

276

# RIMBAUD'S TOWNS

RIMBAUD'S TOWNS  
A STUDY OF THEIR FUNCTION AS THEME AND IMAGE  
IN HIS POETRY

By

PAULINE POCKNELL, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

September 1976

MASTER OF ARTS (1976)  
(French)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Rimbaud's Towns: A Study of their Function as Theme and  
Image in his Poetry

AUTHOR: Pauline Pocknell, B.A. (Manchester University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor A. W. Patrick

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 254

## ABSTRACT

While most critics make passing references to the town in Rimbaud's poetry, and a few have discussed the theme of the town in his prose poetry, it has never been studied thoroughly as a topic throughout his work. This thesis therefore traces Rimbaud's view of towns and the role of the town as theme and image throughout his poetry, on the premise that the early poems are seminal works for the later ones.

Because of the lacunae in our knowledge of Rimbaud's life, this study is divided geographically rather than chronologically into chapters on Charleville, Paris, Belgian towns and the composite towns of the prose poems. It is not a biographical study but an examination of the poetry.

Within each chapter, the poems are examined as entities in order to demonstrate Rimbaud's attitude towards particular towns, and especially the role of the town in his poetry. The town poems are classified as far as theme is concerned according to their function as social commentary, as analogies for his emotions, as demonstrations of his concept of poetry, as refuges, therapy or antidotes to pressures, as spectacle or theatricalization of reality, as transpositions of reality or memories, or as visions. The imagery which illustrates these varying roles or aspects of the town in Rimbaud's town poems is analysed according to pre-selected areas of urban geography: localization, topography, geology, architectural features, climatic conditions, social and human aspects of towns, commercial activities, botanical and biological life, political organization, circulation and movement, the language of the towns and the vantage point of the observer or narrator. Rimbaud's changing and developing interest in different facets of towns can thus be followed in detail.

This thesis can be read at two levels: for a view of Rimbaud's towns at any point in his poetic development through the analysis of individual poems and for a view of the pattern of development of this preoccupation in Rimbaud's poetry.



#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to record my thanks to Dr. A.W. Patrick for his patient direction of this thesis and for the understanding he has shown in problems that arose during its composition; Professor W.N. Jeeves for help with stylistic problems in Rimbaud's poetry; Professor H.F. Guite, of the Department of Classics, for his expert advice on the difficult question of possible Latin sources in the early verse; and Miss M.M. Ezerkalns for her painstaking proofreading and typing. I should also like to thank the School of Graduate Studies for generous financial assistance.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHRONOLOGY	15
CHAPTER I - CHARLEVILLE	40
CHAPTER II - PARIS	86
CHAPTER III - BELGIAN TOWNS	129
CHAPTER IV - THE COMPOSITE TOWNS OF THE PROSE POEMS	159
CONCLUSION	226
APPENDIX - TOWNS IN RIMBAUD'S POETRY	239
BIBLIOGRAPHY	244

## INTRODUCTION

In the western world, the second half of the nineteenth century saw a colossal movement from agrarian to industrial pursuits and therefore a migration of the population from country to town. The phenomenal growth of technology with the concomitant expansion of the town threw a web of steel across western Europe which permitted relatively rapid communication with far-flung parts of the world for the first time in history. In France, this social upheaval was further complicated by a disastrous foreign war followed by bloody internal dissension, just at the point when Rimbaud had reached adolescence and was seeking his place in the world.

It is during this period of rapid social and topographical change and political unrest, that Rimbaud produced his poetry, which also, through several metamorphoses, is dynamic, revolutionary and exploratory. One can fruitfully discuss Rimbaud's poetry in relation to the social background of his age. One can also discuss it in relation to the shifting fortunes, emotional upheavals and coercions of his family and school life, or in relation to the presumed mental attitudes and attributes of this child, as many critics have done. However the broad outlines of the growth and outlook of Rimbaud, child and young adult, do seem to parallel remarkably the general trends of society's change from stability and conservatism to instability and revolution in moral and social codes, and also, from

limited, traditional expectations and interest to seemingly limitless opportunities for mental and physical exploration, achievement and creation.

Particularly in his early poems, Rimbaud modelled himself on the poetic schools of his time and earlier ones. The influence of his reading on his themes and ideas must not be underestimated. The whole of his poetry can be interpreted as a demonstration of literary progress and can be set against the literary currents of his time. Indeed, Pierre Gascar has observed:

En moins de quatre années, le jeune poète a non seulement revécu une partie importante de l'évolution de la littérature, mais l'a portée aussi au-delà du présent, jusqu'à ce qu'on pourrait appeler les confins de la perspective...<sup>1</sup>

Verlaine's happy phrase, "L'homme aux semelles de vent", epitomizes a whole host of biographies and interpretations of Rimbaud's poetry on the theme of Rimbaud the vagabond adventurer.<sup>2</sup> Claudel's phrase, "... mystique à l'état sauvage", has spawned several critical studies on mystic, Catholic lines.<sup>3</sup> Rimbaud's intellectual, if not physical involvement with the cause and events of the Commune has produced commentaries interpreting his poetry on political, ideological lines.<sup>4</sup> Accounts of

<sup>1</sup>Pierre Gascar, Rimbaud et la commune. Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 111 (hereafter: Gascar, La Commune).

<sup>2</sup>See Bibliography under Carré, Kunel, Plessen, Adam, Soupault, Underwood.

<sup>3</sup>See Bibliography under Rops, Rivière.

<sup>4</sup>See Bibliography under Gascar, Etiemble et Gaucière, Chambon, Décaudin, Denis, St. Aubyn.

his family and personal life, often mythified, have produced psychological interpretations, ranging from pathological studies classifying Rimbaud clinically, to views of the escapist into the world and myths of childhood, the reluctant adult.<sup>5</sup> The opposite face of this same coin has produced Rimbaud the modern rebel, revolting against either the restrictions of the old order represented by family, school, church and the government of Napoleon III, or, against technology, science and the social miseries they produced.<sup>6</sup> Rimbaud the good-for-nothing, the homosexual corrupter of Verlaine, the wrecker of marriage and bourgeois values is another offshoot of this same view.<sup>7</sup> Quite recently a view of Rimbaud the "farceur", writer of deliberately ambiguous poems with strong sexual, often obscene undercurrents, has come to the fore.<sup>8</sup> His letter to Demeny and Izambard of May, 1871, certain accounts of the life he led in Paris and London thereafter, and especially his later poems, produced views of Rimbaud as an escapist in a different sense. He is seen as the "Voyant", the visionary, the orphic poet, the deliberately hallucinated individual if not the drug-addict, the alchemist, magician or Illuminist.<sup>9</sup> For a time, to the Surrealists, he was the recipient

---

<sup>5</sup>See Bibliography under Fréret, Fowlie, Hackett, Verbeek.

<sup>6</sup>See Bibliography under Dhôtel, Ahearn, Peschel, MacLeish.

<sup>7</sup>See Bibliography under Fondane, Fontainas, Coulon, Ex-Madame Paul Verlaine.

<sup>8</sup>See Bibliography under Ascione et Chambon, Denis, Faurisson.

<sup>9</sup>See Bibliography under Chisholm, Gengoux, Richer, Ruchon, Starkie, de Renéville, Davies, Bays.

of thoughts and visions granted to a poetic, receptive mind, automatically and rapidly recorded without the intrusion of the rational.<sup>10</sup>

Particularly with regard to the Illuminations, critics are extremely divided as to whether these poems are transpositions of reality and memories, or pure visions, unrelated to things seen and remembered in real life. Houston flatly states:

The Illuminations, like all of Rimbaud's later work, are built of mythic, poetic conceptions, and it is not really profitable to grope for the 'transpositions of reality' or sources, which have so often been sought in them. [...] The relation of poetry to the pictorial is an exceedingly delicate matter, like the relation of a writer's experience to his work, and I do not believe it is a very fruitful topic of enquiry in regard to Rimbaud.<sup>11</sup>

Delahaye, Rimbaud's childhood friend, asserts: "Beaucoup de ces poèmes furent composés avec le souvenir (choses vues, sentiments passagers, fragments de lecture...)"<sup>12</sup> Chadwick, Adam, De Graaf and Starkie, to mention a few more recent critics, agree with him.

Another source of dissension among the critics is the dating of his poetry, a puzzle throughout, but especially in the Illuminations. Since

<sup>10</sup> André Breton, "Manifeste du Surréalisme", 1924, in Manifestes du Surréalisme, Paris: Gallimard, 1972, p. 39, says however, "Rimbaud est surréaliste dans le pratique de la vie et ailleurs", indicating that the life takes precedence over the work as truly surrealist.

<sup>11</sup> John Porter Houston, The Design of Rimbaud's Poetry, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963, pp. 239 and 257 (hereafter: Houston, The Design).

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Delahaye, Souvenirs familiers à propos de Rimbaud, Verlaine, Germain Nouveau, Paris: Messein, 1925, p. 69, n. 1 (hereafter: Delahaye, Souvenirs).

Bouillane de Lacoste's thesis in 1949,<sup>13</sup> in which he attempted to reverse the accepted view that they had been composed before Une Saison en enfer, new examination of the question has produced many convinced critics but no certain proofs on either side.

This controversy raises important questions: for example, do the "splendides villes" in "Adieu" look forward to the town poems and voyages of the Illuminations, or are the town poems in the Illuminations condemned by implication in "Alchimie du verbe"? Concrete facts on Rimbaud's life during these years are so few, his letters so rare, the testimony of friends and other eye-witnesses so scanty, the poetry so cryptic at times, that it does not seem possible that clear proofs on this issue will be forthcoming.

