

**Rimbaud, letter to Paul Demeny, Charleville, 15 May 1871**

I have decided to give you an hour of new literature. I begin at once with a song of today:

PARISIAN WAR SONG

Spring is in evidence, for  
From the heart of green Estates,  
The flight of Theirs and Picard  
Hold wide open its splendors!

O May! What delirious bare asses!  
Sèvres, Meudon, Bagneux, Asnières,  
Listen to the welcome arrivals  
Sowing spring-like things!

They have a shako, a sabre, and a tom-tom,  
Not the old candle box;  
And boats that have nev ... nev ...  
Cut through the lake of reddened waters!

More than ever we swagger  
When yellow heads come  
Collapsing over our ant-hills  
In special dawns:

Theirs and Picard are Cupids,  
Thieves of heliotropes;  
They paint Corots with gasoline:  
Here their tropes are buzzing about ...

They are friends of the great what's-his-name! ...  
And Favre, lying in the gladiolas,  
Makes an aqueduct of his tears,  
And his peppery sniff!

The Big City has a hot pavement  
In spite of your showers of gasoline,  
And decidedly we have to  
Shake you up in your roles ...

And the Rustics who loll about  
In long squatting  
Will hear boughs breaking  
Among red rustlings.  
A. Rimbaud

—Here is some prose on the future of poetry:—  
All ancient poetry ended in Greek poetry, harmonious life. — From Greece to the romantic movement—Middle Ages—there are writers and versifiers. From Ennius to Theroldus, from Theroldus to Casimir Delavigne, it is all rhymed prose, a game, degradation and glory of countless idiotic generations: Racine is pure, strong and great. — If his rhymes had been blown out and his hemistichs mixed up, the Divine Fool would today be as unknown as any old author of Origins. — After Racine, the game get moldy. It lasted two thousand years!

Neither joke nor paradox. Reason inspires me with more enthusiasm on the subject than a Young France would have with rage. Moreover, newcomers are free to condemn the ancestors. We are at home and we have the time.

Romanticism has never been carefully judged. Who would have judged it? The critics! The Romantics? who prove so obviously that a song is so seldom a work, that is to say, a thought sung and understood by the singer.

For I is someone else. If brass wakes up a trumpet, it is not its fault. This is obvious to me: I am present at this birth of my thought: I watch it and listen to it: I draw a stroke of the bow: the symphony makes its stir in the depths, or comes on to the stage in a leap.

If old imbeciles had not discovered only the false meaning of the Ego, we would not have to sweep away those millions of skeletons which, for times immemorial, have accumulated the results of their one-eyed intellects by claiming to be the authors!

In Greece, as I have said, verses and lyres give rhythm to Action. After that, music and rhymes are games and pastimes. The study of this past delights the curious: several rejoice in reviving those antiquities—it is for them. Universal intelligence has always thrown out its ideas naturally; men picked up a part of these fruits of the mind: people acted through them and wrote books about them. Things continued thus: man not working on himself, not yet being awake, or not yet in the fullness of the great dream. Civil servants, writers: author, creator, poet, that man never existed!

The first study of the man who wants to be a poet is the knowledge of himself, complete. He looks for his soul, inspects it, tests it, learns it. As soon as he knows it, he must cultivate it! It seems simple: in every mind a natural development takes place; so many egoists call themselves authors, there are many others who attribute their intellectual progress to themselves! — But the soul must be made monstrous: in the fashion of the comprachicos [kidnappers of children who mutilate them in order to exhibit them as monsters], if you will! Imagine a man implanting and cultivating warts on his face.

I say one must be a seer, make oneself a seer.

The Poet makes himself a seer by a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses. All forms of love, suffering, and madness. He searches himself. He exhausts all poisons in himself and keeps only their quintessences. Unspeakable torture where he needs all his faith, all his super-human strength, where he becomes among all men the great patient, the great criminal, the one accursed—and the supreme Scholar!—Because he reaches the unknown! Since he cultivated his soul, rich already, more than any man! He reaches the unknown, and when, bewildered, he ends by losing the intelligence of his visions, he has seen them. Let him die as he leaps through unheard of and unnamable things: other horrible workers will come; they will begin from the horizons where the other collapsed!

