

Love & Untaught Strain



So let me bend your ear
with yet another tale
of a Poet
and a Courtesan...

She was his muse, you see,
but one Parisian society kept far apart
from our Poet--one young and reckless
in his talent, the "real" lion

of the cafe scene, his words
enchancing and entrancing
the Muses tinkling sweetly in dreams
at night, of another Time,

and, too, in bodily forms,
now and then one reminding
him how love of art
is indeed a many-sided affair...



Now, dear listener, just as noble
once meant being manly and true--
of principle--or womanly of demeanor, not
demi-monde of endless night,

so too had these times fallen prey
to corruption--those with power to do so
rigging outlandish "Occasion" after "Occasion,"
a cruel and diabolic form of ancient Fate...

Whereas our Poet had once made pilgrimage
to the Holy Land of Jerusalem,
having returned to teach the History
of the Jews at the University,

his time as a Professor had been
frittered away by Scandal
and Controversy, those false pupils
disassembling Wisdom, branding him as a heretic ...

So that now, having lost
his cozy and sunny garret, having become
too hot for any friends to shelter,
he lives, furtive as a cat,

in the campus Library--slipping out,
from the dusty stacks of books before dawn
to wander the deserted cobblestones
until the cafes in Montmartre lazily awaken...

Our Courtesan, too, had once
known better days--her father
had been Captain in Napoleon's army, his reward
for his savvy *the cold shoulder of exile*, too...

Now, her presence, as family legacy,
graces the Court, yet again--

though the Palace now in rural Versailles,
and her function mere paid, pretty coquette...



Yes times all topsy-turvy, grand balls
and carnivals masking paucity of soul--
Parisians in the way tossed by the droves
into the streets--for "public works";

Revanche! the rallying cry for those long overdue
some kind of *Justice* (perhaps a bit of merit or credit
or even good name restored)...Many of the Poet's quarter,
finally making an ill-fated stand behind barricaded

streets, the brief *vive!* of the Paris Commune, bold
in glory for such a brief moment, 'till row upon row
of lock-stepping Teutons, made relentless in their
pursuit
(of these rebels all "fingering,")

slavered as they thrashed--this mob rule turned
against even those craven fools (secret allies)
hiding, with trembling haunches, in the nooks and
crannies
of that vertiginously ornate *Palace of the Crown*...



Still, look us yet before these machinations of *Fate*

ground creakingly into place,
our Poet still masterful
in his performing to his friends...

His work in academia
progressing nicely as well;
solid research on the common origins
of the Semites and his native Brittainy Celts.

(Though our Poet, not exactly one for stuffed shirts,
preferred in his leisure the prowls of bohemia--
late night winehouses full of rogues
choosing fisticuffs over words,

women in disguise
or in a hurry, on the run;
fellow artists--a musician
bounced from the more bourgeois cafes,

where his compositions were played, *sans recompense*,
as waiters laughed in his face...
Those sharing some unspoken
bondage of exile...)

On one of these nights made shimmering
the Poet caught the eyes
of a fine-skinned woman
hiding her beauty beneath clothes most plain.

With barely a word, she slipped him
a note, with address and room number
to meet in half-hour.

She greeted him then
with dancing uncertainty,
turning angry
at his gentlemanly
offer to leave...

Her fury practiced
as a female in bed,
some time before contentment
slaked bodies...glistening with moonbeam...

When, with a start,
her eyes hugely awoke,
our poor Poet soon found
himself walking his (alone) way home.

The air so bright in the full moon's light,
his breath drew in surprise--
there above, held in the face
of the moon, seemed a woman's noble countenance...

As he stopped to study
and steady his weary gaze;
what he saw was *that woman from his dreams*,
his Muse of life made such mystery of late...

Her eyes were teared,
her lips full trembling;
she seemed as if to speak,
wanting, yet not able...



Unknown to our dear Poet, the face
was of our Courtesan, being escorted
about the Palace by the Duke,
making quite a stir in every quarter...

And if not that matter not enough trouble,
we have the woman whose hotel bed he just left,
married to one of the Duke's chief henchmen--
as nasty in disposition as the boor of his liege.

Together they beseiged the Emporer, that third ruthless
legacy of that first tyrant Napoleon. For this *outrage!*
they demanded *compensation!*--which he granted
in the form of Weasel and the Pit Bull

(Two Secret Police usually kept
on short leash, most foul
in disposition 'till given
dirty tricks to perform).

