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Folkways Records FL 9940

BLAISE CENDRARS

"...one of France's most original writers of this century." — New Directions

PROSE DU TRANSSIBERIEEN ET DE LA PETITE JEANNE DE FRANCE

PQ
1165
C46
1967
c.1

MUSIC LP **Les Musiciens** Réalisé en poemontage par Jacques-Henry Lévesque et Frederic Ramsey, Jr.
Produced by Jacques-Henry Lévesque/Produced by Frederic Ramsey, Jr.

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Folkways Records FL 9940

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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BLAISE GENDRARS
PROSE DU TRANSIBERIEN ET
DE LA PETITE JEANNE DE FRANCE

Folkways Records FL 9940

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PROSE DU TRANSSIBERIEN ET DE LA PETITE JEANNE DE FRANCE BY BLAISE CENDRARS

réalisé en poemontage par Jacques-Henry Lèvesque et Frederic Ramsey, Jr.

VOICE/ Récit: Jacques-Henry Lèvesque
TAPE: Frederic Ramsey, Jr.

CENDRARS AND THE TRANSSIBERIEN
by Jacques-Henry Lèvesque

Blaise Cendrars was born September 1, 1887 at La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland, and died at Paris January 20, 1961. Very young, he ran away from home and began to lead an extraordinary life of adventures which took him to Russia, China, North America, Brazil and into many other countries. It also took him among many kinds of persons. And one day, before the war of 1914, among the poets, the writers, and the artists. Then his historic role in the development of poetry and art begins. His friendship with painters is known, particularly with Chagall, Modigliani, Delaunay, Léger, whose defense he took up during the "heroic epoch" when there were more blows to receive than profits to reap. As Philippe Soupault said so well in his fine book, Profils Perdus:⁽¹⁾

"He knew how to be the most cordial of men, and from the moment that he appeared, was hailed, sought after, because his popularity in Montparnasse was enormous. The painters loved him, and had great confidence in him. Pascin, Soutine, and above all, Modigliani consulted him, and he gave of himself to give them courage, because it is known, but forgotten, the material life of these painters was hard, and poor. Sometimes, it was miserable. . . . It was while hearing him talk with these painters that I became familiar with Cendrars' most stunning gift: enthusiasm."

From his side, Chagall, in his autobiography, Ma Vie,⁽²⁾ has submitted this moving testimony:

". . . then Cendrars came along, who consoled me, just from the crackling of his eyes. More than once, he counseled me, having concern for me, but I scarcely obeyed him, even though he was right. He persuaded me that I could work calmly alongside the proud cubists, for whom I was perhaps a nothing."

Enlisting as a volunteer in the French Foreign Legion, in France, in the war of 1914 - 1918, Cendrars loses his right arm, but that will not prevent him, later, from driving at top speed, along many highways, his famous

Alfa-Romeo with a body designed by his friend Georges Braque, nor from rolling the cigarettes that scarcely ever leave his mouth.

His activity took many forms, but whether he was working in business, film, special reporting, radio, television, or, in solitude, writing books of an extreme diversity -- novels, essays, non-fiction, documentary reportages, and, as climax, those key-books (livres-clés) unique in the history of French literature, he persisted in being one of the freest men of our time, as has been so well said by his friend and admirer Henry Miller in the quite remarkable pages dedicated successively to him on various occasions, and in being one of those who have demonstrated, in an exemplary manner, the fundamental identity of the poet, and of life.

"Would it displease you, if, in my mind, you were the buccaneer of prose and poetry?" Georges Simenon once wrote him in a letter that appeared in Les Nouvelles Littéraires December 11, 1960. And he added: "Doesn't the buccaneer give you that tempered face, marked from the beginning by those fissures left by an intense life? Don't you need discoveries, always new, at the same time, a calm scorn for everything that doesn't really count, for that which is not the essential?"

He has often been called "Le Vagabond du Monde," and people have been able to say accurately of him, that he was the only one among contemporary writers knowing that life is worth more than literature. That is why, when in 1912 and in 1913, he published these two poems,⁽³⁾ now become famous, Les Pâques à New-York and the Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jeanne de France, he blew through the poetic climate of the epoch, revolutionizing modern poetry, and influencing Guillaume Apollinaire.

This historic fact was given notice as early as 1923 by Jules Romains in a lecture titled L'Esprit poétique des temps nouveaux, delivered at the Université de Bruxelles on March 27 and published subsequently in La Lanterne Sourde, where he said:

- (1) Mercure de France.
- (2) Stock, Paris, 1931.
- (3) Folkways FL 9595/6 and FL 9940.

"First, there is what one can call Apollinaire's about-face. Does this conversion coincide with Apollinaire's meeting Blaise Cendrars? The point is difficult to clarify. The causes which acted upon Apollinaire were probably numerous enough. . . . All of that does not rule out that it would be legitimate to concede to Blaise Cendrars an influence on Apollinaire and on other, younger ones."

Speaking of the Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jeanne de France, A. t'Serstevens could write quite perceptively, in an article which appeared in Les Nouvelles Littéraires of September 25, 1926 under the title Cendrars poète et romancier:

"This blues about railway stations and faraway places had an accent unknown up to that time. I wasn't the only one to get it. A whole literature tuned its lyre or its banjo to this mood. I except from this, neither Paul Morand, nor Delteil, nor Mac Orlan."

The Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jeanne de France was published in 1913, and announced at that time in this way:

"Poem. First Edition. Simultaneous colors by Mme. Sonia Delaunay-Terk. Unique Edition, said to be of the First Simultaneous Book,⁽⁴⁾ press run as high as the Eiffel Tower."

This first edition, which has become, in its own right, a museum piece (it is specially displayed at the Musée de l'Art Moderne in Paris), has the format of a fold-out nearly seven feet long, and is established as a capital document of l'esprit nouveau, not only by the text itself, but also by the conjunction of the orphico-abstract illustration executed by Mme. Sonia Delaunay (she and her husband, Robert, were both great friends of Cendrars) and the make-up of the poem, printed in multi-colored letters of all sizes by the Imprimerie Crété à Corbeil, in a composition where all the typographic ornaments of this big printing establishment were used according to directives of Cendrars, who during long months helped the type-setters to compose this work absolutely without precedent, totally innovative, and incontestably a precursor of today's advertising, and art.

Cendrars was the poet of simultaneity. Through the profound understanding which he had of it his importance has been basic for the development of a living poetry where simultaneity has been the prime tool. It is through this, in effect, that today's writers can keep in contact with an actual world dominated by a simultaneity which destroys, in time as in space, all which is opposed to it, and, from atom to star, shakes up all our concepts.

In forging, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the tool which could express this simultaneity, Cendrars arrived first at bringing into poetry the immense domain of the modern world. From this point of view, the importance of the Prose du Transsibérien is primordial, and "this immortal poem where the obsessing rhythm of wheels against the track hammers on the nostalgia of the emigrant" (as A. t'Serstevens later said again of it in the issue of Homage published by Le Mercure de

(4) Translator's Note. "First Simultaneous Book" (Premier Livre Simultané). In French, simultané is also used to describe "synchronization" of sound and film, while in a poetic context it has additional shades of meaning.

France in 1962), is one of the greatest of universal poetry because, in the heart of the immense power and activity of the world today, if man enlarges himself to the scale of the universe, he survives, splendidly alive, sensitive, and expresses himself in a way as marvelous and shattering as did before him those poets for whom, in our time, Cendrars is the grand perpetuator: Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Baudelaire, Nerval, and the Villon whom he loved so much.

This is why John Dos Passos was so completely right when he devoted chapter twelve of his book, Orient Express, to Cendrars, to call him "Homer of the Transsibérien."

(translated by Frederic Ramsey, Jr.)

Origin of "The Phenomenon"
How, What, Why, When, Where
by Frederic Ramsey, Jr.

This is the only complete recording available of the Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jeanne de France. It is one of two recordings made with approval of its author, Blaise Cendrars, and the only one that combines voice with montages. Cendrars heard it before his death, and gave his wholehearted approval to the undertaking.

For these reasons alone, it commands attention. The original tape recording was completed in March, 1951. This longplay disc of the original tape appeared for the first time in 1967.

The original taping was done without any idea of seeing it released in record form. It was like a manuscript, a painting, a poem, that circulated among enthusiasts who cared enough to keep it alive. In the fifteen years that followed the original taping, no one else has chosen to record the whole poem in any form whatsoever, although this may not always be so. Now, five years after Cendrars' death, it is unthinkable that such a key interpretation of so significant a poem from such a key figure as Cendrars should be unknown.

The first discussions that led, eventually, to the recording of the Transsibérien began some time early in 1946. Jacques-Henry Lévesque came to New York from Paris in that year, and in the years that followed he was to be going back and forth between New York and Paris regularly. Through friends, we had both learned of a desire we had nurtured, independently, for years -- to attempt recordings of contemporary poetry, using jazz and perhaps other music and sounds as part of the realization.

