

A preview of ***Festivals of Patience: The Verse Poems of Arthur Rimbaud***

Translated by Brian Kim Stefans, with a foreword by Jennifer Moxley (Kenning Editions, 2021).

All rights reserved by the author and [Kenningeditions.com](http://kenningeditions.com)

The Seekers of Lice

When the child's forehead, cursed with furies, red blisters,
pines for a forgetful swarm of pathetic dreams,
there steps to his bed two rangy, highborn sisters
—silver nails extended from refined, slender limbs.

They fix the child in a chair before a window
showing on the blue air that bathes fecund meadows;
they drive, through hair matted with sweat and morning dew,
their charming, delicate fingers, cruel as new snow.

He hears their sibilance, their halting song, their breath
thick with honey odor, vegetable, roseate,
broken here and there by their spittle's sucked hisses,
their plays for kisses thwarted, stillborn, celibate.

He hears black eyelashes flutter in the perfumed
silence; their electric fingers craft paradise,
a half-drunk indolence, while through the humid room
crackle the royal nails crushing the little lice.

But then: the wine of Sloth rises in him; the sigh
of a harmonica bruises the azure sky.
The tympanic flows of their fingers catalyze,
surging, dying, surging in him—the need to cry.

1870-1872

Parisian War Song

It is evident Spring's here, for
the verdant Estates hold wide
agape their amazing splendors
with the flight of Thiers and Picard!

Oh May! What delirious asses!
Sèvres, Meudon, Bagneux, Asnières,
listen now to the trespasses
that strew their spring-like cheers!

They have shakos, sabers, tom-toms,
not the old candle boxes,
and skiffs that have not ev-... ev-... um?
split lakes of bloodstained waters!

More than ever, we drink and dance
when, clambering our ant-warrens,
the yellow crania collapse
in these extraordinary dawns!

Thiers and Picard are twin Erotes
and thieves of heliotropes.
They paint Corots with petrol;
here, beetling about, are their tropes.

They're friends with the Grand Whozit!
—Favre, lounging in gladiolas,
blinking, weeps an aqueduct,
—his sniffles produce a pepper!

The Big City's cobbles are hot
in spite of your rains of oil;
and, decidedly, it's time that we
shuffle you up in your roles...

And the Rustics who find solace
in long, luxurious squatting,
will hear, among red rustlings,
boughs in the forests snapping.

1871

The Poor in Church

Crowding the church corners, parked in their oaken pens
that their warm breath freshens with reek, their eyes all glued
to the gilt chancel and the choir just above them
with its twenty gaping jaws jawing pious odes—

sniffing, as if aromatic bread, wax odors,
happy, humiliated like whip-beaten curs,
these Poor of the good Lord, their patron and master,
bubble with their risible, but stubborn, prayers.

For women, it feels good to wear the benches smooth
after the six black days when God grants only pain;
they cradle in odd wrappings their one and only boon:
beasts (or are they children?) who wail like they're dying!

Dirty breasts uncovered, these slobberers of soup,
a prayer in their eyes and yet who never pray,
watch, as if a parade, the neighborhood girls group
and preen, gamine models, their hats bent out of shape.

Outside, the cold, the hunger—their men on the town,
drunk again! Oh, well. And in an hour, endless ills.
—Meanwhile, the next pew over: sniffles, whispers, groans,
a catalog of women with loose, dangling chins.

The terrified are here; there, the epileptics
one didn't help yesterday by the dry crossroad;
there, burying their noses in ancient texts,
are the blind whom a dog led into the courtyard.

And all, blubbing a stupid begging of faith,
recite their endless complaints to the Lord Jesus
who dreams above, ensconced in yellow, livid panes
far from wicked stick men and pot-bellied gangsters,

far from the smells of meat and of moldy garments,
this prostrated farce of loathsome genuflections
—the prayers flower forth into choice expressions
as the mysticities reach imperative tones...

—When, from the naves where the sun chokes, in banal folds
of silk, green smiles, Ladies from the Right Side of Town,
those with sassy servants, wheat allergies—oh Christ!—
dip long yellow fingers in holy-water fonts.

JUNE, 1871