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Ianthé's alt.sex.intergen 'Poems of the Week'.      Number 26.  
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This week's theme is VIRGINS, to follow on from last week's posting on the theme of 'seduction'.

Peter Redgrove (England ?, Born 1932 ?)
 'Virgins'.
Stephane Mallarme (France, 1842-1898)
 from 'L'apres-midi D'un Faune'.
Octavio Paz (Mexico, Born 1914)
 from 'Virgin'.
Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury (England, 1583-1648)
 'The Green-Sickness Beauty'

Redgrove's poem is a tender evocation of English schoolgirl virgins, a sensual rather than erotic poem. _Mallarme_ is much more direct about the seduction of two sister-nymphs found sleeping on a riverbank. Mallarme was the leading French symbolist poet and light of the Parisian artistic avant-garde. _Paz_ was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1990, and the opening of his poem 'Virgin' is in a surreal/mythical style in which a naked little girl encounters a rather Freudian bull, serpent, and a moon with a 'horn'... _Edward Lord Herbert's_ 17th Century poem celebrates the delights of green young virgins over those of older 'busty lovers'.

VIRGINS

Virgins crunching snow in rosy mouthfuls
That pout, bellow teeth as white;

Virgins yelping through the snow;

Virgins brandishing sticks in tender fingers
Through blossom-shocks, gutters brim
With shattered cherry-flowers;

Virgins float white kites above the green, barelegged,
With hot breath off the lake, the lily-pads;

Or scoop the toad up hunkered in its must
Beneath the holly hocks, replace it, let it be,

And bound away on springy grass to buttercups.

They peruse
The pudgy bumble-bee that deep inside
Its glossy bristles whirrs

With cellophanes and ruby bladders;

Clouds beetle over, frown with thunder;
They offer kittens tooth-white milk in saucers,
Squeeze the deep-piled wolfhound's head
Tilting shut the pitchy blazing eyes;
Skim to school along forbidden meadows
Where, green with seepage of sore throats from tanks,
A whole city slithers and corruption carks;
Nip their noses closed in flowersoft fingers.

And as storm-air bristles with its shock of gnats
That thread mazes up the ripening drops
And winds yelp throughout the emptied schools,
They huddle under trees in snuffling showers,
Great horse-chestnut bluffs, while
the lake goes spiny ...

And with sun warm on their backs, stare
At those absences, their shadows; bound ball
Where the memorial lilies root, and flourish;
Those skinny wrists
Chafed round and round with sensible hard-wearing sleeves;
And tender sappy feet in hobbledehoy shoes.

Peter Redgrove.

from L'APRES-MIDI D'UN FAUNE (The Afternoon of a Faun)

Between the reeds I saw their bodies gleam
Who cool no mortal fever in the stream
Crying to the woods the rage of their desires
And their bright hair went down in jeweled fire
Where crystal broke and dazzled shudderingly..

I checked my swift pursuit: for see where lie,
Bruised, being twins in love, my languor sweet,
Two sleeping girls, clasped at my very feet.
I seize and run with them, nor part the pair,
Breaking this covert of frail petals, where
Roses drink scent of the sun and our light play
'Mid tumbled flowers shall match the death of day.

I love that virginal fury - ah, the wild
Thrill when a maiden body shrinks, beguiled,
Shuddering like arctic light, from lips that sear
Her nakedness...the flesh in secret fear !
Contagiously through my linked pair it flies
Where innocence in either, struggling, dies,
Wet with fond tears or some less piteous dew.

Gay in the conquest of these fears, I grew
So rash that I must needs the sheaf divide

Of ruffled kisses heaven itself had tied.
For as I leaned to stifle in the hair
Of one my passionate laughter (taking care
With a stretched finger, that her innocence
Might strain with her companion's kindling sense
To touch the younger one, who lay
Childish, unblushing) my ungrateful pair
Slipped from me, freed by passion's sudden death
Nor heeded the frenzy of my sobbing breath.

Let it pass ! others of their hair shall twist
A rope to drag me to those joys I missed.
See how the ripe pomegranates bursting red
To quench the thirst of the mumbling bees have bled;
So too our blood, kindled by some chance fire,
Flows for the swarming legions of desire.

Stephane Mallarme.

from VIRGIN

She closes her eyes and within her own self
is naked, a little girl, at the foot of a tree.
In her own shadow rest the tiger and the bull.
Three lambs of mists she offers the tiger,
three doves to the bull, in all their blood and feathers.
The tiger does not want supplications of smoke
nor the bull feathers: it is you they want.
And the doves fly away, the bull flies over,
and she also, a naked milky way,
she flies across the visceral dark sky.
A maleficent dagger with cat's eyes,
rattan-mat wings a little yellowing,
follows her through the wings. She struggles,
defeats the serpent and defeats the eagle,
and over the horn of the moon she ascends.

[...]

Octavio Paz.

THE GREEN-SICKNESS BEAUTY

[Note: the title is a reference to a form of anaemia once common in pubescent girls, characterised by a slight greenish tinge to the otherwise white skin. It also plays on the connotation of 'green' as "young, inexperienced".]

Though the pale white within your cheeks compos'd,
And doubtful light unto your eyes confin'd,
Though short of breath not from itself unloos'd,
And careless motions of your equal mind,
Argues your beauties are not all disclos'd;

Yet as a rising beam, when first 'tis shown,
Points fairer than when it ascends more red,
Or as a budding rose, when first 'tis blown,
Smells sweeter far then when it is more spread;
As all things best by principals are known;

So in your green and flourishing estate
A beauty is discern'd, more worthy love
Than that which further doth itself dilate,
And those degrees of variation prove,
Our vulgar wits so much do celebrate.

Thus, thought your eyes dart not that piercing blaze
Which doth in busty lovers' looks appear,
It is because you do not need to gaze
On other objects than your proper sphere,
Nor wander further than to run that maze.

So, if you want that blood which must succeed,
And give at last a tincture to your skin,
It is because neither in outward deed
Nor inward thought you yet admit that sin
For which your cheeks a guilty blush should need.

So, if your breath do not so freely flow,
It is because you love not to consume
That vital treasure which you do bestow,
As well to vegetate as to perfume
Your virgin leaves, as fast as they do grow.

Yet stay not here, love for his right must call,
You were not born to serve your only will;
Nor can your beauty be perpetual:
'Tis your perfection for to ripen still,
And to be gather'd rather than to fall.

Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury.

ianthe@duende.demon.co.uk

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