The Poet and Inspiration

Francis Jammes

Translated by Brandon P. Otto

Introduction

Francis Jammes (1868-1938) began his career as a college dropout; after traveling in Algeria with the novelist André Gide (1869-1951), he published a poetry collection, *From the Morning Angelus to the Evening Angelus* (1897), that brought him great literary fame. His fame continued with further publications, until, under the influence of the poet and playwright Paul Claudel (1868-1955), he reconverted to Catholicism. After that, Jammes withdrew from the Parisian literary circles and retreated into the Pyrenees mountains, writing primarily on Catholic topics, both in prose and verse. Near the end of his life, he experienced a brief resurgence of fame due to the efforts of Claudel and the novelist François Mauriac (1885-1970).

The essay translated here was originally published in a slim volume decorated with woodcuts by Armand Coussens (1881-1935), though later reprinted in some of Jammes' later collections of writings. It provides a look at Jammes' theory of poetry following his conversion. As a point of comparison, as an appendix, I have also translated Jammes' early poetic manifesto "Jammism," which, while written before his conversion, still focuses on "the Truth, which is the praise of God."

The source for the main text is: Francis Jammes, *Le Poète et L'Inspiration* (Nimes: Gomès, Éditeur, 1922).

The source for the appendix is: Francis Jammes, "Le Jammisme," *Mercure de France*, No. 87 (March 1897), found in *Mercure de France*, Tome XXI (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1897), 492-493.

The Poet and Inspiration

The poet is that pilgrim whom God sends on earth to discover there the traces of Paradise lost and Heaven regained.[1]

The poet is that pauper sitting at noon on the stoop of the old garden where the first man and the first woman were so beautiful. He holds his bowl in his hand, and, his dog at his feet, he asks distracted passersby, and God Himself, for the alms of the beauty that was, is, and will be.

But the passersby do not deign to cast their eyes upon him, they do not see the sorrow of that look. The only creature who has compassion on him, in silence, is that unmoving dog... But God lets the azure of wide-open[2] heaven fall into that poor poet's bowl.

O Fra Angelico! You were seized back then by that azure, you expressed it on the canvas just as you were granted to perceive it in that inspired hour that reached ecstasy.[3]

And you, my brethren, likewise receiving the favor of that heaven that is wide-open to each, in your outstretched hand, you weave your tent, you wrap yourself in it like vineyards and like hills.

And so pure is that divine glow that clothes you that it hides you from the eyes of the profane. Thus the bellflower of August, so white by being so blue, seems to disappear.

And the poet is born, lives, and dies like the flower of the field that one scarcely notices.

---

1 Literally, "heaven refound" or "heaven rediscovered" (*Ciel retrouvé*), but I think the reminiscence of Milton is *à propos*, if not intended.

2 Literally, "whole entire" (*tout entier*), but I think "wide-open" gives a better idiomatic sense in English.

3 This recalls a bit of a poem written decades later by Rafael Alberti (1902-1999):
"*To his palette it descended. She wore*
the most hidden blue of the heavens.
On his knees he painted his blues.
With blues the angels baptized him.
They named him: Blessed Blue Angelico."
See Rafael Alberti, "Azul," §7, in Rafael Alberti, *Poesía (1924-1967)*, ed. Aitana Alberti (Madrid: Águilar, 1978), 705; my translation. No subjects are given for the first two lines; I am interpreting the first sentence as referring to the angelic blue color itself ("it descended") and the second as referring to Mary ("she wore"), due to the famous shade of blue she wears in Fra Angelico's paintings. The verb "wore" (*traía*) can also mean "brought" or "carried"; taken that way, the first two lines could be reinterpreted as describing an angelic gift: "To his palette [the angel] descended. It brought / the most hidden blue of the heavens."

