

# **LE BON DIEU**

**SONGS BY JACQUES BREL**

**ENGLISH LYRICS BY PETER OSTROWSKI**

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# LE CHEVAL

I was really a whole lot happier then  
Happier when I was a horse  
When I pulled you in your carriage  
Through the wide streets of Bordeaux  
But you wanted me to be your lover  
You wanted me to leave my mare  
I was only a horse but you took advantage of me  
You said that we should stay together  
And every single night since then  
Between your white satin sheets  
I miss my stable so much  
My stable and my mare

I was really a whole lot happier then  
Happier when I was a horse  
When you fed me my oats  
From a trough on the ground  
But then one day you said you felt I should be more  
You wanted me to learn good manners  
To stand on my hind legs  
I was only a horse but you tamed my wild heart  
And now I am only wild about you  
But every single night since then  
When we dance the tango  
I miss my stable so much  
My stable and my galloping

I was really a whole lot happier then  
Happier when I was a horse  
When I walked with you on my back  
Through the forest of Fontainebleau  
But you wanted me to be a dancer  
You wanted me to learn to sing  
I was only a horse, yes, yes, but you abused me  
But I loved you, so I'd be anything  
And every single night since then  
When I sing "ne me quitte pas"  
I miss my stable so much  
My stable and my former silence

And then suddenly you left me  
For a zebra squat and striped  
It was on the day I refused to  
Teach you how to ride  
But you had taken away my mare  
My silence, my shoes  
My stable, my gallop  
All you left me were my teeth  
And so since then I run and run  
I run neighing across the land  
Having nothing more to do with love  
Either of women or of horses

I was really a whole lot happier then  
Happier when I was a horse  
When I pulled you in your carriage  
When I was a horse and you were a camel

# **SUR LA PLACE**

In the square, in the baking sun  
A dark eyed girl began to dance  
And it seemed to me it was the dance  
Of the dancers of antiquity  
In the old town's sweltering heat  
Drowsy men and women stare  
Through open shuttered windows at  
This girl dancing at mid-day there

Sometimes on such sacred days  
A flame burns brightly in our eyes  
In the church where I once went  
They told me that this was our God  
But the lover calls it love  
The beggar charity  
The sun calls it the day  
And the good man sympathy

In the square, in the shimmering air  
Where not even a dog appears  
Suddenly I see her there  
The girl who comes as if from nowhere  
Without guitar or tambourine  
To accompany her steps  
She simply claps her painted hands  
To give rhythm to her dance

Sometimes on such sacred days  
A flame burns brightly in our eyes  
In the church where I once went  
They told me that this was our God  
But the lover calls it love, the beggar charity  
The sun calls it the day  
And the good man sympathy

In the square, in the burning silence  
A dark eyed girl began to sing  
The song she sang filled the square  
A hymn of love and kindness  
But the day is turning hotter still  
And no one wants to hear her sing  
The men close all the windows fast  
Like doors between the dead and living

And sometimes on such sacred days  
A flame burns brightly deep inside  
Yet we never see its rays  
Cursed to live without its light  
We place our hands against our ears  
Turn our eyes towards the dark  
We fear to watch the clocks  
Of our already aged hearts

In the square a dog is howling  
The dark eyed girl I cannot see  
It seems to me it howls in dying  
Crying out our destiny

# SAINT PIERRE

A long time ago or it is said  
When good Saint Peter lived on Earth  
As a boy he became scared  
To find the star of his own birth  
As soon as he reached out it flew away  
Trailing behind it fire and dust  
And as its glowing wake began to fade  
Young Peter's dreams all turned to rust  
The star laughed aloud  
Through the streets of paradise  
It shouted and cried  
Oh how it made fun of him

## *Chorus*

Let me stroke an angel's wings  
To see whether she thinks of me  
Let me stroke an angel's wings  
To see whether she will love me

And then Saint Peter left this world  
Upon a horse into the night  
In vain he searched the Milky Way  
For his young star that burned so bright  
Until to heaven he returned  
And stood uncertain by the door  
Scared his sorrow would be revealed  
In case his haloed friends all saw

They all laughed aloud  
On the streets of paradise  
They shouted and cried  
Oh how they made fun of him

*Chorus*

But then all the soft white clouds unfurled  
And it was God he stood before  
He changed the star into a world  
And put Saint Peter on the door  
And all these angels lost their wings  
By the power of Saint Peter's love  
He left them demons now in hell  
While he remained with God above  
Now they shout, now they cry  
In the dark night most of all  
Now they shout, now they cry  
In the corner of our souls

*Chorus*

# L'AGE IDIOT

We lose our minds at twenty years  
When our stomachs cramp with hunger  
When we believe that to cleanse our hearts  
We only have to wash our hands  
We have eyes larger than bellies  
Eyes larger than our hearts  
When our hearts should care so much  
And our eyes should be full of dreams  
Across the fields of Armageddon  
Comes the thunder of the drums  
And the distant cry of bugles  
As we watch the setting sun  
And prepare to face the night  
In our freezing barracks

We lose our minds at thirty years  
When our stomachs start to spread  
When our stomachs take control  
And eat away our hearts  
When our eyelids grow so heavy  
When the eyes mark off the hours  
We realise that now, at thirty,  
The countdown begins at last  
And all the old men in their caverns  
Who treat God as a fool  
Each evening light great fires  
They rub together women's hearts

We start to feel we have been damaged  
By our years in those barracks

We lose our minds at sixty years  
When our stomachs roll with fat  
When our stomachs swell so much  
They almost crush our hearts  
When our eyes run out of tears  
And are lost in drifts of snow  
When our eyes lose all their power  
When our eyes can fight no more  
And all we feel for those we love  
Is patience as we wait for the old to return home  
Or for the young to leave  
And we return to the protection of the barracks

We finally lose our minds in death  
Like our stomachs, cold and rotting,  
Our lips now sewn together  
Our hands laid out to guard the heart  
At last our eyes are opened wide  
But unable now to see  
Alone in darkness we decay  
Lost for always to all light  
The golden age lies beyond hell  
Where no wealth can buy our freedom  
Once more we're as the unborn child  
Within the belly of the Earth  
Our golden age is when we sleep  
In our final barracks

