

RIMBAUD

10 POEMS



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY BILL ZAVATSKY

ARTHUR RIMBAUD • OPHELIA

I

On the calm black water where the stars sleep
White Ophelia floats like a great lily,
Floats so slowly, lain in her long veils . . .
—In faraway woods you can hear the hunting horns.

For over a thousand years sad Ophelia
Passes, white phantom on the long black river.
For over a thousand years her sweet madness
Murmurs its romance to the evening breeze.

The wind kisses her breasts and unfolds her long veils
In petals that the waters gently lull;
The shuddering willows weep upon her shoulder,
Over her great dreaming brow the reeds bend low.

The ruffled water-lilies sigh around her;
Sometimes she awakes by a sleeping alder,
Some nest where a little shuddering wing escapes;
—A mysterious song falls from the golden stars.

II

O pale Ophelia lovely as the snow!
Yes, you died, child, carried away by a river!
—The winds falling from Norway's great mountains
Told you of bitter freedom in hushed tones;

A mere breath, twisting your long hair,
Carried your dreaming spirit strange noises;
How your heart listened to the song of Nature
In the plaint of the tree and the sighing of the night;

The voice of the mad oceans, immense rattle,
Broke on your childish breast, too human, too sweet;
It's just an April morning, a pale handsome knight,
A poor fool, seated mute at your knees.

Sky! Love! Freedom! What a dream, O poor Mad Girl!
You flutter there like a snowflake in the fire;
Your great visions strangled your own words
—And the terrible infinite startled your blue eye!

III

—And the Poet says that, every night by starlight,
You go to search for the flowers that you gather,
And that lain in her long veils, he has seen on the water
White Ophelia floating, like a great lily.

“OPHÉLIE” • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BILL ZAVATSKY

The Station Square, Charleville

On the square trimmed into paltry strips of turf,
Square where everything's precise, flowers and trees,
All the wheezy bourgeois strangled by the warmth
Thursday nights bring their jealous stupidities.

—The military band, set up in the middle of the garden,
Rocks its shakos around in the “Waltz of the Fifes”:
—In the front rows the dandy parades up and down;
The notary hangs like a watch from his monogrammed charm.

Independently wealthy (in pince-nez) score all the clams:
Huge bloated desks haul by their huger wives
Trailing those officious handlers of elephants,
Females whose flutterings look like publicity stunts.

On green benches clubs of pensioned grocers
Stirring up the sand with their knobby canes
Really seriously discuss treaties, then,
Pinching silver boxes of snuff, resume: “In short! . . .”

Spreading buttock hemispheres over his bench,
A bourgeois—clear buttons, Flemishly corporate—
Savors his Onnaïng from which shredded tobacco
Billows—This stuff's contraband, y'know;—

Up and down the green swards wiseguys sneer;
And rendered amorous by the chants of the trombones,
Really corny, cadets puffing on roses
Fondle the babies to get a chance at the nurses . . .

—Me, I'm here, I follow it, sloppy as a student,
Under the big green chestnuts these sharp little girls:
And they know it; and turn around laughing
Toward me, their eyes chock full of indiscretions.

I don't say a word; I go right on staring
At the skin of their white necks' wild embroidered curls:
I'm there, beneath the bodice and flimsy blouses,
The divine back where below the shoulder, it curves.

Soon I've unearthed the boot, the stocking . . .
—I reconstruct their bodies, burning with wonderful fevers.
They think I'm silly and talk together in whispers . . .
—And my savage desires lash against their lips . . .

“À LA MUSIQUE” • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BILL ZAVATSKY

ARTHUR RIMBAUD • NOVEL

I

Nobody's serious when he's seventeen.
—One nice evening, screw the beer and lemonade,
The noisy cafés with the shining chandeliers!
—We walk beneath the lindens of the promenade.

The lindens smell good on good June nights!
Sometimes the air's so sweet we close our eyes.
The wind crammed with noises—the town isn't far—
Carries the scent of the vine, the scent of beer . . .

II

—That's where we can pick out a tiny patch
Of dark azure, framed by a little branch,
Pinned with a naughty star that melts
In gentle shudders, small and all white . . .

June night! Seventeen!—It knocks us out.
The sap is champagne and rushes to our heads . . .
We talk a lot; on our lips we feel a kiss
Pulsing like the heart of some tiny beast . . .

III

Our wild heart Crusoes its way through novels,
—When, in the light of a pale street lamp,
A girl goes by doing charming little things
In the shadow of her father's awesome collar . . .

And, since she finds you incredibly corny,
All the while trit-trotting her little boots,
She turns around, alert, so vividly . . .
—That the cavatinas drop dead on your lips . . .