The poet is he who observes, over the high fence of the park, the couples melted into the blue of night, and who hears the spindly invitation of the mandolins. He is not invited to the feast; but the voluble white of the darkness crosses the fence, bends towards him, who alone discovers in it all honey and all hot snow. And, while the amorous chatter of the ladies cover up the song of the nightingale, this song is perceptible only to the poet, whose heart is filled with divine harmony, like a spring of pure water that responds to the song of the bird. And I hear Saint John of the Cross, who lauds:

Peaceful night,
Silent music,
Harmonious solitude,
The supper that charms and increases love,
The bouquet of roses in the form of a pinecone...
...The breathing of the zephyr,
The song of the sweet Philomela,[4]
The woods with their charms
during the serene night,
With the flame that consumes and causes no pain.[5]

The poet is he who, having nothing, receives all, he who renounces, with a heavy blow, drinking even the fresh reflection of heaven, the student whom, many centuries ago, Chu Guangxi sung of in an ineffable poem:

When the setting sun ceases to shine in the northwest window
Then the wind of autumn, whistling, strips the bamboos
The student approaches the southern window,
For his eyes scarcely leave his book, and he is always attentive.

He dreams of antiquity, seeing the moss and the tall grasses;
He looks, he listens, he profoundly enjoys his calm and his solitude;
Perhaps you will ask what he does to at least procure his necessities:
He cuts the half-wild wheat in abandoned lands.[6]

4 That is, the Nightingale, using its Greek name, which is also that of a mythological character turned into such a bird.

5 See St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, Redaction B, Stanzas 15, 16, 39. Here I have translated Jammes' French translation, rather than St. John's original text.

6 Chu Guangxi (706-760) was a Tang-dynasty Chinese poet. Jammes here reprints the translation of Guangxi's poem found in Marquis D'Hervey de Saint-Denys, *Poésies de l'Époque des Thang…* (Paris: Amyot, 1862), 265. The Marquis titles the poem "The Student."

The poet is he who, in the accountant's fastidious and down-to-earth tasks, in lassitude and bitterness, in the monotony of bureaucratic dust, under a sharp patron's goad, discovers the luminous profile of a little girl of five years old, and, on the table of servitude, a bit of bread for the child.

The poet is he who, in beating it with his rod, makes burst from the rock, in the thirsty village, the water that flows, with full banks, through the thick grass. And the factories are born with their tulips of fire, workers' houses rise up with gay gardens and the chatter of children—since the poet's genius has discovered this vein of joyous crystal.

However, he alone is alone, he alone is poor, he alone is magnificently stripped like that bare water where the heavens are reflected.

The poet is he who, ear full of the silence that lies around him, or with the clamor of insult, hears arise in his heart, as if in a temple, the song of the seraphim and the voice of wisdom.

The poet is he who, not having held a victorious and beautiful wife in his arms, seizes the clay of which we are full and sculpts beauty.

The poet is the young man whom I saw in Anvers one day, he was twenty-five years old, all wrapped in darkness, in an attic, such a darkness that my father told me: "the bourgeois of the city have forgotten that he exists." He did not speak a single word to me when he saw me enter. He profited from that deep night by discovering, at the far end of the abyss, a nameless star.

The poet is he who, leaning towards the infant rolling about on its bed, stops the anguished mother with a charitable gaze. And he makes stream over the sick child that fresh virtue of waters, which he has discovered, or he gives him some healing bark gathered in the tropical forest where God smiles among the flamboyant lianas. And the temperature sweetly falls in the twilight.

The poet is he who goes out to sea. He swings in the skiff balanced on the long wave. And again the fog covers the port where his wife and his children await him without ever seeing him return. But he had to go, since he was split, as being two mountains, by

those two contrary and sublime feelings: the tenderness of the dark foyer and the bitter search for that nourishment given by fillets on the plain liquid, without wheat.

The poet is he who goes into the forest. Sometimes, as in the song of the old sailor,[7] he meets the hermit and the joyous wedding there and he delights in flutes, in birds, in the purple leap of squirrels, in carpets of flowers and moss and in inexhaustible details, like the knowledge of nests. And sometimes the woods are naught but a bare cross.

The poet is he who, in his hand, holds a grain of wheat the size of a common pebble. And in it he sees the reduced form of the bread that the worker's child carries in his arms, and the harvest-time with bluets, poppies, and the cries of insects, and the church, and the priest who mounts the altar, and the mysterious traveler who, in the Emmaus evening, mixes the glow of his forehead with the glow of the Host.[8]

The poet is the man to whom God restores splendor.

