Unconfirmed Revelation Vouchsafed by Paris

by strannikov

Poets die every day but are seldom in position to put the experience to literary merit. Alfred Jarry anticipated this problem satisfactorily in two ways: singlehandedly he elaborated the arcane science of ‘Pataphysics and, with a Breton's devout valour and discipline, he withheld publication of his Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, ‘Pataphysician, during breathing hours. Jarry thus advertised himself from beyond the Seine as a writer who had the good sense to discover his vocation as idiot savant well before it became common knowledge.

one dozen haiku
affectations Paris-born
my first voyage through.

Learned imbecile of the first magnitude and accomplished Rabelais revivalist, Jarry now eyes his progeny with clear vision, emptied as his eyes now are of the absinthe elixir with which he did not exactly tame the fires of his brain and which he supplied his fish to frolic in prior to delectation (his delectation, not the fishes'!). He retains that mild deceptive blank look, his deadpan matched only by Buster's, not exactly self-satisfied but more precisely self-contained, though brimming. God knows he'd be a horror to live with, dedicated as he became with increasing expertise to exiting from the closest stage, but after all, he exercised membership in the 27 Club's Paris branch for seven years.

Paris solitaire
striding behind Paris crowds,
tongue-stunted, ear-blind.

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The most curious phenomenon I observed during my lone visit to Paris was the rotational rainbow. With help afterwards from my embroidered Michelin guide, I was able to determine where the pivoting unmoving base was located, viz., in the second district (right-bank, but I had nothing to do with its placement or orientation).

my griefs not assuaged
with consolations of drink
each glass kills anew.

At first glance, naturally, I thought the thing was stationary, rainbows commonly melt as their birthing clouds relocate to other congenial horizons, and this day was abundantly sunny. Plodding north, generally back in the direction of the Gare du Nord where I'd alighted on arriving, I at first mistook the rainbow's quiver and its wobble for mere shimmering. This rainbow was brilliant, though not composed of all the prismatic colors we often associate with both rainbows and prisms. Sir Isaac might have been astonished but would not have been amused, I don't much think. This rainbow had no yellow in it at all, no true orange: a broad band of emerald, a narrow band of sepia white, and bordered on both sides with red but red of distinct hues (one bloody, the other the most sickeningly sweet kind of pale confectionary cherry), technically, a tri-color rainbow.

even in Paris
where lovers link arms and lips,
a solitaire's sleep.

So only as I closed in on the rainbow's northern descent did I realize it was settling close to but not quite in the area known familiarly as Montmartre. Not an utter surprise, and I was not discouraged to discover that the beams did not settle in the placid

dark of the rue Chaptal, but only as I passed close by there did the rainbow swing completely away! It positively fled--I actually fell against a wall there, the solidity kept me from breaking my neck, I've never been so indebted to masonry! I would have snapped a photo merely out of gratitude, but I was not armed with any camera.

I made sure to ask,
made certain to be refused
by that foreign smile.

With all the buildings huddled and looming, I lost sight of the rainbow. I had not quite gotten to the Boulevard de Clichy, had not quite left or even entered Pigalle, when for no reason I looked back south and there stood the rainbow, now straddling the Seine nonchalantly! I was a little put out with it after all this jaunt, not as elaborate as the stroll from the Louvre to Napoleon's grand arch but now I had to walk back, I didn't have cash or cigarettes for a cab.

lovers grind their groins
in bed one floor below me:
standing, I write this.

So back I strolled, this close to Montmartre but no closer, I didn't even reach the Boulevard, the cemetery was only a few kicks away. So now what had been the southern arm of the rainbow was now the northern arm, and only now did I notice that this was the arm on which the entire structure pivoted. Its arm dropped down in front of me, according to my map it stood anchored in the second district (I almost love the word “arrondissement” but, being not a native speaker and only a pukey imitator, I refrain from its use except to add the least shade of color to my narrative, to give a reader only a vague sense of what it means to walk and breathe in Paris, after all these years and all the tumults it's seen still the capital of France, though this was not ever so).

Rabelais may've winked
neither laughing nor smiling
before I spied him.

The second arrondissement offered no especial appeal that I could think of: how this rainbow stood anchored here swinging not with the wind but with the logic it possessed was entirely beyond me, since the day remained mostly sunny. After all my walking, I ducked in somewhere for a cafe gourmand, best I'd had all day. Not strictly paying close attention, I'd wound up on the Boulevard de Sebastopol, the eastern border to speak of to the second district, somewhere in whose depths this rainbow's pivoting arm was planted. The arch was not nearly so high now, but plainly it rose over the Seine and dropped to earth again not far across the river, its shimmering light dropping down onto streets and buildings I had never seen with my eyes.

midnight in Paris,
my circumstance similar
to Paris, emptied.

Up until now I'd only stood and walked north of the Seine, and the closer I got to the river, the queasier I felt, something with that coffee or the gourmand. The rainbow flew the same colors but not now with identical brilliance: the deep emerald was now limpid chartreuse, the sepia white was flickering and now occupied an even narrower band, the one red was distinctly less bloody, the other red still more pale. Nevertheless, the colors still undulated as competently as any flag's.

just possibly she
will remember my shadow,
to imagine me.

By now it was all I could do to cross the Ile de la Cite, that coffee was making me sick! Fortunately, I found some bushes to throw up in. God knows whence but a sturdy fountain appeared for me to lean on and grip tightly while I took hungry sips to rinse my mouth out repeatedly, vomiting had relieved all the distress, and I was relieved also that I hadn't dribbled anything on my overcoat, that stuff can be hell to get off once it dries, I well knew!

solitary tongue
knowing twenty words of French
a strolling infant.

My legs wobbled now more than this vagrant rainbow, so I penetrated no further south than the quays with their changing names (or: “the quay with its changing . . .”), heading west towards the Musee d'Orsay which I had no more intention of entering than I had of stepping into the Louvre from the south bank of the Seine. The rainbow now dropped down to earth somewhere not far distant, into the sixth or the seventh district, I could not say without approximation.

“solitary” read
my sleeves: read to be obeyed,
readers stayed away.

By now, I was about done in after all of my walking and my vomiting, so I began looking for the apt Pont des Invalides and headed back to my room, an authentic fifth-floor garret in the eighth district, just north of the eternally broad and thickly shuffled Champs Elysees. Something told me that in the few books I'd brought along I'd get some clue as to the nature and status of this pivoting rainbow, and I was right, as usual.

were I not alone,
one woman might have read me

with one private smile.

Finding the answer was simplicity itself! At least, the answer I took away persuaded me: the anchor in the second district was Lautreamont-Ducasse himself, whose acquaintance I had not made prior to my journey, and unprovoked otherwise I thought contemporaneously that had I been able to boast any prior familiarity, I'd've come off much worse than to escape merely with a short bout of vomiting. And the rainbow's rotating arm had followed Jarry, I took it, from himself's premiere on the rue Blanche to his residencies around St Germain des Pres. And then came the wholly unanticipated revelation: when the rainbow had pivoted away from the rue Blanche, it had spun with a counterclockwise rotation! This amounted to tangible inspiration, you might appreciate, to see a rainbow fused of the spirited forces of THAT pair lighting my way across and through daylit Paris. (Because of that tri-colored rainbow, though, I can't help but guess that Fénéon played some role in these proceedings.) I have not returned yet and may never for all I know, but even with the vomiting, but probably especially because of it, my first visit remains vividly recalled for now.

tasted vocation
neither seen nor spoken with:
the foreigner's bliss!

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