Rimbaud's work then is not easily or neatly categorized, partly because during its composition he was in a state of rapid mental and physical development and frequent change of physical and mental environment. The poetry reflects these transmutations. There are many lacunae in our knowledge of his life and his output is slender enough to produce few samples of some aspects of his work. Its rapid transformation in style and theme not only precludes the safe classification of Rimbaud into any of the particular poetic or psychological categories mentioned above, but also, paradoxically, permits the acceptance, at least as far as some of his poetry is concerned, of almost all of his critics' classifications. Their classifications tend to be a limited view of part of his work. As Frohock remarks: "Everyone seems to have been

---

<sup>13</sup>Henry de Bouillane de Lacoste, Rimbaud et le problème des "Illuminations", Paris: Mercure de France, 1949 (hereafter: Lacoste, Le Problème).

able to find something for himself - or of himself - in this poet."<sup>14</sup>

Labelling of Rimbaud's themes and style may tell rather more about the commentator than about the poetry, which seems to act in the manner of the Rorschach ink-blot test. These contradictory classifications all contain one central thesis however: throughout his creative period, Rimbaud was constantly in search of some goal or ideal which he considered attainable through his actions and his poetry. Whether this quest was for his own place in the world, for another world, new or old, its end promised happiness for himself and for mankind. "Vagabonds" (O.C., 136-137),<sup>15</sup> seems to resume this search: "moi pressé de trouver le lieu et la formule."

This search manifested in his wanderings and in his poetry, is closely linked with towns. Despite his obvious affinity with nature and the countryside, expressed perhaps most fervently in his early poetry, Rimbaud was a man of his time and a town-dweller. Although he was set apart by his intellectual qualities and his poetic activities, he did not compose his poetry in a vacuum: it is town-poetry because of his environment. The principal stages of Rimbaud's life can be represented by a list of towns, with Charleville being the centre of his wanderings, the place to which he always returned.

---

<sup>14</sup>W.M. Frohock, Rimbaud's Poetic Practice, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963, p. 3 (hereafter: Frohock, Poetic Practice).

<sup>15</sup>All references to the text are taken from Arthur Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Antoine Adam, Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1972 (hereafter: Rimbaud, O.C.).



There are two opposing interpretations of these wanderings: that he never went to any town except out of material necessity; that he was continually driven on by some inner compulsion to find his ideal place. Either reason still evokes the notion of finding a happier life if not perfect happiness, and both reasons are suggested at various times in his poetry and correspondence. As late as 1885 when he had certainly abandoned poetry, he wrote to his family:

En tout cas, ne comptez pas que mon humeur deviendrait moins vagabonde, au contraire, si j'avais le moyen de voyager sans être forcé de séjourner pour travailler et gagner l'existence, on ne me verrait pas deux mois à la même place. Le monde est très grand et plein de contrées magnifiques que l'existence de mille hommes ne suffirait pas à visiter. Mais, d'un autre côté, je ne voudrais pas vagabonder dans la misère... Mais pour vivre toujours au même lieu, je trouverai toujours cela très malheureux... le plus probable, c'est qu'on va plutôt où l'on ne veut pas, et que l'on fait plutôt ce qu'on ne voudrait pas faire, et qu'on vit et décède tout autrement qu'on ne le voudrait jamais, sans espoir d'aucune espèce de compensation.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>"Rimbaud aux siens, Aden le 15 janvier, 1885", Rimbaud, O.C., p. 397. In his early correspondence, Rimbaud manifests the strong desire to reach the towns, to write his poetry and to be free. "Dans deux ans, dans un an peut-être, je serai à Paris ... Je jure... d'adorer toujours les deux déesses, Muse et Liberté." "A Théodore de Banville, 24 mai 1870", (O.C., p. 236). "Que voulez-vous, je m'entête affreusement à adorer la liberté libre... Je devais partir aujourd'hui même;..." "A Izambard, 2 novembre 1870", (O.C., p. 245). His poetry is full of lines indicating his desire to travel and see new places, the need for multiple experiences and unfettered existence: "Et j'irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien, / Par la Nature, ---..." (O.C., p. 6). "L'hiver, nous irons dans un petit wagon rose / Avec des coussins bleus..." (O.C., p. 31). "Il lisait son roman sans cesse médité, / Plein de lourds ciels ocreux et de forêts noyées..." (O.C., p. 45). "Les Fleuves m'ont laissé descendre où je voulais." (O.C., 66). "Tu ne sais pas où tu vas ni pourquoi tu vas, entre partout, réponds à tout." (O.C., 97). "Nous voyagerons, nous chasserons dans les déserts, nous dormirons sur les pavés des villes inconnues, sans soins, sans peines," (O.C., p. 105). "Je dus voyager, distraire les enchantements assemblés sur mon cerveau," (O.C., 111). "Et à l'aurore, armés d'une ardente patience, nous entrerons aux splendides villes," (O.C. 117). "Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs!" (O.C. p. 129). "...le monde votre fortune et votre péril," (O.C., p. 147.).

This passage, while written by a man resigned to "La réalité rugueuse" and no longer searching for his ideal in the towns, indicates his need for multiplicity of experience and environment, and his disillusionment about possible rewards or consolation in this world or the next. One presumes that this "compensation" was what he had so feverishly searched for earlier.

Not surprisingly, up until 1879, the quest for happiness, stimulation, freedom or novelty in the towns was reflected in his other talisman for happiness, his poetry, and in the poems about the towns. The town is one of the most important preoccupations in Rimbaud's poetry, and is present throughout his work, often used as an allegory or an analogue to a state of mind, and changing its forms and points of interest as the poet develops. Yet its importance has been ignored; apart from passing references to the town by most of his critics, there is only a handful of articles and chapters in books,<sup>17</sup> where the town is recognized as a major topic, mainly in the Illuminations.

---

<sup>17</sup>A. Dhôtel, Rimbaud et la révolte moderne, Paris: Gallimard, 1952 ( Hereafter: Dhôtel, La révolte ) has a chapter on "La Cité". W. Fowlie, Rimbaud, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966 ( Hereafter: Fowlie, Rimbaud ) identifies five themes in the Illuminations: "Childhood", "Life of the Poet", "Vision of Nature", "Vision of the City", "Mystical Vision". He devotes pp. 185-206 to the City. M.-J. Whitaker, La Structure du monde imaginaire de Rimbaud, Paris: Nizet, 1972 ( hereafter: Whitaker, Structure ) devotes her last chapter to "La Ville", which for her is a metaphor, "l'état du créateur", enclosed in the larger metaphor of creation which embraces all Rimbaud's poetry. E. Ahearn, "Imagination and the Real", Revue de la littérature comparée XLVII (1973) ( Hereafter: Ahearn, "Imagination" ) uses a method of literary comparison to align Rimbaud with the English Romantics and contemporary French poets in their attitudes to nineteenth century towns. J. Lebeau, "Le Thème de la ville", Mercure de France 339 ( mai-août 1960 ), 359-363 ( Hereafter: Lebeau, "La ville" ) concentrates on Rimbaud's hallucinatory vision of the towns and compares him to Baudelaire and De Quincey. C.A. Hackett, "Rimbaud and the 'splendides villes'", L'Esprit Créateur IX, no. 1 ( Spring 1969 ), pp. 46-53 ( Hereafter: Hackett, "Splendides villes" ) identifies the basic opposition of town versus nature in Rimbaud's poetry and discusses some of the town poems, especially those in the Illuminations.

Hackett has said about the town poems:

It is understandable that critics, in considering the place of the town in Rimbaud's work, should have concentrated on the Illuminations, for there that theme reaches its climax and is given supreme artistic expression.<sup>18</sup>

He admits however that this theme, with that of nature, spans the work. Perhaps the reason why critics have concentrated on the town imagery only in the prose poems is that they have considered the topic in too narrow a light and have largely equated the town with its architecture.

One of the best ways of attempting to understand Rimbaud's poetry, to strike some sort of balance among his critics, is to select a topic which is present throughout his poetry -- in this case, the town-- and to analyse and evaluate its function as theme and image in Rimbaud's work as a whole.<sup>19</sup> Whatever the criteria chosen for studying this topic, in view of the gaps in our knowledge of Rimbaud's life and his reactions to it, the only certainty is that this research must be based very squarely on the poetry itself. A method of analysis must be used which proceeds from the work to the life, and thence to the social and literary background of his age, and not vice versa. It must also examine all aspects of the town which preoccupied Rimbaud.

If the term "urban geography" is given its widest application to encompass the localization, the topography, the geological and architectural features of a town, its social and human aspects, its

---

<sup>18</sup> Hackett, "Splendides villes", p. 52.

<sup>19</sup> F. Ruchon, Rimbaud, Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970 (hereafter: Ruchon, Rimbaud), p. 66, as early as 1929, suggested a similar approach: "Le procédé critique le plus commode pour étudier cette poésie, consiste... à en dégager un certain nombre de cycles...C'est de la confrontation...de ces cycles, que nous pourrions dégager une idée qui les explique tous". Few critics have followed his suggestions, and this study will concentrate on only one of these themes or cycles, but in our view, the one which embraces all the others.

biological and botanical life, its commercial activities, its political organization, its climatic conditions, its transport and circulation system and its language, including the sounds made by any object in the town, as well as the varying vantage points of its observers, then, by studying all these aspects of the town in Rimbaud's poetry, one can see the full extent of Rimbaud's preoccupation with the town and establish a comparative urban geography of his work. Important as it is in the later prose poems, the town can be established as a topic of equal significance in Rimbaud's early poetry. Although they are lightly dismissed by many critics, the early poems are seminal works for Rimbaud's view of the town and the qualities of his ideal place.

Some aspects of Rimbaud's poetry are not readily classifiable under the term "geography": the fantastic, metaphysical or futuristic visions of some of his towns; the moral or philosophical attitudes or the manifestations of psychological states in some of the town poems; the language of the town poems in the wider sense of that used by the observer or narrator to evoke them. In this study they will be included under the all-encompassing concept of the vantage point of the observer. This is a study of the imaginary geography in Rimbaud's poetry, with other aims than simple description, opposed to the factual geography of places. The observer/ architect/ poet must be granted wider scope than the surveyor/ geographer of the prosaic, concrete world.