And now I see Noah singing under the definitive rainbow the canticle of the covenant of deliverance. And then he strolls into his well-cared-for vineyard. And each mature grape on his trellis seems to him like a transparent eye, all full of the blond or brown sun fixed on the Lord.[9]

And next I see Abraham under the oaks of Mamre. His tent is a golden millstone all crackling with ears of grain and, in the overwhelming splendor, not knowing what to do for His God Who appears to him and Whom he adores, he gives Him bread to eat.[10]

Then, exalting, if I may say so, the glory of the scorching harvest-time, plunging into it with majesty, the old Boaz sees Ruth arise on the horizon of barley. And he lets the gleaner taste the vinegared wine of the scythemen. And henceforth the dark taskmasters, soaking their bread in that poor drink, will be able to taste in it the divine savor that the Moabite has left there, since the love of the patriarch was gathered up for her in heaven and came forth like a sweet rumbling storm.[11]

---

7 A reference to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834).
8 Cf. Lk 24:13-35.
9 Cf. Gen 9.
10 Cf. Gen 18:1-8.
11 Cf. Ruth 2:1-16.

Blessed are you, men who in your hearts sown by a divine inspiration, fertilized by it, discover the promised lands and their fauna and their flora and their stones, and penetrate them with those same rays that render the mountain transparent and make the horns on Moses' face tremble![12]

What, then? Some want to tell me, "Aren't you soon going to mix up the saints and the graces that those rather deplorable men receive, who, hair crowned with narcissus, flute on their lips, are pleased to instruct the starlings? ... And those men to whom the ages attribute so many follies, like sacrificing a billy goat under the roses?"

Mixing up poets in general with saints: God, keep me from this! And however much admiration I profess for Verlaine, I will not dare to put him face to face with Saint John of the Cross.[13]

And yet! Verlaine wrote *Sagesse*, which Francis of Assisi might have signed.[14] And I remain confused before that abyss of purity, whose walls bear lilies and are veiled with clouds of incense, when I know that, at the same time, he wrote that book *Parallèlement*, where the rarest vices and heaviest fleshes have a rendezvous.[15]

---

12 Cf. Ex 34:29-35. In the Vulgate, these verses speak of Moses' face being "horned" (*cornuta*) due to his conversing with the Lord. The Septuagint and the Hebrew are generally translated as saying that his face was instead "shining" or "glorious."

13 Though the Symbolist poetry of Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) was widely praised, his personal life left much to be desired: he abandoned his wife and son to take up a relationship with the young poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), whom he later shot in the wrist, leading to a prison sentence. Later in life, he became a poor drug addict and alcoholic, known for his erratic behavior. He himself is one of the "cursed poets" (*poètes maudits*) whose epithet he immortalized in an anthology.

14 The collection *Sagesse*, published in 1880, includes many poems dating from Verlaine's time in prison, when he underwent a re-conversion to Catholicism. So Verlaine says in the preface to this collection: "The author of this book has not always thought like today. He has a long time erred in contemporary corruption, taking from it, on his part, fault and ignorance. Well-merited punishments have since warned me, and God has given me the grace to comprehend the warning. He has prostrated before the long-unknown Altar, he adores the All-Good and invokes the Almighty, sworn son of the Church, the last in merits, but full of good will." One poem in the collection begins "O my God, You have wounded me with love / And the wound is still trembling, / O my God, You have wounded me with love. // O my God, Your fear has struck me / And the burn is still thundering there, / O my God, Your fear has struck me." In another, the poet protests his unworthiness: "Lord, it's too much! Truly, I dare not. Love who? You? / Oh! No! I tremble and dare not. Oh! love You, I dare not, / I don't want to! I'm unworthy. You, the Rose / Immense with the pure winds of Love, O You, all // The hearts of the Saints, O You Who were the Jealous One / of Israel, You, the chaste bee who alights / On the only flower of a half-closed innocence, / How could, *I, I*, love *You*. Are You a fool?" See Paul Verlaine, *Œuvres Poétiques Complètes*, ed. Y.-G. Le Dantec and Jacques Borel (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1962), 239, 264, 269.

