



**Paul Verlaine**  
**Selected Poems**

**INCLUDES PARALLEL FRENCH TEXT**

New translations by Martin Sorrell

**OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS**

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## SELECTED POEMS

PAUL VERLAINE was born in Metz, eastern France, in 1844, the only son of an army captain; his mother came from a well-to-do family. In 1851 they moved to Paris, where Verlaine received a formal education. His father died in 1865. At first Verlaine was destined for a career as a civil servant, but his literary talents and ambitions brought him into the artistic milieu of Paris. His first poems were published in his early twenties. In 1870 he married the very young Mathilde Mauté. But Verlaine's erratic and drunken behaviour was unacceptable to her respectable family. Matters became worse when, in 1871, Verlaine invited to his in-laws' home the precocious and ill-behaved 16-year-old Rimbaud. Soon the two poets left to roam France, Belgium, and England together. Their scandalous liaison spelled the ruin of Verlaine's marriage. In 1873 he shot and wounded Rimbaud, for which he served eighteen months in prison. By then he already had four collections of poetry to his name: *Poèmes saturniens* (1866), *Fêtes galantes* (1869), *La Bonne Chanson* (1870), and *Romances sans paroles* (1874). For a while, intermittently buttressed by religious faith, he held his life together with brief spells of farming and teaching. The collection *Sagesse* appeared in 1880. But after the death of his over-indulgent mother in 1886, Verlaine's life drifted into disease and destitution. Nevertheless, he continued to write and publish substantial amounts of poetry. *Jadis et Naguère* (1884), *Amour* (1888), *Parallèlement* (1889), *Dédicaces* (1890), *Bonheur* (1891), *Chansons pour Elle* (1891), *Liturgies intimes* (1892), *Odes en son honneur* (1893), *Dans les limbes* (1894), *Épigrammes* (1894). *Chair* and *Invectives* were published posthumously. Verlaine also wrote a number of prose works, including criticism and an autobiography. He was elected Prince of Poets in 1894. Destitute, he died in Paris in 1896.

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PAUL VERLAINE

*Selected Poems*



*Translated with an Introduction and Notes by*  
MARTIN SORRELL

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For Robert Niklaus



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## INTRODUCTION

### *Verlaine's Life and Career*

As a man and as a poet, Verlaine spent his life facing in two directions at once, unable to choose one at the expense of the other. The emotional man who yearned for peaceful family life was also the drunken assailant of his mother and his wife; the humble believer in God was also a foul-mouthed blasphemer; the poet with the most delicate touch imaginable was also the author of the most aggressively pornographic verse. In fact, in an implied recognition of the watermark duality imprinted in him, Verlaine entitled one of his later collections *Parallèlement*, and the image of parallel lines is as appropriate as any to sum up both the poetry and the person.

Whether with regard to his personal life or to his poetic voice, Verlaine found himself in a constant succession of self-imposed crises of irresolution that, viewed a century or so later, appear to form a seamless continuity. However, whereas his inability to be decisive had disastrous consequences for his life and the lives of others, he made of indecision (or imprecision, or vagueness, terms favoured by many of Verlaine's commentators) a significant poetic virtue, so much so that it has become the quality most readily associated with the best of his prolific and diverse work. A deliberate imprecision is at the heart of such of his poetic techniques as are innovative. There is a close connection between Verlaine's techniques and the aesthetics of music and painting; this connection will be discussed later.

In terms of literary as well as of personal history, Verlaine stood at a crossroads. Born in 1844, while Romanticism was still dominant, he was 13 years old when Baudelaire's epoch-making *Flowers of Evil* was published (1857), heralding a decisive shift away from the Romantic movement, and indeed, the birth of the modern literary age. The adolescent Verlaine, reading widely, and already writing verse (which later he categorized as of 'the obscene-macabre genre'), fell for a while under the spell of the semi-demonic Baudelaire, whose dark masterpiece influenced the handful of his late-teens poems as much as did certain of the principal figures of the

Romantic movement, notably Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore.

However, his first publication of significance seemed to suggest that, by his early twenties, when he was frequenting certain Parisian literary salons, Verlaine was allied not so much to Romanticism or to the modernizing Baudelaire as to a quite different literary movement. In 1866 there appeared a publication of some significance. *Le Parnasse contemporain*, an anthology of contemporary poems, which was followed by two further issues under the same title, contained seven poems by Verlaine, and thus constituted his first important publication. The Parnassian movement sought to counter Romanticism's cult of inspiration and subjectivity with an altogether more science-based aesthetic of dispassion and objectivity.<sup>1</sup> Yet Verlaine's contributions to *Le Parnasse contemporain* revealed a poet whose approach was altogether too personal and emotional to be truly Parnassian. And, if his first collection proper, *Poèmes saturniens*, also of 1866, showed some traces of Baudelaire, of Romanticism, and of Parnassianism, there were equally firm indications that he would not be long in finding his poetic individuality. Much of what would soon become recognized as uniquely Verlainian was evident in *Poèmes saturniens*: sensuality, a disposition to melancholy and to daydreaming, misty half-tones, and patterns of versification straining to break the stricter rules of French prosody.

If the distinctively Verlainian tones could already be seen and heard in *Poèmes saturniens*, this was nevertheless an untidy volume, a collection of disparate poems which did not seem to blend completely happily with one another. The contrast, therefore, with Verlaine's next book, *Fêtes galantes* (1869), was a marked one, for this volume was clearly held together by strong thematic ties. Figures taken from Italian *commedia dell'arte* flit in and out of pastoral scenes reminiscent of the paintings of Watteau, a century or so before. But Verlaine was not only reflecting a contemporary interest in eighteenth-century art; *Fêtes galantes* is more personal than that. There is a chilly feeling that all is not lightness and insouciance among the revellers in the graceful parklands. It is as if anxious dawn

<sup>1</sup> The Parnassian ideal dominated French poetry around the middle years of the 19th century. Leconte de Lisle was recognized as its leader. The movement yielded three influential volumes of verse, *Le Parnasse contemporain* (1866, 1871, and 1876), to which Verlaine and other emerging poets contributed.

must follow drunken night, and happiness were a house of cards built on foundations of melancholy.