Rimbaud's later poems subject the reader to enormous leaps through the dark to follow his rapid, free association of concepts and images. By considering his poetry under the above-mentioned subdivisions of urban geography, by dissecting the poems and placing their images under these headings, one would lose the impact of the whole poem or whole town in each

poem, and thereby forfeit an understanding of the poet's emotions and attitudes. When discussing a theme, we must consider poems as entities to avoid misrepresentation, to avoid giving an impression of the preponderance of one theme over other topics in the same poem. Similarly, only by treating each poem as a complete unit can one refer to other complete poems which do not contain this theme or imagery, but which, nonetheless have a direct bearing on its interpretation. Similar scruples prevent the use of obviously later poems as commentary on or evidence for Rimbaud's feelings or observations in earlier ones.

There are over a hundred poems among Rimbaud's rather slender output which mention at least one of the aspects of towns listed above under urban geography. It is felt that critics who have singled out Rimbaud's towns for consideration, concentrating only on those poems which fit their particular view of his poetry, have managed to illustrate their view at the expense of a more complex overview of the diversity of Rimbaud's towns as he himself developed as a poet, person and thinker. Therefore, for all these reasons, the town poems will be analysed individually as entities for the most part. Statistically this is the only "accurate", although rather lengthy, possible method. In conclusion, attempts will be made to discern patterns in his attitudes to and treatment of the towns.

It has been decided, somewhat reluctantly, to use the hackneyed arrangement of geographical division which is loosely chronological, rather than a strict biographical and chronological method. This study is therefore divided under the general headings of Charleville, Paris, Belgian towns and the composite towns of the prose poems. Within each section, the urban geography will be explored through individual poems, then summarized. The sources or transpositions of reality will be discussed when necessary.

The role of the town in the poem, and Rimbaud's attitude to the town in general, or to this particular town, will be mentioned within each chapter section. Biographical evidence will be used sparingly, psychological analyses of Rimbaud the man, not at all. However, psychological interpretations of Rimbaud's mental visions conjured up in the poems are of great value. The influence of literature and socio-historical currents and events will be touched on in relation to individual poems.

Certain themes, styles and attitudes will emerge as attached to a particular town or period of composition, others as constant aspects of Rimbaud's towns. The titles of the chapters must not be taken to indicate a shortsighted preoccupation only with the sources for the poems, or with Rimbaud's attitude to a particular "real" town. It is what Rimbaud creates out of the possible sources that matters. Themes and attitudes evinced in the early Charleville poems may well be transferred to other town poems later, or prove to be enduring attitudes. They will be acknowledged as originally Charleville themes and traced to their limit within the Charleville chapter. Similarly, attitudes toward Charleville may alter in his later poetry, when his view retrospectively may be very different from that when Charleville was his first source of inspiration. Poems containing these later references to Charleville will be included in the Charleville chapter. Similar patterns of tracing aspects attached initially to a particular town will be followed for Paris and the Belgian towns. The composite towns of the prose poems will be treated separately, although places involved in their composite patterns will have already been mentioned in the first three chapters in connection with the prose poems. There are precedents for some of their aspects in Rimbaud's earlier poetry. They are mentioned in the conclusion.

Given what we know of Rimbaud's life and poetry, we can be very suspicious of too much order and singlemindedness in interpretations of his poetry. Overlapping and backtracking appear to be inevitable using this method, as they were in his own search for happiness. Criteria for placing any poem in any section are based on the possible original source of inspiration or on the preponderance of that source over others contained in the poem, on similarity of mood or style, occasionally on place of composition. Some poems have multiple connotations so that they are discussed, for different reasons, in several chapters.

To orient the reader in time and space, a chronology follows the introduction before the main text begins. The names of towns and of words denoting town in the poetry are given in an appendix to the thesis.

It is hoped that this thesis, apart from presenting a comparative urban geography of Rimbaud's poetry, capable of being consulted for Rimbaud's attitude to the town in a particular poem, or for the pattern of his attitude towards a particular town he knew, or for his attitude towards the town at different stages of his poetic life, will suggest answers to more general questions about Rimbaud's compelling poetry.

Is there a typical or permanent townscape in this poetry? Why is the town such a central preoccupation in his work? Is town imagery an integral part of his verbal experimentation or expression? How far are his towns used as social criticism or attempts at social reform, indicating Rimbaud's reaction to his age and his role as a man of his age? How far are his town poems the result of metaphysical pursuits and of private visions unrelated to outside influences? And especially, why do these town poems still appeal to or communicate with us today?

Apart from indicating the multiplicity of Rimbaud's town images and their links with his personal and poetic concepts, it is also hoped that this treatment of one of Rimbaud's main preoccupations will indicate by analogy or implication, possible patterns of development of other topics in his poetry, nature or man for example, opposed to or linked with his town imagery, and thus lead to a more complete understanding of this poetry.



## CHRONOLOGY

The purpose of this chronology is to orient the reader in time and space. This attempt to synchronize biographical and historical facts is therefore restricted to the latest possible dates of composition of those poems in which they may be reflected. No judgments are made in this table. Only poems discussed in the following study are listed here. Literary sources suggested for Rimbaud's poetry cover too wide a time span to list in this chronology. Similarly, his political, social, metaphysical and aesthetic preoccupations, which are of prime importance for appreciation of his work, are mentioned in the body of this thesis.

It seems necessary to indicate the controversial opinions of Rimbaud's critics in this chronology to show their prevalence and to emphasize further the difficulties inherent in studying the theme, role and image of the town in Rimbaud's work by employing a strictly biographical or chronological method. As far as the Illuminations are concerned, listing the critical theories about individual poems would overburden this table; therefore only the beginning and end of dates and places of composition, according to individual critics, are recorded.

To simplify the reading of this table, historical events are capitalized; square brackets enclosing dates or facts indicate differences of opinion among Rimbaud scholars. Thus, the same poem may be listed more than once under different dates. In such cases, summaries of the differing critical views are given in the footnotes.

I am particularly indebted to the following chronologies for the data about Rimbaud listed below:

Adam, Antoine. " Chronologie", in Arthur Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, [1972], pp. XXXIX-LII.

Bernard, Suzanne. " Sommaire biographique", in her edition of Oeuvres de Rimbaud. Paris: Garnier, [1960], pp. V-XIV.

Boulestreau, Nicole. " Chronologie de Rimbaud", Europe, ( mai-juin, 1973 ), 153-170.

Ruff, M.A. " Chronologie rimbalienne", Etudes rimbaldiennes, 2 (1969 ), 159-170.

Other biographical material used in this chronology and points on which these four critics differ are acknowledged in the footnotes.

#### 1792

July 20th: LOUIS XVI PUT ON A BONNET ROUGE OFFERED ON A PIKE BY THE MOB ASSEMBLED AT THE TUILERIES. HE WAS ADDRESSED BY THE BUTCHER , LEGENDRE.

September 20th: BATTLE OF VALMY. THE VA-NU-PIEDS DEFEATED THE PRUSSIAN ARMY.

#### 1794

September 21st: BATTLE OF FLEURUS.  
ABOLITION OF THE MONARCHY.

#### 1791-96

THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGNS.

#### 1848

February: REVOLUTION IN PARIS. ABDICATION OF LOUIS-PHILIPPE.  
ABD-EL-KADER SURRENDERS TO GOVERNOR GENERAL OF ALGERIA. IMPRISONED UNTIL RELEASED BY NAPOLEON III IN 1853.

#### 1851

December 2nd: COUP D'ETAT BY LOUIS NAPOLEON.

December 2nd: LOUIS NAPOLEON PROCLAIMED EMPEROR AS RESULT OF PLEBISCITE.

#### 1853

February 8th: Marriage of Rimbaud's parents. His father, Frédéric Rimbaud, son of Didier Rimbaud, tailor, of Dôle. Captain in the Infantry.

His mother<sup>1</sup>, Vitalie Cuif, daughter of Jean-Nicholas Cuif, farmer at Roche, retired to Charleville. Owing to the absences from and later abandonment of the family by Captain Rimbaud, Rimbaud's childhood experiences in Charleville were under the supervision of his mother.

1854

October 20th: Birth of Jean-Nicholas-Arthur Rimbaud in Charleville, Ardennes.

November 20th: Baptized in l'église Notre-Dame in Charleville.

1860

Rimbaud family moves to 73, rue Bourbon in working-class quarter of town. Final separation of Rimbaud's parents.<sup>2</sup>

1862

June: Rimbauds move to bourgeois quarter of town: 13, cour d'Orléans.

October: Rimbaud enters private school: l'Institution Rossat.

[ Composition of " Cahier des dix ans" during school year. ]

[1864]

[ " Cahier des dix ans" including " Prologue".]<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>His mother's family "...avait accédée à la bourgeoisie rurale depuis un petit nombre de générations...Le travail, l'argent, la religion constituaient l'ossature de sa personnalité." Suzanne Briet, Madame Rimbaud, Paris: Minard, 1968, p. 8 ( hereafter: Briet, Mme R. ).

<sup>2</sup>" Elle a du bien au soleil qu'elle ne veut pas vendre, ni confier à d'autres contrôles que les siens. Ses moyens lui permettent d'élever ses enfants à la ville...Elle a trop de racines dans le sol ardennais pour s'expatrier: elle ne suivra pas son mari." Briet, Mme R., p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Nicole Boulestreau, " Chronologie de Rimbaud", Europe, (mai-juin, 1973), p. 155 ( hereafter: Boulestreau, " Chron." ). Suzanne Bernard, in her edition of Oeuvres de Rimbaud, Paris: Garnier, 1960 ( hereafter: Bernard, Oeuvres ), p. 358, proposes an even earlier date: 1862-63. Adam, in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 1027, supplies convincing arguments based on the curriculum at the Collège de Charleville for its composition in 1863-64, since the notebook contains Latin texts and " ...les Empires d'Orient et la Grèce formaient le programme d'histoire de la sixième." M.A. Ruff, " Chronologie rimbaldiennne", Etudes rimbaldiennes, 2 (1969), ( hereafter: Ruff, " Chron." ), p. 161, dates it 1866-67.

1865

Easter: Enters septième at Collège de Charleville situated on the Place Ducale by the Meuse.

October: Enters sixième and soon transferred to cinquième.