# L'IVROGNE

## *Chorus*

My friend please fill my glass  
Just one and I will go  
One more and I'll be gone  
No, I don't feel down  
I sing and I'm happy  
But I'm sick of being me  
My friend please fill my glass  
My friend please fill my glass

Let us drink to your health  
For my own's too far gone  
Tell me all will be well  
Tell me life carries on  
But the beer spins the room  
And has deadened my brain  
I'll be drunk very soon  
I will be without pain  
Let us drink to my friends who will later be here  
Sometime around ten  
They will finally appear  
I know that these guys  
Will leave me on the floor  
Still I'll be drunk in a while  
I'll be angry no more

## *Chorus*

Let us toast those who come  
To dance here tonight  
The old and the young  
I will share their delight  
But this joy will turn sour  
They will laugh and they'll stare  
I'll be drunk in an hour  
I will no longer care  
I will drink to the girls in the ballroom tonight  
They laugh and they dance  
In the bright coloured lights  
When they throw back my flowers  
I'll be able to cope  
For I'll be drunk in an hour  
Without passion or hope

*Chorus*

## **LE PLAT PAYS**

Where the North Sea meets the rocky shore  
Grey waves crash against grey stone  
And dark weed sways with the breathing sea  
As it has for all eternity  
Where the fog's forever rolling in  
And we listen forever to the eastern wind  
This flat land I call home

Above the cities the cathedrals rise  
Their dark bell-towers piercing skies  
Which spitting gargoyles fill with clouds  
Their silent rage has summoned down  
And if for just one evening the rain would cease  
We could listen to the western breeze  
In this flat land I call home

The sky's so low above the roofs  
Pressing down on all that moves  
The sky's so grey I shut my eyes  
And listen to the north wind sigh  
I need the night to wash away  
The darkness of this morbid grey  
Of this flat land I call home

Winter melts to April rain  
And leaves behind a barren plain  
But when the world's aflame with colours bright  
When the fields turn golden in July  
When the south wind ripples through the corn  
When the days are long and blue and warm  
I think of the flat land I call home

# **VESOUL**

You wanted to see Vierzon  
We saw Vierzon  
You wanted to see Vesoul  
We saw Vesoul  
You wanted to see Honfleur  
We saw Honfleur  
You wanted to see Hamburg  
We saw Hamburg  
I wanted to see Antwerp  
We went to Hamburg again  
I wanted to see your sister  
We went to your mother's  
Like every time

You got bored with Vierzon  
We left Vierzon  
You no longer liked Vesoul  
We left Vesoul  
You hated Honfleur  
We left Honfleur  
You didn't like Hamburg  
We left Hamburg  
You wanted to see Antwerp  
We saw only its suburbs  
You fell out with your mother  
And we left your sister's  
Like every time

But I'm telling you once and for all  
That I won't go any further  
My mind is made up, that's the end of the matter  
I'm not going to Paris  
Besides, I've this fear  
Of all those croissants  
Those little berets  
And accordions

You wanted to see Paris  
We saw Paris  
You wanted to see Dutronc  
We saw Dutronc  
I wanted to see your sister  
I saw Mont Valerien  
You wanted to see Hortense  
In the Cantal  
I wanted to see Byzance  
We saw Pigalle  
At St Lazare station  
I saw all those flowers  
Quite by chance

You got bored with Paris  
We left Paris  
You hated Dutronc  
And we left halfway through  
Then I confused your sister  
With Mont Valerien

Now I've met Hortense  
I'll revisit the Cantal  
I've forgotten Byzance  
Since I saw Pigalle  
And St Lazare station  
Is a ludicrous waste  
Of flag-stones and bricks

But I'm telling you once and for all  
That I won't go any further  
My mind is made up, that's the end of the matter  
Our holiday's over  
Besides, I've this fear  
Of all those croissants  
Those little berets  
And accordions

# **CES GENS-LA**

Down there  
Down there  
Do you see?  
The oldest of them  
Shaped like a melon  
With the thick nose  
Who has forgotten his name, sir  
Through so much drink  
He is so drunk  
His brain can't work his hands  
He can't take much more  
Completely wrecked  
He thinks he's a king  
Every night he gets drunk  
On cheap lager and wine  
Then is found in dawn's light  
Asleep in a church  
Laid out across the pews  
Pale as a candle  
Mumbling to himself  
His eyes still unconscious  
Let me tell you, sir  
Those people  
They don't think, sir  
They don't think  
They pray

And then there's the other one  
With unkempt, greasy hair  
Which has never seen a comb  
As mean as a louse  
The kind who'd give his old shirt  
To the grateful poor  
Who married that Denise  
A girl from the city  
That is, another city  
And that is not all  
He does what he does  
In his little hat  
In his little coat  
In his little car  
He is nothing and no one  
But thinks he looks cool  
Pretending to be rich  
But a penniless fool  
Let me tell you, sir  
Those people  
They don't live, sir  
They don't live  
They cheat

And then there are the others  
The mother who says nothing  
Who speaks only to curse  
And from morning till night  
On his handsome face  
In its wooden frame

There's the father's moustache  
He died in a fall  
And watches his family  
Eating cold soup  
The room fills with slurps  
Just the sound of great slurps  
And the old woman sits there  
She shakes all the time  
They wait for her death  
The house and the money are hers  
And they don't even listen  
To what she tries to say with her hands  
Let me tell you, sir  
Those people  
They don't talk, sir  
They don't talk  
They count

And then  
And then  
And then there is my Frieda  
Beautiful as the sun  
And who loves me as much as I love Frieda  
And we talk of our future  
That we'll buy a house  
With so many windows that there'll hardly be walls  
And we will live there  
We will be happy  
Although we're not sure  
It's all still uncertain

Because they all disapprove  
Her family is against us

The others explain  
She is too good for me  
That all I am good for  
Is skinning cats  
I have never killed a cat  
Or maybe, long ago  
If I did, I've forgotten  
Well, maybe it stank  
Everybody's against us  
Against what we have  
Sometimes when we meet  
Pretending it wasn't planned  
With her big wet eyes  
She says that she'll leave  
She says she'll come with me  
Then for a moment  
For one moment only  
Then I believe her, sir  
For a moment  
For one moment only  
Because those people, sir  
They don't leave  
They don't leave, sir  
They don't leave

