

# PIERROT LUNAIRE

## By Arnold Schoenberg

Three times seven poems from Albert Giraud's  
*Pierrot Lunaire - Rondels Bergamasques*  
Translated into German by Otto Erich Hartleben  
English translation by Roger Marsh

### Part One

#### *1 Moondrunk*

The wine which through our eyes we drink  
Pours from the moon in waves upon us  
And like a springtide  
Overflows the stillness of the night.

Desires so thrilling and so sweet,  
Cascading through the floods in thousands:  
The wine which through our eyes we drink,  
Pours from the moon in waves upon us.

The writer, so divinely moved,  
Is greedy for the holy liquid,  
And skyward he directs his dizzy head,  
Then reeling, gulps and slurps down  
The wine which through our eyes we drink.

#### *2 Columbine*

The moonlight's bleached white blossoms,  
Those white amazing roses,  
Bloom on this night in August,  
O to pick one; to pick just one!

To ease my painful longing,  
I search in darkening waters,  
For moonlight's bleached white blossoms,  
Those white amazing roses.

I'd cease from all my yearning  
If I could have my one wish –  
O sweet delight! I'd scatter  
Upon your lovely brown hair  
The moonlight's bleached white blossoms!

#### *3 The Dandy*

And with a fantastical searchlight  
Now spotlights the moon all the crystalline flasks  
On the jet black, most holy wash stand  
Of the voiceless young dandy of Bergamo.  
Resounding around the bronze basin  
Brightly laughs the fountain, metallic and clear.  
And with a fantastical searchlight  
Now spotlights the moon all the crystalline flasks.  
Pierrot, with pasty complexion  
Stands pensive and thinks;  
What make-up shall I use today?  
Out goes first the red, then the Orient green,  
And he paints up his face with impeccable style –  
Using a fantastical moonbeam.

#### *4 A Pale Washergirl*

Here's a pale washergirl  
Washing nightly faded garments;  
Naked, silver white her arms are,  
Stretching down into the flow,  
Through the clearing creeps a slight wind,  
Lightly stirring up the stream.  
She's a pale washergirl,  
Washing nightly faded garments.  
And the spotless Maid of heaven,  
Now caressed by wispy branches,  
Lays out, on the dusky meadow,  
All her linen woven with moonlight.  
She's a pale washergirl.

#### *5 Chopin Waltz*

As a pale drop of blood  
Stains the lips of a consumptive,  
So there rests upon these phrases  
A malignant, sickening charm.  
Wild indulgent chords  
Disturb the bleakness of an icy dream,  
As a pale drop of blood  
Stains the lips of a consumptive.  
Hot, exultant, sweet and aching,  
Melancholy gloomy waltzes,  
Will you never leave my senses?  
Must you defile all my thinking,  
Like a pale drop of blood'?

#### *6 Madonna*

Climb, O Mother of all Sorrows  
On the altar of my verses.  
Blood spurts from your meagre bosom  
Which the sword's blind rage has opened.  
And your gashes, fresh for ever,  
Are like bloodshot eyes, wide open.  
Climb, O Mother of all Sorrows  
On the altar of my verses.  
In your wasting withered hands  
You hold up your son's rotting body,  
Which you offer to the people;  
But the people's eyes avoid your gaze,  
O Mother of all Sorrows.

#### *7 The Sick Moon.*

You nightly deathward sinking moon  
Draped upon Heaven's blackened bed.  
Your face, so fevered, overlarge,  
Haunts me, like some exotic song.  
An all consuming lovesickness  
Kills you with longing, suffocates...  
You nightly deathward sinking moon,  
Draped upon Heaven's blackened bed.  
Your loved one, senseless with desire,  
Without a thought speeds to his love,  
Delighting in your dancing beams,  
Your white contaminated blood,  
You nightly deathward sinking moon.

## **Part Two**

### *8 Night*

Black enormous butterflies  
Have blotted out the sun's bright rays.  
A forbidden book of spells,  
Broods the night time sky – mysterious.  
From the misty gloom below them,  
Comes a perfume that wipes out memory.  
Black enormous butterflies  
Have blotted out the sun's bright rays.  
And then earthwards from the sky,  
Flittering down with massive wingspan,  
Unperceived, the monstrous creatures,  
Light on human hearts and settle.  
Black enormous butterflies.

### *9 Prayer to Pierrot*

Pierrot! my laughter  
I have forgot.  
My source of light is erased, – erased.  
Black waves the flag now,  
Upon my mast.  
Pierrot! my laughter  
I have forgot.  
O give me back,  
You farrier of spirits,  
Snow-man of poesy,  
Princess of moonshine,  
Pierrot! – my laughter!

### *10 Robbery*

Priceless, red exquisite rubies,  
Bloody drops of ancient glory,  
Slumber in the burial caskets  
Down there in the vaulted graveyard.  
Night ..... and with his drunken cronies,  
Down comes Pierrot to plunder  
Priceless, exquisite, red rubies;  
Bloody drops of ancient glory.  
But ... then .. all their hair stands upright,  
White with fear they're fixed to the spot.  
Through the murky gloom, like eyeballs,  
staring from the burial baskets,  
Priceless, red exquisite rubies.