[Probable date of "Cahier des dix ans".]

1866

First communion. Move to 20, rue Forest.

October: Enters quatrième.

[1866-67, probable date of "Cahier des dix ans".]

1867

October: Enters troisième. Beginning of friendship with Delahaye.

1868

Rimbaud sends ode in Latin verse to mark first communion of Prince Imperial.<sup>4</sup>

October: Enters seconde.

[Composition of "Les Assis".]<sup>5</sup>

1869

January: Composes "Ver erat...".

June: Rimbauds move to 5, quai de la Madeleine, facing the Meuse.

August: At prize-giving receives nine first prizes including that of the Concours académique for "Jugurtha" (July 2nd).

<sup>4</sup>"Chez lui on est monarchiste, bonapartiste." Briet, Mme R., p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Verlaine, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. O. Nadal, J. Borel and Henry de Bouillane de Lacoste, Paris: Le Club du meilleur livre, 1959, "Les Poètes maudits, 'Arthur Rimbaud'", I, 477-78 (hereafter: Verlaine, O.C.).

1870

January 2nd: "Les Etrennes des orphelins" appears in La Revue pour tous.

January 17th: Georges Izambard arrives as teacher of rhétorique.

January, February: "Les Effarés", "Ophélie".

Spring: "A la musique", "Sensation", (dated March by Rimbaud)<sup>7</sup>, "Credo in unam" ("Soleil et chair"), (dated April 29th), "Roman", (dated September 23rd), "Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI", (class composition).

["Le Forgeron"]<sup>8</sup>

[At some point in the school year he gave "Un Coeur sous une soutane" to Izambard.]

May 24th: Letter to Théodore de Banville begging him to include "Sensation", "Ophélie", and "Credo in unam" in the next issue of Le Parnasse contemporain. He affirms his adherence to the Parnassian doctrine and states, "Dans deux ans, dans un an peut-être, je serai à Paris." (O.C., pp. 236-237.)

July 13th: de Cassagnac, Bonapartist editor of Le Pays wrote, "Que c'est beau la guerre, quand elle plane au-dessus des intérêts particuliers...C'est pour le passé pour le présent, pour l'avenir que nous allons lutter."<sup>9</sup> EMS TELEGRAM.

---

<sup>6</sup>"Le professeur de rhétorique enseignera à ses élèves les règles de tous les genres d'écrire, leur en fera voir les plus beaux exemples dans les auteurs anciens et modernes et les exercera à la composition en latin et français." Boulestreau, "Chron.", p. 156.

<sup>7</sup>Rimbaud had the habit of dating his poems at the time he recopied them. See Georges Izambard, Rimbaud tel que je l'ai connu, Paris: Mercure de France, 1946, p. 382.

<sup>8</sup>Henry de Bouillane de Lacoste, editor of Arthur Rimbaud, Poésies, Paris: Mercure de France, 1939 (hereafter: Lacoste, Poésies), p. 7, notes that while Izambard never mentioned that Rimbaud had given him "Le Forgeron", he owned a copy of this poem. It therefore seems likely that it was written during the school year while Izambard was in Charleville.

<sup>9</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 371, n. 1.

July 16th: de Cassagnac urged the descendants of the Republicans of 1792 to enlist.

July 18th: ["Morts de quatre-vingt-douze", ("Aux Morts de Valmy"), (dated Mazas, September 3rd.)]<sup>10</sup>

July 19th: WAR DECLARED AGAINST PRUSSIA.<sup>11</sup>

July 24th: Izambard returns home to Douai leaving Rimbaud in Charleville.

Late July: LARGE GROUPS OF RESERVISTS IN CHARLEVILLE AND MEZIERES.

August 2nd: SAARBRUCKEN TAKEN BY FRENCH LED BY NAPOLEON III. PRINCE IMPERIAL PRESENT. EMPEROR SENDS TELEGRAM ANNOUNCING VICTORY AND PRINCE'S BRAVERY.

August 3rd: WISSEMBOURG TAKEN BY PRUSSIANS.

August 6th: Prize-giving at Collège de Charleville. Rimbaud refuses to donate books for war effort.  
MACMAHON DEFEATED AT WOERTH. DEMONSTRATIONS IN PARIS.

August 7-8th: STATE OF SIEGE DECLARED IN PARIS AND 15 PROVINCES.

August 9th: OLLIVIER DEPOSED.

August 11th: FAVRE REORGANIZES NATIONAL GUARD AND OPENS IT TO MASSES.

August 14th: BLANQUI'S ATTEMPT AT INSURRECTION CRUSHED IN PARIS. BAZAINE DEFEATED OUTSIDE METZ.

August 25th: Letter to Izambard mocking the bellicose citizenry of Charleville, comparing them to those besieged in Metz and complaining of lack of new books from Paris. ( O.C., p. 238 ).  
PRUSSIANS AT BOULZICOURT, 10 KM. SOUTH OF CHARLEVILLE.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Izambard's testimony quoted by Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 857, n. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Rimbaud's critics list various dates for de Cassagnac's editorials and the actual date of the French declaration of war: Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 371, says war was declared July 10th. The actual date of the article, part of which was quoted at the head of "Morts de quatre-vingt-douze..." was July 16th. War was declared three days later. However, D.W. Brogan, The French Nation, New York: Harper Row, 1963, p. 144, points out that while the provinces were highly pacific, war fever ran high for a long time beforehand in Paris, where "The streets were full of mobs, some of them officially inspired shouting 'A Berlin' and singing the long-banned 'Marseillaise'". (Hereafter: Brogan, The French).

<sup>12</sup>Briet, Mme R., p. 23.

August: [Composition of following poems: "L'Eclatante victoire de Sarrebrück", (dated October), "Le Dormeur du val", (dated October), "Le Mal", "Le Châtiment de Tartufe", "Les Reparties de Nina", (dated August 15th), "Un Coeur sous une soutane".]<sup>13</sup>

August 29th: Runs off to Paris via Givet, Charleroi and Saint-Quentin, (the limit of his train ticket). Arrives August 31st, is arrested immediately and imprisoned in Mazas.

September 2nd: DEFEAT AT SEDAN. NAPOLEON III CAPTURED AND TAKEN TO WILHELMSHOHE CASTLE.

September 3rd: [Composition of "Morts de quatre-vingt-douze..."].

September 4th: 500,000 DEMONSTRATORS BESIEGE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. FAVRE AND GAMBETTA LEAD CROWD TO TOWN HALL. REPUBLIC DECLARED. CONSTITUTION OF GOVERNEMENT DE LA DEFENSE NATIONALE.

September 8th: Released from Mazas after frantic appeals to Izambard and authorities in Charleville, Rimbaud arrives in Douai at Izambard's home. While there, reads, composes and copies poems, walks in country, meets Demeny. [Composes "Les Poètes de sept ans".]<sup>14</sup>

September 10th: Izambard enrolls in National Guard. Rimbaud, too young to be accepted, joins him in the exercises nevertheless.

September 18th: Rimbaud's "Lettre de protestation", published in Libéral du Nord. Protests scarcity of arms supplied to National Guard and criticizes the complacency of the fallen government and Douai town council in this matter.<sup>15</sup>  
INVESTMENT OF PARIS.

September 23rd: Rimbaud's account of a public meeting in Douai, "Réunion publique rue d'Esquerchin",<sup>16</sup> published in the Libéral du Nord, of which Izambard is now editor-in-chief.  
[Composition of "Rages de Césars".]

September 27th: SURRENDER OF STRASBOURG.

End September: Izambard accompanies him home to Charleville.  
TRUCE FOR EVACUATION OF WOUNDED.

<sup>13</sup>Ruff, "Chron.", p. 162.

<sup>14</sup>Testimony by Izambard quoted by Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 885.

<sup>15</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 241-42.

<sup>16</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 242-43.

October 2-7th: Runs off again, this time on foot, via Givet, Fumay, Vireux, Charleroi to Brussels. Received there by Izambard's friends. Takes train to Douai. At Douai, or during flight composes ["Rêvé pour l'hiver", (dated October 7th), "Au Cabaret vert", (dated October), "La Maline", (dated October), "Ma Bohème", "Le Dormeur du val".] He copies these poems and his earlier ones to present to Demeny at Douai. Known as Le Cahier Demeny, a total of 22 poems in 2 notebooks.

October 20th: [BEGINNING OF SIEGE OF CHARLEVILLE AND MEZIERES.]

October 27th: SURRENDER OF BAZAINE AT METZ.

October 31st: FAILURE OF INSURRECTION OF NATIONAL GUARD IN PARIS INCITED BY BLANQUI AND FLOURENS.

End October: Rimbaud returns to Charleville.

November 2nd: Letter to Izambard expressing his disgust with life in Charleville but his determination to be sensible and stay.<sup>17</sup>

November: Walks and discussions with Delahaye. Reading in public library.

["Les Assis" composed last weeks of 1870.]<sup>18</sup>  
["Oraison du soir" and "Les Douaniers".]

"Le Dormeur du val" appears in local paper, Le Progrès des Ardennes.<sup>19</sup>

December 30th: BOMBARDMENT OF MEZIERES. LARGE PART OF TOWN DESTROYED BY FIRE.

December 31st: SURRENDER OF MEZIERES.

Rimbaud's reaction to the burned town: "--Rien d'important,... une tortue dans du pétrole."<sup>20</sup>

1871

January 5th: BEGINNING OF BOMBARDMENT OF PARIS BY PRUSSIANS.

January 6th: POSTING OF A "RED BILL" DEMANDING THAT THE GOVERNMENT GIVE WAY TO A COMMUNE.

<sup>17</sup>"--Donc je suis resté! je suis resté! -- et je voudrai repartir encore bien des fois...Guerre: -- Pas de siège de Mézières. Pour quand?... Par ci par là des francs-tirades.--Abominable prurigo d'idiotisme, tel est l'esprit de la population..." Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 245-46.

<sup>18</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. 875, n. 2.

<sup>19</sup>Etiemble, Le Mythe de Rimbaud I, Genèse du Mythe 1869-1949, Paris: Gallimard, 1968, p. 13 (hereafter: Etiemble, Genèse).