*Fêtes galantes* appeared at the time when Verlaine's contradictory impulses, both personal and poetic, were becoming impossible to ignore. While he was preparing the refined poems of *Fêtes galantes*, a quite different collection—of lesbian poems, in fact—was being banned by a court of law; while he was getting drawn into the so-bourgeois Mauté family, and attracted to its young, upright daughter Mathilde, he was also indulging in unbridled orgies of drink and sex, and even violence. On one occasion, he attacked (and not for the last time) his long-suffering and over-indulgent mother. But whenever he went too far in one direction, Verlaine would either repent or rebel, as the circumstances demanded, and then see-saw the other way. So it was that, in 1870, engaged to Mathilde Mauté and in well-behaved mode, he published *La Bonne Chanson*, a paean to the domestic decencies of the married state. This is the most obviously autobiographical of Verlaine's collections. It expresses the hopes he had at that time of disciplining himself through well-ordered family life. The quality of *La Bonne Chanson*, however, does not match the behavioural ideals. The direct expression of fervent regard for a loved one, and of hopes for happiness, are not of themselves powerful poetry, and the collection represents that particular tendency which Verlaine would regularly indulge throughout his writing career, of purveying raw sentiment or religious urgency as if it were finished art.

However, his next volume, *Romances sans paroles* (1874), was as full of art and artistry as *La Bonne Chanson* had been flatly direct. The consensus is that this collection is Verlaine's best. Certainly, it contains exquisitely crafted, often short poems composed of short lines, and which have the effect of the most delicate and evanescent tone poems, haunted by copper skies, suns, mists, and sadnesses. Yet these gems were for the most part written during a period when Verlaine's life was at its most ambivalent, not to say chaotic. His marriage to Mathilde, which took place in August 1870, came under great strain from the very start. The Franco-Prussian War, the Siege of Paris, followed by the bloody weeks of the Paris Commune, all drew in Verlaine, to a lesser or greater extent, and had damaging effects on his employment prospects in a volatile and highly politicized Paris. But something even more momentous was to come, and

that was Arthur Rimbaud. When Verlaine invited the extraordinarily precocious and un-house-trained Rimbaud to stay in the Mauté family flat in Paris, he set in train a series of events which would be as disastrous to his personal life as they were productive in his development as a poet. The liaison, at first ambiguous then overtly homosexual, between the two young poets soon resulted in their fleeing the various oppressions of family and of Paris. Their wanderings in Belgium and England, their separations and reunions, the growing impatience of the iron-willed Rimbaud with the vacillations of an ambivalent Verlaine, culminating in the latter's bungled attempt to shoot Rimbaud, are notorious, and have been extensively documented. So, too, have the effects on Verlaine's writing of Rimbaud's rigorous and unremitting search for absolute and objective truth, which led to a poetry incandescent with solar energy,<sup>2</sup> the likes of which had never been seen before in French poetry. Verlaine was as ambitious poetically during his association with Rimbaud as he ever was, although he was to continue producing adventurous and exciting poetry all through his life, albeit more spasmodically. The little volume *Romances sans paroles*, then, is Verlaine at his best. At the same time, though, it should be stressed that its major strengths—those indeterminate northern landscapes which stand as objective correlatives (to borrow T. S. Eliot's celebrated term, whereby aspects of the external, physical world are made symbolically to express the poet's moods and inner states), and a near-minimalism of language combined with echoes of street and popular utterance—are equally evident both in later poems and in certain earlier ones, notably some of the more sophisticated poems of *Poèmes saturniens*.

After *Romances sans paroles*, published when Verlaine was serving out his jail sentence in Belgium for the shooting of Rimbaud, the predictable see-saw effect produced a change both in his personal life and in the poems he next wrote. The Janus-like Verlaine, never able to decide whether he wanted to be bourgeois or bohemian; the bisexual, emotionally bifocused Verlaine, unable voluntarily to relinquish either Mathilde or Rimbaud, now found himself

<sup>2</sup> The solar image is apposite. Where Rimbaud's quest for a kind of cosmic revelation made him worship the sun's power to absorb and take him over, Verlaine's poems dating from the early 1870s reveal almost an equal fascination with the sun, but as a star whose force is shrouded, guarded, veiled, and intangible. In a fascinating way, the two poets' concern with the sun is the two sides of one coin, and can stand emblematically as their quest to make poetry an instrument of knowledge and even of change.

scorned by Rimbaud and on an irreversible path to divorce from Mathilde, despite some unconvincing steps on both sides to rescue the marriage. Alone in his prison cell, he turned to the comforts of religion, as he would do periodically throughout his life, when the need was pressing. If a somewhat saccharine conversion to Catholicism helped ease his long months of confinement, and produced a number of delicate and genuinely touching poems, regrettably it also engendered what the critic Albert-Marie Schmidt has dismissed as the bleating effusions of an anodyne spirituality. What are being described are those poems from prison which Verlaine intended for a collection entitled *Cellulairement*, which never appeared. However, they were retained as the nucleus of *Sagesse*, which was then expanded with more poems of a similar stamp. To be fair to *Sagesse*, there is a body of critical opinion which sees the volume as proof of Verlaine's stature as a great religious poet.

*Sagesse* appeared in 1880, some five years after Verlaine's release from Mons prison. In the intervening years, the crises of irresolution in his personal life continued unabated. Going to Stuttgart in 1875, to meet Rimbaud for what turned out to be the last time, the recent convert to Catholicism evidently was quickly seduced, as Rimbaud put it with searing brutality, into renouncing his God and causing the ninety-eight wounds of Our Saviour to bleed. If this was one of the lowest points in Verlaine's increasingly desperate life, at least there followed a period of some stability, in England, first alone, then later in the company of Lucien Létinois, the young man whom Verlaine took under his wing when for a brief time he was a teacher in northern France. Even their ill-fated adventure, trying to make a go of running a farm together, had a fresh idealism about it. By the time Létinois died, in 1883, and his personal fortunes dived once more, the desolate Verlaine had enough material for his next volume, *Jadis et Naguère*, published in 1884. Unfortunately, this was an uneven collection, mainly because there were assembled in it not only some of his most recent compositions, but also others which dated back some fifteen years, and which appear to have been pressed into service somewhat opportunistically. One poem in particular has always been singled out, 'The art of poetry'. Written in fact some ten years before, it is often taken—wrongly—as the definitive statement of Verlaine's poetic credo, his way forward from that point, and as a manifesto of sorts for the emergent Symbolist



movement, which was getting itself established in the decade of the 1880s. Definitions of Symbolism are notoriously difficult, but, broadly, what was meant in late nineteenth-century France was a movement in the arts away from realist modes and towards idealism, a search for the Absolute. As it was claimed that the Absolute could not be expressed directly, an allusive, symbolic way of reaching the mysteries behind appearance was sought, and, to that end, poetry of suggestion was considered the key instrument to map out the symbolic. Verlaine's poem 'The art of poetry' has at its heart the belief that poetry is all suggestion, and that suggestion is best achieved through musical effects.

