

Le CANARD SAUVAGE

Marius Engh

To the Wild Duck

Opening: Friday 6 December 7 pm
Centralbanken, Brugata 12, NO-0186 Oslo

6 SABLE **St Navet** et **Ste Perruque**, humanistes -
7 DÉCERVELAGE **Sts Polonais**, prolétaires 152 E.P.
(6 December - 3 January 2025 Vulg.)

- *It's a duck, isn't it?*
- *Of course it's a duck.*
- *But what kind of duck do you think it is?*
- *It's not an ordinary duck.*
- *It's not a turkish duck.*
- *No, Mr. Werlé, it's not a turkish duck;*
it's a wild duck.

The Wild Duck, Act 11

You are a wild duck, my dear colleague. In the amorous season (may it last for you forever!) you are dressed in silk and gold. Your head is topped with a green hood with purple highlights; you wear a silver ring around your neck. A brown coat, with gray stripes extends over your back. You have a yellow beak, red eyes, and orange legs. You shine at the mouths of our rivers, like the Norman chiefs of old on their fast boats. But, not being a servant, you will receive neither beets, nor salads, nor potatoes, nor screenings, nor lumps of buckwheat flour or barley diluted in milk. And men in boots up to their necks will hunt you down, at the hut, at the streetlight.

But Buffon assures us that you are suspicious, and we know that you have a hard life.

When old Ekdal says to his granddaughter: Ha ha! you are afraid that I will kill your duck," Hedvig replies:

- No, you could not. They say that it is very difficult to kill, a wild duck."

That reassures me a little about your fate. And then it must be said that domestic ducks as soon as they are fat, which can be seen by the tail feathers that stand up and spread apart, their necks are wrung.

Perhaps, my dear duck, you are doing well to be wild. Aristophanes and Jules Renard, both poets and friends of birds, are worthy, one on the shores of the Styx, the other on earth, of celebrating your industrious and wily spirit, your regular travels through the air, and your melancholy passages in the marshes where the hunter awaits you. I only want, to distract you, to tell you the story of your cousins, the cranes of Ibycus.

Ibycus was a lyre player. He composed the poems himself, which he sang, shaking the strings stretched on the shell of a tortoise.

He was dear to the Immortal Muses and went from town to town, singing before the rich men who have enough piety to give gifts to the divine singers. The tyrant Polycrates kept him for a long time at Samos.

This island is like a nymph swimming in the Aegean Sea, while sitting on the neighbouring coast, Mount Mycale seems like another Polyphemus admiring another Galatea.

It is surrounded by vineyards; olive gardens flower its valleys and beaches. Its high mountains, girded with pines and cypresses, raise their bare peaks to the clouds.

At twenty years old, Ibycus crowned his head with the roses of Samos. But Polycrates, having taken more than his share of happiness and power, experienced the Nemesis of the Gods and was crucified by the satrap Orontes.

After the fall of the tyrant, the singer left the sweet Samos, resumed the wandering life he had led in his youth, and traveled throughout Greece as a beggar. Already very old, he went to play the lyre in Corinth. Merchants and courtesans abounded there. Ibycus carried away from this joyous city praise and a large sum of money. As he was crossing the rough mountains of Argolis, two brigands struck him and stripped him. Lying all bloody across the road, he had cranes pass over his head. He called them to witness the crime, and died.

A year later, the two murderers of the singer found themselves together in the theatre of Corinth. It was in the open air. A company of cranes passed over the spectators.

One of the criminals, pointing to the birds, said to his companion:

- Here are the witnesses of Ibycus.

This strange remark, heard by the neighbours, aroused their curiosity. They went repeating it throughout the city and brought it to the ears of the magistrates, who wanted to discover its meaning. The judges sought out and questioned the man who had said it. He confessed his crime, he denounced his accomplice. Both were punished.

Dear wild duck, following the example of the cranes of Ibycus, be the witness and the avenger of the lyre-bearer offended by the greedy and brutal men.

Anatole France

Translation of the French foreword to the first issue of the weekly journal
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