<sup>20</sup>Delahaye, Souvenirs, p. 90.



January 18th: PROCLAMATION OF GERMAN EMPIRE AT VERSAILLES.

January 21-22nd: DEMONSTRATIONS IN PARIS.

February 8th: ELECTION OF A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WHICH SAT FIRST AT BORDEAUX THEN AT VERSAILLES. ONE OF FIRST ACTS TO ABOLISH PAY TO NATIONAL GUARDS.

February 15th: Collège de Charleville resumes classes in Municipal Theatre. Rimbaud refuses to attend.

February 17th: THIERS MADE CHIEF OF EXECUTIVE POWER OF FRENCH REPUBLIC.

February 25th: Rimbaud runs off to Paris again. Lives as vagrant. Reads new books in bookstores. Attempts to find Vermesch. SEIZURE OF 227 CANNON BY NATIONAL GUARD TO PREVENT THEM FALLING IN HANDS OF PRUSSIANS.

March 1st: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY RATIFIES PEACE TERMS ALLOWING PRUSSIAN OCCUPATION OF PARIS.

March 3rd: SYMBOLIC MARCH BY PRUSSIANS DOWN DESERTED CHAMPS-ELYSEES.

March 10th: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ABOLISHES MORATORIUM ON RENTS. Rimbaud returns to Charleville on foot.

March 12th: BLANQUI AND FLOURENS SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR THEIR PART IN THE INSURRECTION OF OCTOBER 31st, 1870.

March 18th: Classes resume in Collège de Charleville. Rimbaud sorts the mail at Le Progrès des Ardennes. INSURRECTION IN PARIS. COMMUNE OFFICIALLY<sup>21</sup> INSTALLED AT HOTEL DE VILLE. Rimbaud greets this news joyfully.

March-April: Composition of "L'Orgie parisienne" ("Paris se repeuple"),<sup>22</sup> (signed May), "Chant de guerre parisienne", "Les Mains de Jeanne Marie", "Projet pour une constitution communiste" which is lost without trace.<sup>23</sup>

April 2nd: VERSAILLES TROOPS ATTACK COURBEVOIE.

<sup>21</sup>Delahaye, Souvenirs, p. 103, recounts how they heard the news in Charleville on March 20th and went through the streets shouting "L'ordre... est vaincu!"

<sup>22</sup>M.A. Ruff, Rimbaud, Paris: Hatier, 1968, pp. 58-9 (Hereafter: Ruff, Rimbaud).

<sup>23</sup>Mentioned by Delahaye, Rimbaud l'artiste et l'être moral, Paris: Messein, 1923, p. 38 (hereafter: Delahaye, Rimbaud ).

April 3rd-4th: COMMUNE FORCES MARCH ON VERSAILLES. DISPERSED. FLOURENS  
KILLED.

April 7th: VERSAILLAIS BOMBARD NEUILLY.

April 14th: An article in Le Cri du peuple describes the bombardments.

April 17th: Letter to Demeny announcing closing of newspaper and giving news  
of what he saw in Paris in February/March, especially new books.  
[ Soon afterwards Rimbaud leaves for Paris, joins Versaillais troops  
and returns to Charleville before May 13th. ]<sup>24</sup>

April 19th: [ "Rimbaud part pour Paris? " ]<sup>25</sup>

April 23rd: [ Rimbaud reaches Paris. ]<sup>26</sup>

End April-early May: [ Rimbaud in Paris. Spends some time in the barracks  
at Babylone or at the Château d'Eau. ]<sup>27</sup> [ " Les Déserts de l'amour",  
" Photographies des temps passés" of which the " Proses évangéliques"  
are a fragment ]<sup>28</sup>

April 18th -May 11th: [ Possible but unlikely that Rimbaud in Paris. ]<sup>29</sup>

May 1st: VERSAILLAIS CAPTURE CLAMART RAILWAY STATION AND THE CHATEAU D'ISSY.  
BEGIN BOMBARDING THE CAPITAL.

<sup>24</sup>Gist of an article by Chambon, " Rimbaud versaillais? ( ou l'art  
de changer son fusil d'épaule)", La Revue des deux mondes, ( avr.-juin 1971),  
pp. 554-60 ( hereafter: Chambon, "Rimbaud, versaillais?" )

<sup>25</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLI.

<sup>26</sup>H. Matarasso et P. Petitfils, La Vie d'Arthur Rimbaud, Paris:  
Hachette, 1962, pp. 71-2 ( hereafter: Matarasso, La Vie ).

<sup>27</sup>D.A. De Graaf, in Arthur Rimbaud, sa vie, son oeuvre, Assen, Pays-  
Bas: Van Gorcum & Comp, S.A., 1960, pp. 49-50, bases this supposition on  
Verlaine's letter to Edmond Maître, November 20th, 1872, Verlaine, O.C.,  
I, 1009-10, " ... mon cas politique et le cas de Rimbaud sont tellement peu  
graves, après plus de 2 ans de prescription..." ( hereafter: De Graaf, Rimbaud ).  
In " Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui", O.C., II, 638, Verlaine talks of Rimbaud's  
return to Paris during the Commune and of a stay at the barracks at the  
Château d'Eau. Bernard, Oeuvres, XXXLV, recounts a similar story around  
these dates but gives it little credence.

<sup>28</sup>Delahaye, Rimbaud, pp. 36-7 and 44-6: " La lecture de Baudelaire  
a suggéré de tenter des poèmes en prose. Il écrit le commencement d'une série  
ayant pour titre ' Les Déserts de l'amour' ".

<sup>29</sup>E. Noulet, Le Premier Visage de Rimbaud, Bruxelles: Palais des  
Académies, 1953, p. 19 ( hereafter: Noulet, Premier Visage ).

May 3rd: ["Rimbaud quitte Paris?"]<sup>30</sup>

May 4-8th: HEAVY BOMBARDMENT OF IVRY AND VANVES.

May 9th: THIERS' GOVERNMENT SIGNS PEACE TREATY WITH PRUSSIA.

May 13th: Letter from Charleville to Izambard, known as "Lettre du Voyant", announcing new plans for life and poetry. Encloses "Le Coeur supplicié". Implies would go to Paris, " -- où tant de travailleurs meurent pourtant encore tandis que je vous écris!", were it not for his need to pursue his new mission. (O.C., pp. 248-49).

May 15th: Letter to Demeny from Charleville. Known as "Lettre du Voyant". Appears to expand on statements made to Izambard. Encloses "Chant de guerre parisien", "Mes petites amoureuses" and "Accroupissements", and mentions two more poems on Paris, now lost: "'Amants de Paris', cent hexamètres,... 'Mort de Paris', deux cent hexamètres...!" He ends, "...car dans huit jours, je serai à Paris, peut-être." (O.C., pp. 249-254.)

May 16-17th to May 21st: ["4<sup>e</sup> départ pour Paris, à pied et par moyens de fortune(?)"]<sup>31</sup>

May 17th: FEMALE BATTALION OF COMMUNARDS FORMED.

May 21st: VERSAILLAIS ENTER PARIS BY POINT-DU-JOUR (SAINT-CLOUD) GATE.

May 21st-28th: "LA SEMAINE SANGLANTE". ABOUT 50,000 SYMPATHIZERS WITH COMMUNE REPORTED DEAD, 25,000 TAKEN PRISONER, NEARLY ONE QUARTER OF PARIS DESTROYED BY FIRE.<sup>32</sup>

May 29th: THIERS ISSUES DECREE DISARMING PARIS AND ABOLISHING ITS NATIONAL GUARD.

May: [Composes "Les premières communions" (dated June).] ["Oraison du soir"] Sees Charles Bretagne frequently. [First prose poems from this period. Illuminations? "Déserts de l'amour"? "Proses évangéliques"? "Photographies des temps passés"?<sup>33</sup>]

<sup>30</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLI.

<sup>31</sup>Ruff, "Chron.", p. 164.

<sup>32</sup>These figures and many of the other facts about the Commune in this chronology are taken from "Chronology of the Principal Events of the Paris Commune, with selected Background Dates", in Eugene Kamenka, Paradigm for Revolution? The Paris Commune 1871-1971, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972, p. 7 (hereafter: Kamenka, Paris Commune).

<sup>33</sup>Delahaye, Souvenirs, pp. 145-46, "Charles Bretagne...on se réunissait aussi dans l'appartement de Bretagne...Pour finir, on lisait les vers ou quelques-uns des premiers poèmes en prose de Rimbaud."

May -June: ["Les Poètes de sept ans", (dated 26th May), " Les Pauvres à l'église", " Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie ", " Les Assis", " L'Homme juste".] ["L'Orgie parisienne", (Paris se repeuple").]

June 10th: Letter to Demeny asking him to destroy all the poems he has given him previously, Encloses " Les Poètes de sept ans". (O.C., pp. 254-255.) ["Les Pauvres à l'église"]

July-August: " Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs" ( dated July 14th). Sent to Banville August 15th.  
[ " Les Premières communions".]<sup>34</sup> [ " Voyelles",]  
" Le Bateau ivre".

August 28th: Letter to Demeny asking for practical advice on ways of supporting himself in Paris. " Je veux travailler libre; mais à Paris, que j'aime... Je vous ai prié d'indiquer des occupations peu absorbantes, parce que la pensée réclame de larges tranches de temps." (O.C., pp. 258-60)

Early September: [ " Un Coeur sous une soutane".]<sup>35</sup> ["Le Bateau ivre".]  
Letters now lost to Verlaine, asking for help in working in Paris. Affirmative reply.

September 7th: CONDEMNATION OF COMMUNARD PIPE-EN-BOIS IN PARIS.

September 16th: [ Left Charleville for Paris. ]<sup>36</sup>

September 18th: [ Verlaine's affirmative reply. ]  
Departure for Paris. Lodged first with the Verlaines at the Mautés, then sheltered by Charles Cros, Cabaner, Forain and Banville in turn.

October: Forming of the Cercle Zutique, meeting at l'Hôtel des Etrangers on the blvd Saint-Michel at corner of rue Racine.