For some critics, Verlaine's poetry deteriorated rapidly after *Jadis et Naguère*. For others, it was even earlier. Few have disputed that *Amour* (1888) is disappointing. Yet, in the cycle of twenty-five poems devoted to sad recollections of Létinois, some have a poignancy, a naked grief expressed with enough verbal power to make them work as poetry. Much of *Amour*, though, is an over-sentimental apologia for Catholicism, and falls into the old trap of *Sagesse*, that strong sentiment does not of itself make art. On the other hand, *Parallèlement* (1889), too easily dismissed by the critical consensus, celebrates what Verlaine knows best and captures best in verse, the honest joys of physical pleasure. However morally troublesome or downright shocking the types of love displayed, the vibrant note of authenticity which Verlaine conveys is what breathes life into much, though certainly not all, of *Parallèlement*.

A similar claim could be made for at least some of the patchy and hastily turned-out volumes which followed, and which mark the final abject years of Verlaine's life. By the early 1890s, with his devoted and regularly abused mother dead, his ex-wife and his son seemingly estranged for good, his modest fortune recklessly squandered or given away, his health failing fast, his squalid life divided between certain shady ladies and a variety of charitable Parisian hospitals, Verlaine was still able to write and get his work published. The quality of his output was as unreliable as ever it had been, but it is unfair to dismiss out of hand everything from his final period. *Bonheur* (1891) overall is weak, but parts of *Chansons pour Elle* (1891 also) and *Odes en son honneur* (1893) have an acerbic wit about them, a knowing, wry tone which is also present in *Liturgies intimes* (1892), as well as *Dans les limbes* and *Épigrammes* (both of 1894). The

posthumous *Chair* and *Invectives*, too, have an acid sharpness, even if, as a whole, these volumes are relatively lightweight. It would be foolish to make too extravagant claims for each and every one of the collections after *Parallèlement*, but the consensus that there is a 'good' first phase in Verlaine's poetic life, and a 'bad' second, is altogether too peremptory.<sup>3</sup> The position is more subtle. Clearly, the sheer number of poems Verlaine produced suggests that quality control was not his strongest suit; and, undoubtedly, a considerable amount of what was published should have been sifted out before it reached the printer. But then, Verlaine always had money problems, and writing was the only trade he could ever sustain. His poetic skills never entirely deserted him, and a proportion at least of his final poems repay attention. Certainly, that must have been the opinion of those cognoscenti who invited him, in his final years, to deliver lectures in Holland, Belgium, and England. It must have been the opinion, too, of his peers, who, in 1894, on the death of the Parnassian Leconte de Lisle, elected Verlaine Prince of Poets.

### *Verlaine's Poetic Form (i) Musicality*

The greatness and uniqueness of Verlaine's poetry is often said to inhere in a number of distinctive and fairly precise features. Among them, there are two which particularly repay close attention—music, or musicality; and literary impressionism.

For many readers and critics, Verlaine tends to mean music, or perhaps more precisely, musicality. He was the poet who, more than any other of his time, loosened the conventional metres of French prosody and helped them shed excess weight. Undoubtedly this is the achievement of several early poems, most notably those in *Romances sans paroles*, but many in other collections as well. A note of caution, though; the fact is that short, light, and elusive poems are in a minority. Over-extravagant claims should not be made for Verlaine's innovations. All in all, he was a reasonably cautious technician, capable of remarkable things, but mostly content not to wander too far off the established highways.

Music, then, and musicality. The two should be distinguished one

<sup>3</sup> At least one critic, Antoine Adam, has attempted to rehabilitate Verlaine's most readily dismissed collections. The spirited defence he puts up for the religious verse, though, seems largely unconvincing. See Select Bibliography.

from the other, the more so as, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, Symbolism saw in music the supreme art form, to the condition of which, borrowing from one of the most influential English critics of the day, Walter Pater, all art constantly aspired.<sup>4</sup> In poetry, this meant not so much an ambition to sound fluent and melodious as an aspiration to make organized words act non-representationally. That is, the ambition was to detach words as far as possible from the flux of banal and contingent meaning, and to place them instead in collocations far removed from the approximations of daily usage. Thus, poetic language would be as disconnected from the 'real' world as, say, a piano sonata or a string quartet. Crucial in this ambition was the perception that 'pure' music, such as the sonata and quartet, while redolent with meaning about human life, was 'about' nothing other than itself. A sonata's content might be said to be the possibilities of its own form. What Symbolist writers and theoreticians so valued was that music, by virtue of this autonomy and purity, seemed to speak as deeply and perfectly to and about the heart and spirit as was humanly possible. It yielded profound truths about the human condition in the most allusive (symbolic) way, and without the need for mimesis, that is, without having to imitate or represent the world directly. The greatest French exponent of poetry-as-music was undoubtedly Mallarmé. Indeed, his pronouncements on the art of suggestion—the essence of music, surely—as well as his astonishing and often difficult poems can be considered the cornerstone of Symbolism, in whose orbit Verlaine moved.

But another aspect of Symbolism was musicality, as opposed to music. If words finally could not be freed from their day-to-day meanings, as Mallarmé's glorious but doomed enterprise seemed to betoken, at least they could be made to sing. This, of course, is an age-old ambition of poetry. An essential quality of good poetry always has been its capacity to resonate, to sound more musical than prose (or, at least, than most prose). French verse produces melodies quite unlike those of English. Without going into the detailed issues of accent and stress,<sup>5</sup> the French line of poetry conventionally has

<sup>4</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, 'The School of Giorgione', ed. Donald Hill (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Much has been written on this subject, both in English and French. In English, C. Scott, *French Verse-Art: A Study* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980) and R. Lewis, *On Reading*

been organized by length. That is, the exact number of syllables per line has determined metre, rather than the number of stresses or beats, as generally happens in English metres. Over the centuries, line-lengths of eight, ten, and twelve syllables have prevailed in French prosody. Of these, the twelve-syllable line, the alexandrine, probably has had the most application. And, equally conventionally, certain patterns of end-rhyme have dominated. Crafted by great writers, such seemingly rigid measures have produced the most subtle and varied verse. Deployed by lesser talents, however, the same measures too often have produced leaden-footed results. Until Verlaine, the greatest French poets were technically conservative, even if they allowed themselves a modicum of adventure within formality. The patterns of fixed-syllable lines, weighted with rhyme, continued unbroken. The parisyllabic (even-numbered) line predominated, even in the poetry of such a modernizing spirit as Baudelaire.