I knew that Jacques-Henry Lévesque, more than any other living man of French letters, would make an ideal collaborator for this experimental undertaking. He had been an intimate friend of many poets, musicians, writers, artists, in Paris. The review he had published, beginning in the late 1920's had had among its contributors Marcel Duchamp, Erik Satie, Pierre Reverdy, Gertrude Stein, Francis Picabia and Blaise Cendrars. The influential role played by Orbes (the title was suggested by Cendrars) and its editor, Jacques-Henry Lévesque, is told in Robert Motherwell's Documents of Modern Art, Vol. 8, "The Dada Painters and Poets," published 1951 by Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., New York. Lévesque had also written provocatively about jazz: "Au Coeur du Jazz," published 1938 in a French review, contained original and stimulating comments on the music.

In early discussions, Lévesque and I⁽⁵⁾ concurred that to accompany verse with music or sound was not enough -- that words "set to music" might yield a song, but that there was a body of contemporary French poetry that required more than this -- that called for the stress of contrast, of textures of sound and music that would provide more than "sound effects" or "musical settings." We talked of using sound and music as counter-voices to texts of poems, rather than as literal emphasizees or lyricizers. Sometimes the sound would fight the text. We drew from the structure of jazz, and aspired to achieve a similar cross-fire and interplay by bringing together sound, music, and a voice, as many voices.

Jacques-Henry Lévesque was well qualified for this, too. His spoken French is extraordinarily lucid. As a young man, he attended the Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation: he had been born to a family of the theater. His father, Marcel Lévesque, had appeared on stage and before film cameras, and had been one of the pioneers of the heroic epoch of Max Linder. It would have been impossible to find anyone more trained, more sensitive, more experienced, and more in the world of contemporary French poetry, music, art, theater.

It was not until tape recording arrived, in 1948, that Lévesque and I could begin to get something down. Before this date, sound recording had been so costly and so clumsy that it had belonged almost exclusively to large concerns that could afford sound technicians and acoustically treated environments. Tape did for recording what the box camera had done for photography. An interested amateur could achieve sound-takes, anywhere, that were like snapshots.

Many persons in New York were inspired to explore the new technique and matériel. I was one of them. Much of the work was experimental; we were all feeling our way, often recording indiscriminately. We were tuned to something new. I began by recording the many random sounds of the city. I experimented with montages of live sound and off-the-air material. I recorded anything that seemed worth preserving, possibly much that was not. But I am still glad, for example, that I was there on the day the clothesline man appeared on top of a pole five flights up, just opposite our fire escape. I had heard his call echoing through the streets, a weird, plaintive cry that sounded like "Boon - yay - ro!" but which turned out to be a singsong adaptation of "Line Yer Rooope!" Five years later, this particular scrap of sound found a permanent home. It became part of a compilation of human sounds figuring in the Folkways record, "Sound Patterns" (FX 6130). It was like owning a piece of New York, not real estate, but something real that told a story of 100 years of tenement life as it had been before laundromats and automatic dryers.

Almost simultaneously, in Europe as well as the United States, many individuals had begun to tinker with patching together taped sound. They went on from this to mixes and multiple tracks, producing sequences of composed sound. In France, the name of musique concrète (rough translation, "aggregated music") appeared. As the process of aggregating sound became more intricate, the mixers went into full-time development of electronic equipment and tape-handling consoles. Work along these lines led, inevitably, to multi-channel, multi-track recording and playback, many kinds of stereophonic systems, and, as one stop along the way to Nirvana-in-sound, the "built-up" textures of contemporary rock-and-roll and rock-folk recordings of the latter days of the 1960's.

But in 1948, all of this was yet to come. For many of us in that year, non-electronic sound from the world of actuality, that is, sounds of the city and country, of human voices; of animals, insects, birds; of instruments played by human beings, seemed enough. During this period, Tony Schwartz began building his now incredibly thorough archive of all the sounds of New York City -- of its voices, its machines, its hums and its chants. Other documentary recordings of sound and music were being got under way all over the world; many were to appear later on the Folkways label.

A shelf full of dog-eared tape boxes tells the story of some of our other activities of 1948 - 1952. In the fall of 1948, my wife, Amelia, and I began the series with Leadbelly that was later to appear as "Leadbelly's Last Sessions" (FA 2941/42) in 1953. We also spent time getting down, with Sonny Terry, an account of his life and music-making. Still later, in 1950-51, Moe Asch and I began preparation of a soundtrack to accompany the beautiful exhibit, "Men of the Montaña," which the late Harry Tschopik was then assembling for the Museum of Natural History, in New York. It is still in use at the Museum, and still available as "Sounds of a Tropical Rain Forest in America" (Folkways FX 6120). There were many other projects. Some are still incomplete.

During that period, ours was a small and busy apartment, and neighbors must often have wondered at microphones dangling from windows, cables fed over rooftops, and the late-hour sessions that took place many evenings. We came to know that they heard some of the work in progress - the dull thump of a broomstick or mop as it hit the ceiling beneath our floor was one response. It had a ghostly sound, but it was a live enough protest that could be heard above the twang of guitars, the wail of the mouth harp, or whatever other howling happened to be on. It told us when the sessions were over.

That was how things were when Jacques-Henry Lévesque, with Mme. Angèle Lévesque, Amelia and I, began our recordings of French poetry. We were free to combine as we chose, experiment at will. We began with one or two poems selected at random. We did them and re-did them, over and under live sound, with and without recordings, with or without mixes from other sources, often selected on the spur of the moment. All the takes were impromptu, unrehearsed. We did them with voice, solo, trying for different sounds of the voice, different environmental sounds. We did them on the rooftop, and one take was successfully completed beneath a blanket. We blended in live, expansive tones from out-of-doors on other occasions. When we had listened to test after test, playback after playback, we were ready to préciser -- to focus on a purpose, an order.

On January 16, 1949, we accomplished in one day, a Sunday, a recording in its entirety of Blaise Cendrars' poem, "Les Pâques à New York." We were encouraged with the result. It was like nothing that had been done before, it had an entity of its own. Combining poème with montages, we gave the approach a name -- poemontages.

Not long after, we got to work on the most extensive and carefully planned project of this period "Poemontages: Petite Anthologie de la Poésie Française Moderne." The anthology of 33 poems and poetic statements was chronologically arranged, from Gérard de Nerval (1808 - 1885) through Jacques Prévert (1900 -). In compiling the selection, Lévesque followed my

(5) See Code 2A, 2B.

suggestion that he put together statements that had particular meaning for him, from his experience. Many were chosen which might not have figured in a collection intended for academic studies, but this was not our objective. We were reaching out, refusing to be limited by conventional requirements. It did not occur to us then that this would ever be anything more than a document of personal exploration.

We had it completed by March of 1949. It would never have been issued without the interest of one man, Moe Asch, and the determination of one other, Jacques-Henry Lévesque. Jacques-Henry's determination, however, was strongly oriented in another direction at that time. He planned to return to France, in mid-1949, and was going to visit with Cendrars at Villefranche-sur-Mer. He asked if I could supply him with acetate longplay discs, or dubs (there would be no tape-playback set-up at Villefranche-sur-Mer) and a set of tapes (for Paris) of the "Poemontages" so far completed: the "Anthologie," and "Les Pâques à New York."

Moe Asch volunteered to do the job. Before the dubbings to tape and disc had been completed, however, his approach to the routine copy job had changed. He wasn't watching meters, he was listening.

"I like it," he said. "Let's bring it out on longplay."

Jacques-Henry demurred; he hadn't meant it that way. Besides, there would be the question of permissions -- from living French poets, from estates of dead ones, publishers. It would take a long time, and much negotiating. It did. Two or three years later, in late 1953 or early 1954, Folkways FL 9595 appeared: "Poemontages: Petite Anthologie de la Poésie Française Moderne et Les Pâques à New York."

We did not become famous, and not many copies left the press. "Extremely good diction," wrote one professor of French in a scholarly review. The New York Times noted its existence, but withheld comment. Returning to this same record on April 17, 1966, in an article titled "Ici No One Is In It Just for L'Argent" (and they weren't telling us anything), a Times writer tagged it as "a bizarre anthology of surrealist verse set to jazz." It was worth waiting thirteen years for that.

Meanwhile, back in France, Blaise Cendrars had heard our project and liked it. Impulsively, he requested an audition for "Les Pâques à New York" at Radiodiffusion Française; that resulted in its being cleared for air, and heard over the French national radio network, on April 14, 1952. This was a premiere; clearances for American release in record form were not obtained until 1953.

Prior to that date, no one had attempted anything like this. Later, many American poets, in San Francisco, New York and elsewhere, undertook coffee house and cabaret readings to jazz and other accompaniments. Perhaps we had got it started; perhaps it would have happened anyway. Other recordings followed: in Canada, Kenneth Patchen taped his "Kenneth Patchen Reads with Jazz" (Folkways FL 9718) with music by the Alan Neil Quartet. Still later, Jack Kerouac recorded with Steve Allen at the piano (Hancock ML 5000, no date). In his notes to the Kerouac-Allen collaboration, "Poetry for the Beat Generation," Gilbert Millstein said: "It occurred to me that what had been done in San Francisco in the way of combining the reading of poetry with jazz (the phenomenon did not begin here) might also be done by Kerouac in New York." As far as can be determined now, "the phenomenon"

referred to by Millstein did begin in New York, probably in January of 1949, in an apartment on East 68th Street.