IV

You're in love. Fixed up till the month of August.
You're in love.—Your sonnets make Her laugh.
All of your friends drop you, you're insufferable.
—Then, one evening, your dear one's deigned to write you! . . .

—That evening . . .—you go back to the bright cafés,
Your order some beers or maybe lemonade . . .
Nobody's serious when he's seventeen
And has green lindens lining the promenade.

“ROMAN” • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BILL ZAVATSKY

ARTHUR RIMBAUD • DREAMED FOR THE WINTER

Winter: we'll go on a little pink train
With blue cushions.
We'll be nice. A nest of crazy kisses sits
In a soft corner.

You'll shut your eyes, not to see the evening shadows
Making faces through the glass,
Those snarling monstrosities, populace
Of black demons and black wolves.

Then you'll feel your cheek tickled . . .
A little kiss, like a crazy spider,
Will run around your neck . . .

And you'll tell me: "Get it!" sliding your head back,
—And we'll take plenty of time to find that creature
—Which travels a lot . . .

"RÊVÉ POUR L'HIVER" • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BILL ZAVATSKY

ARTHUR RIMBAUD • AT THE GREEN CABARET

Five in the Afternoon

For eight days I'd torn up my boots
On the gravel of the roads. I went into Charleroi.
—At the Green Cabaret: I ordered
Some butter and some ham that'd still be cold.

So happy, I stretched my legs beneath the green
Table: I contemplated the wallpaper subject matter,
So corny.—And how adorable it was
When the girl with enormous tits, with lively eyes,

—Not the kind to be scared of a little kiss!—
Laughing, brought me butter cookies,
Warm ham, on a colored plate,

Pink and white ham scented with a clove
Of garlic,—and filled my immense mug, with its foam
Turned into gold by a lingering sunbeam.

“AU CABARET-VERT” • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BILL ZAVATSKY

ARTHUR RIMBAUD • MY BOHEMIA (*FANTASY*)

I took off, fists in my torn pockets;
Even my coat was becoming an idea;
I went beneath the sky, Muse! and I was your vassal;
Oo-la-la did I dream some love affairs!

My only pair of pants had a big hole.
—Tom Thumb the dreamer, I picked rhymes
On my way. My inn was at the Big Dipper.
—My stars in the sky made a gentle swoosh.

And I listened to them, seated by roads,
Those good September evenings where I felt drops
Of dew on my brow, like a strong wine;

Where, rhyming surrounded by fantastic shadows,
Like lyres I strummed the elastic laces
Of my wounded shoes, one foot near my heart!

“MA BOHÈME (*FANTAISIE*)” • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY BILL ZAVATSKY

ARTHUR RIMBAUD • EVENING PRAYER

I live sitting down, like an angel held by a barber,
Clutching a deeply fluted mug,
Stomach and neck arched, a Briar
In my teeth, under air swollen by sails no one can touch.

Like the steamy droppings of an old columbarium,
A thousand Dreams light sweet fires inside me:
Then sometimes my sad heart's an alburnum
Whose own ooze bloodies its deep new gold.

Then, when I've carefully gulped down all my Dreams,
I turn around, after thirty or forty mugs,
And collect myself to dispense with my burning need:

Sweet as the Lord of the cedar and the hyssops,
I piss up at the brown skies, very high, very far,
Permission granted by giant sunflowers.

“ORAISON DU SOIR” • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BILL ZAVATSKY

ARTHUR RIMBAUD • THE STOLEN HEART

My sad heart drools at the poop,
My heart drowned in tobacco juice:
They splash it with jets of soup,
My sad heart drools at the poop:—
Beneath the insults of the crew
Bursting into general laughter,
My sad heart drools at the poop,
My heart drowned in tobacco juice!

Ithyphallic and greenhornesque,
Their insults have depraved it!
On the rudder you see frescoes
Ithyphallic and greenhornesque!
O abracadabrantic billows,
Ithyphallic and greenhornesque,
Their insults have depraved it!

When they've chewed their plugs,
How to act, O stolen heart?
There will be Bacchic hiccups
When they've chewed their plugs:
And I'll have a stomach fuckup,
If my heart's dragged through the muck:
When they've chewed their plugs,
How to act, O stolen heart?

“LE COEUR VOLÉ” • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BILL ZAVATSKY

ARTHUR RIMBAUD • THE DRUNKEN BOAT

As I tumbled down emotionless rivers
I lost the feeling of moving with rowers:
Howling Redskins had captured them for targets,
Nailed them naked to stakes of all colors.

I lost my interest in any crew,
Packboats' Flemish wheat, or English cotton,
All these uproars finished, rowers done for,
The rivers let me tumble where I wanted.

There I was, in furious splashing tides,
More empty, that winter, than brains of little kids,
How I moved! And those unlatched peninsulas
Never have sustained more fantastic hubbubs.