At the Poet's favorite cafes,
all were told that he'd gone *insane!*,
his *phantasies* having cost him his job--
said with a practiced, sad shake of the head,

We're only trying to help... Then his new double *nemeses*
gave each waiter in turn *something to calm*
the poor man's nerves.... Yet what they really slipped
into his wine was *arsenic, powder of the devil...*

Knowing, too, the Poet's *proclivity for strumpets*
his nemeses recruited (by force)
a fair maiden of the court
to woo the Poet...(You see,

she suffered from a case of *the clap*--a secret
the court police's guarding of which
the price to pay
became giving *it* to the Poet...



Still, in spite,
of all
these difficulties,
the Poet found work

to be inspiring...he wrote
romances of epic love,
some about
a wandering King

looking for his Queen--
both with aching heart...
When read these tales
his friends raised eyebrows;

they asked, among each other,
if the Poet knew
exactly what he was doing.
When in the cafes the Poet's words

no longer were heard (himself barred, too, given his temper at being told he could no longer read) why, no one was really surprised.

And though *official*
(and fervently wished in some quarters)
the story that the poet had degenerated with *syphillis*
all knew to be false...



And still the Courtesan's tears
aching in his head--
sharp pains
in his body, too...

Knowing the reasons
yet puzzled by it all,
the poet turned to Jeanne,
a woman of the night

not yet *too* upset
at his recent inattention.
With a laugh and gleeful
toss of her hair,

she said, "Hah, and I thought you
worldly. The Duke is, shall we say,
unable...You see the whole palace has been
dabbling"--her fingers crawled the air--"in black magic,

and there are some rather *unfortunate*
side-effects. Too, the guards and priests
who started it all
have been saying the fault

lies with women, you know--
God's alleged *punishment*
for bringing on *the sins of the snake*.
Not a one of them ever liked *females*

in the first place--all they crave
is *power* over each other..."
Thus the Poet learned the rumoured *secret*
of the Court to be true--

not a real man left in the lot...
(And the Courtesan bounced
between prissy buffoons peacocking for each other
and the thuggery and buggery of the Palace Guard...)

At night now
in his dreams
the Courtesan came to the Poet,
their psychic lovemaking the healing

of which they both
were in such need.
And yes she dreamed of him, too,
becoming radiant

once again...
(Creating gossip

among the *unable*
when the Duke took credit.

One day the Courtesan perchanced to see
the Poet on the street,
and something tugged
at her heart...

When she asked her friends,
Who is that man,
they pulled her back from the carriage window,
their eyes grown wide with alarm.

Feeling the need to shelter her
from so obvious a *lunatic!*
they told her his whole story--
how he'd once been a *scribe*

scintillating with promise...
but now was just a drunk
left alone, even in taverns,
while he laughs and shouts and bangs his fist,

"And yes, where is my
good true friend,
Master White Horse..."
The Courtesan's friends then giggled,

(politely, covering one's mouth),
and said, "Get it?
now he's just a whore,
see..."

*Still the Courtesan knew
that man from somewhere,
remembering again that night
just how and where...*

*When she awoke
she penned a letter
and entrusted her closest friend
to seek out the Poet.*

*Though her friend had grave doubts,
she did as she'd been asked
and delivered the letter to his landlord
(as the Poet was not home).*

*Ah, here my friend, The Fates
(or their dissemblance, The Furies) played a cruel trick--
for the landlord,
smelling the envelope's perfume*

*and knowing the Poet's habit
of housing wayward demi-mondes,
tore the letter to shreds, huffing,
"The man's already a month late in his rent"...*



*L*ater, the Poet's friend
Jeanne, happening across
his latest nom de plume broadside
tacked up in a square

*set out to find him
(wishing to soothe
his wounds, as she
often did)...*

*Not one hundred feet later, the two
Secret Police pulled her aside, and she
disappeared (the Palace, you see, was angry
about the Poet's latest communique).*

*"Good news," snarled the duo,
"Here's our leak--and the means
by which we'll nail
that bastard to his wannabe Cross..."*

*Meanwhile the Poet sat drinking,
his once shining eyes
lidded heavy with poison and pain.
Feeling infected*