15 The collection *Parallèlement (Parallelly)* was published in 1889 and expanded in 1894; it reflects Verlaine's more debauched self. However, the religious themes first shown in *Sagesse* return in two later collections, interspersed between the decadent ones: *Amour (Love)* in 1888 and *Bonheur (Bliss*, or *Happiness*, or *Blessedness*) in 1891.

Should one conclude with logic, rather, with a poet of our days, that the world is drawn into a dance that the two races of angels conduct and count the beats for on their violins: the good angels, and the wicked?

And could I not situate in this kind of musical and spiritual penumbra, where evil and good fight, where man sometimes hears the seraphic harmonies, sometimes registers the specious voices of demons, poets such as Verlaine, Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire, and so many others?

They live their poetry, in the same manner, alas! in which the Christian too often also conducts his existence: he approaches the marsh at noon when the white waterlily seems to invite him most to gather it. First, he merely admires this snow, but, soon, alas! he soils it by carrying it in his hand. And he weeps, repenting for having seen this flower, once immaculate, now tarnished, delivered into the hands of demons whose whole joy resides in the soiling of what is virginal and in the rupture of harmony...

But, doubtless, they have focused too much on the weakness of the disgraced poet. Few true poets, no true poet, fails to sin against the spirit. And it is then that, on the pure and melodic breeze of the good angels, in an unexpected jolt, the poet, reanimating, coming back to life, snatches the flower from the hands of the wicked and plunges with it into the pure-white[r6] spring where the Virgin washes and absolves.

One day, this difficult question was posed to me:

"What place, then, does the poet occupy in the contemplative states?"

I simply respond:

"The poet occupies, in mysticism, according to the good that he does for souls, the place of any mortal—but, indeed, he has that privilege of hearing, more than an ordinary mortal, the voices that reveal Heaven to us."

It is, it seems to me, Saint Bernard who says that the persons who enjoy supereminent graces, through ecstasy or spiritual marriage, being unable—once they have come back down from those states—to give us a part in them, acquire, at least, that faculty of

16 Literally, *candid*.

communicating them to us in some measure in a ravishing, imaged language, which the angels inspire in them.[17] This opinion of Saint Bernard appears wholly just to me.

And I cannot keep myself, when I read the *Spiritual Canticle*, from thinking that the angels have passed through it:

> *Of flowers and emeralds*
> *Chosen on fresh mornings*
> *We weave garlands,*
> *Which your love has made flower,*
> *And which binds a single one of my hairs.*
> *This single hair*
> *That you have considered flying on my neck,*
> *Which you have regarded upon my neck,*
> *You have kept prisoner;*
> *And a single one of my eyes you have injured.*[18]

How to not find in such expressions the mark *of a kind*[19] that is expressed to aid all that is most beautiful upon earth in suggesting to us some idea of Heaven and which inspires, to that end, the most sensible of lyres: the lyres of mystical poets? The leaves and flowers, the brilliant prairies, all the symbolism of precious stones, the sweetest animals, come to the aid of the soul desirous to make itself understood.

Is this to say that every mystic is a poet?

I would keep myself from insinuating this in the natural sense of the word, although the great Teresa, in the imageless desert where she hears her eagle's wings, can pretend to that title in the *most elevated sense*.[20] But: neither a Saint Thomas Aquinas, nor a

---

17 See St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* XLI.4: "*Images of gold we craftsmen will craft for you, with decorations of silver* (Sgs 1:10). … This seems to me to signify that not only are images suggested by the angels within, but also that the splendor of eloquence is ministered by them outwardly, by which [these images] are fittingly and decently adorned, and more easily and delightfully received by listeners" (PL 183:986C-D). *Sermons* XLI.2-3 discuss how the soul is granted these images because it cannot yet see the glory of God face to face; they are a temporary substitute and a consolation for the soul, though they also, as Jammes emphasizes, allow her to communicate what she has received to others.

