

Le fou Bonnet

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I know they're not real, what I'm seeing.
But they look real.
Nobody believes me;
They think I'm crazy — "*le fou*" they secretly call me,
Just because I see things they don't.
Now I'm in this hospital ... this *institution*.

They say I have *les cataractes*
And that I'm blind.
I beg to differ —
I see many things scattered about in this room.
How can my eyes not be working
If I can still see?!
Let me show you the world through my eyes,
And you be the judge.

When the candles get lit,
I see a bright scatter, a flash.
The flicker from the flames makes the world move
And lights up a tapestry on the wall.
The colours that paint the rolling hills of *Bretagne*,
So vivid, so green.
When I ask the nurses about it,
They say there is no tapestry, just a white wall.
They keep pushing medications on me.
I believe them, since no one seems to see it.
Mais, mon Dieu! — It looks so real!

I get taken outside for some fresh air,
And it is extremely busy:
Horses and carriages transporting goods and people,
The mud kicking up behind,
With emaciated, stray dogs roaming the roads.
I can see the beads of sweat on the merchants,
And practically reach out and pet the strays ...

The hospital workers do not take notice.
Their pace is much slower than the commotion.
They must either truly not care,
Or the horses, carriages, dogs do not actually exist.
Their profession precludes the first —
I must be wrong then.

In my old age, I'm not crazy,
But the line between *réalité* and *imagination* blurs.
Red birds, yellow birds, brown birds;
I see them inside, flying and chirping,
Yet birds don't live in hospitals.

The gentle, grassy hills are around me
With a small village in the distance,
Not unlike the tapestry on the wall;
Only there is a family of rabbits now racing across.
Clearly not a hospital.



Occasionally, *sa Majesté le roi Louis XV* comes to visit;
Except I know *ce n'est pas sa Majesté*
Because his face looks drawn in
With ink from a swan's quill.
I cannot read the newspaper anymore,
But I can count the jewels on his crown while he's here.
In this hospital room.

"*Bonjour!*"
A figure comes into my view.
I can tell it's my nurse. She's smiling.
A bird — a small sparrow, it looks like —
Is yelling obscenities from her shoulder.
The nurse is obviously oblivious.
Hilarious.

"*Temps pour vos médicaments, Monsieur Bonnet.*"
Alas, they still think I'm crazy.

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This article has been peer reviewed.

Author's note: Charles Bonnet Syndrome is a complex visual hallucinatory disturbance that occurs in those having partial or severe blindness, with otherwise intact cognition. Swiss naturalist and philosopher Charles Bonnet first described the disorder in 1760 in his grandfather, Charles Lullin, who had cataracts. This poem is written from the perspective of the grandfather, whose name I changed out of artistic license.