*by all the lies,
being cleansed
by tears...
"Another chalice!" he called,*

*(as if mocking too).
Though in doubt, the barmaid
served him anyway,
as he once was kind...*



*Walking home as the sun rose,
the Poet sang out--
songs from some
forgotten campaign,*

*gladness at his being
able to burst
above the gloom
making the will so ill...*

*Mid-morning came a knock
at his door--it seems
his gentle friend Jeanne
had been found with her throat slit*

*and guess whose
monogrammed straight-edged
razor, stained with her blood,
lay next to her roughed-up form?*

*As the Poet was locked away,
he roared, "It's a set-up
to make me shut up--
but it won't work...*

*I'll never be your scapegrace!"
The Secret Police schmirked and hooted--
thinking the Poet too hung-
over to get the words right.*

*Then the duo said,
"Now you'll pay the price*

for your big-mouth about the Court."

They began to applaud,

saying, "Wonderful, dear!

another masterful performance!

Truly gracious and such

a sweet inspiration!...

For the Poet,

hollow words...from the cafes haunting

echoes of his

former praise

Vacant-eyed the Poet stared

at the encrusted cell bars,

too dazed with who would steal

his razor and be so inhuman...

Unable to sleep on the cold

stone floor, the Poet paced like a caged lion...

The tinkling sounds of his Courtesan

fading like his Jeannne...

Cleverly, the Duke turned even the words

of the Poet against him--

as the Duke wooed the Courtesan

and stole her heart.

Out of concern a once-dreamed muse

returned to the Poet--her presence

in his mind comforting,

she no longer willing to forestall

*the prescience that surely he must know
Wiping away his tears,
returning the favor
of his healing touch...*

*Wearied he muttered, "How could she
mistake that wind-up cad
for me?*

Some foul popingay

all mechanical...

My love

*turned to mocking charade
by that swivel-headed snake..."*



*A*fter what seemed
so long a time
the tavern maid
and friends came forth,

*telling a magistrate
He was with us
till early that morning--
after his friend was discovered...*

*As orders were given to release
the Poet, his two would-be accini
could not resist a parting shot,
telling the Poet, "in any event*

*you deserved
to be taught a lesson
for your obstinate
and unbending pertinacity."*

*Leaving the Palace,
the Poet,
on his long way back
into his quarter*

*was passed
by a carriage--
the latticed window
flung wide*

*to reveal the Courtesan's face
and tearing eyes;
her graceful hand
extending to blow him a kiss...*

*Then she called out
in her pure
ringing voice
I know who you are...*

*Yes, the tearing
at the Poet's heart,
as the dust swirled
up and around--*

*to be sent his angel
of inspiration*

*and never taste
merci*



*[above written 1991-1992, re-written 10/21/1997,12/3+4/97,
Thomas Francis Noonan]*

--Historical note: This epic is based upon the life-story of Joseph Ernest Renan, whom the author believes was assassinated (for "refusing to learn his lesson of respect for the Crown's authority") in the 1871 riots and strife in Paris, France, and replaced with a "popinjay" of a puppet controlled by Napoleon III, a "short, fat, ugly-pugged and pasty-faced" minion in no way resembling the real Renan, a tall, broad-shouldered "dark Celt" from Brittany pictured in photos from the Paris Commune's Central Committee, albeit with an nom de plume...

--"'Honour' and 'reputation' are more objective concepts, being analogous to the kind of personal interests which are protected by actions for defamation...Nonetheless, there are still problems in determining what is the scope of the expression 'honour and reputation.' This was raised by several delegates at the Brussels Conference [Revisions to the Berne Conference for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, 1886]...The consensus among delegates was that the wider meaning was inteneded, and that, while this did not need clarification in the text of article 6, it should be referred to in the report of the rapporteur general. This was done by Marcel Plaisant in the

following passage in his report:

