

Pierrot Lunaire, Op. 21
Arnold Schoenberg

Original collection of French poems by Albert Giraud
German translation by Eric Harleben
English translation of Schoenberg's selection by Cecil Gray

1. Moondrunk

The wine which through the eyes we drink
Flows nightly from the moon in torrents,
And as a spring-tide overflows
The far and distant land.
Desires terrible and sweet
Unnumbered drift in floods abounding.
The wine which through the eyes we drink
Flows nightly from the moon in torrents.
The poet, in an ecstasy,
Drinks deeply from the holy chalice,¹
To heaven lifts up his entranced
Head, and reeling quaffs and drains down
The wine which through the eyes we drink.

2. Colombine

The pallid² buds of moonlight
Those pale and wondrous roses
Bloom in the nights of summer—
O could I pluck but one!
My heavy heart to lighten,
I search in darkling river
The pallid buds of moonlight,
Those pale white wondrous roses.
Fulfilled would be my longing
If I could softly gather,
With gentle care besprinkle
Upon your dark brown tresses
The moonlight's pallid blossoms.

3. The Dandy

A phantasmagorial³ light ray
Illumines tonight all the crystalline flasks
On the holy, sacred, ebony wash-stand
Of the taciturn dandy of Bergamo.⁴
In sonorous bronze-enwrought chalice
Laughs brightly the fountain's metallic sound,

¹*chalice*: cup, goblet.

²*pallid*: faint in color, pale, wan

³*phantasmagorial*: a rapidly changing series of things seen or imagined, as the figures or events of a dream.

⁴*Bergamo*: commune northern Italy in Lombardy NE of Milan.

⁵*chlorosis*: a kind of anemia sometimes affecting girls at puberty and causing the skin to run a greenish color.

⁶*consumptive*: a person who has tuberculosis of the lungs.

A phantasmagorial light ray
Illumines tonight all the crystalline flasks.
Pierrot with countenance waxen
Stands musing and thinks
How he tonight will paint.
Rejecting the red and the green of the east
He bedaubes all his face in the latest of styles
With a phantasmagorial moonbeam.

4. A Chlorotic Laundry Maid

A Chlorotic⁵ laundry maid
Washes nightly white silk garments;
Naked, snow-white silvery foreams
Stretching downward to the flood.
Through the glade steal gentle breezes.
Softly playing o'er the stream.
A chlorotic laundry maid
Washes nightly white silk garments.
And the gentle maid of heaven.
By the branches softly fondled.
Spreads on the dusky meadows
All her moonlight-bewoven linen
A chlorotic laundry maid.

5. Valse de Chopin

As a lingering drop of blood
Stains the lip of a consumptive,
So this music is pervaded
By a morbid deathly charm.
Wild ecstatic harmonies
Disguise the icy touch of doom,
As a lingering drop of blood
Stains the lip of a consumptive.⁶
Ardent, joyful, sweet and yearning,
Melancholic sombre waltzes,
Coursing ever through my senses
Like a lingering drop of blood!

6. Madonna

Rise, O mother of all sorrows,
From the alter of my verses!
Blood pours forth from thy lean bosom
Where the sword of frenzy pierced it.
Thy forever gaping gashes
Are like eyelids, red and open.
Rise, O mother of all sorrows,
From the alter of my verses.
In the lacerated arms
Holdst thou thy Son's holy body,
Manifesting Him to mankind—
Yet the eyes of men avert themselves,
O mother of all sorrows!

7. The Ailing Moon

You ailing, death-awaiting moon,
High upon heaven's dusty couch,
Your glance, so feverish overlarge,
Lures me, like strange enchanting song.
With unrequited pain of love
You die, your longing deep concealed,
You ailing, death-awaiting moon,
High upon heaven's dusty couch.
The lover, stirred by sharp desire
Who reckless seeks for love's embrace
Exults in your bright play of light
Your pale and pain-begotten flood,
You ailing, death-awaiting moon.

8. Night

Heavy, gloomy giant black moths
Massacred the sun's bright rays;
Like a close-shut magic book
Broods the distant sky in silence.
From the mists in deep recesses
Rise up scents, destroying memory.
Heavy, gloomy giant black moths
Massacred the sun's bright rays;
And from heaven earthward bound
Downward sink with sombre pinions⁷
Unperceived, great hords of monsters
On the hearts and souls of mankind. . .
Heavy, gloomy giant black moths.

9. Prayer to Pierrot

Pierrot! my laughter have I unlearned!

⁷*pinion*: 1. wing; 2. feather, quill

⁸*harlot*: prostitute

⁹*paramour*: an illicit lover.

¹⁰*scimitar*: a short, curved sword with an edge on the convex side, used chiefly by Turks, Arabs, etc.

The picture's brightness dissolves.
Black flies the standard now from my mast,
Pierrot, my laughter have I unlearned
O once more give me, healer of spirits,
Snowman of lyrics, monarch of moonshine,
Pierrot, my laughter!

10. Loot

Ancient royalty's red rubies,
Bloody drops of antique glory,
Slumber in the hollow coffins
Buried in the vaulted caverns,
Late at night with boon companions
Pierrot descends to ravish
Ancient royalty's red rubies.
Bloody drops of antique glory.
But there every hair a-bristle,
Livid fear turns them to statues;
Through the murky gloom, like eyes—
Glaring from the hollow coffins
Ancient royalty's red rubies.