18 St. John of the Cross, "Spiritual Canticle," Redaction B, Stanzas 30 and 31.

19 In French, *d'une espèce*, literally, "of a species."

20 St. Teresa's poetry, though not of the same caliber and influence as St. John of the Cross', is still looked upon with some favor by lovers of literature. In particular, her poem "I live without living in me" ("Vivo sin vivir en mí"), with its refrain of "I die because I don't die" (*muero porque no muero*) is well-known and well-regarded, and it is frequently found in anthologies of Spanish poetry.

Vincent de Paul, nor a Saint Teresa, enters into the view of my subject, whatever be the sublimity of their roles.

I conclude, then, that a religious mystic, a true mystic, is not necessarily a poet.

But the reciprocal is not exact, and I will hardily affirm that, in every true poet, in every poet expressing a pure thought and feeling, there is a mystic.

And even if there is nothing mystical, and thus pure, in a part of his work, in concluding that this part remains acquired by contemplation, ought one to proceed, furthermore, to that division between the good and wicked spirit that the examination of the most authentic saint sometimes imposes?

What part ought one to give to the imagination in the, however edifying, work of a Catherine Emmerich—to demoniac inspiration in the life of a Mary of Jesus Crucified?[21]

Here all latitude, all judgment, is left to the authority of the Church.

But with the poet we come into more moderate regions which do not engage these capital solutions. This is why we appreciate their works according to their relative value, without pronouncing ourselves in the last resort, knowing that a light difference, more or less, does not always lead to a grave consequence.

It is useful, however, in this modest domain of simple poetry, to impose a classification:

The poet in whom the spirit of evil dominates;

The poet who, in his expression, although he does not tend directly towards the praise of God, glorifies, at least, His work, His creation;

The poet who, be it in a description of nature, be it in the exposition of a feeling, of love, for example, rises little by little to that sacred thrill in which we feel, for an instant, if I can say so, the trembling of God, the wind of an angel's wing.

21 St. Mary of Jesus Crucified, born Maryam Baouardy (1846-1878), a Carmelite nun from Galilee, then part of Ottoman Syria. She was a mystic and stigmatist who experienced visions, transverbation of the heart (like St. Teresa of Ávila), ecstasies, levitation, bi-location, and other gifts. She was beatified in 1983 and canonized in 2015: it seems Jammes held a much more suspect view of her.

Poets uniquely vowed to evil—they are not poets in truth—I will name none. For what good? They well belong to mysticism, but in a wholly other sense that that which we apply to this science here. They resort to demonology, to impregnation, to obsession, to diabolic possessions.

Among the descriptive poets, one must understand the majority of those of antiquity, our Pleaide,[22] a good number of the Romantics. Certainly a Theocritus, a Virgil, a Ronsard, a Musset do not always enter easily into our framework, but, sometimes, on the very surface of their paganism, a mystical feeling is disengaged, purifies the inspiration. The division is often difficult.

The last, but the highest in our test of mysticism, are those of the race of a Dante, of a Cervantes, of a Lamartine, of the Verlaine of *Sagesse*, of Claudel. Not all reach these masters. But there are many who are superior to them whose pages are sparse and often scattered. The most beautiful masterpieces have not, doubtless, been formulated by those whom glory crowns with the green laurel. Have you sometimes dreamed of the crypt where sleep the greatest poems, known only to God?

There the angels and the men of shadow join together. From one of those, from Coventry Patmore, I will borrow this short page which will show the ineffable bond through which the night espouses the dawn and Earth, Heaven:

My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my law the seventh time disobey'd,
I struck him, and dismiss'd
With hard words and unkiss'd,
His Mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darken'd eyelids, and their lashes yet

22 The name for a group of poets from the French Renaissance, writing in the 1500s. The most important are Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585), Joachim du Bellay (1522-1560), and Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1532-1589). The name refers to the seven stars of the Pleiades cluster, though differing lists of seven poets are given; the same name was applied to a group of Greek poets in Alexandria in the 3rd century BC. The French name was later borrowed for the Bibliothèque de la Pléaide ("the Pleiades Library"), a leather-bound collection of prominent works of literature, published by the Gallimard publishing house. Originally the series aimed to include sets of the complete works of French literary giants: it later expanded to include history and science, major works rather than complete collections, minor writers, and even non-French authors.