– To be continued in six minutes –

Here I interpolate a second psalm to accompany the text: please lend a friendly ear—and everyone will be delighted. — The bow is in my hand and I begin:

#### MY LITTLE MISTRESSES

A lacrymal tincture washes  
The cabbage-green skies:  
Under the drooling tree with tender shoots ...  
You raincoats

White with special moons  
With round eyes  
Knock together you kneecaps,  
My ugly ones!

We loved one another at that time,  
Blue ugly one!  
We ate soft boiled egges  
And chickweed!

One evening you consecrated me poet,  
Blond ugly one:  
Come down here, that I can whip you  
on my lap;

I vomited your brilliantine,  
Black ugly one;  
You would cut off my mandolin  
On the edge of my brow.

Bah! my dried saliva,  
Red-headed ugly one,  
Still infects the trenches  
Of your round breast!

O my little lovers,  
How I hate you!  
Plaster with painful blisters  
Your ugly tits!

Trample on my old pots  
Of sentiment;  
—Up now! be ballerinas for me  
For one moment! ...

You shoulder blades are out of joint,  
O my loves!  
A star on your limping backs,  
Turn with your turns.

And yet it is for these mutton shoulders  
That I have made rhymes!  
I would like to break your hips  
For having loved!

Inspid pile of stars that have failed,  
Fill the corners!  
—You will collapse in God, saddled  
With ignoble cares!

Under special moons,  
With round eyes,  
Knock together your kneecaps,  
My ugly ones!

A.R.

That's that. And note carefully that if I were not afraid of making you spend more than sixty centimes on postage—I poor terrified one who for seven months have not had a single copper! — I would also give you my Lovers of Paris, one hundred hexameters, sir, and my Death of Paris, two hundred hexameters!

— I continue:

Therefore the poet is truly the thief of fire.

He is responsible for humanity, even for the animals; he will have to have his own inventions smelt, felt, and heard; if what he brings back from down there has form; if it is formless, he gives formlessness. A language must be found. Moreover, every word being an idea, the time of a universal

language will come! One has to be an academician—deader than a fossil—to complete a dictionary in any language whatsoever. Weak people would begin to think about the first letter of the alphabet, and they would soon rush into madness!

This language will be of the soul for the soul, containing everything, smells, sounds, colors, thought holding on to thought and pulling. The poet would define the amount of the unknown awakening in his time the universal soul: he would give more—than the formulation of his thought, than the annotation of his march toward Progress! Enormity becoming normal, absorbed by all, he would really be a multiplier of progress!

This future will be materialistic, as you see. — Always filled with Number and Harmony, these poems will be made to endure. — Fundamentally, it would be Greek poetry again in a new way.

Eternal art would have its functions, since poets are citizens. Poetry will not lend its rhythm to action, it will be in advance.

These poets will exist. When the endless servitude of woman is broken, when she lives for and by herself, man—heretofore abominable—having given her her release, she too will be a poet! Woman will find some of the unknown! Will her world of ideas differ from ours? — She will find strange, unfathomable, repulsive, delicious things; we will take them, we will understand them.

Meanwhile, let us ask the poet for the new—ideas and forms. All the clever ones will soon believe they have satisfied the demand—it is not so!

The first romantics were seers without wholly realizing it: the cultivation of their souls which began accidentally: abandoned locomotives, their fires still on, which the rails carry for some time. — Lamartine is at times a seer, but strangled by the old form. — Hugo, too ham, has vision in his last volumes: *Les Misérables* is a real poem. I have *Les Châtiments* with me; *Stella* gives approximately the extent of Hugo's vision. Too many Belmontets and Lamennais, Jehovahs and columns, old broken enormities.