What Verlaine did was to challenge the hegemony of established metres, more especially of the longer, parisyllabic line. So, when commentators speak of his music, generally they mean the musicality of lines of five, seven, nine syllables, and sometimes of fewer, sometimes more.

As already mentioned, in 'The art of poetry' of 1874 Verlaine appears to set out his poetic manifesto. This is only an appearance, however, because this poem is in truth less the declaration of a consolidated position or of future intent than a recapitulation of what he had been doing at an earlier stage of his career. In the much-quoted opening lines, Verlaine calls for music above all else, to be produced by the use of imparisyllabic lines. The relationship between musical verse and imparisyllables is a subtle one. As Verlaine amplifies it in the next lines of the poem, an odd number of syllables in a line produces something more vague, more evanescent, lighter, and airier. The point, of course, is that, given that a parisyllabic line can be divided and subdivided into equal fractions, given the French tendency to prescription in matters of language, all too easily the caesura (that lightest of pauses which comes at some point within the line) in the alexandrine tended to fall exactly midway, so that a long

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*French Verse: A Study of Poetic Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) are advanced and absorbing studies. An easier introduction to the subject might be Peter Broome and Graham Chesters, *The Appreciation of Modern French Poetry, 1850-1950*.

poem routinely divided six by six could and did become excessively monotonous. In 'The art of poetry' Verlaine is saying in so many words that such regularity has had its day. At least, in imparisyllabic metres, the caesura will have to fall somewhere off-centre. Note that 'The art of poetry' itself is written entirely in nine-syllable lines, and that the caesura generally falls after the fourth syllable. Thus:

De la musiqu/(e) avant toute chose,  
Et pour cela/ préfère l'Impair . . .

The ear attuned to the sounds of French will appreciate the uneven pattern of this rhythm. It represents a greater departure from the norm than anglophone readers sometimes think.

When Verlaine uses shorter imparisyllabic metres, the effect is even more distinctive. In *Sagesse*, a little, untitled poem has the following opening line (again, which must be given in French): 'L'échelonnement des haies' and the poem continues to use this seven-syllable length. Then, in *Romances sans paroles*, the poem whose opening line is 'Dans l'interminable' has lines consistently of five syllables each. The length, in such a case, is so restricted that it scarcely allows for a caesura.

The section of *Romances sans paroles* entitled 'Ariettes oubliées' has been much praised and much anthologized, commentators commending its dexterous lightness of touch. But, interestingly, while it contains several imparisyllabic metres, the 'Ariettes' section has a solid representation of even-numbered ones too, and the poems written parisyllabically dance every bit as gracefully as the others. It is justified, therefore, to downplay a little the importance of the imparisyllabic measure. It is one among several aspects which combine to create that unique Verlainian music. The poem which, arguably, has been more anthologized than any other, 'Autumn song', from *Poèmes saturniens*, is as fine an example as exists of the poet's sure touch with fragile metres (p. 24). But one notes that the predominant line-length is of four syllables, substantially outnumbering those of three. Much of the musical pleasure of this poem derives from the off-set pattern of 4 + 4 + 3, from the carefully controlled nasal vowels, often rhyming, and from the frequent carry-over of meaning from one line to the next (so-called *enjambement*). The difficult achievement in this remarkable little poem, so slight as almost to evaporate, is to have created the most perfect tension between a

severely restricted form and a content always in expansion. The shape is constantly under threat while wholly maintained.

Overall, what Verlaine did of such lasting value was to unshackle French versification by creating what has come to be known as the 'vers libéré', or liberated verse, thereby setting French poetry on the road towards the 'vers libre', or free verse, a road taken by some of his contemporaries, though most of them lesser poets. Ever since Verlaine, the gates have been wide open for innovation, experiment, and new definitions.

That other crucial building-block of orthodox French prosody, rhyme, also comes in for Verlaine's criticism in 'The art of poetry'. Wrongly used, he claims, rhyme is a flashy and cheap trinket which rings false and hollow. Yet, virtually nowhere does Verlaine himself truly abjure it. Admittedly, he uses assonance from time to time. However, what he is really saying in 'The art of poetry' is that rhyme needs to be not so much abandoned as tamed. And, by and large, his own rhymes have a lightness, and sometimes a freedom bordering on the approximate, and they ring more mellifluously for that.

One final observation regarding musicality in Verlaine. He had an excellent ear for the sounds and strains of popular language, as heard in the streets or in ballads, songs, and refrains. For the critic Jacques Robichez, this was a manifestation of Verlaine's taste for popular-populist ways, part of his constant drift towards 'low life', a drift which put him so often in prisons, hospitals, and slums. For another critic, Gaëtan Picon, rather more positively, Verlaine was masterly in his 'poetization' of the spoken language. Among the best examples of poetry which deploys the popular language of street ballads are 'False impression', 'Another', and 'Reversibilities' (all in *Parallèlement*), to name but three. Note, too, the decidedly casual, spoken syntax Verlaine uses in a line such as the first in 'Landscape': 'Vers Saint-Denis c'est bête et sale la campagne'.

### *Verlaine's Poetic Form (ii) Literary Impressionism*

The second of the two Verlainian features which repay close attention might be called literary impressionism. Verlaine's career, spanning as it did the second half of the nineteenth century, ran simultaneously with the Impressionist movement in painting. The revolutionary work of its great masters—Monet, Pissarro, Manet,

Sisley, Degas, and others, at work roughly between 1860 and 1890—was almost bound to have some effect on a rising poet of the period. In an era of redefinition in all the arts, it was quite predictable that a poet such as Verlaine would respond as much to remarkable developments in painting as to musical techniques.

Many established ideas about painting were under scrutiny, among them, the perennial and thorny issue of ‘objectivity’, that is, the imitation of what was understood as reality. So, the techniques used to paint ‘objectively’—perspective, balance, pattern, shape, the different values attached to tones, the principles of chiaroscuro—all were under examination and were subject to redefinition. So, too, was the important assumption that painting was to be done in the artist’s studio, not outdoors, and that, concomitantly, light would be even and flat.