October 22nd-[November 9th]: Collaborated on Album Zutique.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Enid Starkie, Arthur Rimbaud, London: Faber and Faber, 1961, p. 93 ( Hereafter: Starkie, Rimbaud.)

<sup>35</sup>Starkie, Rimbaud, p. 93.

<sup>36</sup>Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 100.

<sup>37</sup>Opinions differ as to how long the club lasted and how long Rimbaud belonged. Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 116, states that since the Album contains 29 sheets and Rimbaud wrote on the 25th, he must have belonged for longer than was previously thought. Lautréamont et Germain Nouveau, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. P.O. Walzer, Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1970, p. 778

December: [Expelled from Cercle Zutique.]  
[Incident with Carjat.]<sup>38</sup>

1872

Late January: [Incident with Carjat at dinner of Vilains Bonshommes.]<sup>39</sup>  
Living in room at rue Campagne-Première.

Early months in Paris: Experimenting with hashish.<sup>40</sup>

February: Fantin Latour paints "Coin de table".

Madame Verlaine demands legal separation and goes to Périgord with their child.

["Les Corbeaux", "Qu'est-ce pour nous mon coeur..."]<sup>41</sup>

Returns to Arras, then Charleville, where he writes some of his last verse poems. Walks and discussions with Delahaye.

[First Illuminations.]<sup>42</sup>

---

(hereafter: Lautréamont, O.C.), notes that Pascal Pia thinks the club existed until September 1872, Verlaine and Rimbaud having left in February/March, 1872. Michael Pakenham, "Sur l'Album Zutique", Mercure de France, 342 (août, 1961), 746-48, convincingly asserts that Richépin, Ponchon and Nouveau continued the Album to 1873, Nouveau filling in gaps on earlier pages. Since Nouveau was not in Paris until after September 1872, he did not meet Rimbaud at this time.

<sup>38</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLII.

<sup>39</sup>Ruff, "Chron.", p. 164.

<sup>40</sup>Delahaye, Souvenirs, p. 162, recalls a visit to Rimbaud at l'Hôtel des Etrangers. Rimbaud was still asleep after taking hashish. His comments on the experience imply it was unsatisfactory: " --Alors, rien du tout...des lunes blanches, des lunes noires qui se poursuivaient..."

<sup>41</sup>Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 130. Most other critics agree.

<sup>42</sup>Matarasso, La Vie, p. 118. Albert Py, Illuminations, Genève: Droz, 1967, p. XV (hereafter: Py, Illuminations), Pierre Guiraud, "L'Evolution statistique du style de Rimbaud et les Illuminations", Mercure de France, (1er octobre, 1954), pp. 200-34 (hereafter: Guiraud, "L'Evolution"), and Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 142, all agree on this period for the beginning of the Illuminations.

March 15th: Madame Verlaine returns. Reconciliation with her husband.

March-May: Correspondence (lost) with Verlaine and Forain who are plotting his return to Paris.

[May 4th-9th]: Rimbaud returns to Paris and lives in succession at rue Monsieur-le-Prince, rue Victor Cousin and l'Hôtel de Cluny.

June: Letter to Delahaye describing his life in Paris, his drinking, his work, his feelings. His only regret, "les rivières ardennaises et belges, les cavernes..." (O.C., pp. 265-66).

March-August: Composition of the poems classed in the Pléiade edition as Vers nouveaux et chansons, most of which are dated by Rimbaud: "Larme" (May), "La Rivière de Cassis" (May), "Comédie de la Soif" (May), "Bonne pensée du matin" (May), "Fêtes de la patience" (May-June), "Jeune ménage" (June), "Bruxelles" (July), "Est-elle aimée..." (July). "Fêtes de la faim", "Entends comme brame...", "Michel et Christine", "Honte", "Mémoire", and "O saisons, ô châteaux" are undated. His critics have attempted to divide them more precisely into three groups: those written in the Ardennes,<sup>43</sup> those written in Paris, and those copied in Belgium, according to internal evidence.<sup>44</sup> ["Les Déserts de l'amour".]<sup>45</sup>

July 7th: Leaves with Verlaine for Belgium by a circuitous route: Paris, Arras, Paris, Charleville, Walcourt, Charleroi, Brussels.<sup>46</sup> Trips to Malines and other towns using Brussels as centre.

<sup>43</sup>Verlaine in one of the few existing letters of their correspondence March/May, April 1872, O.C., I, 973, says, "...Mais m'envoyer tes vers 'mauvais' (!!!!!), tes prières (!!!)..." In the postscript he repeats, "Et m'envoyer tes vers anciens et tes prières nouvelles." An editor's note assumes that these "prières" are poems now lost, though they could well be some of the Vers Nouveaux.

<sup>44</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 146, feels that "Comédie de la soif", "Fêtes de la patience" and "Honte" must have been written in Charleville during their separation, "Bonne pensée du matin" in Paris and "Bruxelles" and "Est-elle aimée..." in Brussels. Boulesteau adds "O saisons, ô châteaux..." to the Belgian poems, "Chron.", p. 161. Lacoste, Poésies, p. 46, n. 65, says of "Bruxelles": "Juillet 1872 évidemment." Matarasso, La Vie, p. 129, agrees.

<sup>45</sup>Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 142, quotes Verlaine's statement in the "Poètes Maudits", where after commenting on the poems he says, "...un prosateur étonnant s'ensuivit."

<sup>46</sup>This itinerary is reflected in Verlaine's "Paysages Belges", in Romances sans paroles, inspired by this period.

July 14th: French national holiday. }  
 July 21st: Belgian national holiday. } [Source of part of "Phrases".]<sup>47</sup>

July-August: Met Communards exiled in Brussels, including Pipe-en-Bois.<sup>48</sup>

September 7th: Embark at Ostend for England. Spend one night in Dover then go directly to London. Live at 34-35 Howland St., Fitz-Roy Square.

In London: Associate with exiles from the Commune: Barrère, Matuszewicz, Lissaragay, Vermesch, Andrieu and with Félix Régamey. Composition of "Ressouvenir" and "L'Enfant qui ramassa les balles..." in his Album.<sup>49</sup> According to Verlaine's correspondence from this period,<sup>50</sup> visit museums, art galleries,<sup>51</sup> theatres, the Crystal Palace, public houses, docks and slums.  
 [Chinese dens in East End where learned to smoke opium.]<sup>52</sup>

November-December: [Madame Rimbaud, after a fruitless trip to the Mautés, summons her son back to Charleville.]

<sup>47</sup>Py, Illuminations, p. 120. Charles Chadwick, Etudes sur Rimbaud, Paris: Nizet, 1960, p. 112, holds a similar opinion. (Hereafter: Chadwick, Etudes sur Rimbaud.)

<sup>48</sup>De Graaf, Rimbaud, p. 129, bases this supposition on Mathilde's statement in ex-Madame Paul Verlaine, Mémoires de ma vie, Paris: Flammarion, 1935, p. 221: "Verlaine me disait à Bruxelles qu'il s'était mis en rapport avec quelques réfugiés communards et voulait faire un livre sur la Commune et les horreurs commises par l'armée de Versailles, devant rester en Belgique quelque temps." In "Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui", "Arthur Rimbaud '1884'", written in 1893, Verlaine himself states, "Juillet 1872, voyage et station en Belgique, Bruxelles plutôt. Rencontre avec quelques Français, dont Georges Cavalié dit Pipe-en-Bois, étonnés." O.C., II, 640.

<sup>49</sup>Félix Régamey, Verlaine Dessinateur, Paris: Floury, 1896, p. 22, 26, gives these poems, but attributes them to Verlaine, aided by Rimbaud. Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., places them at the end of the Album Zutique, whose style they resemble, noting Régamey's evidence. Lacoste, Poésies, p. 255, n. 38, notes that the writing is Rimbaud's but the style resembles Verlaine's "coppées".

<sup>50</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, 978-1026.

<sup>51</sup>Suzanne Bernard, "Rimbaud, Proust et les Impressionnistes", Revue des Sciences humaines, (avr-juin, 1955), p. 260, n. 5 (hereafter: Bernard, "R.P. et I."), observes that Durand-Ruel organized five exhibitions of French paintings in London, including works by the Impressionists, 1870-75.

<sup>52</sup>Starkie, Rimbaud, p. 258.

November [8th]: Letter from Verlaine to Lepelletier including a list of objects left at rue Nicolet with his in-laws: "...Un manuscrit sous pli cacheté, intitulé "La Chasse spirituelle" par "Arthur Rimbaud". Une dizaine de lettres du précédent, contenant des vers et des poèmes en prose."<sup>53</sup>

December: Rimbaud returns to Charleville.

### 1873

January: Rimbaud returns to London after appeal from Verlaine who is ill and claims to be dying.

March 25th: Obtains readers' card from British museum.

September-March: [Illuminations]<sup>54</sup>

April 3-4th: Verlaine leaves England for Jehonville.  
[Verlaine and Rimbaud embark together on the Comtesse de Flandres.]

April 12th: Rimbaud arrives home at Roche.

April-May: Rimbaud at Roche composing beginning of Une Saison en enfer, then entitled Livre pâle or Livre nègre.

[First Illuminations.]<sup>55</sup>  
["Proses évangéliques".]<sup>56</sup>

May: Letter to Delahaye bemoaning his boredom at being buried in the country, talking about his work in progress, excusing himself from a

<sup>53</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, 1004.

<sup>54</sup>Chadwick, Etudes sur Rimbaud, pp. 74-100, 101-32, regarding the dates of the Illuminations, argues for their composition in this period, relating certain details in the poems to specific events in London in these months. On pp. 117-8 he points out that Rimbaud had time to visit Scarborough, possible inspiration for "Promontoire". Verlaine, O.C., I, 607, in his "Préface" for the first edition of Illuminations for La Vogue, 1886, states, "Le livre que nous offrons au public fut écrit de 1873 à 1875, parmi des voyages tant en Belgique qu'en Angleterre et dans toute l'Allemagne." Thus dating the beginnings from the same period as Chadwick.