The reception accorded our efforts in France, especially the warm reaction of Blaise Cendrars on first hearing the "Poemontages," encouraged us to continue. Lévesque discussed, with Cendrars, doing the "Transsibérien." Accordingly, on one of the occasions when Jacques had returned to New York, we set to work again. The recording of the "Transsibérien" was completed in March, 1951. A disc was taken to Cendrars for his approval and his reaction was again warm. All this had been accomplished before any longplay disc of any of the "Poemontages" had appeared.

For many reasons, release of this taping of the "Transsibérien" had to wait. For a long time, it seemed, the number of persons interested in it was limited. The original tape circulated back and forth between them, and that was that. I became involved in quite different activities, and was often away from New York when Jacques came back for his periodic visits. Amelia and I were parents by then; we had moved to the country, gone South to record and photograph on a Guggenheim Fellowship.

The death of Cendrars in 1961 made us go back to the "Transsibérien." The decision was made to proceed with a limited pressing. Permission then had to be sought from Mme. Cendrars and from the French publisher, Denoël. In the spring of 1966, Denoël, after consulting with Mme. Cendrars, wrote a letter confirming that we could proceed. Our debt to them is great.

By the sort of coincidence which has given us the term, "literary circles," the Spring, 1966 issue of The Paris Review ran a short biographical account of

Cendrars' life, a translation excerpting a series of interviews with Cendrars which Denoël had published complete under the title, Blaise Cendrars Vous Parle, and for the first time since the 1920's, a few translations into English of Cendrars' poetry. All of this was put together by William Brandon, an author of three historical works about the American West. Brandon also lived in France in the 1950's.

The same issue of The Paris Review carried a notice from New Directions of publication of a book, Blaise Cendrars/Selected Writings. It is described as "the first representative collection of the writing of one of the most remarkable figures of twentieth-century French literature, edited by Walter Albert, with a foreword by Henry Miller. . . . Albert's long introductory essay is perhaps the most detailed biographical and critical study of Cendrars now available in English."

The translations should open for us here a wider understanding of Cendrars' poetry and prose; it is to be hoped more of his works will appear in English. For there is enough explosive material in Cendrars to turn on generations of poets and writers.

It is hoped, also, that this recording of the "Transsibérien" will help to carry forward the "crackling" of Cendrars' fine spirit, the vitality which he brought to all his creativity, and the freedom which he breathed and shared so generously with others through his works.

FOOTNOTE:

(5) The questions may occur: How was it possible for this collaboration to take place? At the time, Lévesque spoke very little English. And how does an American qualify for something that requires a speaking knowledge of French, and some acquaintance with French literature? And the answers: There had been a tradition of speaking French in my family for a number of years. My father, an American abstract painter, had been born to American parents (his father, Milne Ramsey, was a still-life and portrait painter) living in the colony of artists and writers at Pont-Aven, Finistère, in Brittany in 1875. He had spent the early years of his childhood in France, then came to this country. He returned to Paris at the turn of the century to study painting at the Atelier Julien on a Cresson Fellowship from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. In the United States, my grandmother had given classes and private instruction in French.

It followed that when I went to Princeton University I should major in modern languages and conclude with two final years in the French Department. There, I began studies under the direction of Professors Maurice-Edgar Coindreau, Percy Chapman, and Dean Christian Gauss. All were men with wide-ranging interests in contemporary literature from both sides of the Atlantic. Professor Coindreau is particularly well known for his translations, into French, of a number of American authors, including Hemingway, Caldwell, and Faulkner.

Under their guidance, I undertook a senior thesis that attempted to trace several aspects of François Rabelais' influence, particularly among contemporary writers.

While still an undergraduate at Princeton, I had been selected to represent the university on a good will tour of France sponsored by the Institute of International Education, the Cercle Interallié, and other groups. With 10 others representing 10 other universities, I sailed on the maiden voyage of La Normandie June 7, 1935.

In my luggage, I carried letters of introduction to a number of French authors -- it had been suggested by my advisors that I should interview James Joyce in Paris. Philippe Soupault was a close friend of Joyce, and one of those for whom I had a letter from Professor Coindreau. It turned out that he was on the boat -- so, too, was Blaise Cendrars, whom I never saw, as he was working on a special journalistic assignment covering the workings of the boat -- the machines, the crew, the kitchens -- and rarely circulated among passengers. I introduced myself to Soupault, who was most cordial, and interested in my mission. He promised to arrange a meeting with Joyce when we got to Paris. He kept his word; following a few rendezvous at the Café du Dôme, I was referred by Soupault to Joyce's secretary, a M. Léon, who when assured that I was not from "the papers," appointed a time when I could meet and talk with Joyce in his apartment at 7, Rue Edmond-Valentin.

That conversation was influential in shaping the development of my thesis, which in 1936 was awarded the Prix France-Amérique, a distinction almost entirely unknown outside academic runways. All the foregoing may help to illuminate how it came about that, ten years later, I could communicate and collaborate with a French man of letters. -- F. R., Jr.

A SELECTED LISTING OF BOOKS/ARTICLES BY/
ABOUT BLAISE CENDRARS & JACQUES-HENRY
LEVESQUE, Related to This Recording:

Selected List of Works of Cendrars:

LA PROSE DU TRANSSIBERIEN ET DE LA PETITE JEANNE DE FRANCE, Dédiée aux Musiciens, is included in DU MONDE ENTIER AU COEUR DU MONDE, Editions Denoël, Paris 1957; and in the first volume of OEUVRES COMPLETES DE BLAISE CENDRARS, Editions Denoel, Paris, 1963; and in POESIES COMPLETES DE BLAISE CENDRARS, edited and with an Introduction by Jacques-Henry Lévesque, Editions Denoël, Paris, 1944.

BLAISE CENDRARS/SELECTED WRITINGS, Ed. Walter Albert, New Directions, 1966. & Note: some earlier works of Cendrars were translated into English and published in the 1930's by Harcourt, Brace and Co., including NEGRO ANTHOLOGY (Anthologie Negre). Others were SUTTER'S GOLD, and translations by John Dos Passos of some of his poems. Bibliographies of Cendrars appear in most French editions of his works. Refer to the Oeuvres Complètes (above), Ed. Denoel.

About Cendrars:

Both Henry Miller and John Dos Passos (vide Orient Express) have written of Cendrars in some detail. Livres de France, Bulletin d'Information du Département Etranger Hachette,

pub. French and European Publications, Rockefeller Center, 610 Fifth Avenue, New York Number 4, Aout-Septembre, 1950 contains photographs, interviews, articles, and an excellent Bibliography to this date.

The Paris Review, No. 37, Vol. 10, Spring, 1966 contains biographical sketch, transcript of an interview, translations of poetry.

BLAISE CENDRARS, by Jacques-Henry Lévesque, Editions de La Nouvelle Revue Critique, Paris, 1947. A key book about Cendrars.

Related Works by Lévesque About Cendrars:

BLAISE CENDRARS, by Jacques-Henry Lévesque, see above, Paris, 1947. Document pour l'Histoire de la Littérature Française, and excellent bibliography. Includes selected writings of Cendrars, critical essay of extended length by Lévesque, whose knowledge of Cendrars is nearly total. Illustrated w. rare photos.

POESIES COMPLETES DE BLAISE CENDRARS, EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION by Jacques-Henry Lévesque, Les Editions Denoël, 1944.

A Related Work on French Poetry by Lévesque:

ALFRED JARRY, Une Etude par Jacques-Henry Lévesque - Ouvres Choisies, Bibliographie, dessins, portraits, facsimiles, No. 24 in Poètes d'Aujourd'hui, Editions Pierre Seghers, Paris, 1951.

And Vide also editions of ORBES, the French review edited by Lévesque beginning 1928.

About Levesque (in English):

DADA, by Robert Motherwell, The Documents of Modern Art, Vol. 8, Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., New York, 1951. See entries about Lévesque, passim.

(Selected Listing of Works Related to This Recording, compiled by F. R. Jr.)

PROSE DU TRANSSIBÉRIEN
ET DE
LA PETITE JEANNE DE FRANCE

Dédiée aux musiciens

En ce temps-là j'étais en mon adolescence
J'avais à peine seize ans et je ne me souvenais déjà plus de
mon enfance
J'étais à 16.000 lieues du lieu de ma naissance
J'étais à Moscou, dans la ville des mille et trois clochers et des
sept gares
Et je n'avais pas assez des sept gares et des mille et trois
tours
Car mon adolescence était alors si ardente et si folle
Que mon cœur, tour à tour, brûlait comme le temple d'Éphèse
ou comme la Place Rouge de Moscou
Quand le soleil se couche.
Et mes yeux éclairaient des voies anciennes.
Et j'étais déjà si mauvais poète
Que je ne savais pas aller jusqu'au bout.