With the advent of Impressionism—generally considered to have started in 1863, when Manet’s *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* was exhibited at the Salon des Refusés—different principles were in the ascendancy. Most importantly, perhaps, painters began to emphasize colour for its own sake, so that it appeared more obviously to be the picture’s subject-matter than did the objects and shapes it was filling. If the idea of representation, of mimesis, was not lost, certainly it was radically rethought. As changing ideas about the composition of light and of colour evolved, the interest was transferred, in a new phenomenology of painting, from the ‘reality’ of the external world to the ways in which that world was mediated by light. The ‘truth’ of things depicted lay in the intercession of light and colour. That most celebrated of techniques elaborated by the Impressionists, pointillism, the breaking-down of an apparently unified colour into its constituent parts, tiny individual points of vibrating light, gave a much greater degree of autonomy to colour, which seemingly became as much the ‘subject’ of a painting as was a field, a sunset, or a street. The primacy of sensation—the blue of the sea, the yellow of a flower, the black of an article of clothing as, above all else, a blue, a yellow, a black—indicates a refusal to see art as predominantly cerebral and intellectual. And, in the same way that Impressionism moved some distance away from the anecdotal, from narrative, refusing as a consequence the mythological and the allegorical, so Verlaine, in some of his poetry at least, and arguably in the best, turned to subjects and techniques favoured by the Impressionists.

That is, open-air scenes, urban decors, suburban scenarios, railway stations, sunsets, fairgrounds, fountains, town squares... And, more than that, some of his poems puzzled contemporary readers by the strangeness of the sensations presented, the tones and colours used. What Verlaine did in a certain kind of poem was to put on paper a sensation, and in that he was not far from one of Impressionism's aims.

What is meant by sensation? How does poetry of sensation differ from other kinds in its use of language? It is a subtle issue, and has to do with a movement away from predominantly intellectual and rational explanation, representation, and narrative. Instead, words are made to appeal as directly as possible to the reader's senses. Verlaine's poems of sensation tend to reject a story-line; rather, they are more static. Such poems are to be found principally in *Romances sans paroles*. However, there are examples also in the earlier *Poèmes saturniens*, although, in these, experimentation with sensory impression is perhaps less subtle than in the later volume. But in both, Verlaine makes his language abrupt and immediate, bypassing much of the syntactical apparatus of connection and explanation. An excellent example of such immediacy is 'Walcourt', from *Romances sans paroles* (p. 76). It is striking in its enumeration and juxtaposition of nouns; also, in its lack of verbs (verbs generally giving a forward and organizing impetus), and of articles and conjunctions. Sensation is conveyed instead with immediacy and without explanatory links. Things are set out unexplained. The effect is to remove objects from expected contexts, and to bring them directly to our senses without the agency of a rationalizing intellect. Similarly, in 'Right time for lovers' (*Poèmes saturniens*), redness becomes a subject in the first stanza. A landscape is evoked by means of colour, but also by blurred tones ('haze-shrouded', 'mists', 'cloudy'). Perhaps no poet has captured better the vagueness of landscape or the imprecision of associated feelings than has Verlaine.<sup>6</sup> Unlike, for example, Baudelaire, he does not explore metaphysical dimensions in poems of this kind.

So long as Verlaine confines himself to the task of registering a

<sup>6</sup> The matter of Verlaine's 'vagueness', seen as a way of apprehending and conveying the world, and which thereby is an organizing principle of his poetry, is discussed in one of the most illuminating pieces on Verlaine, J.-P. Richard's essay 'Fadéur de Verlaine', in his *Poésie et profondeur*. See Select Bibliography.



sensation, of snatching fleeting frissons of feeling, then he is truly remarkable. The extraordinary little eighth poem of the 'Ariettes oubliées' section of *Romances sans paroles*, which starts 'Endless sameness', exemplifies his skill in evoking a scene and a corresponding mood, both of them embedded in mists (p. 74). This is a poem very close to the principles of Impressionism. Its point of departure is a sensation and an emotional state of 'ennui', a word best left untranslated, as English equivalents do not fully capture the spiritual desolation which, from Baudelaire onwards, it has come to connote. The poem's construction is repetitive—the first stanza becomes the last, the second the fourth. The sense is that 'ennui' is a given, which, by its very nature, is immobile. Beyond this, the poem vouchsafes little information. It is made up of the slightest variations on a theme. The immobility is bathed in a diffuse light; the colour quality of the snow is 'uncertain', causing it to be confused with sand. The very verb 'gleams' suggests a light without particular definition. Similarly, the colour of the sky is impossible to determine. And is the moon shining or is it not? The trees have a ghostly, unreal aspect. What Verlaine is doing is to blur contour and to create imprecision by precise means, in a way which corresponds in some measure to Impressionist painting. Time, place, narrative scarcely exist, if at all. By contrast, a certain impression reaches directly to the senses, especially sight. Furthermore, there is a fusion of the exterior world with the poet's inner places. The first two lines give the sensory impression of a bleak plain and the emotional category of 'ennui'. As the poem unfolds, so the plain *becomes* the 'ennui'. To speak of one is to speak of the other. Verlaine does not tell us what causes the 'ennui'; the rationale of cause and effect is not his business. The effects themselves, the sensation, the impression, these are his poetic truths.

In other poems, such as 'The piano kissed . . .' (also from *Romances sans paroles*), equally there is a nebulous, diaphanous quality, a delicacy, achieved not only by the means so far discussed, but also perhaps by certain ambiguities of language and grammar which convey the intangible, even fractile aspects of experience, aspects which are not reducible simply to the intellect. The excellent 'Setting suns' (*Poèmes saturniens*), for example, is a model of restraint, of movement within stillness. This undivided poem of sixteen lines unfolds without apparently going anywhere; if divided up into groups of four lines each, it is apparent that they mirror one another,

that they present the scene—sunset over a shore—and the emotion—melancholy—face to face, the two reflecting and complementing each other until, finally, through the delicately shifting but unchanging vocabulary, they become one. Here we have an admirable example of Verlaine's great gift for conflating pictorial effects, the world of the senses and the life of the emotions. Language, far removed from the conventions of narrative and intellectual apprehension, is being used in a way virtually unparalleled at the time.

The concept of literary impressionism in Verlaine thus has a real and forceful application. Nevertheless, its use is relatively limited. It could not be claimed with much justice that every poem he wrote is essentially like 'Setting suns' or 'Endless sameness'. But the concept can provide a fuller appreciation of, say, 'Home' (*La Bonne Chanson*) or 'Marine' (*Poèmes saturniens*), or even 'Night effect' (also *Poèmes saturniens*). However, this last poem equally could be seen as under the control of Parnassian ideals, as indicated perhaps by the title of the section from which it is taken: 'Eaux-fortes', or Aqua Fortis. The reference is to the engraver's precise technique, and to black-and-white results. Of course, at the time of the *Poèmes saturniens*, Verlaine was writing to a certain extent, at least, in the Parnassian way; celebrating the ideals of impassivity, as in, for example, the poem 'Savitri', in which he sought to give precise and accurate detail in as dispassionate a fashion as possible. None the less, a distinctly un-Parnassian judder of emotion runs through 'Night effect', bringing it closer than might at first appear to those crowning achievements of Verlaine's impressionist poetry, the 'Ariettes oubliées' and 'Paysages belges' sections of *Romances sans paroles*.