But it's getting late now, sir  
I must be getting home

# LES FENETRES

The windows look in  
As if waiting for our deaths  
As if our final breaths were awaited by the world  
The windows laugh at us  
When they see how we behave  
When they see what we believe  
When they hear the words we hurl  
The windows cry in the dawn's phlegmatic light  
For the dead who lie in the old cemetery  
But the windows curse and frown  
And wish they could pull down  
Or somehow see around the great oak tree

The windows mutter to themselves  
When the afternoons bring rain  
That beats against the pane  
Forming streams upon the glass  
The windows sing aloud  
When autumn comes aggrieved  
Blowing dead and fallen leaves  
Down the street where people pass  
The windows stay closed tight  
When the frosts of winter bite  
And the snow lies thick and white  
On the parapet and frame  
But they open wide once more  
When the girls pass by the door

Just like they used to do before  
The bitter winter came

The windows watch over  
The child we used to hold  
Who, encircled by the old,  
Takes his first few steps  
The windows smile  
When at fifteen years of age  
As if freed from a cage  
The child seeks adult depths  
But the windows scowl and seethe  
The windows threaten me  
When with audacity  
I frankly speak my mind  
The windows follow me  
All I do they see  
I've no way to break free  
From my home's all-seeing eyes

# JAURES

At only fifteen years of age  
Our lives are finished before they start  
All twelve months are like December  
What life did our grandparents have  
Between the absinthe and the factory gates  
They were worn out and old so early  
Fifteen hours each day drained their lives away  
Their faces left pale and grey as ash  
Yes your lordship, thank you, bless you mistress  
Why did they kill Jaures?  
Why did they kill Jaures?

One cannot say that they were slaves  
They had the choice to go or stay  
The choice to live that way or die  
None of them could change the world  
And yet the hope of better times  
Remained a vision in the weary eyes  
Of those few who refused  
To lead obsequious, obedient lives  
Yes your lordship, thank you, bless you mistress  
Why did they kill Jaures?  
Why did they kill Jaures?

If by misfortune they survived  
That war that was to end all wars  
They remained at war for life  
Lunatic generals used them  
Like they used the bullets and grenades  
In the killing fields of Europe  
At twenty years they'd hardly yet been born  
As they died in abject fear  
And still we bow and scrape just as before  
Still we beg their God to take yet more

Demand our rights and common wealth  
Our youth and freedom, Earth itself  
Demand the right to dream  
Why did they kill Jaures?

## **QU'AVONS NOUS FAIT BONNES GENS**

What have we done, good people, tell me  
With all the kindness in the world  
Perhaps it's been lost in the darkest wood  
Well, that would hardly surprise me  
If we've buried it ten feet underground  
I wouldn't be shocked at all  
And it's a shame, but it won't be found  
In the dirty city's strife  
Nor heard above the incessant sound  
Of cars and crowds and life

What have we done, good people, tell me  
With all the love that's in the world  
If it's all been traded for God knows what  
Well, that would hardly surprise me  
If we've sold it all to finance our wars  
Well, what could you expect  
And it's a shame, but it isn't found  
When we fall in love at last  
We tell a thousand and one stories  
Trying to rewrite our past

But we will find, good people, believe me  
That all this joy and love  
Has been lost deep within ourselves  
Well, would that really surprise us?  
If we found it under all this ash and dust  
It would not astonish us at all  
And then we'll finally see  
We all went mad long ago  
And lost our songs and stories  
And with them all our hope  
And we've been searching so long, good people  
To find these things again  
Looking and waiting  
For paradise regained

# IL NEIGE SUR LIEGE

It snows, it snows on Liege  
On its streets and its roofs in this pale, faded light  
It snows, it snows on Liege  
Only the snaking darkness of the river  
Cuts the white  
The town clock strikes twice  
And the children who play  
Watch a flock of birds rise  
Over the black and the grey  
It snows, it snows on Liege  
Through which the silent river flows

It snows, it snows on Liege  
There is so much snow between the sky and Liege  
That one can't tell anymore if it snows on Liege  
Or if it's really Liege which snows towards the sky  
Large fragile flakes  
Fall on my hair and hands  
And as I look up  
I see the sky falling down  
It snows, it snows on Liege  
Through which the silent river flows  
Tonight, tonight it snows on my dreams and Liege  
Through which the silent river flows

# LES SINGES

Before they arrived to riot and curse here  
The flowers, the birds and the people were free  
But now they've invaded, the flower's uprooted  
The bird's flown the cage  
And now we have been put there  
They built the prisons  
And they named the condemned  
They made the laws and the locks and the keys  
And they've tried to divide us  
By destroying our language  
All this, they would claim, makes them civilised men  
The monkeys, the monkeys,  
The monkeys have taken over our land  
The monkeys, the monkeys, the monkeys have  
Snatched my world from my hands

Before they arrived we never had problems  
We shared with our neighbours the fruits of the Earth  
But now we are ruled by the soldier and banker  
And we're fighting each other from the moment of birth  
They hunted us down, now they're hunting the others  
The wise and the peaceful, those who will not fight back  
And because we do nothing  
As they murder our brothers  
This, they believe, makes them civilised men

The monkeys, the monkeys,  
The monkeys have taken over our land  
The monkeys, the monkeys, the monkeys have  
Snatched my world from my hands

In times long ago the man was a prince  
The woman a princess in a kingdom of love  
But since they arrived the prince is a beggar  
The kingdom has died and the woman's been sold  
For they have brought with them the love which is sinful  
That's sold in a market, a love which is business  
Now women work brothels kept by their mothers  
And this, they tell us, makes them civilised men

The monkeys, the monkeys,  
The monkeys have taken over our land  
The monkeys, the monkeys, the monkeys have  
Snatched my world from my hands

Before them there was always peace in our land  
We had all we needed and we had all we wanted  
But now they have beaten us into submission  
And for reasons of state they have driven out reason  
They brought with them sharpened steel and explosives  
And the gas chamber and electric chair  
And the napalm bombs and nuclear missiles  
This evil, they believe, makes them civilised men

The monkeys, the monkeys,  
The monkeys have taken over our land  
The monkeys, the monkeys, the monkeys have  
Snatched my world from my hands

# UNE ÎLE

An island  
An island in our dreams  
A place where we are not afraid  
As still and peaceful as your mirror  
An island  
Bright as Easter morning  
Languid on the ocean  
Rising from the waves  
Oh come  
Come with me my love  
Far away from all these fools  
Who tell us to be wise  
But who wish to relive their own lives  
The time has come for us to live  
The time has come for us to love

An island  
An island paradise  
On the altar of the sea  
Satin under velvet skies  
An island  
Where white burning sands  
Are deserts hoping for the clouds  
Bringing rain upon the land

Oh come  
Come with me my love  
Far away from all these fools  
Who would keep us from the warm  
Take your hand in mine my love  
We'll come in from the storm  
The time has come for us to live  
The time has come for us to love

An island  
Born in Creation's fire  
And then lost until this day  
Along with all our dreams and lost desires  
An island  
This land on which we gaze  
A land we have not looked upon  
Since our childhood days

Oh come  
Come with me my love  
Let us walk through heaven's door  
This is our only chance  
I want you and nothing more  
The time has come for us to live  
The time has come for us to love.  
An island.