11. Red Mass

To fearsome grim communion
Where dazzling rays of gold gleam,
And flickering light of candles,
Comes to the alter Pierrot.
His hand, with grace invested,
Rends through the priestly garments,
For fearsome grim communion
Where dazzling rays of gold gleam.
With signs of benediction
He shows to frightened people
The dripping crimson wafer:
His heart—with bloody fingers
In fearsome grim communion.

12. Song of the Gallows

The haggard harlot⁸ with scraggy gizzard
Will be his ultimate paramour.⁹
Through all his thoughts there sticks like a gimlet
The haggard harlot with scraggy gizzard.
Thin as a rake, round her neck a pigtail,
Joyfully will she embrace the rascal,
The haggard harlot!

13. Decapitation

The moon, a polished scimitar¹⁰
Upon a black and silken cushion,
So strangely large hangs menacing
Through sorrow's gloomy night.
Pierrot wandering restlessly
Stares upon high in anguished fear
Of the moon, the polished scimitar
Upon a black and silken cushion,
Like leaves of aspen are his knees,
Swooning he falters, then collapses.
He thinks: the hissing vengeful steel
Upon his neck will fall in judgement,
The moon, a polished scimitar.

14. The Crosses

Holy crosses are the verses
Where the poets bleed in silence,
Blinded by the peck of vultures
Flying round in ghostly rabble.
On their bodies swords have feasted,
Bathing in the scarlet bloodstream.
Holy crosses are the verses
Where the poets bleed in silence.
Death then comes; dispersed the ashes—
Far away the rabble's clamour,
Slowly sinks the sun's red splendour,
Like a royal crown of glory.
Holy crosses are the verses.

15. Nostalgia

Sweetly plaintive is the sigh of crystal
That ascends from Italy's old players,
Sadly mourning that Pierrot so modern
And so sickly sentimental is now.
And it echoes from his heart's waste desert,
Muted tones which wind through all his senses,
Sweetly plaintive, like a sigh of crystal
That ascends from Italy's old players.
Now abjures¹¹ Pierrot the tragic manner,
Through the pallid fires of lunar landscape
Through the foaming light-flood
mounts the longing,
Surging high towards his native heaven.
Sweetly plaintive, like a sigh of crystal.

16. Atrocity

Through the bald pate¹² of Cassander,

As he rends the air with screeches
Bores Pierrot in feigning tender
Fashion with a cranium driller.
He then presses with his finger
Rare tobacco grown in Turkey
In the bald pate of Cassander,
As he rends the air with screeches.
Then screwing a cherry pipe stem
Right in through the polished surface,
Sits at ease and smokes and puffs the
Rare tobacco grown in Turkey
From the bald pate of Cassander.

17. Parody

Knitting needles, bright and polished,
Set in her greying hair,
Sits the Duenna,¹³ mumbling,
In crimson costume clad.
She lingers in the arbour,
She loves Pierrot with passion,
Knitting needles, bright and polished,
Set in her greying hair,
But, listen, what a whisper,
A zephyr titters softly;
The moon, the wicked mocker,
Now mimics with light rays
Bright needles, spick and span.

18. The Moonfleck

With a snowy fleck of shining moonlight
On the shoulder of his black silk frock-coat
So walks out Pierrot this languid evening.
Seeking everywhere for love's adventure.
But what! something wrong with his appearance?
He looks round and round and then he finds it—
Just a snowy fleck of shining moonlight
On the shoulder of his black silk frock-coat.
Wait now (thinks he) 'tis a piece of plaster,
Wipes and wipes, yet cannot make it vanish.
So he goes on poisoned with his fancy,
Rubs and rubs until the early morning
Just a snowy fleck of shining moonlight.

¹¹*abjure*: **1 a.** to renounce upon oath **b.** to reject solemnly. **2.** to abstain from.

¹²*pate*: the crown of the head.

¹³*Duenna*: chaperon.

19. Serenade

With a giant bow grotesquely
Scrapes Pierrot on his viola;
Like a stork on one leg standing
Sadly plucks a pizzicato.
Now here comes Cassander fuming
At this night-time virtuoso.
With a giant bow grotesquely
Scrapes Pierrot on his viola;
Casting then aside the viola,
With his delicate left hand he
Grips the bald pate by the collar—
Dreamily he plays upon him
With a giant bow grotesquely.

20. Journey Home

The moonbeam is the rudder,
Nenuphar¹⁴ serves as boat
On which Pierrot goes southward,
The wind behind his sails,
In deep tones hums the river
And rocks the light canoe,

The moonbeam is the rudder,
Nenuphar serves as boat.
To Bergamo, his homeland,
Pierrot returns once more.
Soft gleams on the horizon
The orient green of dawn.
The moonbeam is the rudder.

21. O Ancient scent

O ancient scent from far-off days,
Intoxicate once more my senses!
A merry swarm of idle thoughts
Pervades the gentle air.
A happy whim makes me aspire
To joys which I too long neglected.
O ancient scent from far-off days
Intoxicate me again.
Now all my sorrow is dispelled,
And from my sun-encircled casement¹⁵
I view again the lovely world
And dream beyond the fair horizon.
O ancient scent from far-off days!

¹⁴*nenuphar*: white or yellow water-lily.

¹⁵*casement*: a window sash that opens on hinges at the side.