From his late sobbing wet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I pray'd
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
"I will be sorry for their childishness."[23]

Two other mysteries, touching upon poetic inspiration, mysteries which I limit myself to scarcely indicating, but which, if I had become a master in these kinds of psychological researches, would have demanded of me no less than three big volumes, are the situations of places and the invention of personages. I don't know how to extend myself very far. I will simply give a schema of my personal experiences. If I expose them briefly, perhaps they will be able to serve as elements, as materials, for those who are interested in this kind of study.

To preserve the parallelism that I promised myself to observe as far as possible, all proportions being preserved between the mystical state and the poetic state, I will first appeal to the case of Anne Catherine Emmerich. One knows that this edifying young

23 Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) was an English poet; here I give his original text rather than translating Jammes' French translation. The text is from Coventry Patmore, *The Unknown Eros* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1878), 50-52; the poem is titled "The Toys."

girl, so denigrated by some, so exalted by others, very probably presents a case whose analysis is this:

1) Mystical inspiration, probable or certain—through which, retracing the life of Our Lord, she depicts for us, without having ever seen them with her fleshy eyes, the villages, the countrysides, whose reconstruction, it seems, matches exactly with the reality that archaeology brings to light. She expresses herself during an ecstasy quite difficult to define.

2) One part of imagination, served by an incomparably artistic nature: Saint Magdalene wanders around the Holy Sepulchre. The gesture she makes tosses her hair backwards, or forwards, over her tear-bathed eyes, and it is so natural that it shocks us, nearly dazzling us.[24]

I will not say that poetic inspiration follows the same process. But, if it is less sacred, it is more sure. It compromises nothing.

I stroll about, at the decline of day, in a tepid springtime, in one of the rich quarters, gilded and calm, which lie upon a celebrated beach. My solitude is complete. It is not, at least, it was not yet, the era when tourism invaded that beautiful place. I go along a kind of little path. I perceive, through the birthing leaves, a luxurious villa. It is, if I may say so, buried in a mystery as profound and as sweet as that which clothes those domains whose hosts we are completely unaware of. And, furthermore, is that villa deserted? It could be, since all its shutters are closed, if I judge it by those two whose wings are shut at such an angle that they make the Spanish laurels shine.

And now, with all this mystery and with all this clandestine charm, which some fairy of the Lady of the sleeping woods seems to have spread there, this irresistible lullaby is born and rises and weeps in me:

24 This is in Volume XI, Chapter LXIV, of Anne Catherine Emmerich's visions. See *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ; From the Meditations of Anne Catherine Emmerich* (London: Burns & Lambert, 1862), 340: "I then saw Magdalene re-enter the garden and direct her steps towards the sepulchre; she appeared greatly agitated, partly from grief and partly from having walked so fast. Her garments were quite moist with dew, and her veil hanging on one side, while the luxuriant hair in which she had formerly taken so much pride fell in dishevelled masses over her shoulders, forming a species of mantle. Being alone, she was afraid of entering the cave, but stopped for a moment on the outside, and knelt down in order to see better into the tomb. She was endeavouring to push back her long hair, which fell over her face and obscured her vision, when she perceived the two angels who were seated in the tomb..."

If one beautiful day—in the forest—you encounter—in the forest—where makes its nest—the old woodpecker—a house—with bright—green shutters—tell yourself that in—that house—peace flowers.
If one beautiful day—in the garden—O vermilion thread!—in the garden—where the poppies—are tired—you encounter—a pavilion—inhabited—tell yourself that it is there—that flowers—heavy sleep.