### *11 Red Mass*

At ghastly grim communion,  
Midst blinding golden brightness,  
Midst flickering of candles,  
Comes to the altar – Pierrot!  
His hand now consecrated,  
Rips wide the priestly cassock,  
At ghastly grim communion,  
Midst blinding golden brightness.  
And signing absolution,  
He shows the trembling, trembling people,  
The blood soaked holy wafer:  
His heart, in bloody fingers;  
At ghastly grim communion.

*12 Gallows song,*  
The skinny strumpet,  
With neck extended,  
Will be the last  
To make love to him!  
Into his brain  
She sticks like a needle;  
The skinny strumpet  
With neck extended.  
Thin as a rake  
With a pigtail round her;  
Wantonly will she  
Embrace the scoundrel  
– the skinny strumpet!

*13 Execution*  
The moon a glinting Turkish sword,  
Upon a soft black silken cushion,  
Its ghostly blade, aimed at the Earth  
Through suffering's darkest night.  
Pierrot roams about restlessly,  
And upward stares in mortal fright  
At the moon, the glinting Turkish sword,  
Upon a soft black silken cushion.  
His knees beneath him start to wobble,  
Suddenly giving way completely.  
He thinks he feels already  
On his sinful neck the blade of judgement –  
The moon – the glinting Turkish sword.

*14 The crosses*  
Holy crosses are the verses  
On which poets bleed to death in silence,  
Sightless, with their eyes pecked out  
By flocks of ghostly vultures.  
Bodies by the sword devoured,  
Now adorned by bleeding scarlet!  
Holy crosses are the verses  
On which poets bleed in silence.  
Lifeless head, the hair stiff matted,  
Faint and distant cheers the rabble.  
Slowly comes the fading sunset,  
Like a crown of royal crimson.  
Holy crosses are the verses.

### **Part Three**

*15 Homesickness*  
Sweet lamenting – an exquisite sighing,  
Comes from Bergamo's old-fashioned dumbshow.  
And the song asks why Pierrot's so wooden,  
And has grown modern and sentimental?  
And it strikes the empty heart inside him,  
Strikes once more, though muffled, all his senses.  
Sweet lamenting – an exquisite sighing,  
Comes from Bergamo's old-fashioned dumbshow.  
Then Pierrot forgets his tragic manner!  
Up through pale firelight of the moon,  
Up through floods of sea light swells his longing  
Bravely up, on high, to home and heaven  
Sweet lamenting – an exquisite sighing.

### *16 Dirty Trick*

In the bald head of Cassander,  
As his screams rip through the night air,  
Bores Pierrot, with insincere affection –  
And a cranium driller  
Wherein he stuffs with his brown thumb  
Leaves of purest, Turkish tobacco,  
In the bald head of Cassander,  
As his screams rip through the night air.  
Then, twisting a cherry pipestem  
Right into the burnished baldness,  
There he sits and smokes and puffs on ....  
Leaves of purest Turkish tobacco  
From the bald head of Cassander!

### *17 Parody*

Knitting needles gleaming and glistening,  
Set in her greying hair,  
Sits the Duenna mumbling  
There in her skirts of red.  
She waits beneath the trellis,  
She loves Pierrot with aching heart.  
Knitting needles gleaming and glistening  
Set in her greying hair.  
From nowhere – hush! – a whisper!  
A windbreath cackling softly.  
The moon, the wicked mocker,  
Is mimicking with moonbeams,  
Knitting needles' click and clack.

### *18 The Moonfleck*

With a snowy fleck of shining moonlight  
On the shoulder of his smart black dress coat,  
So strolls out Pierrot this summer evening;  
Out in search of pleasure and adventure.  
Something bothers him about his outfit:  
He looks round to see  
And finds he's quite right.  
There's a snowy fleck of shining moonlight  
On the shoulder of his smart black dress coat.  
Hold on! he thinks. That must be some plaster!  
Wipes and wipes, but he can not remove it  
Then continues, tainted on his journey;  
Rubs and rubs – until the early morning,  
At a snowy fleck of shining moonlight.

### *19 Serenade*

With a giant bow, grotesquely  
Scrapes Pierrot on his viola.  
Standing like a stork on one leg,  
Grimly snaps a pizzicato.  
Now Cassander runs in  
Yelling at this midnight virtuoso.  
With a giant bow grotesquely  
Scrapes Pierrot on his viola.  
Now he throws down his viola;  
With his left hand delicately,  
Hoists baldy up by the collar;  
Dreaming plays upon his baldness  
With a giant bow, grotesquely.

*20 Journey Homeward*

A moonbeam is the rudder,  
Lily white is the boat,  
On which Pierrot sails Southward,  
With friendly following wind.  
The stream hums deep arpeggios,  
And rocks the little skiff.  
A moonbeam is the rudder,  
Lily white is the boat.  
To Bergamo, his homeland,  
Returns Pierrot once more.  
Faint dawn on the horizon,  
A green glow in the East, –  
A moonbeam is the rudder.

*21 O Ancient Scent,*

O ancient scent of days gone by,  
Intoxicate once more my senses.  
A host of entertaining pranks  
Sails through the weightless air.  
Good fortune brings me once again  
Those pleasures far too long neglected.  
O ancient scent of days gone by  
Once more intoxicate me.  
All my ill humour is dispelled  
And from my sun-encircled window  
I view afresh the love-filled world  
And dream beyond the blissful distance ...  
O ancient scent – of days gone by!

Roger Marsh  
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