Le Kremlin était comme un immense gâteau tartare
Croustillé d'or,
Avec les grandes amandes des cathédrales toutes blanches
Et l'or mielleux des cloches . . .
Un vieux moine lisait la légende de Novgorode
J'avais soif
Et je déchiffrais des caractères cunéiformes
Puis, tout à coup, les pigeons du Saint-Esprit s'envolaient sur
la place
Et mes mains s'envolaient aussi, avec des bruissements d'alba-
tros
Et ceci, c'était les dernières réminiscences du dernier jour
Du tout dernier voyage
Et de la mer.

Pourtant, j'étais fort mauvais poète.
Je ne savais pas aller jusqu'au bout.
J'avais faim
Et tous les jours et toutes les femmes dans les cafés et tous
les verres
J'aurais voulu les boire et les casser
Et toutes les vitrines et toutes les rues
Et toutes les maisons et toutes les vies
Et toutes les roues des fiacres qui tournaient en tourbillon sur
les mauvais pavés
J'aurais voulu les plonger dans une fournaise de glaives
Et j'aurais voulu broyer tous les os
Et arracher toutes les langues
Et liquéfier tous ces grands corps étranges et nus sous les
vêtements qui m'affolent . . .
Je pressentais la venue du grand Christ rouge de la révolu-
tion russe . . .
Et le soleil était une mauvaise plaie
Qui s'ouvrait comme un brasier.

En ce temps-là j'étais en mon adolescence
J'avais à peine seize ans et je ne me souvenais déjà plus de ma
naissance

PROSE OF THE TRANSSIBERIAN
AND OF
LITTLE JEANNE OF FRANCE

Dedicated to the musicians

It was in the time of my adolescence
I was scarcely sixteen and I had already forgotten my child-
hood
I was 16,000 leagues from the place of my birth
I was in Moscow, city of the one thousand and three bell
towers and the seven stations
And I was not satisfied with the seven stations and the one
thousand and three bell towers
Because my adolescence was so intense and so insane
That my heart, in turn, burned like the temple at Ephesus or
like the Red Square of Moscow
When the sun is setting.
And my eyes were lighting ancient paths.
And I was already such a bad poet
That I couldn't go to the end.

The Kremlin was like an immense Tartar cake
Frosted in gold,
The great almonds of the cathedrals all in white
And the honeyed gold of the bells . . .
An old monk was reading me the legend of Nizhni Novgorod
I was thirsty
And I was deciphering runic letters
When, all at once, the pigeons of the Holy Ghost flew up from
the square
And my hands took flight too, with the rustling of albatross
wings
And those were the last reminiscences of the last day
Of the very last voyage
And of the sea.

Still, I was a very bad poet.
I couldn't go to the end.
I was hungry
And all the days and all the women in the cafés and all the
glasses
I should have liked to drink them and break them
And all the shopwindows and all the streets
And all the houses and all those lives
And all the wheels of cabs turning like whirlwinds over broken
pavements
I should have liked to plunge them into a furnace of swords
And I should have liked to grind up all the bones
And tear out all the tongues
And dissolve all those tall bodies, naked and strange under
garments that enrage me . . .
I could sense the coming of the great red Christ of the Russian
Revolution . . .
And the sun was a fierce wound
That burned like live coals.

It was in the time of my adolescence
I was scarcely sixteen and I had already forgotten my birth

J'étais à Moscou, où je voulais me nourrir de flammes
Et je n'avais pas assez des tours et des gares que constellaient
mes yeux
En Sibérie tonnait le canon, c'était la guerre
La faim le froid la peste le choléra
Et les eaux limoneuses de l'Amour charriaient des millions de
charognes
Dans toutes les gares je voyais partir tous les derniers trains
Personne ne pouvait plus partir car on ne délivrait plus de
billets
Et les soldats qui s'en allaient auraient bien voulu rester . . .
Un vieux moine me chantait la légende de Novgorode.

Moi, le mauvais poète qui ne voulais aller nulle part, je pou-
vais aller partout
Et aussi les marchands avaient encore assez d'argent
Pour aller tenter faire fortune.
Leur train partait tous les vendredis matin.
On disait qu'il y avait beaucoup de morts.
L'un emportait cent caisses de réveils et de coucous de la
Forêt-Noire
Un autre, des boîtes à chapeaux, des cylindres et un assorti-
ment de tire-bouchon de Sheffield
Un autre, des cercueils de Malmoë remplis de boîtes de con-
serve et de sardines à l'huile
Puis il y avait beaucoup de femmes
Des femmes des entre-jambes à louer qui pouvaient aussi
servir
Des cercueils
Elles étaient toutes patentées
On disait qu'il y avait beaucoup de morts là-bas
Elles voyageaient à prix réduits
Et avaient toutes un compte-courant à la banque.
Or, un vendredi matin, ce fut enfin mon tour
On était en décembre
Et je partis moi aussi pour accompagner le voyageur en bijou-
terie qui se rendait à Kharbine
Nous avions deux coupés dans l'express et 34 coffres de joail-
lerie de Pforzheim
De la camelote allemande "Made in Germany"
Il m'avait habillé de neuf, et en montant dans le train, j'avais
perdu un bouton
— Je m'en souviens, je m'en souviens, j'y ai souvent pensé
depuis —
Je couchais sur les coffres et j'étais tout heureux de pouvoir
jouer avec le browning nickelé qu'il m'avait aussi donné

J'étais très heureux insouciant
Je croyais jouer aux brigands
Nous avions volé le trésor de Golconde
Et nous allions, grâce au transsibérien, le cacher de l'autre
côté du monde
Je devais le défendre contre les voleurs de l'Oural qui avaient
attaqué les saltimbanques de Jules Verne
Contre les Khougouzes, les boxers de la Chine
Et les enragés petits mongols du Grand-Lama
Alibaba et les quarante voleurs
Et les fidèles du terrible Vieux de la montagne
Et surtout, contre les plus modernes
Les rats d'hôtel
Et les spécialistes des express internationaux.

Et pourtant, et pourtant
J'étais triste comme un enfant

I was in Moscow, where I was trying to nourish myself with
flames
And I was not satisfied with the bell towers and the stations
that my eyes turned to stars
In Siberia cannon were thundering, it was war
Hunger cold plague cholera
And the muddy waters of Love carted away millions of corpses
In all the stations I saw all the last trains leaving
Nobody could leave anymore because they weren't selling any
more tickets
And the soldiers who were going away would have liked to
stay . . .
An old monk was singing to me the legend of Nizhni
Novgorod.

And I, the bad poet who didn't want to go anywhere, could go
everywhere
And also merchants still had enough money
To go make their fortunes.
Their train left every Friday morning.
It was rumored there were many dead.
One took along a hundred boxes of alarm clocks and cuckoo
clocks from the Black Forest
Another, hatboxes, cylinders, and an assortment of Sheffield
corkscrews
Still another, coffins from Malmö filled with tin cans and cans
of sardines in oil
Then there were many women
Women with crotches for hire which could also be useful
Coffins
They were all patented
It was rumored there were many dead out there
They traveled at reduced rates
And they all had savings accounts in the bank.
Finally, one Friday morning, it was my turn
It was in December
And I left accompanying the jewel merchant who was going to
Harbin
We had two compartments in the Express and 34 coffers of
jewelry from Pforzheim
German junk "Made in Germany"
He had bought me a new outfit, and getting on the train, I had
lost a button
— I remember, I remember, I've often thought of it since —
I slept on the coffers and I was happy to be able to play with
the nickel-plated Browning he had also given me

I was very happy carefree
I thought it was a game of cops and robbers
We had stolen the Golconda treasure
And we were going, thanks to the Transsiberian, to hide it on
the other side of the world
I was supposed to defend it against robbers from the Ural who
had attacked the mountebanks out of Jules Verne
Against the Koungouzes, the Chinese Boxers
And the fierce little Mongol hordes of the Grand Lama
Ali Baba and the forty thieves
And the cohorts of the terrible Old Man of the Mountain
And especially the most up-to-date brigands
Hotel thieves
And crooks operating on the International Express.

And yet . . . and yet . . .
I was as sad as a child

Les rythmes du train
 La "moëlle chemin-de-fer" des psychiatres américains
 Le bruit des portes des voix des essieux grinçant sur les rails
 congelés
 Le ferlin d'or de mon avenir
 Mon Browning le piano et les jurons des joueurs de cartes dans
 le compartiment d'à côté
 L'épatante présence de Jeanne
 L'homme aux lunettes bleues qui se promenait nerveusement
 dans le couloir et qui me regardait en passant
 Froissis de femmes
 Et le sifflement de la vapeur
 Et le bruit éternel des roues en folie dans les ornières du ciel
 Les vitres sont givrées
 Pas de nature!
 Et derrière, les plaines sibériennes le ciel bas et les grandes
 ombres des Taciturnes qui montent et qui descendent
 Je suis couché dans un plaid
 Bariolé
 Comme ma vie
 Et ma vie ne me tient pas plus chaud que ce châle
 Écossais
 Et l'Europe tout entière aperçue au coupe-vent d'un express
 à toute vapeur
 N'est pas plus riche que ma vie
 Ma pauvre vie
 Ce châle
 Effiloché sur des coffres remplis d'or
 Avec lesquels je roule
 Que je rêve
 Que je fume
 Et la seule flamme de l'univers
 Est une pauvre pensée . . .