Musset is fourteen times loathsome to us, suffering generations obsessed by visions—insulted by his angelic sloth! O! the insipid tales and proverbs! O the Nuits! O Rolla, O Namouna, O La Coupe! it is all French, namely detestable to the highest degree; French, not Parisian! One more work of that odious genius who inspired who inspired M. Taine's commentary! Springlike, Musset's wit! Charming, his love! There you have enamel painting and solid poetry! French poetry will be enjoyed for a long time, but in France. Every grocer's boy is able to reel off a Rollaesque speech, every seminarian carries the five hundred rhymes written in his notebook. At fifteen, these bursts of passion make boys horny; at sixteen, they are satisfied to recite them with feeling; at eighteen, even at seventeen, every schoolboy who has the ability makes a Rolla, writes a Rolla! Some still die from this perhaps. Musset could do nothing: there were visions behind the gauze of the curtains: he closed his eyes. French, sloppy, dragged from tavern to schoolroom desk, the fine cadaver is dead, and, henceforth let's not even bother to wake him up with out abominations.

The second Romantics are very much seers: Théophile, Gautier, Leconte de Lisle. Théodore de Banville. But since inspecting the invisible and hearing the unheard of is different from recovering the spirit of the dead things, Baudelaire is the first seer, king of poets, a real god! And yet he lived in too artistic a world; and the form so highly praised in him is trivial. Inventions of the unknown call for new forms.

Broken-in to old forms, among the innocent, A. Renaud—has written his Rolla; L. Grandet has written his Rolla; the Gauls and the Mussets, G. Lafenestre, Coran, Cl. Popelin, Soulayr, L. Salles; the pupils Marc, Aicard, Theuriet; the dead and the imbeciles, Autran, Barbier, L. Pichat, Lemoyne, the Deschamps, the Des Essarts; the journalists, L. Cladel, Robert Luzarches, X. de Ricard; the fantasists, C. Mendès; les bohémians; the women; the talents; Léon Dierx and Sully-Prudhomme, Coppée; the new school, called Parnassian, has two seers: Albert Mérat and Paul Verlaine, a real poet. There you are.

So, I work to make myself into a seer. — And let's close with a pious hymn.

SQUATTINGS

Very late, when he feels his stomach sicken,  
Brother Milotus, an eye on the skylight  
When the sun, bright as a scoured cooking-pan,  
Darts a migraine at him and blinds his vision,  
Moves his curate belly under the sheets.

He stirs about under his grey blanket  
And gets out, his knees against his trembling belly,  
Terrified like an old man who has eaten his snuff,  
Because he has to lift up the folds of his nightshirt  
Around his waist, as he takes the handle of a white chamberpot!

Now, he has squatted, cold, in his toes  
Turned up, shivering in the bright sunlight which daubs  
A cake yellow on the paper windowpanes;  
And the old man's nose where the crimson catches fire  
Sniffs in the rays like a flesh polypary.

.....

The old man simmers on the fire, his arms twisted, his blubber lip  
On his belly: he feels his thighs slipping into the fire,  
And his pants getting scorched, and his pipe going out;  
Something like a bird stirs a bit  
In his serene bely like a pile of tripe!

Round about sleeps a mass of cowering furniture  
In rags of grease and over dirty bellies;  
Stools, strange toads, are hunched  
In dark corners: cupboards have mouths of cantors:  
Opened by a sleep full of horrible appetites.

The sickening heat fills the narrow room;  
The old man's brain is stuffed with rags:  
He listens to the hairs growing in his moist skin,  
And, at times, in very seriously clownish hiccougs  
Escapes, shaking his rickety stool...

.....

And in the evening, in the rays of moonlight which make  
Droolings of light on the contours of his buttocks,  
A shadow with details crouches, against a background  
Of pink snow, like a hollyhock...  
Fantastic, a nose pursues Venus in the deep sky.

You would be loathsome not to answer: quickly, because in a week, I will be in Paris, perhaps.

Goodbye,  
A. Rimbaud

From: <http://rimbaudanalysis.wordpress.com/letters/>