It is not on this motif that the gifted[25] zeal should stop. The seed, swept away by I know not what breeze to the peaks of secular trees, will bloom. The poet is far away from the house, but the house remains in him, it gains layers, it develops in an atmosphere superior to that of the thousand and one nights. A young girl inhabits it, more precisely: a young blond girl: a young girl, quite large: a young girl strong and beautiful, and equal to the genius of Rubens—and yet of a wholly English charm. And, nevertheless, she is from Spain. It seems to me that she is the heroic statue of victory in the equilibrium of health! And yet she is attacked by psychic troubles. What troubles? The doctors don't know. But the poet discovers their powerful nature: this singular evil is naught but the joyful blooming of a misunderstood soul in the solar joy of the marvelous villa that is life.

Henceforth the heroine will live in the poet's soul. And, when he reaches that summit of life of which the greatest of colonial lyrics spoke:

"Standing on the hill blindly climbed!"[26] the vision of a whole world situated in the depths of the soul will be clarified, spiritualized, stretched out before him who is now near to undertaking the eternal voyage.

25 The French is *donné*: "that which has been given."

26 A reference to the poem "The Supreme Illusion" ("L'illusion suprême") by Charles Marie René Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894). He was born on the French island of Réunion, near Madagascar, hence why Jammes describes him as "colonial." The first stanza of the cited poem reads:
"When man finally approaches the summits where life
Will plunge into your inert shadow, O mournful skies!
Standing on the height gravely climbed,
The first lived days dazzle his eyes."

Jammism

I: I think that Truth is the praise of God; that we ought to celebrate it in our poems so that they might be pure; that there is but one school: that in which, like children who imitate a beautiful model of writing as exactly as possible, poets copy, with conscience, a pretty bird, a flower, or a young girl with charming limbs and gracious breasts.

II: I believe that this suffices. How do you want me to judge a writer who is pleased to depict a living tortoise encrusted with precious stones?[27] I think that, in this, there is nothing worthy of the name of poet: since God has not created tortoises for this end, and since their homes are lagoons and the sand of the sea.

III: All things are good to describe when they are *natural*; but natural things are not only bread, food, water, salt, lamp, key, trees, and sheep, man and woman, and gaiety. There are also, among them, swans, lilies, coats-of-arms, crowns, and sadness.

What do you want me to think about a man who, since he sings life, wants to hinder me from celebrating death, or vice versa; or who, since he depicts a thyrsus[28] or an ermine-lined cloak, wants to oblige me to not write about a rake or a pair of stockings?

IV: I find it completely natural that a poet, lying with a pretty little hard woman, prefers, in that moment, existence to death; however, if a poet who has lost everything in this world, who is attacked by a cruel malady, and who has faith, composes sincere verses in which he asks the Creator to soon deliver him from life, I find this reasonable.

V: There have been many schools since the world [was world][29] (they dragged me into the schools, I knew more than the doctors—the Buddha says)—but have they not always denoted, according to the founder of any one of them, the vanity of seeing inferiors grouped around oneself, who contribute to one's glory? Will one say that this is recommending some philosophical system in a disinterested fashion? That would be

27 This occurs in the famous Chapter 5 of the novel *À Rebours* (1884) by Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907).
28 A rod of giant fennel wrapped in ivy; it was used prominently in ancient Greek rituals of Dionysius.
29 Jammes only gives the first half of this French expression meaning "since the beginning of time": *depuis que le monde est monde*.

childishness, for this one who hates fish loves rice, and there is but one system: Truth, which is the praise of God.[30]

VI: A poet, then, is wrong to say to his brethren: "You will stroll only under the lindens; take great care to flee the scent of the iris and to not taste beans": since they might not love the perfume of lindens, but [they might instead love] that of irises and the taste of beans.

VII: And as all is vanity,[31] and as this saying is also a vanity, but since it is opportune, in this age, for *each individual* to found a literary school, I ask those who want to join with me in not forming one to send their subscription to Orthez, Basses-Pyrénées, rue Saint-Pierre.

30 Jammes' argumentation here is a bit elliptical: what he seems to be saying is that all philosophical schools are just vehicles of vanity for the founder, merely expressing his own quirks and tastes ("this one who hates fish loves rice," *tel aime le riz qui déteste le poisson*), and that it is foolish to consider them true attempts to provide philosophical systems. The next paragraph expounds on this idea of dictated taste.

31 Eccl 1:2.