Du fond de mon cœur des larmes me viennent
 Si je pense, Amour, à ma maîtresse;
 Elle n'est qu'une enfant, que je trouvai ainsi
 Pâle, immaculée, au fond d'un bordel.

Ce n'est qu'une enfant, blonde, rieuse et triste,
 Elle ne sourit pas et ne pleure jamais;
 Mais au fond de ses yeux, quand elle vous y laisse boire,
 Tremble un doux lys d'argent, la fleur du poète.

Elle est douce et muette, sans aucun reproche,
 Avec un long tressaillement à votre approche;
 Mais quand moi je lui viens, de-ci, de-là, de fête,
 Elle fait un pas, puis ferme les yeux — et fait un pas.

Car elle est mon amour, et les autres femmes
 N'ont que des robes d'or sur de grands corps de flammes,
 Ma pauvre amie est si essulée,
 Elle est toute nue, n'a pas de corps — elle est trop pauvre.

Elle n'est qu'une fleur candide, fluette,
 La fleur du poète, un pauvre lys d'argent,
 Tout froid, tout seul, et déjà si fané
 Que les larmes me viennent si je pense à son cœur.

Et cette nuit est pareille à cent mille autres quand un train file
 dans la nuit
 — Les comètes tombent —
 Et que l'homme et la femme, même jeunes, s'amuse à faire
 l'amour.

Le ciel est comme la tente déchirée d'un cirque pauvre dans

The rhythms of the train
 The trainlike medulla of American psychiatrists
 The noise of doors voices wheels grinding over the frozen
 tracks
 The golden thread of my future
 My Browning the piano and the oaths of the cardplayers in the
 next compartment
 The fantastic presence of Jeanne
 The man with the blue spectacles who paced nervously up and
 down in the corridor and looked at me as he passed
 The rustling of women
 And the steam engine's whistle
 And the everlasting sound of wheels whirling madly along in
 their ruts in the sky
 The windows are frosted over
 No view!
 And beyond, the Siberian plains the lowering sky and the tall
 shapes of the Silent Mountains that rise and fall
 I am curled up in a plaid shawl
 Motley
 Like my life
 And my life doesn't keep me any warmer than this Scotch
 Shawl
 And the whole of Europe seen through the windcutter of an
 Express racing ahead at full speed
 Is no richer than my life
 My poor life
 This frayed
 Shawl on the coffers filled with gold
 With which I'm traveling
 And which I dream
 And which I smoke
 And the only fire in the universe
 Is a shabby thought . . .

From the depths of my heart tears rise
 If I think, Love, of my mistress . . .
 She is only a child I found,
 Pale, immaculate, in the depths of a bordello.

She is only a child, blond, laughing . . . and sad,
 She does not smile and she never cries;
 But deep in her eyes, when she lets you drink there,
 Trembles a gentle silver lily, the poet's flower.

She is gentle and mute, makes no reproach,
 With a slow trembling at your approach;
 But when I come to her, no fuss, no fret,
 She takes one step, closes her eyes — and takes one step.

For she is my love, and the other women
 Have only dresses of gold on tall bodies of flame,
 My poor friend is so lonely,
 She is quite naked, has no body — she is too poor.

She is only a slender white flower,
 The poet's flower, a poor silver lily,
 So cold, so alone, and already so wilted
 That tears rise to my eyes if I think of her heart.

And tonight is like a thousand other nights when a train
 rushes into the dark
 — Comets fall —
 And men and women, even though young, play at making
 love.

The sky is like the torn tent of a wretched circus in a little

un petit village de pêcheurs
 En Flandres
 Le soleil est un fumeux quinquet
 Et tout au haut d'un trapèze une femme fait la lune.
 La clarinette le piston une flûte aigre et un mauvais tambour
 Et voici mon berceau
 Mon berceau
 Il était toujours près du piano quand ma mère comme
 Madame Bovary jouait les sonates de Beethoven
 J'ai passé mon enfance dans les jardins suspendus de Babylone
 Et l'école buissonnière, dans les gares devant les trains en
 partance
 Maintenant, j'ai fait courir tous les trains derrière moi
 Bâle-Tombouctou
 J'ai aussi joué aux courses à Auteuil et à Longchamp
 Paris-New York
 Maintenant, j'ai fait courir tous les trains tout le long de ma
 vie
 Madrid-Stockholm
 Et j'ai perdu tous mes paris
 Il n'y a plus que la Patagonie, la Patagonie, qui convienne à
 mon immense tristesse, la Patagonie, et un voyage dans
 les mers du Sud
 Je suis en route
 J'ai toujours été en route
 Je suis en route avec la petite Jehanne de France
 Le train fait un saut périlleux et retombe sur toutes ses roues
 Le train retombe sur ses roues
 Le train retombe toujours sur toutes ses roues

"Blaise, dis, sommes-nous bien loin de Montmartre?"
 "Blaise, tell me, are we very far from Montmartre?"

Nous sommes loin, Jeanne, tu roules depuis sept jours
 Tu es loin de Montmartre, de la Butte qui t'a nourrie du
 Sacré-Cœur contre lequel tu t'es blottie
 Paris a disparu et son énorme flambée
 Il n'y a plus que les cendres continues
 La pluie qui tombe
 La tourbe qui se gonfle
 La Sibérie qui tourne
 Les lourdes nappes de neige qui remontent
 Et le grelot de la folie qui grelotte comme un dernier désir
 dans l'air bleui
 Le train palpite au cœur des horizons plombés
 Et ton chagrin ricane . . .

"Dis, Blaise, sommes-nous bien loin de Montmartre?"
 "Tell me, Blaise, are we very far from Montmartre?"

Uneasiness
 Forget your uneasiness
 All the stations, their walls cracked, slanted along the route
 The telegraph lines they hang from
 The grimacing poles which grope for and strangle them
 The world stretches lengthens and retracts like an accordion
 tormented by a sadistic player
 In the rents in the sky, the engines furiously
 Flee
 And in the gaps,
 The dizzying wheels the mouths the voices
 And the dogs of misfortune barking at our heels
 All Hell has broken loose
 Rails
 Everything is out of tune
 The "broun-roun-roun" of the wheels
 Shocks
 Shattering leaps
 We are all a storm in the skull of a deaf man . . .

Oh viens! viens!

Aux Fidji règne l'éternel printemps
La parresse
On Fiji it's always spring
Drowsiness
Love makes the lovers swoon in the tall grass and syphills in
heat grows under the banana trees
Come to the lost islands of the Pacific!

They have names like Phoenix, the Marquesas
Borneo and Java
And Sulawesi shaped like a cat.

We can't go to Japan
Come to Mexico!

On the escarpments the tulip trees are in bloom
Riotous vines are the sun's tresses
They seem a painter's palette and brushes
Colors booming like gongs
Roussseau was there
His life was dazzled

It's the country of birds
The bird of paradises, the lyrebird
The toucan, the mockingbird
And the hummingbird nests in the heart of black hills

Comel
We will make love in the majestic ruins of an Aztec temple
You will be my idol
A childish, multicolored idol somewhat ugly and curiously
strange
Oh comel

If you like we'll go by plane and fly over the land of the
thousand lakes
The mighis are fantastically long
The prehistoric ancestor will be afraid of my motor
I'll land
And I'll build a hangar for my airplane out of fossilized mam-

moth bones
The ancient fire will warm our meager love
Samovar
And we will make love like a good bourgeois couple near the
pole
Oh comel

Et de toutes les heures du monde elle n'en a pas gobé une
scule
Tous les visages entrévus dans les gares
Toutes les horloges
L'heure de Paris l'heure de Berlin l'heure de Saint-Peters-

burg and the time in all the stations
And at Ufa, the bloodied face of the canonier
Et le cadran bêtement lumineux de Grodno

Viens dans mon cœur
I will tell you a story . . .

Viens sur mon cœur
I will tell you a story . . .

Viens dans mon cœur
I will tell you a story . . .

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A childish, multicolored idol somewhat ugly and curiously
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Oh viens!

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Tous les visages entrévus dans les gares
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L'heure de Paris l'heure de Berlin l'heure de Saint-Peters-

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And at Ufa, le visage ensanglanté du canonier
Et le cadran bêtement lumineux de Grodno

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Viens dans mon cœur
I will tell you a story . . .

"Dis, Blaise, sommes-nous bien loin de Montmartre?"

Mais oui, tu m'énerves, tu le sais bien, nous sommes bien loin
La poêle le choïlra se lèvent comme des braises ardentes sur
notre route
Nous disparaissons dans la guerre en plein dans un tunnel
La faim, la putain, se cramponne aux nuages en débada-
Et hente des batailles en tas puants de morts
Fais comme elle, fais ton métier . . .