# LES MOUTONS

I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I don't like your sheep  
They're nothing more than socks or hats  
Just bags of wool with feet  
They stand around in fields  
And bleat and fart all day  
And if not for the dogs and sticks  
They'd be forever in the way  
I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I don't like the sheep

I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I don't like the lambs  
I know it only goes to show  
Just what a git I am  
But I hate the way they bounce behind  
The other sheep like fools  
And to be quite frank with you  
I much prefer the wolves  
I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I don't like the lambs

I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I don't like the ewes  
Whatever you may say to them  
They will agree with you

You can herd them to their pens  
Or the office or the priest  
And if you open the doors of the slaughterhouse  
They jump in with four feet  
I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I don't like the ewes

I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I hate the shepherds too  
I'm sorry shepherdess  
I hate the shepherds too  
They shelter from the rain  
As they watch over the sheep  
But I know they're really watching you  
In case one day you bleat  
I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I hate the shepherds too

I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I don't like your sheep  
They're nothing more than socks or hats  
Just bags of wool with feet  
They stand around in fields  
And bleat and fart all day  
And if not for the dogs and sticks  
They'd be forever in the way  
I'm sorry shepherdess  
But I don't like the sheep

# **PRIERE PAIENNE**

Mary, is it really true  
That giving up our prayers to you,  
When we whisper “I love you”, falling to our knees,  
Mary, is it really true  
That when we bow our heads to you,  
Cry with boundless happiness, laughing out aloud,  
Then our prayers are heard by you,  
And our dreams are granted too?  
Mary is this how it is?  
Is it really true?

Mary, is it really true  
That when we sing our hymns to you,  
When we lift our voices up in simple poetry,  
Mary, is it really true  
That when we sing our songs for you,  
Witnessing the beauty within everything we see,  
When we sing to the child we believe will come,  
Are we singing to the child lying in your arms?

Mary, is it really true?  
Mary, is it really true?

# GRAND JACQUES

It is too easy to enter the church  
When we need to be cleansed of our sins  
We sit in the dark with the priest and we search  
For forgiveness for the things we tell him  
Just stay silent, say nothing  
Though you know the truth is that God  
Is an image, an illusion  
Make out you don't know any better

It is too easy when peace is declared  
To believe there will be no more wars  
But how can we see any end to the killing  
Here by the crematorium doors  
Just stay silent, say nothing  
Let them shout if they so wish  
Let them cry out in their joy  
You play no part in their games

It is too easy when love fades away  
When it breaks, folded too many times  
To silently cry day after day  
As if love endured for all time  
Just stay silent, say nothing  
When you think you've discovered true love  
The blue eyes, the wild hair  
You know nothing about it at all

Understand these things forever  
Tell yourself whenever you can  
It is too easy  
It is much too simple  
To be true

## **JOJO**

Jojo

Shall we go for a beer later on in the evening  
We can stay out all night at that club where the bar  
Does not shut until dawn

Jojo

I want you to sing your songs of the wild sea  
Where the mad captain rages in search of his whale  
With the fog rolling in  
Six feet underground Jojo, I hear you sing  
Six feet below ground, you did not die

Jojo

This evening as always we will replay our battles  
You'll take St Nazare again  
I Olympia  
At the side of your grave

Jojo  
In silence we speak  
Of when we were both young men  
We each realise  
That there is this black door  
At the end of the world  
Six feet underground Jojo, your passion still burns  
Six feet below ground, you did not die

Jojo  
I will leave in the morning for some alien city  
Where the drunks stagger by  
Their hearts bleeding dry  
And stones for their eyes

Jojo  
I have nowhere to go, I dress only in memories  
Grieving your death, yet thankful  
That I have known you in life  
Six feet underground Jojo, we are brothers still  
Six feet below ground, I hear you sing  
Six feet underground Jojo, you did not die  
Six feet below ground, I will always love you

# L'ADVENTURE

## *Chorus*

The adventure begins in the morning  
The morning of every day  
The adventure begins the moment when  
We see the sun's first ray  
The adventure begins in the morning  
As soon as we arise  
The adventure is the treasure which  
We see when we open our eyes  
For Mike it's the iron on the anvil  
For Daniel the football and beer  
For Yvonne it's the foaming sea  
It's the day God has made  
It's the corn that one beats  
The adventure begins in the morning  
The morning of every day  
The adventure begins the moment when  
We see the sun's first ray

This isn't the world we knew yesterday  
Each new day's our chance to start once again  
To change the cards with which we play  
To feel the sun and not more rain  
It's out there beyond the fence and the stile  
It's ours if we climb the highest peak  
Seeing in the distant miles  
The great adventure which we seek

*Chorus*

All those who have the adventure with us  
The friends and neighbours by our side  
    In city streets, in shady lanes  
    On wooded hills we run and hide  
Or stand in the wind sowing the corn  
    Casting the future into the world  
All we do now is for those yet unborn –  
    The great adventure which unfurls

*Chorus*

**REGARDE BIEN PETIT**

*Chorus*

Look very carefully, look hard  
Through the fields over there  
    Among the long reeds  
Between the sky and the mill  
    A man approaches  
    A man I don't know  
Look very carefully, look hard

And who could he be  
A traveller who's lost  
A ghost from the war  
Or a salesman perhaps  
Is it a zealot who brings  
His false news and hopes  
To help us grow old  
Is this my brother who comes  
Ravaged by years  
To tell me it's time  
Or is it only the wind  
Which disturbs the dry sand  
And forms a mirage  
In the far distant haze