### *Verlaine's Achievements*

How, finally, should we understand and judge Verlaine?

No one will disagree that, at his supreme best, he is the master of the art of suggestion. In his copious work are to be found surely the best examples in French of allusive poetry. Short in length and made up of short lines, some of his greatest poems see the world as diaphanous evanescence (to use vocabulary much favoured by the Symbolist movement). Reality is almost what is not. Verlaine creates vanishing topographies in a way no other French poet can. And, with consummate skill, he links indeterminate place to unfocused

mood. The pathetic fallacy, that trick of making nature appear to feel the same way as humans, is superbly woven into the texture of many of his lines. Indeed, often it is a key element in holding together poems which are as translucent and elusive as what Gaëtan Picon, borrowing from Verlaine himself, has called 'the thing in flight'.

Verlaine's sheer endurance in the face of adversities, self-inflicted or not, has to be respected. The English poet Ted Walker has said that, whatever the deficiencies in the results, whatever the setbacks in his circumstances, it is wholly admirable that Verlaine 'kept going'. The remark is particularly pertinent, coming as it does from a fine poet and translator of Verlaine who has suffered the curse every writer dreads—drying up. When Verlaine died, worn out by disease and excess, and looking decades older than his 51 years, he was still writing. Indeed, his very last poem was written a mere matter of weeks before his death. So prolific was he that, although most of his work, both poetry and prose, was published in his lifetime, a considerable quantity of uncollected writing had to wait for publication until much later.

Yet it must be said that Verlaine's ability to produce work has a debit as well as a credit side. While other poets—including, interestingly, two of those with whom he is most often associated, Rimbaud and Mallarmé—allowed relatively little through, Verlaine seemed inspired or compelled to commit himself to paper as much as he could. If he was hoping for financial gain, he was out of luck, for such payment as he received did not get him out of the holes he dug for himself, and anyway, he was famously careless with money.

It may be that Verlaine was one of those poets (Apollinaire, later, would be another) whose lives of week-by-week turbulence nourish their art, and vice versa. A shambles of a man, he needed to tell all. He was constantly sorting his life out aloud, taxing friends, lovers, wife, and especially mother. His personality leached into his poetry when it did not positively flood into it. The risk, of course, for any fluent poet is that fluency can become logorrhoea. Poetry can die from an excess of words as much as from a paucity. No one knew this better than Mallarmé, the High Priest of refinement, the sculptor of language, whose poems were pared down to absolute essentials. No poet was more disillusioned by the poetic word than Rimbaud, who turned his back not only on Verlaine but also on all aspirations to make poetry significant. The tendency of both these great

contemporaries of Verlaine was always towards reduction, even at the risk of silence. Verlaine, however, went on, and it is undeniable that in many poems there is too much mortar and too few bricks. When this is so, the frisson of poetry does not happen. There is not that wonderful hovering between sound and sense, as the last, great French Symbolist, Paul Valéry, put it.

Finally, to return to the first image of parallel lines, Verlaine was both a good and a bad poet, but at one and the same time, in tandem. At his best, he was sublime, unique. At his worst, pedestrian, not to say lame. For a variety of possible reasons, he did not suppress the bad. It might even be claimed that the crises of irresolution, the divisions in his life and work, somehow sustained him. Had it been possible to resolve them, quite conceivably his creativity would have dried up, and he might have become the unremarkable bourgeois which one critic at least (Jean Richer) thinks was a crucial aspect of his essential self.<sup>7</sup>

Instead, Verlaine's conflicts and contradictions, apparent from an early age, were never resolved, and the fundamentally Romantic icon of the untamed poet of genius was created. Bourgeois and bohemian, tender and brutal, coarse and refined, sentimental and hard-edged, religious and sacrilegious, Verlaine was all of these, at one and the same time. So was his poetry. In the last analysis, the best elements in Verlaine's poetry have to be those multiple and durable threads which celebrate sensation, whether robustly or with gossamer fragility. One such thread is those masterpieces of verbal painting or verbal musicality, those moods-in-landscape, landscapes-in-mood. Others would include the joyous and sunlit pleasures of the human body, the darker secrets of the riskiest eroticism, and the suspect affection for an unofficially adopted son, an attachment doing its best to stay on the acceptable side of morality. These are the strands, sometimes thin but always strong as cables, which run through all of Verlaine's poetry, from beginning to end. When he is not attempting—and failing—to make good art out of good morals, when, to gloss his own, dismissive final line of 'The art of poetry', he is not merely purveying the tired banalities of routine literature, Verlaine is a great and splendid poet, whose singing voice can be confused with no other.

<sup>7</sup> While he is well disposed to Verlaine's poetry, Richer's view of Verlaine the man is less positive. See Select Bibliography.

## NOTE ON THE TEXT AND TRANSLATION

The principal editions of Verlaine's complete work are:

*Œuvres complètes*, 5 vols., published by Albert Messein (successor to Léon Vanier, Verlaine's first publisher) in 1923, and *Œuvres posthumes*, 3 vols., also published by Messein, between 1922 and 1929.

*Œuvres poétiques complètes*, Éditions Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, ed. Yves-Gérard Le Dantec, 1st pub. 1938, revised, completed, and presented by Jacques Borel in 1962.

*Œuvres complètes*, published by Le Club du meilleur livre in 2 vols., 1959–60, ed. Henry de Bouillane de Lacoste and Jacques Borel, with a preface by Octave Nadal.

The Messein edition is unannotated and contains a considerable number of inaccuracies. Since the time of its publication, and especially since the Second World War, Verlaine scholarship has moved substantially forward, and the benefits are visible in the Pléiade and the Club du meilleur livre editions, whose editors have been able to work from the Verlaine autograph manuscripts and papers in the archives of the Fonds Doucet in Paris. The dating of poems thereby has been made accurate. Furthermore, each edition gives comprehensive lists of variants. Both editions are accompanied by substantial, evaluative essays.

In preparing this edition, I have consulted all the editions mentioned, but have used the text of the 1962 Pléiade edition. One of the Pléiade edition's virtues is that it places Verlaine's uncollected poems in two sections, 'Premiers vers' and 'Poèmes divers'. This represents a more accurate distribution than do the rather provisional *Œuvres posthumes* of the Messein edition.