Do like her, do your job . . .

And sparns batts in stinking heaps of corpses
Hunger, that whore, clings to the clouds in flight
We are disappearing into war drawn into a tunnel
Plague cholera rise around us like burning coals along the
route
Madness boiling-over bellows in the engine
far
Of course, you're driving me crazy, can't you see we're quite

"Tell me, Blaise, are we very far from Montmartre?"

Yes, we are, we are
All the scapegoats have croaked in the desert
Listen to the trumpeting of this many troop Tomsk
Chelyabinsk Kansu Ob Tai Shan Verkhneudinsk Kurgan
Samara Penza-Tulun
Death in Manchuria
Is our debarcation point is our last lair
God what a terrible trip
Yesterday morning
Ivan Oulitch had white hair
And Kolia Nicolai Ivanovitch has been biting his nails for two
jours . . .

Fais comme elles la Mort la Famine fais ton métier
Ça coûte cent sous, en transibétien, ça coûte cent roubles
EnHère ce banquet et rougeoie sous la table
Le diable est au piano
Ses doigts noueux excitent toutes les femmes
La Nature
Les Gougues
Fais ton métier
Jusqu'à Kharbine . . .

"Dis, Blaise, sommes-nous bien loin de Montmartre?"

Nous sommes les cuis-de-jatte de l'espace
Nous roulons sur nos quatre plaques
On nous a rogné les ailes
Les ailes de nos sept péchés
Et tous les trains sont les bilboquets du diable
Basse-cour
Le monde moderne
La vitesse n'y peut mais
Le monde moderne
In the modern world
Distances are too great
Et au bout du voyage c'est terrible d'être un homme avec une
femme . . .

"Tell me, Blaise, are we very far from Montmartre?"

Viens dans mon cœur
I will tell you a story . . .

Viens dans mon cœur
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Viens dans mon cœur
I will tell you a story . . .

Et l'avance perpétuelle du train
Tous les matins on met les montres à l'heure
Le train avance et le soleil retarde
Rien n'y fait, j'entends les cloches sonores
Le gros bourdon de Notre-Dame
La cloche aigrelette du Louvre qui sonna la Barthélémy
Les carillons rouillés de Bruges-la-Morte
Les sonneries électriques de la bibliothèque de New-York
Les campanes de Venise
Et les cloches de Moscou, l'horloge de la Porte-Rouge qui me
comptait les heures quand j'étais dans un bureau
Et mes souvenirs
Le train tonne sur les plaques tournantes
Le train roule
Un gramophone grasseye une marche tzigane
Et le monde, comme l'horloge du quartier juif de Prague,
tourne éperdument à rebours.

Effeuille la rose des vents
Voici que bruissent les orages déchainés
Les trains roulent en tourbillon sur les réseaux enchevêtrés
Bilboquets diaboliques
Il y a des trains qui ne se rencontrent jamais
D'autres se perdent en route
Les chefs de gare jouent aux échecs
Tric-trac
Billard
Caramboles
Paraboles
La voie ferrée est une nouvelle géométrie
Syracuse
Archimède
Et les soldats qui l'égorgeaient
Et les galères
Et les vaisseaux
Et les engins prodigieux qu'il inventa
Et toutes les tueries
L'histoire antique
L'histoire moderne
Les tourbillons
Les naufrages
Même celui du Titanic que j'ai lu dans le journal
Autant d'images-associations que je ne peux pas développer
dans mes vers
Car je suis encore fort mauvais poète
Car l'univers me déborde
Car j'ai négligé de m'assurer contre les accidents de chemin
de fer
Car je ne sais pas aller jusqu'au bout
Et j'ai peur.

J'ai peur
Je ne sais pas aller jusqu'au bout
Comme mon ami Chagall je pourrais faire une série de tab-
leaux déments
Mais je n'ai pas pris de notes en voyage
"Pardonnez-moi mon ignorance
"Pardonnez-moi de ne plus connaître l'ancien jeu des vers"
Comme dit Guillaume Apollinaire
Tout ce qui concerne la guerre on peut le lire dans les
"Mémoires" de Kouroupatkine

Ou dans les journaux japonais qui sont aussi cruellement
illustrés

And the continuous rushing of the train
Every morning all the clocks are set
The train is set forward and the sun is set back
Nothing can be done, I hear the sonorous bells
The big clapper of Notre Dame
The shrill ringing of the Louvre announcing Saint Bartholo-
mew
The rusted bells of Bruges-la-Morte
The electric bells of the New York Public Library
The city bells of Venice
And the bells of Moscow, the clock at the Red Gate which
kept time for me when I was in an office
And my memories
The train rumbles on revolving plates
The train rolls
A phonograph grinds out a gypsy march
And the world, like the clock in the Jewish quarter in Prague,
turns desperately counterclockwise.

Strip the compass card
How the unleashed storms rage!
The trains roll like whirlwinds over tangled tracks -
Insane cups-and-balls
There are trains which never meet
Others are lost on the way
The trainmasters play chess
Backgammon
Pool
Pool balls
Parabolas
The railroad is a new geometry
Syracuse
Archimedes
And the soldiers who butchered him
And the galleys
And the ships
And the prodigious machines he invented
And all the ways of killing
Ancient history
Modern history
Whirlwinds
Shipwrecks
Even that of the Titanic I read about in the paper
So many associative images I can't develop in my verse
Because I'm still a very bad poet
Because the universe overwhelms me
Because I neglected to insure myself against train accidents
Because I'm not capable of going to the end
And I'm afraid.

I'm afraid
I'm not capable of going to the end
I could make a series of hallucinatory paintings like my friend
Chagall
But I didn't take any notes on my trip
"Forgive me my ignorance
"Forgive me for no longer knowing the old game of writing
poetry"
As Guillaume Apollinaire says
Everything about war can be found in the *Memoirs* of Kropot-
kin

Or in the Japanese newspapers which are also cruelly illus-
trated

A quoi s'abandonne
Je m'abandonne
Aux sursauts de ma mémoire...

A partir d'Irkoutsk le voyage devint beaucoup trop lent
Beaucoup trop long
Nous étions dans le premier train qui contournait le lac
Baikal
On avait orné la locomotive de drapeaux et de lampions
Et nous avions quitté la gare aux accents tristes de l'hymne
au Tzar.
Si j'étais peintre je déverserais beaucoup de rouge, beaucoup
de jaune sur la fin de ce voyage
Car je crois bien que nous étions tous un peu fous
Et qu'un délire immense ensanglantait les faces éternelles de
mes compagnons de voyage
Comme nous approchions de la Mongolie
Qui ronflait comme un incendie.
Le train avait ralenti son allure
Et je percevais dans le grincement perpétuel des roues
Les accents fous et les sanglots
D'une éternelle liturgie

J'ai vu
J'ai vu les trains silencieux les trains noirs qui revenaient de
l'Extrême-Orient et qui passaient en fantômes
Et mon œil, comme le fanal d'arrière, court encore derrière
ces trains
A Talga 100.000 blessés agonisaient faute de soins
J'ai visité les hôpitaux de Krasnoïarsk
Et à Khilok nous avons croisé un long convoi de soldats fous
J'ai vu dans les lazarets des plaies béantes des blessures qui
saignaient à pleines orgues

Et les membres amputés dansaient autour ou s'envolaient
dans l'air rauque
L'incendie était sur toutes les faces dans tous les cœurs
Des doigts idiots tambourinaient sur toutes les vitres
Et sous la pression de la peur les regards crevaient comme

des abcès
Dans toutes les gares on brûlait tous les wagons
Et j'ai vu
J'ai vu des trains de 60 locomotives qui s'enfuyaient à toute
vapeur pourchassées par les horizons en rut et des bandes
de corbeaux qui s'envolaient désespérément après

Disparaître
Dans la direction de Port-Arthur.

A Tchita nous eûmes quelques jours de répit
Arrêt de cinq jours vu l'encombrement de la voie
Nous le passâmes chez Monsieur Iankéléwitch qui voulait me
donner sa fille unique en mariage
Puis le train repartit.
Maintenant c'était moi qui avais pris place au piano et
j'avais mal aux dents

Je revois quand je veux cet intérieur si calme le magasin du
père et les yeux de la fille qui venait le soir dans mon lit
Moussorgsky
Et les lieder de Hugo Wolf
Et les sables du Gobi
Et à Khaïlar une caravane de chameaux blancs
Je crois bien que j'étais ivre durant plus de 500 kilomètres
Mais j'étais au piano et c'est tout ce que je vis
Quand on voyage on devrait fermer les yeux
Dormir

I give myself over
To the bounds of memory...