### *Chorus*

It's not a neighbour of ours  
For his horse is too proud  
To be from these parts  
Or have returned from the war  
It's not a zealot or priest  
For his horse is too poor  
To be of this parish  
It can't be a rich man for his horse is too light  
As are his clothes  
And no traveller's been  
Past the bridge on the stream  
Since the day father died  
No one knows who I am

## *Chorus*

No, it is not my brother  
His horse would have stopped to drink  
No, it is not my brother  
He would not have dared come here  
There is nothing here for him  
And he has nothing for us  
No, it is not my brother  
He turned away long ago  
From his family and friends  
He is not wanted here  
My brother is dead  
It seems it's only the wind  
Which disturbs the dry sand  
In the far distant haze

Look very carefully, look hard  
Through the fields over there  
Among the long reeds  
Between the sky and the mill  
A man rides away  
A man we don't know  
Look very carefully, look hard

And it is too late now  
I see a man leaving  
A man whom we'll now never know  
As we prepare for the war

# LE BON DIEU

You

If you were God you could change  
Guns into flowers and make  
Teardrops stars

You

If you were God you'd transform  
This Earth onto which we're all born  
To paradise

You

If you were God then the sky  
Would forever be blue and bright  
As spring's first day

But

You are not God, you are more  
You're that which God holds in awe  
You are a man

You are a man

You are a man

# JE NE SAIS PAS

I don't know why the falling rain  
Has left the sky above  
Or why the heavy clouds  
Have darkened like they have  
I don't know why the swirling wind  
Blows the children's laughter through  
These winter morning streets  
Beneath skies clear and blue  
I know nothing of these things  
I only know I still love you

I don't know where this road I walk  
Will end or what I'll see  
Beyond the wild flowers' scent  
And the lines of poplar trees  
I don't know why this veil of fog  
Has fallen on the land  
Like I've entered a cathedral  
Where I kneel and clasp my hands  
I know nothing of these things  
I only know I still love you

I don't know why this silent street  
In the moon's dim, silver light  
Wide and straight, recedes  
Into the country night

I don't know what has brought me here  
Quite despite my will  
To meet you at this station  
In this evening's chill  
I know nothing of these things  
I only know I still love you

I don't know what time this train leaves  
For Amsterdam tonight  
I don't know why we are going  
I don't know if this is right  
I don't know what I am doing  
With my heart or with my hands  
My soul's torn from my body  
As I try to understand  
I know nothing of these things  
But I know I still love you  
I know I still love you

# COMMENT TUER L'AMANT DE SA FEMME

How do you kill your wife's lover  
When you are someone like me  
Brought up to behave respectably  
How do you kill your wife's lover  
When you are someone like me  
Brought up in a religious family

It would take me too much time  
And I have no time to spare  
For I work from morning until night  
Night, it cannot be at night  
Day, it cannot be by day  
And Sundays I always like to keep free  
And even if I weren't such a mouse  
It would still bring shame on me  
To sully my good reputation  
So I have to sleep out in the garage  
While they are sleeping in my bed  
And I'm the one who does all of the housework  
And I have to eat out in the shed  
How do you kill your wife's lover  
When you are someone like me  
Brought up to behave respectably

Arsenic – no, that would take too long  
A revolver, but that's too quick  
Friendship? I still have my pride  
Contempt – that's a sin

How do you kill your wife's lover  
When, like I have, you've received  
A gold medal for being a coward  
How do you kill your wife's lover  
When you do not even dare  
To say it to him with flowers

And because I am afraid  
To complain about all this  
He tells me that love fills a man with fear  
And even though he's unemployed  
He tells me while he's punching me  
It's well known that love makes one indigent  
He always seems to be amused  
To see a man of my age lose  
His wife and eleven kids  
As I cook them breakfast in the kitchen  
As I beat the carpets and the dogs  
As each evening I sing love songs for them  
It really begins to piss me off

But why kill my wife's lover  
When it is because of me  
He is plagued with syphilitic sores  
But why kill my wife's lover  
When it is because of me  
He'll be on penicillin evermore

# ISABELLE

When Isabelle sleeps the world sleeps too  
When Isabelle sleeps in her cradle of joy  
    She is more lovely than  
        All the oases in the Sahara  
        All the goldfish in China  
        And the gardens of Alhambra  
When Isabelle sleeps the world sleeps too  
When Isabelle sleeps in her cradle of joy  
    She dreams her favourite things  
        In her slumber sweet and deep  
    The wonders which the dawn will bring  
        A beautiful angel fast asleep

When Isabelle laughs the world laughs too  
When Isabelle laughs in her cradle of joy  
    Her laughter is more lovely yet  
        Than waterfalls cascading down  
        Crickets in the meadow grass  
        Church bells over the town  
When Isabelle laughs the world laughs too  
When Isabelle laughs in her cradle of joy  
    She opens up the window wide  
        The window of her little heart  
        That looks out on paradise  
    She is beautiful when she sleeps

When Isabelle sings the world sings too  
When Isabelle sings in her cradle of joy  
Her voice is far more lovely than  
The gentle song of nightingales  
The wind at sea that rushes through  
Our hair and fills the sails  
When Isabelle sings the world sings too  
When Isabelle sings in her cradle of joy  
And when her tired eyes  
Are closed and she in silence lies  
I kiss her little head goodnight  
Isabelle is beautiful

## **VIEILLIR**

To die in one's gore  
Riddled with German lead  
Blown apart in the war  
By the blue, white and red  
To die buried alive  
In a collapsed flooded trench  
Or to starve to our bones  
In a dank dungeon's stench  
To die of the cold  
In darkness and fear  
Abandoned by all  
Alone in the field

*Chorus*

Or in our hundredth year  
To pass away at night  
A wretched aged man  
Without hearing or sight  
Before they nail my coffin down  
I'll spit out my last tooth  
Singing "Amsterdam"  
It is nothing to die  
Death is a beautiful act  
But to grow old...oh, to grow old

We can die laughing  
They say it is true  
They say we can die  
From ecstasy too  
To die suddenly  
As our hearts burst in pain  
Or consumed by the tumour  
Devouring the brain  
To die in a car  
Trapped in the flames  
Then cut from the ashes  
No one knowing our name