Jacques Robichez's annotations to his *Verlaine: œuvres poétiques* (Classiques Garnier), the updated edition of which appeared in 1995, are full and interesting. They constitute one of the best commentaries available. It should be noted that this edition does not seek to be complete, in that it contains Verlaine's poetry up to and including *Parallèlement* only.

The history of Verlaine in English translation reveals at least three significant features. First, many translators have taken on Verlaine. The catalogues of the principal copyright libraries reveal (on my last count) some thirty-five of them, and this number surely must be only a minimum. Secondly, no translator seems to have taken on the *whole* of Verlaine's poetry—admittedly a daunting task, and perhaps one without clear profit. By pointed contrast, however, the complete works of other major French poets of his time, such as Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Laforgue, and Corbière, have been done, in some cases more than once. At best, not even a substantial proportion of Verlaine's output has been attempted. C. F. MacIntyre and Joanna Richardson, two leading Verlaine translators, have done around eighty poems each, which, in percentage terms, is a modest amount. Thirdly, the choice of poems made by virtually all the translators reveals considerable adherence to the notion that only the early Verlaine is worth attention.

All in all, then, there seems to have existed, perhaps still to exist, in the English-speaking literary world a climate of hesitation around Verlaine. Of the French Symbolists, he has fared the worst at the hands of translators. Part of the explanation for this, I believe, must be that Verlaine's 'music', that exquisite delicacy of the early poems, has acted as a barrier. How to achieve in any other language the evanescence of those fine, gossamer lines? A fascination with this problem has manifested itself in one way particularly: translators return again and again to the same poems, poems of great technical skill, as if the challenge resided almost exclusively in getting those, and only those, just 'right'. So, there are numerous English versions of 'My recurring dream', 'Autumn song', 'Exchange of feelings', 'Falling tears', 'The sky above the roof', and, of course, 'The art of poetry'. Some of the translations are fine indeed; others, in my view, suffer from an over-reverence for the original. By that, I mean that too high a regard for exact metre, for solid and indeed insistent rhyme, and, most damagingly, for a kind of late-Victorian register and out-of-date syntactical structures have produced translations which read stiffly, even archaically. Thus, while the 1895 translations of William Robertson, those published in 1900 by Ernest Dowson, and Arthur Symonds's well-known versions of 1924 are, to my mind, acceptable in that they belong firmly to their times, later translations work less well because they have refused to acknowledge the changes

and developments in poetic codes of practice. In short, they seem stuck in the past and suggest that Verlaine can speak only to the past.

In preparing this book, my own principles have been rather different. First, I have chosen a greater number of poems than has any other edition of which I am aware. There are some 170 here. Secondly, I have moved away from the consensus by selecting a substantial number of poems from *Parallèlement* onwards, often considered the cut-off point between the best and the worst in Verlaine. As part of this approach, I have included relatively few of the religiously inspired poems. Despite the arguments of some critics, I cannot warm to them nor do I feel that more are required to give a balanced view of Verlaine's output. Thirdly, I have endeavoured to find ways of translating which chime with the English-language poetic practices of our own time. I felt, with echoes of 'The art of poetry' ringing in my ears, that the worst tyranny for any translator of Verlaine was rhyme. In many of the translations published over the last few decades, it does seem indeed that rhyme is the tail which wags the dog. The impression is strong that the translator somehow has first created a rhyme, and then has worked backwards from it, buckling syntax in order to accommodate it. Of course, it would be gratifying to make rhyme work in English as easily as Verlaine seems to in French. But perhaps that kind of success can occur consistently only when poets are composing original poetry in their own language. I wanted, then, on the whole to eschew rhyme, or at least not to be ruled by it, the more so as it does not anyway have such a strong place in modern English prosody. However, in certain poems, usually ones with a playful or humorous content, and in which the full force of meaning depended on rhyme, I judged it essential to keep full rhyme patterns.

I felt, too, that the syllabic metres of French could not and should not be transferred directly into English. Generally, syllabics are something of an oddity in English practice, and can yield quite mechanical and unmusical lines. As I saw it, a more appropriate way to try to capture Verlaine's musicality was to get away from the strictness of his metres and to use some considerably less constrained patterns, as the English tradition allows. As an example, where Verlaine uses a long line, sometimes I will go for a short one, and vice versa.

My translations, then, will often appear free, sometimes moderately so, sometimes considerably. I hope, nevertheless, that this appearance is just that, an appearance which does not mask the truth of the originals. As I think there is great diversity within Verlaine's poems, I have tried to vary style, tone, and register. My translations are not universally of one 'type'. Two small examples of what I mean: sometimes I will use 'it is', at others, 'it's'; some of my versions are carefully punctuated, with grammatically correct commas, semicolons etc., but others, more free and needing swifter rhythms, deliberately have a more casual punctuation. My aim, though this might not seem to square with the translator's licence I have allowed myself, has been honesty. Honesty to Verlaine's essential *poetry*, lying just below the surface of the lines, and perhaps a touch obscured by their formalities; and honesty to English poetic diction, constructed on different principles from those governing French. I have tried to preserve the essence of Verlaine in my English pieces, which, I hope, have at least some claim to be called poems—poems appropriate to the climate of late twentieth-century English-language writing. Through them, I hope that Verlaine's voice, more diverse in its tonalities than is sometimes thought, will be heard for what it is.

I would like to extend my thanks to Pierre Brunel, of the Sorbonne, Paris. The invitation he made me to speak at his institution on 'Verlaine in Translation' started me in earnest on this book. I would like to acknowledge the admirable initiative of Edith McMorran and Jane Taylor, both of Oxford University, in setting up and sustaining Translation Research in Oxford. It has always been a pleasure and a privilege to participate in TRIO's stimulating debates. Similarly, the two colloquia 'Translating French Literature and Film' organized by Professor Geoffrey Harris of the European Studies Research Institute, University of Salford, were stimulating, and gave me a welcome opportunity to try out some ideas about Verlaine. My thanks go also to Harry Guest, whose expert suggestions of ways to translate one particularly elusive poem pushed me to reconsider several others. Reading the work of my Exeter colleagues Michael Pakenham and James Kearns was a stimulus, as was talking with them both. They provided me with valuable information from an unrivalled storehouse of knowledge of Verlaine and his times. Other colleagues kept



up their encouragement, none more so than Keith Cameron. Andrea Williams unravelled many typographical tangles. To all, my thanks. But first and last, my deepest thanks go to Claire. She has kept this show firmly on the road with loving discretion and patience, as always.

