

**Poems by Rimbaud and Reverdy  
Translated from the French by George Held**



In this installment, we're happy to share with you some new translations of poems by Arthur Rimbaud and Pierre Reverdy sent by the poet and translator George Held. These poems celebrate life and love, happiness, the romantic bridges of Paris, and living in the moment. We hope you like them as much as we do.

And remember, in September and beyond: read and share your best-loved translated poems. We hope our picks will become your new favorites.

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

### **3 Poems by Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891)**

*Translated by George Held*

#### **Happiness**

O seasons, O chateaus,  
Whose soul is without flaw?

O seasons, O chateaus,

I composed a magic etude  
Of Happiness, which none can elude.

O may it live, each time  
The Gallic cock rhymes!

But I felt no desire;  
It took charge of my fire.

This spell! It took me soul and heart  
And fractured every effort.

Who understands what I say?  
It makes my words fly away!

O seasons, O château

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#### **Bonheur**

O saisons, ô châteaux,  
Quelle âme est sans défaut ?

O saisons, ô châteaux,

J'ai fait la magique étude  
Du Bonheur, que nul n'élude.

O vive lui, chaque fois  
Que chante son coq gaulois.

Mais je n'aurais plus d'envie,  
Il s'est chargé de ma vie.

Ce charme! Il prit âme et corps,  
Et dispersa tous efforts.

Que comprendre à ma parole?  
Il fait qu'elle fuit et vole!

O saisons, ô châteaux!

### **Humanity**

Humanity puts shoes on the big kid Progress.

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### **L'Humanité Chaussait**

L'Humanité chaussait le vaste enfant Progrès.

### **Bridges**

Skies crystal gray. A bizarre pattern of bridges, this one straight, that one curved, others falling or obliquely angled to the first, and these shapes recur in other lighted circuits of the canal, but all so long and light that the banks, covered by domes, are demeaned and diminish. A few of these bridges are still clad in masonry. Others bear masts, signal lights, frail parapets. Minor chords cross and spin around each other, ropes rise from the banks. One makes out a red jacket, maybe other costumes and musical instruments. Are these pop songs, bits of highbrow concerts, remnants of public hymns? The water is gray and blue, broad as an arm of the sea.

—A white ray, falling from high in the sky, wipes out this comedy.

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### **Les Ponts**

Des ciels gris de cristal. Un bizarre dessin de ponts, ceux-ci droits, ceux-là bombés, d'autres descendant ou obliquant en angles sur les premiers, et ces figures se renouvelant dans les autres circuits éclairés du canal, mais tous tellement longs et légers que les rives, chargées de dômes, s'abaissent et s'amoindrissent. Quelques-uns de ces ponts sont encore chargés de masures. D'autres soutiennent des mâts, des signaux, de frêles parapets. Des accords mineurs se croisent et filent, des cordes montent des berges. On distingue une veste rouge, peut-être d'autres costumes et des instruments de musique. Sont-ce des populaires, des bouts

de concerts seigneuriaux, des restants d'hymnes public? L'eau est grise et bleue, large  
comme un bras de mer.

—Un rayon blanc, tombant du haut du ciel, anéantit cette comédie.

**Pierre Reverdy (1889-1960)**

*Translated from the French by George Held, with help from Kathryn Levy*

**For the Moment**

Life is simple and gay  
The bright sun rings softly  
The sound of bells has calmed down  
This morning light crosses all

My head is a relighted lamp  
and the room where I live is bright at last

Just one ray is enough  
just one burst of laughter  
My joy rocking the house  
restrains with the notes of its song  
those who wish to die

I sing out of tune  
Ah, how amusing  
My mouth open to every breeze  
hurls foolish notes everywhere  
that come out, I don't know how,  
to fly toward other ears

Listen, I am not crazy  
I laugh at the bottom of the stairs  
in front of the wide-open door  
in the sun scattered  
along the green vine on the wall  
and my arms reach out to you

Today's the day that I love you

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## **Pour le moment**

La vie est simple et gaie  
Le soleil clair tinte avec un bruit doux  
Le son des cloches s'est calmé  
Ce matin la lumière traverse tout

Ma tête est une lampe rallumée  
Et la chambre où j'habite est enfin éclairée

Un seul rayon suffit  
Un seul éclat de rire  
Ma joie qui secoue la maison  
Retient ceux qui voudraient mourir  
Par les notes de sa chanson

Je chante faux  
Ah que c'est drôle  
Ma bouche ouverte à tous les vents  
Lance partout des notes folles  
Qui sortent je ne sais comment  
Pour voler vers d'autres oreilles

Entendez je ne suis pas fou  
Je ris au bas de l'escalier  
Devant la porte grande ouverte  
Dans le soleil éparpillé  
Au mur parmi la vigne verte  
Et mes bras sont tendus vers vous

C'est aujourd'hui que je vous aime



**Arthur Rimbaud**, born in France in 1854, ran away from home as a teenager and pursued a precocious literary life in Paris, including a sometimes violent affair with the poet Paul Verlaine. At 21, Rimbaud quit writing and traveled widely as a merchant until his death from cancer at age 37, in 1891. His books *A Season in Hell* and *Illuminations* influenced the Symbolists and remain classics.

Born in the south of France to a family of stone masons, **Pierre Reverdy** went to Paris at 19 and made friends with important Surrealists and Dadaists while staying independent of any “ism” as a writer of numerous books of prose and poetry. Andre Breton called him “the greatest poet of the time,” but between the wars Reverdy converted to Catholicism and retreated, with his wife, to a quasi-monastic life in the country. He did become, however, a devotee of “Chanelism,” resulting from a 40-year love affair with Coco Chanel, for whom he wrote her famous maxims. Though she was a collaborator of the Nazis, Reverdy fought with the Resistance. He died at his country home in 1960. Frank O’Hara famously refers in a poem to carrying with him a volume of Reverdy’s verse.

#### **About the translator:**

**George Held** has published translations of poems from French, Hungarian, and Latin, in such journals as *Circumference*, *Ezra*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *National Translation Month*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *Transference*. Among his nineteen poetry collections is *Martial Artist* (Toad Press Translation Series, 2005). In 2016 he received Pushcart Prize nominations in both poetry and fiction. His most recent book is *Phased II* (Poets Wear Prada, 2016).