<sup>55</sup>Ruff, "Chron.", p. 166.

<sup>56</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 193, notes that since they are on the back of rough drafts of some of Une Saison en enfer they must have been written at Roche, either before he began Une Saison, or afterwards, in August. She opts for April.



rendez-vous with Delahaye and Verlaine in Bouillon on the 18th. He adds, "il te chargera probablement de quelques fraguemants en prose de moi ou de lui, à me retourner." (O.C., p. 267.) Verlaine, Delahaye and Rimbaud meet at Bouillon from time to time to have dinner. Verlaine and Rimbaud correspond and correct each other's English.<sup>57</sup>

May 24th: Meets Verlaine at Bouillon. They leave for London via Liège and Anvers.

May 26th: Cross North Sea.

May 28th: Rent room at 8, Great College St., Camden Town, N.W. London.

May-July: According to Verlaine's correspondence for this period,<sup>58</sup> occupied by walks in the country above Highgate, reading at the British Museum, French lessons, learning English, seeing Vermesch, Andrieu, going to the theatre.

July 3rd: Verlaine quarrels with Rimbaud and leaves immediately for Brussels.

July 4th: Letter from Rimbaud to Verlaine, urging him to return, taking the blame for the rift, promising better behaviour, offering to join Verlaine.

July 5th: After receipt of letter from Verlaine to Rimbaud from boat, Rimbaud writes second, confused letter, urging him to return, reminding him of their good life together, suggesting he join him in Brussels, stating he plans to go to Paris and giving Forain's address as his forwarding address.

July 7th: Third letter Rimbaud to Verlaine. Verlaine has written to landlady saying returning to London. Rimbaud asks what Andrieu will think if he returns, urges him to return and promises to behave better. (O.C., pp. 270-71, 271-72, 275.)

July 8th: Telegram from Verlaine to Rimbaud summoning him to Brussels.

July 9th: Rimbaud joins Verlaine in Brussels.

July 10th: Rimbaud has repeated several times his wish to go to Paris, mentions it again in his declaration to the police as a cause of Verlaine's anger against him. Verlaine wounds him in the wrist with a revolver.

July 12th: Rimbaud in hospital.

July 18th: Second interrogation by police.

July 19th: Rimbaud officially withdraws all charges against Verlaine.

<sup>57</sup> Verlaine, O.C., I, 1037. Letter of 18th May, "Merci de ta leçon, sévère mais juste, d'anglais."

<sup>58</sup> Verlaine, O.C., I, 1043-50.

July 20th: Signs himself out of hospital.

[He returns to Roche.]<sup>59</sup>

[He takes a furnished room in Brussels.]<sup>60</sup>

[Composes "Bruxelles".]<sup>61</sup>

End of July: [Returns to Roche.]<sup>62</sup>

August 8th: Verlaine sentenced to two years imprisonment and a fine.

[Rimbaud returns to Roche, "date indéterminée".]<sup>63</sup>

August: Completion of Une Saison en enfer.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., XLIII

<sup>60</sup>De Graaf, "Autour du dossier de Bruxelles" quoted by Antoine Fongaro, states that he stayed on for several days in Brussels, lodging at a certain Mme Pincemaille's, where Jef Rosman painted his portrait, and did not in fact arrive in Roche until the end of the month. Antoine Fongaro, "Les Echos verlainiennes chez Rimbaud et le problème des 'Illuminations'", Revue des sciences humaines, 105 (1962), 265, (hereafter: Fongaro, "Les Echos".)

<sup>61</sup>Noulet, Premier visage, p. 28, n. 3, states, "...Certes le poème n'a pas été composé entre le 8 et le 10. Mais pourquoi pas le 20, à sa sortie de l'hôpital, quand la paix provinciale de la ville fait contraste avec le drame (où la plus triste comédie a sa part) qu'il vient de vivre? Manifestement, le poème est écrit par quelqu'un qui est seul et désabusé." Fongaro, "Les Echos", pp. 265-6, agrees with this date of July 1873, identifying references to Verlaine's imprisonment in it, and relates "La Folle par affection" to a line in "Images d'un sou", completed before July 1873.

<sup>62</sup>Vitalie's diary makes it clear only that Rimbaud was at Roche sometime in July 1873, Rimbaud, O.C., p. 820: "Le mois de juillet... Mon frère Arthur ne partageait point nos travaux agricoles; la plume trouvait auprès de lui une occupation assez sérieuse pour qu'elle ne lui permit de se mêler de travaux manuels."

<sup>63</sup>Ruff, "Chron.", p. 166.

<sup>64</sup>Opinions vary as to the order of composition of the different sections of Une Saison and as to whether he continued to work on it in London. Bernard, Oeuvres, pp. 203-4, suggests that he wrote 3 parts, possibly "Mauvais sang", "L'Impossible" and "Alchimie du verbe" at Roche, revised what he had written earlier and composed the rest in July/August at Roche again. Ruff, Rimbaud, pp. 153, 163, suggests that he continued to write it throughout his stay in London. On p. 155 he insists on its deliberate organization as a literary work: "L'unité du ton est évidente et indéniable d'un bout à l'autre", and is of the opinion that Verlaine and Rimbaud did not take their quarrels nor the imprisonment as seriously as did their contemporaries, that it was not written in a state of emotional crisis.

October 24th: Rimbaud in Brussels, probably to collect his author's copies from the printers, Poot et Cie. A police dossier notes that "Il quitte Bruxelles furtivement."  
Copies of Une Saison en enfer given to six friends, including Verlaine and Forain.

November 1st: [Rimbaud seen in Paris at Café Tabourey.]<sup>65</sup>

[Meets Germain Nouveau towards the end of 1873, presumably in Paris.]<sup>66</sup>

Verlaine composes "Sonnet boiteux".

1874

[Meets Germain Nouveau in Paris.]<sup>67</sup>

March 25th: Leaves for London with Germain Nouveau. Rent a room at 178, Stamford St.

April 4th: They obtain reader's cards from the British Museum.

[They work for a time in a cardboard box factory, sightsee, learn English, copy out and compose poems.]<sup>68</sup>

[Beginning of composition of Illuminations.

Parts of "Ville" and "Métropolitain" copied out by Germain Nouveau.]<sup>69</sup>

June: [Germain Nouveau leaves for Paris or Brussels.]<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLIII, quotes Berrichon's statement of this fact.

<sup>66</sup>Lautréamont, O.C., p. 782.

<sup>67</sup>Léon Verane, Humilis, poète errant, Paris: Grasset, 1929, p. 54 (hereafter: Verane, Humilis).

<sup>68</sup>Verane, Humilis, p. 57, first mentions this factory. Jean Richepin, "Germain Nouveau et Rimbaud", La Revue de France, (1er janvier, 1927), p. 128 (hereafter: Richepin, "G.N. et R."), quotes a letter from Nouveau of March 26th, 1874 giving his first impressions, and commenting on Turner.

<sup>69</sup>Lacoste, Le Problème, p. 172.

<sup>70</sup>Richepin, "G.N. et R.", p. 130 quotes a letter from Nouveau of April 17th, 1875, telling of their separation but giving no date.

July 6th: Madame Rimbaud and Vitalie arrive in London, because Rimbaud has been ill and he invited them.<sup>71</sup> Vitalie's diary shows him as a devoted son and brother who speaks English well and takes them sightseeing, looks for jobs and works in the British Museum. It is a valuable source for things seen in London, probably none of them new for Rimbaud.<sup>72</sup>

July 31st: Rimbaud engaged as tutor in coaching establishment in Reading. Madame Rimbaud and Vitalie leave for Charleville.  
[Perhaps Rimbaud leaves for Scarborough]<sup>73</sup>

November 7th and 9th: Advertisement in the Times seeking job as a companion to gentleman travelling in southern or eastern countries. At this point at Reading, 165, King's Rd., at Monsieur Leclair's school.

[In Scarborough]<sup>74</sup>

[November-December: Returns to Charleville.]

1875

January: [Returns to Charleville from Scarborough.]<sup>75</sup>

February 12th: Rimbaud in Stuttgart at Dr. Lübners, Wagnerstrasse. Learning German, tutor to children.

End February: Verlaine joins him for two and a half days. Rimbaud very correctly dressed visiting art galleries and libraries.<sup>76</sup>

March 15th: Moves to pension in Stuttgart. Mother still financing him.

<sup>71</sup>Verlaine, O.C., II, 640, "Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui", mentions "l'hôpital un instant".

<sup>72</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 822-33 and 285-94, (correspondence).

<sup>73</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLIV. V.P. Underwood, "Rimbaud et l'Angleterre", Revue de la littérature comparée, 29 (janvier - mars, 1955), pp. 32-33, holds a similar opinion. (Hereafter: Underwood, "R. et l'Ang.")

<sup>74</sup>De Graaf, "Rimbaud a-t-il séjourné à Scarborough?", Revue de la littérature comparée, I (janvier-mars, 1957), 93, (hereafter: De Graaf, "Scarborough".)

<sup>75</sup>De Graaf, "Scarborough", p. 93, thinks he stayed until January, his mother having registered him for military service in December and the mayor having drawn his number.

<sup>76</sup>Verlaine, Ceuvres en prose complètes, Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1972, p. 970, "Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui", (hereafter:

End April: Leaves Stuttgart for Milan. Ill there, [ Cared for by a lady.]  
[ End of composition of Illuminations.]<sup>77</sup>

May 1st: Letter from Verlaine, in Stickney, to Delahaye: " Si je tiens à avoir détails sur Nouveau, voilà pourquoi. Rimbaud m'ayant prié d'envoyer pour être imprimés des 'poèmes en prose' siens, que j'avais, à ce même Nouveau, alors à Bruxelles ( je parle d'il y a deux mois), j'ai envoyé ( 2 fr. 75 de port!!! ) illico..." Rimbaud still interested in literary success?  
[ Whole or part of Illuminations ? ]<sup>78</sup>  
[ " Photographies des temps passés". ]<sup>79</sup>

Early June: Leaves Milan, suffers sunstroke on way to Leghorn.