*Chorus*

To die without honour  
Without wealth or power  
Mourned by our friends  
And deluged with flowers  
To die in our youth  
Our lifetimes cut short  
So much left undone  
So much still to prove  
To die with our futures  
Bright before our eyes  
When it seems we are standing  
At the start of our lives

*Chorus*

## **LES PIEDS DANS LA RUISSEAU**

*Chorus*

The stream flows through the fields  
I sit and watch its life before me flow  
The stream winds round the trees  
I sit in silence, happy just to breathe

Fish dart about content in their lives  
Sending up bubbles onto their sky  
I try to answer, engraving in water  
Words, useless words, but I've no other way

## *Chorus*

The current is strong, erasing the letters  
Of the name of a girl whom I never have met  
Someone I'd like so much to be beside me  
Someone with whom I could watch this bright world

## *Chorus*

Evening descends on the brook and the trees  
Dragonflies hover over the reeds  
Leaning my face out over the still water  
I see my reflection. I see a fool

# **VOICI**

## Here

A sky heavy with grey clouds hangs over Italy  
Where you pledge your lifetime's love to me

On these darkened rocky hills  
Where we can walk for hours  
Among the swathes of incandescent flowers

The bells ring at the carnival  
Where all these people mill  
Nothing stops their cries and nothing will

In your long white dress  
With wild flowers in your hair  
Even angels turn their heads and stare

The chains we make with words  
That echo to infinity  
Bind us to our own mortality

St John will grant us anything  
Promise all we ask  
But nothing can hold back the years that pass

The twisted smiles on our fathers' faces  
As they storm outside  
Seeking solace in the silent night

With each friendship that we make  
Our agony's assuaged  
Crushed by fists that tighten in blind rage

And in these crumbling suburbs  
Where old priests are bent in prayer  
They become the lowest workmen there

Hands old and courageous toil tirelessly for days  
To create proof of God's living grace

Flowers crowd the distance  
Between us and the enemy  
Trying to prevent the butchery

# PARDONS

Forgive the things I did or said to make you cry  
Forgive this distant look I give you when you smile  
I'm sorry if through me you yourself have changed  
    Forgive this crumbling house  
    Where our loving home should be  
    And for all the words I speak  
    Which are never words of love  
Yet they are all I have to breach our silent hours  
    And all the empty promises  
    Which break before sunrise  
    Forgive me all I've done  
    And all I never did

I'm sorry I can't see things as I once did  
I'm sorry that I want to forget our twenty years  
    Forgive me for forgetting  
    All the things we learned  
    Forgive me for renouncing  
    Our vows and secret dreams

And forgive all those who seek  
    Nothing in this world  
Those who always sleep yet never dare to dream  
    Forgive these people and  
    Especially forgive me  
For I have never known the forgiveness  
    Which we in turn forgive

# C'EST COMME CA

In the countryside the girls  
Come to the village well each day  
To fill the pails they bring  
As they wait in line they chat  
Everyday it's the same  
As they wait in line they chat  
Everyday just the same  
Of water and of flame

## *Chorus*

That's the way the world must turn  
And there's nothing we can do  
That's the way the world must turn  
It isn't up to me and you

By the girls there are the boys  
The tall, the thin, the fat as well  
Who laugh and yell  
The dark haired, ginger and the fair  
Always talking about their dads  
The dark haired, ginger and the fair  
Always talking about their dads  
And Louisa's eyes

Near the boys, their fathers stand  
Meeting up, all in good cheer to have a beer  
They shout that they are going out  
And head off into the night  
They shout that they are going out  
And head off into the night  
For the city lights

*Chorus*

In the cafes friends all meet  
Glasses placed on tables stained  
Alongside those they've drained  
And then all these dearest friends  
Stagger off to God knows where  
And then all these dearest friends  
Stagger off to God knows where  
Their pockets bare

In the city where we live  
Among the concrete and the brick  
And where I feel sick  
The city sells its pleasures cheap  
And stinks of choking petrol fumes  
The city sells its pleasures cheap  
And stinks of choking petrol fumes  
Each home a tomb

*Chorus*

Near the city in the fields  
The blonde and dark haired girls all sing  
Dancing in a ring  
The mountains rise up all around  
As they have done for all time  
The mountains rise up all around  
As they have done for all time  
The mountains heroes climb

*Chorus*

It's nothing to do with me and you  
There is nothing we can do

## **FERNAND**

Can it be that Fernand's dead  
Is it true Fernand has gone  
That I am left behind alone  
And that he is alone before me  
Maybe he drinks one final beer  
While I am lost in this dense fog  
While he is taken by that hearse  
And I remain in my lifeless desert

A white horse heads the slow cortege  
I walk behind them all and weep  
And as we pass the river's edge  
A cold wind beats down  
On the flowers and the wreaths  
And if I were almighty God  
I believe I would feel shame inside  
This rain that falls will never stop  
Now Fernand has died

As we cross Paris today  
In the early morning light  
As I walk the city we once loved  
This could as easily be Berlin  
Although we're unconscious in sleep  
Night hasn't death's finality  
To have to leave the world like this  
While Paris still sleeps  
I wish I'd something I could do  
To make these people all awake  
And create a family for you  
To be at your funeral today  
And if I were almighty God  
I really believe I'd not be proud  
I know one does what one can  
Yet still they lower you into this ground

You know that I will return here  
As often as I'm able to  
Here in this accursed field  
Where you have been laid to rest  
In summer I will shade your grave  
And bring you orchids and a prayer  
Then sit down and in silence stare  
And think of the friend whom I couldn't save  
And it seems that fools control this world  
And soon there'll be another war  
Then I'll finally be here for evermore  
At your side, Fernand  
And then our holy, loving God  
Will laugh at all humanity  
But now I'll cry at Fernand's tomb  
My God of stars and all infinity  
  
My God of love and all infinity

## **VOIR**

To see the river freeze, to wish for spring's return  
To see the parched dry earth  
And sow songs across this land  
To see that one is only twenty  
Stepping out on life's road  
To count each passing moment  
Holding each one dear

To see a barricade  
To want to defend ourselves  
To see the ambush fail  
To see the world at peace  
To see the grey suburbs  
To want to be Renoir  
To see your lifelong enemy  
Forget the hate he feels