Storm blessed my awakenings on the sea.
Light as a cork I danced upon the waves
Somebody's called Those Eternal Jugglers of Victims—
Ten whole nights, without silly lanterns' eyes!

Sweeter than flesh of sour apples to children,
Green water poked through my firwood hull
Washing my blue winestains, and my vomit,
Scattering rudder and grapple in the wind.

From then on I bathed in the Poem of the Sea,
Shot full of stars and a shining milkiness,
Eating up azure greens; where livid ravished flotsams
Drift around a tumbling human, drowned, brooding;

Where suddenly dyeing the bluities, the deliria
And slow rhythms beneath day's rosyings,
Stronger than alcohol, vaster than our lyres,
The bitter rednesses of love ferment!

I know skies splitting in lightnings, and waterspouts
And undertows and currents: I know evenings,
Dawns exalted as colonies of doves,
And sometimes I've seen what man has thought he sees!

I've seen the sun low, stained with mystic horrors,
Its great violet clots lighting up
Distant waves rolling their quivering shutters,
Like the actors in ancient dramas!

I have dreamed green night with dazzled snows,
A kiss reaching the eyes of seas with slownesses,
The circulation of unheard-of saps,
And the yellow and blue waking of singing phosphorous!

For months, like the hysterical cows, I've followed
The surge in its assault upon the reefs,
Never dreaming that the Marys' luminous feet
Could push away the Oceans' wheezy snouts!

You see, I've touched on incredible Floridas
Mingling the flowers of panther eyes with the skin
Of men! Rainbows stretched like reins
Beneath the seas' horizons, to bluegreen herds!

I've seen enormous swamps fermenting, nets
Where a whole Leviathan rots in the reeds!
Avalanches of waters among calms,
And vistas cataracting toward the deeps!

Glaciers, silver suns, pearly waves, ember skies!
Hideous wrecks at the bottoms of brown gulfs
Where giant serpents devoured by bugs
Fall, from gnarled trees, with dark perfumes!

I would have liked to show babies those dorados
Of the blue wave, those fishes of gold, those singing fish.
—Foams of flowers have lulled me in my driftings
And sometimes ineffable winds have lent me wings.

Sometimes, a martyr weary of poles and zones,
The sea whose sob created my gentle roll
Lifted me shadowy yellow-nozzled flowers
And I stayed, like a woman on her knees . . .

Nearly an island, at my edges tossing the feuds
And droppings of screaming birds with blonde eyes.
And I traveled, while across my fragile lines
Drowned humans tumbled to sleep, backwards! . . .

Or me, boat lost beneath the tresses of coves,
Thrown by the hurricane into the birdless ether,
Me whose carcass drunken with water never
Would be salvaged by Monitors, Hanseatic sloops;

Free, smoking, topped by violet fogs,
Me who punctured the reddening sky like a wall
That carries, exquisite jelly for good poets,
Lichens of sun and mucuses of azure;

Who ran, stained by electric moonules,
A crazy plank, escorted by black seahorses,
When Julys beat down ultramarine skies
In cudgel blows, with their burning funnels;

Me who trembled, sensing groaning fifty leagues away
The rut of the Behemoth and dense Maelstroms,
Eternal scudder of blue immobilities,
I miss the Europe of ancient parapets.

I have seen sidereal archipelagos! and islands
Whose delirious skies are open to the traveler:
—Do you sleep self-exiled in these endless nights,
Million birds of gold, O future power?—

But really, I've wept too much! Dawns break your heart.
Every moon's atrocious, every sun bitter:
Acrid love has swollen me with intoxicating torpors.
O let my keel explode! O let me go into the sea!

If I want any stretch of Europe's water, it's the puddle,
Dark and cold, where toward the embalmed twilight
A squatting child full of sadness releases
A boat fragile as a May butterfly.

Bathed in your languors, O waves, I can no longer
Follow the wake of the cotton carriers,
Or travel past the pride of flags and flames,
Or swim beneath the prison ships' terrible eyes.

“LE BATEAU IVRE” • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BILL ZAVATSKY

ARTHUR RIMBAUD • VOWELS

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,
I will reveal your hidden births some day:
A, black hairy corset of dazzling flies
Burrowing up around disgusting smells,

Gulfs of shadow: E, artlessness of hazes and tents,
Spears of proud glaciers, white kings, trembling umbels;
I, purples, spit blood, laughter from lovely lips
In anger or in penitent drunkenness;

U, cycles, divine vibrations of viridian seas,
Peace of pastures strewn with animals, peace of wrinkles
Alchemy stamps on great studious brows;

O, supreme Clarion full of weird stridencies,
Silences that Worlds and Angels travel:
—Omega O, the violet ray from His Eyes!

“VOYELLES” • TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BILL ZAVATSKY