

**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,<sup>1</sup>  
To heaven lifts up his entranced  
Head, and reeling quaffs and drains down  
The wine which through the eyes we drink.

**2. Colombine**

The pallid<sup>2</sup> 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 phantasmagorial<sup>3</sup> light ray  
Illumines tonight all the crystalline flasks  
On the holy, sacred, ebony wash-stand  
Of the taciturn dandy of Bergamo.<sup>4</sup>  
In sonorous bronze-enwrought chalice  
Laughs brightly the fountain's metallic sound,

---

<sup>1</sup>*chalice*: cup, goblet.

<sup>2</sup>*pallid*: faint in color, pale, wan

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

<sup>4</sup>*Bergamo*: commune northern Italy in Lombardy NE of Milan.

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

<sup>6</sup>*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 Chlorotic<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>  
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 pinions<sup>7</sup>  
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!

<sup>7</sup>*pinion*: 1. wing; 2. feather, quill

<sup>8</sup>*harlot*: prostitute

<sup>9</sup>*paramour*: an illicit lover.

<sup>10</sup>*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 harlot<sup>8</sup> with scraggy gizzard  
Will be his ultimate paramour.<sup>9</sup>  
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 scimitar<sup>10</sup>  
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 abjures<sup>11</sup> 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 pate<sup>12</sup> 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,<sup>13</sup> 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.

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

<sup>12</sup>*pate*: the crown of the head.

<sup>13</sup>*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,  
Nenuphar<sup>14</sup> 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 casement<sup>15</sup>  
I view again the lovely world  
And dream beyond the fair horizon.  
O ancient scent from far-off days!

---

<sup>14</sup>*nenuphar*: white or yellow water-lily.

<sup>15</sup>*casement*: a window sash that opens on hinges at the side.