To see that we all age  
To want to be born again  
Falling in love  
Wanting to be burned  
To see there is nothing to fear  
In this life we live  
To see that we are mortal  
And to sing again

Here where all I see  
Is all I could ever want  
For ever since I first saw you  
You are all I want

# LA HAINE

I feel only hatred for you  
I want to sail away to sea  
And I'd feel such pleasure too  
If I looked back and saw you weep  
I'll go and train to be a priest  
To ask God what life is for  
And if I saw you cry with grief  
I'd pray for you to suffer more

All you did with every day  
Was to seek ways to destroy  
You sought the trouble and the pain  
When others look for love and joy  
One night for a thousand days  
Was all you ever gave to me  
You painted our love all in grey  
Ending our eternity

I will drink myself to death  
And bawl obscene songs about you  
And if you ever heard me sing them  
I would thank the devil too  
I will become a mercenary  
Each morning face my final day  
But if news of your death reached me  
I'd dance upon your grave

And you beg me and you cry  
As the days turn to long months  
As if the flowers that I buy  
Could bridge two continents  
Love is death, praise be to hate  
Love is something to despise  
I realised this much too late  
But now I'm old and I am wise

I will drink myself to death  
And bawl obscene songs about you  
And if you ever heard me sing them  
I would thank the devil too

## **QUAND MAMAN RIVIENDRA**

When my mother returns home  
Dad will be so happy  
When mum comes home to us  
I'll be so happy too  
And it will be just like before  
She'll ride back on a horse of love  
And to meet her when she comes  
All the family will be there  
And she will sing to me those songs  
The songs I loved so much  
We need songs so very much  
When it seems we are twenty years old

When my brother returns home  
Dad will be so happy  
When Fernand comes home to us  
I'll be so happy too  
Returned from prison free  
Upon a proud white horse  
He will return and everyone  
Will meet him on that day  
And he'll tell me his stories again  
The stories I loved to hear  
We need these stories so very much  
When it seems we are twenty years old

When my sister returns home  
Dad will be so happy  
When mother's little girl returns to us  
I'll be so happy too  
From Paris she'll return  
On the horse of a shining knight  
And all the family  
Will meet her crying  
And then she'll smile at me  
With her smile which I love so much  
We need smiles so immeasurably  
When it seems we are twenty years old

When my dad returns he will be so happy  
We'll hear his happy songs  
And I'll be happy too  
But he won't come from that other place  
Nor on that death black horse  
It will be like it was so long ago  
When our family began  
And I won't feel that anxiety  
That feeling I feared so much  
For I feel only perfect peace  
And it seems I am twenty years old

If my mother returned home  
Dad would be so happy  
If mum came home to us I'd be happy too

## **L'HOMME DANS LA CITE**

The man who has been sent to us is coming  
Nearing now the city's eastern slopes  
The kingdom's people all start running  
To greet the man who brings us renewed hope  
In the same way as the trees  
My father planted long ago  
Proud and noble like this summer's eve  
On which our children's laughter floats  
Until reaching our hero's ears  
And growing into a mad celebration

The man who has been sent to us is with us  
Walking through our city's open gate  
We sing of all the things that he will give us  
We almost thought it had become too late  
He is a man who will not bow  
In front of any lord or king  
Yet sometimes he will kneel to pick a flower  
With a hand he'd never use  
To turn another man away  
His answers lie in love and not in power

The man who has been sent to us is walking  
Along our city's major thoroughfare  
He carries with him neither balm nor tonic  
But brings instead a force so clear and rare  
And any anger this man has  
Is always anger just and pure  
Beautiful and youthful as the storm  
The truth he brings us is sublime  
It is not found in books or church  
He brings us understanding of our form

The man who has been sent to us is here now  
With us in our Earthly paradise  
And all that we have is now eternal  
Creation is revealed before our eyes  
And those with murder in their hearts  
Who in their stifled anger rage  
We have driven from our city gates  
And now these men are building new barricades

# **DORS MA MIE, BONSOIR**

Sleep my love  
Outside the night is dark  
Sleep my love, goodnight  
Sleep my love, this is our last evening  
Sleep my love, goodnight

Upon the flowers starting to close their petals  
A light rain falls tonight  
And the birds which will exalt the morning  
Sleep and dream for now  
It will be tomorrow soon  
It will be another new day  
And you will have lost me  
Through wanting me too much  
All we had together was wasted  
When you tried to build an eternal happiness  
Doomed to perish in boredom  
When I wanted something else  
Something altogether simpler  
All I needed was the spring  
I hoped that you could bring  
No, none of the girls we love  
Can ever understand  
That they are, each time, our final love  
Our final chance, our last beginning  
Our last departure, our last ship leaving

Sleep my love  
Outside the night is dark  
Sleep my love, goodnight  
Sleep my love  
This is our last evening  
Sleep my love  
Goodbye

## **ON N'OUBLIE RIEN**

### *Chorus*

We forget nothing if nothing's happened  
If there's nothing to remember at all  
We don't forget nothing  
We just get used to it that's all

All these farewells and all these ships  
All these long voyages on which  
We see places within places  
And people's faces in faces  
Neither all these ports nor all these bars  
Nor these cheap rooms where we spend hours  
Just waiting for the grey morning  
With our whisky in our hands  
Neither these things nor anyone  
Nothing underneath the sun  
Can make us forget  
It's as true as the Earth is round

*Chorus*

All which we have, all which we've burned  
All we have given and all we've earned  
All that comes from hope and fear  
The grey in grey, the tears in tears  
Neither my arms nor wretched heart  
Nor true science nor high art  
Building golden temples to  
The God in which we seek our truths  
Neither these things nor anyone  
Nothing underneath the sun  
Can make us forget  
It's as true as the Earth is round

*Chorus*

**JE SUIS UN SOIR D'ETE**

In the old city hall the tables are laid  
At the lord mayor's banquet  
We're served orangeade and tepid champagne  
With the dazed glassy eyes  
Of the gloomy young girls  
Who wait on us tonight

I am a summer evening

With the windows wide open  
The families who dine  
Push back their plates  
And look out at the night  
Where the last light of day is not yet quite dead  
And brush the tablecloth crumbs  
Off the balcony's edge

I am a summer evening

The terraces fill  
People take drinks outside  
And speak of their work and the joys of their lives  
It's hard to remember the cold winter days  
In the sweet summer air  
And in alcohol's haze

