

The Ransom by Charles Baudelaire

Translated from the French

by [Thomas Banks](#) (August 2020)



Soul Carried to Heaven, William-Adolphe Bouguereau, 1878

The Ransom

To pay the ancient debt he owes,

Two fields are given to man's keeping,

Whose wealthy earth he stirs and sows

With his hard mind, and waits the reaping

Of some small portion of good grain,
And waits the coming of one rose,
Patient for these in sweat and pain—
The cost of everything that grows.

One field is Art, one Charity:
He lays their harvest at the feet
Of the great Judge of all, when he
Appears before the judgment seat,
To let their form and color state
Their worth to heaven's host, so gaining
Passage for him through that last gate,
With shouts of angels him sustaining.

La Rançon

L'homme a, pour payer sa rançon,
Deux champs au tuf profond et riche,
Qu'il faut qu'il remue et défriche
Avec le fer de la raison;

Pour obtenir la moindre rose,
Pour extorquer quelques épis,
Des pleurs salés de son front gris

Sans cesse il faut qu'il les arrose.

L'un est l'Art, et l'autre l'Amour.

– Pour rendre le juge propice,
Lorsque de la stricte justice
Paraîtra le terrible jour,

Il faudra lui montrer des granges
Pleines de moissons, et des fleurs
Dont les formes et les couleurs
Gagnent le suffrage des Anges.

– *Les Épaves*, 1866

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