At Irkutsk the trip became much too slow
Much too long
We were in the first train which wound around Baikal Lake
The engine was decorated with flags and Venetian lamps
And we had left the station to the sad harmonies of the Czarist
hymn.
If I were a painter I would spill great splashes of yellow and
red over the end of this trip
Because I am quite sure we were all a little mad
And that a raging delirium was bloodying the lifeless faces
of my traveling companions
As we approached Mongolia
Which roared like a bonfire.
The train had slowed its pace
And I perceived in the continuous groaning of the wheels
The insane howling and sobbing
Of an eternal liturgy

I saw
I saw the silent trains the black trains returning from the Far
East and passing like phantoms
And my eye, like a rear signal light, is still running along
behind those trains
At Talga 100,000 wounded were dying for lack of care
I visited the hospitals of Krasnoyarsk
And at Khilok we encountered a long convoy of soldiers who
had lost their minds
In the pesthouses I saw gaping wounds bleeding full blast

And amputated limbs danced about or took flight into the
raucous air
Fire was on all the faces in all the hearts
Idiot fingers rapped on all the windowpanes
And in the press of fear glances burst open like abscesses
In all the stations where all the cars were burning
And I saw

I saw trains with 60 engines fleeing at top speed pursued by
flaming horizons and by flocks of crows flying desperately
after them
Disappearing
In the direction of Port Arthur.

At Chita we had a few days' rest
Five days stopover because of blocked tracks
We spent it with Monsieur Iankélevitch who wanted to give
me his only daughter in marriage
Then the train took off again.
Now it was I who was at the piano and I had a raging
toothache
When I want to I can still see that calm interior the father's
store and the eyes of the daughter who would come each
evening into my bed

Moussorgsky
And Hugo Wolf *lieder*
And Gobi sand dunes
And at Khaïlar a caravan of white camels
I'm quite sure I was drunk for more than 500 kilometers
But I was at the piano and that's all I saw
When you travel you should close your eyes
Sleep

J'aurais tant voulu dormir
Je reconnais tous les pays les yeux fermés à leur odeur
Et je reconnais tous les trains au bruit qu'ils font
Les trains d'Europe sont à quatre temps tandis que ceux d'Asie
sont à cinq ou sept temps
D'autres vont en sourdine sont des berceuses
Et il y en a qui dans le bruit monotone des roues me rappel-
lent la prose lourde de Maeterlinck
J'ai déchiffré tous les textes confus des roues et j'ai rassemblé
les éléments épars d'une violente beauté
Que je possède
Et qui me force.
Tsitsikar et Kharbine
Je ne vais pas plus loin
C'est la dernière station
Je débarquai à Kharbine comme on venait de mettre le feu
aux bureaux de la Croix-Rouge.

O Paris
Grand foyer chaleureux avec les tisons entrecroisés de tes rues
et tes vieilles maisons qui se penchent au-dessus et se
réchauffent
Comme des aïeules
Et voici des affiches, du rouge du vert multicolores comme
mon passé bref du jaune
Jaune la fière couleur des romans de la France à l'étranger.
J'aime me frotter dans les grandes villes aux autobus en marche
Ceux de la ligne Saint-Germain-Montmartre m'emportent à
l'assaut de la Butte
Les moteurs beuglent comme les taureaux d'or
Les vaches du crépuscule broutent le Sacré-Cœur
O Paris

I would so have liked to sleep
I can identify all the countries by their smell with my eyes
closed
And I can identify all the trains by the noise they make
European trains move to measured beats while Asian trains
move to broken rhythms
Others move to muted sounds these are cradle songs
And there are those which in the monotonous noise of their
wheels make me think of Maeterlinck's heavy prose
I have deciphered all the confused texts of the wheels and I
have assembled the scattered elements of a most violent
beauty
That I control
And which compels me.
Tsitsihar and Harbin
I'm not going any further
It's the last station
I got off at Harbin just as they set fire to the offices of the Red
Cross.

O Paris
Great smoldering hearth with the intersecting embers of your
streets and your old houses which bend over them and
warm one another
Like grandmothers
And here are signs red green gaily colored like my past in
short yellow
Yellow the proud color of French novels sold abroad.
I like to rub up against moving buses in the big cities
Those of the Saint Germain-Montmartre line carry me to my
assault of the Butte
The engines bellow like golden bulls
The bovine dusk grazes on the Sacré-Cœur
O Paris

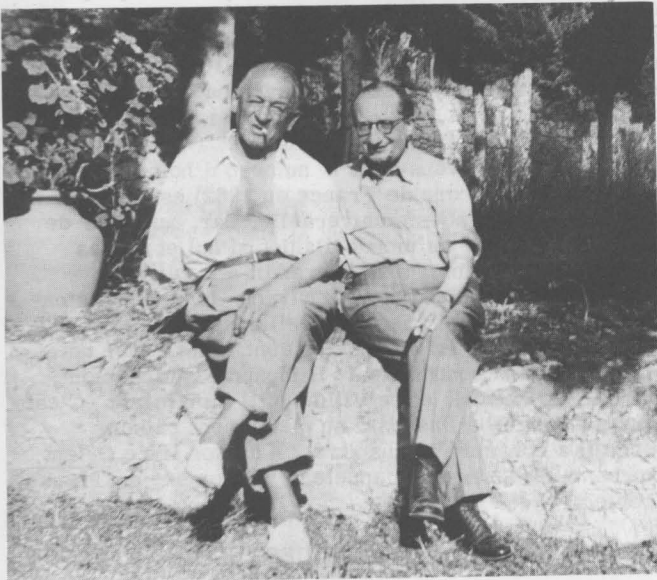
Gare centrale débarcadère des volontés carrefour des inquié-
tudes
Seuls les marchands de couleur ont encore un peu de lumière
sur leur porte
La Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits et des Grands
Express Européens m'a envoyé son prospectus.
C'est la plus belle église du monde
J'ai des amis qui m'entourent comme des garde-fous
Ils ont peur quand je pars que je n'y revienne plus
Toutes les femmes que j'ai rencontrées se dressent aux hori-
zons
Avec les gestes piteux et les regards tristes des sémaphores
sous la pluie
Bella, Agnès, Catherine et la mère de mon fils en Italie
Et celle, la mère de mon amour en Amérique
Il y a des cris de sirène qui me déchirent l'âme
Là-bas en Mandchourie un ventre tressaille encore comme
dans un accouchement
Je voudrais
Je voudrais n'avoir jamais fait mes voyages
Ce soir un grand amour me tourmente
Et malgré moi je pense à la petite Jehanne de France.
C'est par un soir de tristesse que j'ai écrit ce poème en son
honneur
Jeanne
La petite prostituée
Je suis triste je suis triste
J'irai au "Lapin agile" me ressouvenir de ma jeunesse perdue
Et boire des petits verres
Puis je rentrerai seul
Paris
Ville de la Tour unique du grand Gibet et de la Roue
Paris, 1913.

Central Station last stop of desire crossroads of unrest
Only the hardware and paint stores still have a bit of light
on their doors
The "Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits et des
Grands Express Européens" has sent me its prospectus
It's the most beautiful church in the world
I have friends who surround me like guardrails
They are afraid when I leave that I won't return
All the women I've met rise up on the horizon
With pitiful gestures and the sad looks of lighthouses in the
rain
Bella, Agnes, Catherine, and the mother of my son in Italy
And she, mother of my love in America
There are siren blasts that tear at my soul
Over in Manchuria a belly still heaves as if it were giving
birth
I would like
I would like never to have taken my trips
This evening an intense love torments me
And in spite of myself I think of little Jehanne of France
It was on an evening filled with sadness that I wrote this poem
in her honor
Jeanne
The little prostitute
I am sad I am sad
I will go to the Lapin Agile to recall my lost youth
And drink a few glasses
Then I'll return home alone
Paris
City of the incomparable Tower of the Rack and the Wheel
Paris, 1913.

From SELECTED WRITINGS of Blaise Cendrars. Trans-
lated by Walter Albert. 1962, 1966 by Walter Albert.
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Corporation.

Jacques-Henry Lévesque, poet and writer, founded and directed the avant-garde review *Orbes* which appeared in Paris between the two wars. This review, dedicated primarily to poetry, published the boldest and most independent authors of the time and discovered many young authors who today are famous. Jacques-Henry Lévesque himself has published two critical works of outstanding importance on the poets Blaise Cendrars and Alfred Jarry (See Selected List and Bibliographical material).

Son of the great actor Marcel Lévesque, famous in both theater and cinema (he was, together with Max Linder, one of the pioneers during the heroic days of French film), Jacques-Henry Lévesque attended the Conservatoire National de Musique et de Declamation in his youth and has always shown a keen interest in everything of the theater. It follows naturally that he has been engaged in both radio and movies, has written on the theater, and was one of the first in France to write on the subject of jazz. Currently, he is at work on a number of critical essays.



Blaise Cendrars & J. H. Levesque at Saint-Segond (Villefranche-sur-Mer, France, in 1949. Photo by Angele Levesque.

RAMSEY, (Charles) Frederic, Jr., 1915-

PERSONAL: Born January 29, 1915, in Pittsburgh, Pa; son of Charles Frederic and Ethel A. (Runnette) Ramsey; married Amelia Johnston, 1948; children: Loch, Martha, Alida. Education: Princeton University, B.A.; 1936. Home: The Federal Twist, R.D.2, Stockton, New Jersey.