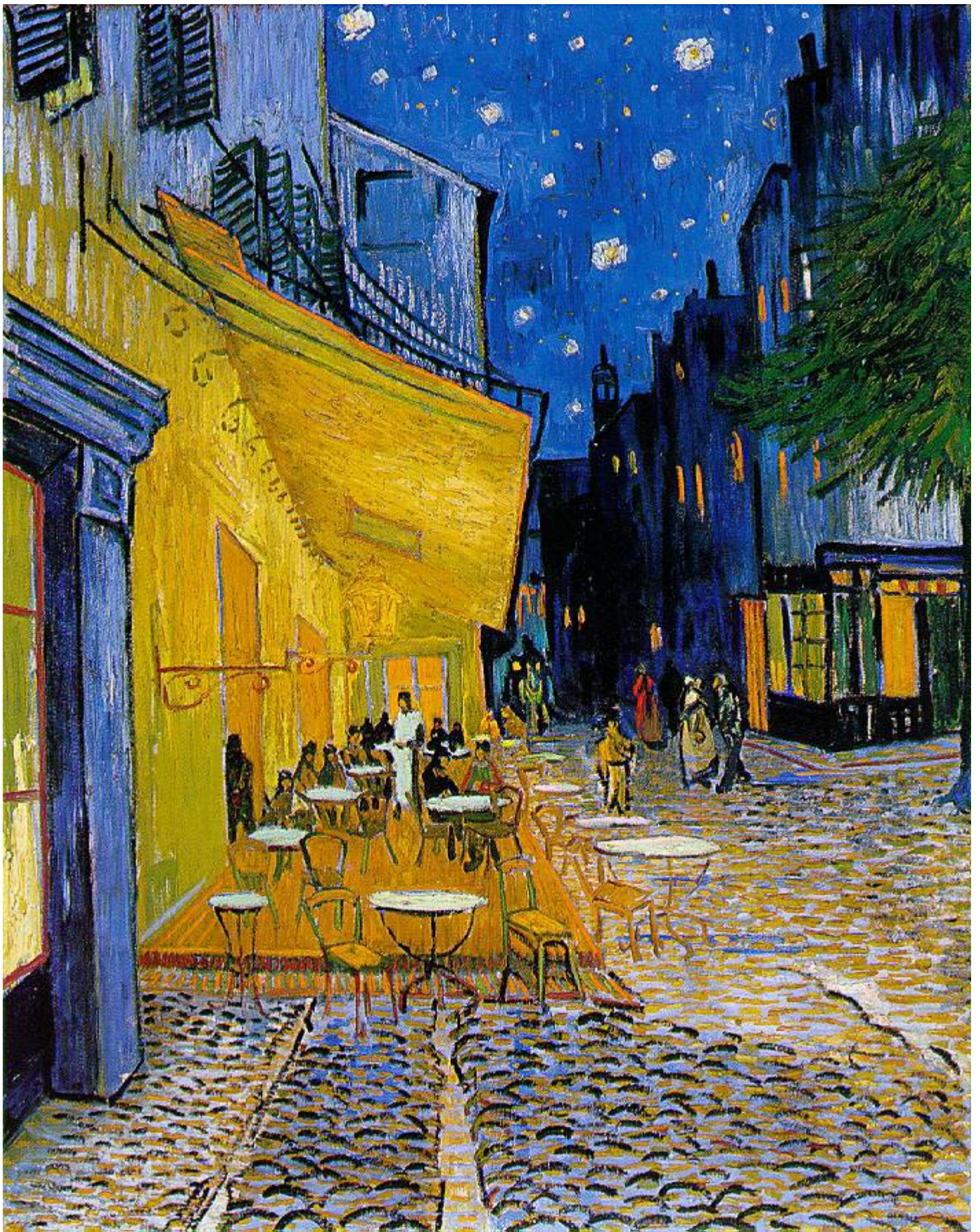
'The author will have the right to take proceedings against any action prejudicial to his honour and reputation and in generally emerged from the debate that the author should be protected as a writer just as much as in his capacity as a personality on the literary scene. This is why you have added that he may object to any other action, implying by this action likely to be prejudicial to the man, as a result of the distortion of his work.'

--Sam Ricketson, Center for Commercial Law Studies, Queen Mary College, The Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, 1886-1986 (Eastern Press, London, 1987).

--"[T]here are three periods at which the world dies; the period of a plague, of a general war, and the dissolution of verbal contracts [, the most serious type of the latter being] the suspension of amity between a king and the country."

Senchus Mor(Ancient Laws of Ireland)(5 cols.)(Alexander Thorn, Dublin, 1865).

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Van Gogh's "Cafe Terrace of the Place du Forum" (Sept. 1888)