I am a summer evening

By the bank of the river  
Two girls take a walk  
In soft voices they talk  
Of the soldiers they miss  
While the black waters splash  
And lap on the stone  
While the river boats drone  
Where reflected lights flash

I am a summer evening

By the fountains the old men  
Sit with their sticks  
With eyes bright reminisce  
How it was different then  
They laugh toothless laughs  
Then are silent again  
And watch the girls and young men  
Dancing under the stars

I am a summer evening

## **LES FLAMANDES**

Flemish girls dance with nothing to say  
They will not speak except on Sundays  
Flemish girls dance with nothing to say  
Being Flemish means not speaking  
They dance because they're twenty years old  
And at that age they must become engaged  
And if they're engaged they'll be able to marry  
And if they're married they can have children  
That is what their parents tell them  
So does the priest and His Eminence  
The bishop preaching at the convent  
And this is what they're dancing for

Flemish girls dance without trembling  
They only tremble if it's Sunday  
Flemish girls dance without trembling  
Being Flemish means not trembling  
They dance because they're thirty years old  
And at that age they like to show  
Although they've children of their own  
They haven't yet reached middle age  
These children make their parents proud  
And the priest and His Eminence  
The bishop preaching at the convent  
And this is what they're dancing for

Flemish girls dance without smiling  
They will not smile in a month of Sundays  
Flemish girls dance without smiling  
Being Flemish means not smiling  
They dance because they're seventy  
And at that age they like to show  
They have not faded with the years  
Impressing their grandchildren  
Who all dress in black like their parents  
And like the priest and His Eminence  
The bishop rambling away at the convent  
It's for their inheritances that they dance

Flemish girls dance without tiring  
They never rest except on Sundays  
Flemish girls dance without tiring  
Being Flemish means not tiring

They dance because they're a hundred years old  
And at that age they like to show  
They still have quick and nimble feet  
And still have a reason to dance  
They know they will soon meet their parents  
And the priest and His Eminence  
The bishop droning on at the convent  
And it's for this they have one last dance

## **L'OSTENDAISE**

In Ostend a woman cries in her chair  
Her cat in her arms  
Its love all she has  
She speaks not a word in the depths of her sorrow  
And the old men each think it will next be his turn  
Out in the kitchen  
Her neighbours are talking of China  
And of the girl who has come from Singapore  
A woman of Java  
A sister of all the girls of Ostend

### *Chorus*

There are only two kinds of time  
The time we spend waiting and time spent in hope  
There are only two kinds of people  
Those still alive and those out at sea

In Ostend the woman  
Her pain beyond easing  
Alone in her chair  
Alone with her wound  
While on the dockside the sailors are milling  
Leaving their ships for the streets of Ostend  
And there is the captain  
His stomach is shaking  
Bloated with beer, walking alone  
A man of deep mystery  
A man of the stars  
Resting one night in the port of Ostend

*Chorus*

In Ostend the woman  
In the heat of midsummer  
Became the lover of a pharmacist  
Her captain lies dead beneath his fat stomach  
Like the great whales and submarines  
And I who am no more than just the ship's boy  
Write you this letter from so far away  
Because I love you  
Love you far too much  
I am afraid of a pharmacist

There are only two kinds of time  
The time we spend waiting and time spent in hope  
There are only two kinds of people  
Those still alive and me here at sea

# LA LUMIERE JAILLIRA

The light will shine forth  
One clear, bright morning  
Dazzling my eyes  
Lighting the world

The light will shine forth  
The light of which I've dreamed  
So many times  
For so many years

The light will shine forth  
And bathed in its beauty  
I will understand  
Why I've needed it so much

The light will shine forth  
Across the whole Earth  
And our voices will rise  
In one single song

The light will shine forth  
And I will invite it  
To shine into my home  
And transform all I have

The light will shine forth  
And those it has changed  
For the first time will see  
The people they were

The light will shine forth  
And my palate of colours  
Will always burn brightly  
As the sun in July

The light will shine forth  
And my home will be filled  
With the warmth of the fire  
And the sound of our songs

The light will shine forth  
I will be silent  
Smiling in joy  
For the rest of my life

The light will shine forth  
And the eternal traveller  
My heart in vain sought  
I will find in my heart

The light will shine forth  
The horizon aflame  
The light will shine forth  
And carry your name

# ORLY

Among more than two thousand  
I see but the two of them  
As if welded in fire  
One joined to the other  
Among more than two thousand I see only two  
I know what they say  
He is saying I love you  
She is saying I love you  
They promise each other the Earth and themselves  
Neither of them looks to me dishonest

Among more than two thousand  
I see but the two of them  
Suddenly he cries  
Uncontrollable tears falling in streams  
One old woman looks at him  
People's heads turn  
They watch them then walk away  
They are alone  
Alone in their sorrow  
Abandoned to dogs  
No part of humanity

Life owes you nothing  
We curse God  
This Sunday in Orly  
With or without Becaud

And now they both cry  
I don't know what they think  
I don't know what they feel  
Their figures are carved from a single stone block  
They hear nothing around them  
Only each other's sobs  
And then  
And then just discernibly  
Their two bodies move  
Infinitely slowly their two bodies separate  
And in separating their two bodies tear  
And I swear to you they scream  
And fall together again  
Once more becoming just one  
Once more becoming fire  
But now tearing in two again  
Linked only by their eyes  
And as they withdraw  
As the tide pulls the sea back  
Their goodbyes are lost  
Blown on the wind  
Drowned in the waves  
The man stands and leaves  
With not one glance behind him  
Then disappears into the two thousand

Life owes you nothing  
We curse God  
This Sunday in Orly  
With or without Becaud

The crowd closes around him  
He is lost there forever  
And she, she remains  
Mortally wounded  
Not crying, not speaking  
Death stands before her  
Its hand on her shoulder  
She has fallen  
She is falling  
Her arms unable to move  
She has been here one thousand years  
The door is closing again  
Pitch darkness returns  
She knows this so well  
It's how it all was before  
There is no love  
There is only hatred  
We have no love to lose  
And only spite to give others  
What is the purpose?  
What use is there in living?  
We're alone in Creation  
There is no sky above  
There is no God

And I stay where I am  
I dare not approach her  
Passers by stand and stare  
At this woman with her head in her hands  
Alone among two thousand