SIDELIGHTS: Ramsey sums up his work as a "quarter of a century in research and writing." His findings from five field trips between 1951 and 1957 in the Carolinas, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana are documented and illustrated in sound in ten albums of "Music from the South." With his words, camera, and tape recorder, he aimed to capture the traces of the day "When there was music everywhere." Many of the sights and sounds he feels he recorded "just in time. Already many of them are gone. The South is changing fast and they are vanishing." Has produced, edited, and recorded over forty long-play recordings for Folkway Records, including "Folkways Jazz Series," "Leadbelly's Last Sessions," and "Music from the South."

Blaise Cendrars est né le 1^{er} Septembre 1887 à la Chaux-de-Fonds en Suisse et est mort à Paris le 20 janvier 1961. Très jeune il s'est enfui de chez ses parents et a commencé à mener une extraordinaire existence d'aventures qui l'a mené en Russie, en Chine, en Amérique du Nord, au Brésil, et dans bien d'autres pays. Egalement parmi toutes sortes de gens. Et, un jour, avant la guerre de 1914, parmi les poètes, les écrivains et les peintres. Et alors commence son rôle historique dans le développement de la poésie et de l'art. On connaît son amitié avec les peintres, en particulier avec Chagall, Modigliani, Delaunay, Léger, dont il se fit le défenseur à "l'époque héroïque" où il y avait plus de coups à recevoir que de profits à recueillir. Comme l'a dit fort bien Philippe Soupault dans son beau livre *Profilés perdus* (Mercure de France): "Il savait être le plus cordial des hommes et dès qu'il apparaissait on le saluait, on l'interpellait car sa popularité à Montparnasse était énorme. Les peintres l'aimaient et avaient grande confiance en lui. Pascin, Soutine et surtout Modigliani le consultaient et lui s'efforçaient de leur donner du courage, car on le sait mais on l'oublie, la vie matérielle de ces peintres était dure, pénible. C'était parfois la misère... C'est en l'écoutant parler avec ces peintres que j'ai appris à connaître le don le plus éclatant de Cendrars: l'enthousiasme." De son côté Chagall a laissé ce témoignage émouvant dans son autobiographie *Ma Vie* (Stock, Paris, 1931): "... alors venait Cendrars, qui me consolait du seul éclat de ses yeux.

"Plus d'une fois, il me conseillait, ayant souci de moi, mais je ne lui obéissais guère, bien qu'il eût raison.

"Il me persuadait que je pouvais travailler tranquillement à côté des cubistes orgueilleux, pour qui j'étais peut-être un rien du tout."

Engagé volontaire, à la Légion Etrangère, en France, à la guerre de 1914 - 1918, Cendrars perd son bras droit, mais cela ne l'empêchera pas, plus tard, de conduire à fond de train, sur bien des routes, avec sa seule main gauche, sa fameuse Alfa-Romeo, dont la carrosserie fut dessinée par son ami Georges Braque, et de rouler les cigarettes qui ne quittent guère sa

bouche. Il avait une activité multiforme, mais qu'il fasse des affaires, du cinéma, du grand reportage, de la radio, de la télévision, ou que, dans la solitude, il écrive des livres d'une extrême diversité: romans, essais, nouvelles, histoires vraies et, pour finir, ces livres-clés uniques dans l'histoire de la littérature française que sont ses dernières oeuvres, il est toujours resté l'un des hommes les plus libres de notre époque, comme l'a fort bien dit son ami et admirateur Henry Miller dans les pages toutes remarquables qu'il lui a consacrées à diverses reprises, et l'un de ceux qui ont manifesté, d'une manière exemplaire, l'identité fondamentale du poète et de la vie.

"Vous déplairait-il que dans mon esprit, vous soyez le boucanier du roman et de la poésie?" lui écrivait Georges Simenon dans une lettre publiée dans *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* du 11 décembre 1960. Et il ajoutait:

"N'avez vous pas du boucanier, le visage recuit et, depuis toujours, marqué de ces fissures qu'y laisse une vie intense? N'en avez vous pas le besoin de découvertes toujours nouvelles en même temps qu'un calme mépris pour tout ce qui ne compte pas réellement, pour ce qui n'est pas l'essentiel?"

On l'a souvent appelé - le "Vagabond du monde", et l'on a pu dire justement de lui que c'était le seul parmi les auteurs contemporains sachant que la vie vaut mieux que la littérature. C'est pourquoi, quand, en 1912 et en 1913, il a publié ses deux poèmes, devenus fameux, Les Paques à New York et la Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jeanne de France, il a bouleversé le climat poétique de l'époque, révolutionnant toute la poésie moderne et influençant Guillaume Apollinaire. Ce fait historique a été signalé par Jules Romains, dès 1923, dans une conférence intitulée L'esprit poétique des temps nouveaux donnée à l'Université de Bruxelles le 27 mars et publiée ensuite par La Lanterne Sourde où il disait:

"Il y a d'abord ce que l'on peut appeler le changement de front d'Apollinaire. Cette conversion coïncide-t-elle avec la rencontre de Blaise Cendrars par Apollinaire? Le point est difficile à éclaircir. Les causes qui agissent sur Apollinaire furent probablement assez nombreuses... Tout cela n'empêche pas qu'il ne soit légitime d'accorder à Blaise Cendrars une influence sur Apollinaire et sur d'autres plus jeunes."

Parlant de la Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jeanne de France, A. t'Serstevens a pu écrire très justement dans un article paru dans Les Nouvelles Littéraires du 25 septembre 1926 sous le titre de Cendrars poète et romancier: "Cette complainte des gares et des lointains avait un accent inconnu jusqu'alors. Je n'ai pas été le seul à le comprendre. Toute une littérature a accordé sur ce mode sa lyre ou son banjo. Je n'en excepte ni Paul Morand, ni Delteil, ni Mac Orlan."

La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jeanne de France fut publiée en 1913, et annoncée alors ainsi: "Poème. Ed orig. Couleurs simultanées de Mme Sonia Delaunay-Terk. Ed. unique, dite du Premier livre Simultané, tirage atteignant la hauteur de la Tour Eiffel." Cette première édition qui est devenue, à juste titre, un objet de musée (elle figure en particulier au Musée d'art moderne à Paris) se présente comme un dépliant long de 2 mètres, et reste un document capital de "l'esprit nouveau", non seulement par son texte même, mais aussi par la conjonction de

l'illustration orphico-abstraite due à Madame Sonia Delaunay (grande amie de Cendrars comme son mari Robert Delaunay) et de l'impression du poème imprimé en lettres multicolores de toutes tailles, par l'Imprimerie Crété à Corbeil, en une composition où tous les signes typographiques de cette grande imprimerie ont été employés selon les directives de Cendrars qui, durant de longs mois, aida les typos à composer cet ouvrage absolument sans précédent, totalement novateur, et précurseur incontestable de la publicité et de l'art d'aujourd'hui.

Cendrars a été le poète de la simultanéité. Par la compréhension profonde qu'il en a eue son importance a été capitale dans le développement de la poésie vivante dont la simultanéité a été l'outil majeur. C'est par elle, en effet, que les écrivains d'aujourd'hui peuvent rester en contact avec le monde actuel entièrement dominé par une simultanéité qui détruit, dans le temps comme dans l'espace, tout ce qui s'oppose à elle et, de l'atome à l'étoile, bouleverse toutes nos conceptions.

En forgeant, au début du XX^e siècle, l'outil qui pouvait exprimer cette simultanéité, Cendrars, le premier, est parvenu à intégrer dans la poésie l'immense domaine du monde moderne. A ce point de vue l'importance de la Prose du Transsibérien est primordiale et "cet immortel poème où le rythme obsédant des roues sur le rail martèle la nostalgie de l'emigrant" (comme l'a dit encore A. t'Serstevens dans le numéro d'hommage publié par le Mercure de France en 1962) est l'un des plus grands de la poésie universelle, car, au coeur de l'immense activité du monde d'aujourd'hui et de ses puissances, l'homme, s'il s'agrandit à la taille de l'univers, reste splendidement vivant, sensible et s'exprime d'une manière aussi merveilleuse et bouleversante que le firent avant lui ces poètes dont il est, pour notre temps, le grand continuateur: Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Baudelaire, Nerval, et ce Villon qu'il aimait tant. C'est pourquoi John Dos Passos a eu pleinement raison, lorsqu'il a consacré le chapitre XII de son livre Orient Express à Cendrars, d'appeler: "L'Homère du Transsibérien."

JACQUES-HENRY LEVESQUE

Vendredi

le 20 août 50

Mon cher Fred Ramsey,

C'est un grand jour pour moi. L'ami Jacques Lévesque vient de me faire entendre les enregistrements que vous fait ensemble des Paques à New York.

Je suis absolument bouleversé de cette audition qui a été pour moi une révélation. Comment vous exprimer ma reconnaissance émue et vous remercier de la peine que vous êtes donnée? C'est merveilleux. Merci de tout coeur.

Avec ma main amie
Blaise Cendrars