more it is the ancient joy of
earth
Breathes in thee and flings the wild wings sunward to
the dome
To the light where all the children of the fire had birth
Though our hearts and footsteps wander far from
home.

EJ Moeran 'When smoke stood up from Ludlow'
from *Ludlow Town*

When smoke stood up from Ludlow,
And mist blew off from Teme,
And blithe afield to ploughing
Against the morning beam
I strode beside my team,
The blackbird in the coppice
Looked out to see me stride,
And hearkened as I whistled
The trampling team beside,
And fluted and replied:
'Lie down, lie down, young yeoman;
What use to rise and rise?
Rise man a thousand mornings
Yet down at last he lies,
And then the man is wise.'
I heard the tune he sang me,
And spied his yellow bill;
I picked a stone and aimed it
And threw it with a will:
Then the bird was still.
Then my soul within me
Took up the blackbird's strain,
And still beside the horses
Along the dewy lane
It sang the song again:
'Lie down, lie down, young yeoman;
The sun moves always west;
The road one treads to labour
Will lead one home to rest,
And that will be the best.'

Benjamin Britten 'Proud Songsters' from
Winter Words

The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
And as it gets dark loud nightingales
In bushes
Pipe, as they can when April wears,
As if all Time were theirs.
These are brand-new birds of twelve months' growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales,
Nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain,
And earth, and air, and rain.

Welsh Traditional *The Ash Grove*

Down yonder green valley where streamlets
meander,
When twilight is fading, I pensively rove,
Or at the bright noontide in solitude wander
Amid the dark shades of the lonely Ash-grove.
'Twas there while the blackbird was joyfully singing,
I first met my dear one, the joy of my heart;
Around us for gladness the bluebells were ringing,
Ah! then little thought I how soon we should part.
Still glows the bright sunshine o'er valley and
mountain,
Still warbles the blackbird his note from the tree,
Still trembles the moonbeam on streamlet and
fountain;
But what are the beauties of nature to me?
With sorrow, deep sorrow, my bosom is laden,
All day I go mourning in search of my love.
Ye echoes, O tell me, where is the sweet maiden?
She sleeps 'neath the green turf down by the Ash-
grove.

Gerald Finzi 'Before and After Summer' from
Before and After Summer

Looking forward to the spring
One puts up with anything.
On this February day
Though the winds leap down the street,
Wintry scourgings seem but play,
And these later shafts of sleet
- Sharper pointed than the first -
And these later snows - the worst -
Are as a half-transparent blind
Riddled by rays from sun behind.
Shadows of the October pine
Reach into this room of mine:
On the pine there swings a bird;
He is shadowed with the tree.
Mutely perched he bills no word;
Blank as I am even is he.
For those happy suns are past,
Fore-discerned in winter last.
When went by their pleasure, then?
I, alas, perceived not when.

Adrian Williams *Red Kite Flying*

Forward on my way,
No wish for noisy streets
or bitter crying
Stride without delay
To breathe the wind and watch
the red kite flying,
Till sun fire meets
far hills and drops away.

Up the rising lane
Feel no pain, forget
long nights of sighing,
Sad heart, lift again,
Behold in open skies
the red kite flying
above bracken red
and golden broome aflame.

Forward on my way,
Underfoot is love betrayed
Those rages of the heart
They push me on,
Red wings of passion
Keep swooping and rising
Dipping and gliding
Soaring, till, out of sight
Lift me away.

Across the gorse and heather
No fear of judgment day
or thoughts of dying
Fine in any weather
Is Radnorshire to watch
the red kite flying.