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- Buisine, Alain, *Verlaine: Histoire d'un corps* (Paris: Tallandier, 'Figures de proue' series, 1995). Looks at ways in which Verlaine's writing manifests a connection between the body and literary creation.
- Chadwick, Charles, *Verlaine* (London: The Athlone Press, 'Athlone French Poets' series, 1973). A useful monograph.
- *Paul Verlaine: 'Sagesse'* (London: The Athlone Press, 'Athlone French Poets' series, 1973). Detailed commentary on one collection; companion volume to Chadwick's monograph.
- Hillery, David, *Paul Verlaine: 'Romances sans paroles'* (London: The Athlone Press, 'Athlone French Poets' series, 1976). Detailed commentary; a further and very valuable volume in this excellent series.
- Martino, Pierre, *Verlaine* (Paris: Boivin, 1st pub. 1924). Focuses on the poetry more than the man.
- Mourot, Jean, *Verlaine* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, Collection 'Phares', 1988). Critical study of earlier poetry, with a chapter on Verlaine's psychological make-up.
- Nadal, Octave, *Paul Verlaine* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1961). A shrewd and absorbing critical study. Devotes much space to Verlaine's musical and pictorial impressionism.
- Pakenham, Michael, *Paul Verlaine: nos murailles littéraires* (Paris: L'Échoppe, 1997). Writing by Verlaine, both poetry and prose, recently discovered by Pakenham, and edited and annotated by him.
- Richard, Jean-Pierre, *Poésie et profondeur* (Paris: Seuil, 1955). Contains an absorbing essay, 'Faveur de Verlaine'. The so-called vagueness in Verlaine's poetry is seen as his distinguishing and creative quality.
- Richer, Jean, *Paul Verlaine* (Paris: Seghers, Collection 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui', 1st pub. 1953). A short, lively, and often psycho-analytical account, with a selection of poems.
- Taylor-Horrex, S., *Verlaine: 'Fêtes galantes' and 'Romances sans paroles'* (London: Grant & Cutler, 'Critical Guides to French Texts', 1988). A short study of two of Verlaine's collections in this helpful series.
- Underwood, V. P., *Verlaine et l'Angleterre* (Paris: Nizet, 1956). A detailed examination of Verlaine's time in England.
- Zimmerman, Eléonore, *Magies de Verlaine* (Paris: Corti, 1967). A study of the ways in which Verlaine's poetry developed.

### Background

- Balakian, Anna, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Random House, 1967). A wide-ranging study.
- Carter, A. E., *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830–1900* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1958). A study of a movement to which Verlaine belonged, at least to an extent.

- Chadwick, Charles, *Symbolism* (London: Methuen, 'The Critical Idiom' series, 1971). In this short and useful book, there is a section on Verlaine.
- Cornell, Kenneth, *The Symbolist Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951). A detailed account of the years 1885–1900 in France.
- Huret, Jules, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (Paris: Charpentier, 1891). The celebrated results of Huret's questionnaires to leading writers of Verlaine's time about the state of literature. Many poets responded.
- Lehmann, Andrew, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France 1885–1895* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1st pub. 1950). A wide-ranging and detailed study.
- Porter, Laurence M., *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990). Symbolism revisited in a careful and challenging study. Contains a chapter on Verlaine's subversion of language.
- Raitt, Alan, *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste* (Paris: Corti, 1965). Considers Verlaine, among many others.
- Schmidt, Albert-Marie, *La Littérature Symboliste* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1st edn. 1942). Puts forward stimulating and decided views of what is good and what is bad in the poet's work.
- Starkie, Enid, *Rimbaud* (London: Faber & Faber, 1st pub. 1938). This major biography of Rimbaud has many pages on Verlaine.
- Stephan, Philip, *Paul Verlaine and the Decadence, 1882–90* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974). A study of the relationship between Verlaine and the Decadent movement.
- Symons, Arthur, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1899). This book by one of Symbolism's first champions contains a study of Verlaine.
- Wilson, Edmund, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* (New York: Scribner's, 1931). This celebrated and influential book contains a few pages on Verlaine.
- Zayed, Georges, *La Formation littéraire de Verlaine* (2nd edn. Paris: Nizet, 1970). Detailed study of Verlaine's literary background and antecedents.

A journal devoted to the study of Verlaine, *Cahiers des amis de Paul Verlaine*, was inaugurated in 1993, and is published by the Musée-Bibliothèque de Charleville-Mézières, France.

Many articles have been published on Verlaine, too numerous to list, and scattered in various scholarly journals.

#### *Further Reading in Oxford World's Classics*

- Baudelaire, Charles, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan, with an introduction by Jonathan Culler.
- *The Prose Poems and La Fanfarlo*, trans. and ed. Rosemary Lloyd.

## A CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL VERLAINE

- 1844 Birth of Paul-Marie Verlaine on 30 March in Metz, eastern France. His father is an army captain; his mother is from a prosperous middle-class family.
- 1851 Verlaine's father resigns his army commission. The family moves to Paris.
- 1853 Birth of Mathilde Mauté, Verlaine's future wife.
- 1853–62 School years, including the Lycée Bonaparte (Condorcet).
- 1854 Birth of Arthur Rimbaud.
- 1858 Verlaine sends his first poem ('Death') to Victor Hugo.
- 1860 Meets Edmond Lepelletier, who will become his lifelong friend and biographer.
- 1862 Obtains baccalaureate.
- 1863 First published poem ('Mr Pomp and Circumstance') appears in *La Revue du progrès moral*, under the name of Pablo. Starts to frequent the Parnassian literary milieu of Paris.
- 1864 Works for an insurance company; then as a clerk in the Hôtel de Ville of Paris.
- 1865 Death of Verlaine's father. He contributes to the reviews *Le Hanneton* and *L'Art*.
- 1866 Publication of *Poèmes saturniens*.
- 1869 Engagement to Mathilde Mauté. Publication of *Fêtes galantes*.
- 1870 Publication of *La Bonne Chanson*. Verlaine marries Mathilde on 11 August. He joins the National Guard. The Franco-Prussian War begins.
- 1871 Siege of Paris and the Commune. Verlaine works as a press officer; briefly flees to the family home at Fampoux, north-eastern France, at the end of the war. Invites Rimbaud to Paris. Rimbaud stays in the Mauté household. Verlaine is increasingly violent towards his wife. Birth of his son Georges.
- 1872 Verlaine tries to strangle Mathilde. He sends Rimbaud away, but after a reconciliation they go to Belgium. Verlaine is briefly reconciled with Mathilde, but returns to Rimbaud. The two go to live in London. Rimbaud leaves but soon returns. Verlaine falls ill; his mother comes to London to look after him.