June 15th: Repatriated to Marseilles by French consul.

[ These experiences in Milan inspiration for " Bottom", " Après le déluge", " Parade" in part. ]<sup>80</sup>

July: In Paris. Visited by his mother and Vitalie who is seriously ill.  
[ Tutor in Maisons-Alfort. ]<sup>81</sup>

Verlaine, O.P.C.). Verlaine states, " Il part pour l'Allemagne, où il est vu, en février 1875, à Stuttgart, correct, fureteur de bibliothèque, encombrant les pinothèques de son amateurisme, qui n'a rien d'un snob."

<sup>77</sup>Lacoste, Le Problème, p. 173, "... ces poèmes en prose composés entre le printemps de 1874 et février 1875." Py, Illuminations, p. XV, agrees.

<sup>78</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, 1102. In " Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui", O.C., II, 640, he talks of Stuttgart, " où le manuscrit des Illuminations fut remis à quelqu'un qui en eut soin."

<sup>79</sup>D.A. De Graaf, " Les Illuminations et la date exacte de leur composition: une nouvelle hypothèse", Revue des sciences humaines, 60 ( oct.-déc. 1950), p. 253 ( hereafter: De Graaf, "Illuminations"), feels that these prose poems were " Les Photographies des temps passés", of which the " Proses évangéliques" form a part.

<sup>80</sup>Antoine Adam, " L'Enigme des ' Illuminations'", La Revue des sciences humaines 57-60 ( décembre 1950), 231-232 ( hereafter: Adam, "L'Enigme".)

<sup>81</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLV.

October: Returns to Charleville.

Verlaine writes "Qu'en dis-tu voyageur..." and "Malheureux! tous les dons..."

October 14th: Letter to Delahaye from Charleville containing last known verses "Rêve" and "Valse".

November: In reply to a letter from Verlaine requesting any poems of Rimbaud, Delahaye, who has just seen Rimbaud replies, "Des vers de lui? Il y a beau temps que sa verve est à plat. Je crois même qu'il ne se souvient plus du tout d'en avoir faits." <sup>82</sup>

December 18th: Death of Vitalie.

Winter: In Roche. Learns music and foreign languages.

[Latest dates for composition of poetry.] <sup>83</sup>

1876

Spring: Robbed in Vienna. Repatriated. Crosses southern Germany on foot to reach Charleville. <sup>84</sup>

May: In Brussels. Goes to Holland.

May 19th: Enlists at recruitment offices in Harderwijk, signing a six year engagement in Dutch colonial army.

June 10th: Embarks on Prinz von Oranje for Java via Southampton, Gibraltar, Naples, Suez Canal and Aden.

<sup>82</sup>Quoted by Matarasso, La Vie, p. 213.

<sup>83</sup>Starkie, Rimbaud, p. 319.

<sup>84</sup>De Graaf, "Illuminations", pp. 250-51, insists that Verlaine meant that Rimbaud had seen a large part of Germany before he completed the Illuminations therefore their final date is at least 1877. Lacoste feels that use of the German word "Wasserfall" in "Aube" dates it to 1875, but not later. Illuminations, Painted Plates, Paris: Mercure de France, 1949, p. 46. Similarly he dates "Jeunesse IV" as 1875 because of the phrase "rafales de givre" which occurs in La Tentation de Saint Antoine, by Flaubert, published in 1874. (Hereafter: Lacoste, Illuminations.)

June 19th: Recruits reach Batavia and are marched to interior at Salitaga.

August 15th: Rimbaud deserts and makes for coast.

August 30th: [ Embarks on Wandering Chief which rounds the Cape and returns to Europe via Saint-Helen ( October 23rd), Ascension, the Azores, to Queenston, Northern Ireland. Rimbaud either leaves here and returns to Charleville via Cork, Liverpool and Le Havre or stays with the ship until Le Havre.] <sup>85</sup>

[ This voyage and stay in Java inspiration for " Démocratie", part of " Enfance", " Vies, and " Métropolitain".] <sup>86</sup>

December: [ Back in Charleville.] <sup>87</sup>

1877

February: Germain Nouveau in Charleville as instructor for brief period.

May 14th: In Bremen and Hamburg. Trip to Scandinavia [ with the Loisset Circus.] <sup>88</sup>

June: Mentioned twice in register of foreigners present in Stockholm.

[ After Sweden, seen in Copenhagen. Proceeds to Norway and possibly visits the Arctic Circle.]

[ This Scandinavian circuit inspiration for parts of " Après le déluge", " Barbare ", and Dévotion".] <sup>89</sup>

[Returns to Charleville.]

Beginning of Winter: Embarks at Marseilles for Alexandria. Falls ill, disembarks at Civita-Vecchia, visits Rome then returns to Charleville.

1878

Beginning of year: In Hamburg. [ In Switzerland.]

<sup>85</sup>For differing opinions on the exact route taken see V.P. Underwood, " Rimbaud le marin", Mercure de France 338 ( décembre 1960) 637( hereafter: Underwood, " Rimbaud" ).

<sup>86</sup> Adam, " L'Enigme", pp. 223-225.

<sup>87</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLV.

<sup>88</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLVI, denies earlier rumours that he worked for this circus.

<sup>89</sup> Adam's itinerary, Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLVI, and " L'Enigme", pp. 228-30, remark that obscurities in the poetry are the result of our ignorance of Rimbaud's wanderings in 1876 and 1877.

Easter: Seen in Paris.<sup>90</sup> [Visits 1878 Exhibition.]<sup>91</sup>

Summer: At Roche.

August 9th: Letter from Verlaine to Charles de Sivry where Illuminations mentioned with this title for the first time.<sup>92</sup>

October 20th: Crosses Vosges, Switzerland, reached by Saint-Gothard, and arrives in Genoa via Lugano and Milan.

October 27th: Verlaine asks de Sivry for Illuminations.<sup>93</sup>

November 19th: Embarks at Genoa for Alexandria.

December 16th: Working as an overseer in a quarry in Cyprus.

[End of composition of Illuminations.]<sup>94</sup>

1879

May 27th: Ill. Leaves Cyprus.

Summer: At Roche.

Autumn: Reaches Marseilles then returns to Roche because of illness.

Winter: At Roche. Verlaine at Coulommès, 2 km. from Roche.

[Could have met Verlaine at this point and handed over more Illuminations.]<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. XLVI.

<sup>91</sup>D.A. De Graaf, "Une Clé des Illuminations; l'exposition universelle de 1878", Revue des sciences humaines, 78 (avril-juin), 267-70 (hereafter: De Graaf, "Une Clé"), attempts to show that this exhibition is reflected in "Villes I" and "Villes II".

<sup>92</sup>"...Avoir relu Illuminations (painted plates) du sieur que tu sais ainsi que sa Saison en enfer...Te le reporterai vers octobre. Dangereux par les postes. Choses charmantes dedans, d'ailleurs au milieu d'un tas de zolismes d'avant la lettre, par conséquent inavouables." Quoted by De Graaf, Rimbaud, p. 179.

<sup>93</sup>"Amitiés à Cabaner: ses musiques, les eaux-fortes, un tas de chinoiseries (pardon, japonismes, et les illuminécheunes, donc!)." Verlaine, O.C., I, 1143.

<sup>94</sup>De Graaf, "Illuminations", pp. 250 and 253. Adam, "L'Enigme", p. 233.

<sup>95</sup>Adam, "L'Enigme", p. 222. De Graaf, "Illuminations", p. 249.



[Spring]: Leaves. In Alexandria, Cyprus, Aden then Harar.

## 1880-1891

Lives as commercial agent and employee, largely in Aden and Harar, making several trips into unexplored areas of Ethiopia.

## 1886

Publication in La Vogue of manuscripts from de Sivry. Verses and prose together.

## 1887

Verlaine composes "Laeti et errabundi".<sup>96</sup>

## 1888

Publication by Vanier of material from La Vogue plus several poems reconstituted from memory by Verlaine.<sup>97</sup>

July 17th: Laurent Gavoty's letter to Rimbaud inviting him as head of Symbolists and Decadents to collaborate in his revue, La France Moderne. Rimbaud never replied. (O.C., p. 634).

## 1891

November 10th: Rimbaud dies in hospital in Marseilles.

Illuminations and Une Saison en enfer published by Vanier.

M. Ries, Rimbaud's employer in Harar in the later years claimed to André Billy that Rimbaud had told him that the poetry of his youth was "des ringures".<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup>Composed after false rumour of Rimbaud's death according to Berrichon, Verlaine, O.P.C., p. 1071.

<sup>97</sup>In the "Préface" to Vanier's edition of the Poésies Complètes of 1895. Verlaine, O.C., II, 1283, said: "Quant aux quelques morceaux en prose qui terminent le volume, je les eusse retenus pour les publier dans une nouvelle édition des oeuvres en prose. Ils sont d'ailleurs merveilleux, mais tout à fait dans la note des Illuminations et de la Saison en enfer..." indicating that he did not understand the Vers Nouveaux to be part of the Illuminations.

<sup>98</sup>De Graaf, Rimbaud, p. 10. In a letter to Emile Deschamps, March 5th, 1929, Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 815-6, Ries recalls Rimbaud, "... se félicitant toujours...d'avoir fait foin de ce qu'il appelait ses frasques de jeunesse, d'un passé qu'il abhorrait."

# I

## CHARLEVILLE

There are countless descriptions of Charleville and its surrounding countryside from Rimbaud's biographers and admirers. They range from sketches of Charleville in Rimbaud's time to impressions handed down by pilgrims to the "shrine" of their poet, to elaborated details gleaned from the poet's own works. They reflect necessarily the selective eye of their authors and their assumptions as to the autobiographical nature of many of Rimbaud's early poems about this town.

There are sketches of Charleville's society,<sup>1</sup> descriptions concentrating on the topography and deducing the character of the town from these landmarks.<sup>2</sup> There is the poetic impression by Claudel, which leads to Roche and the "shrine".<sup>3</sup> Remembering details in his poems, several biographers mention the places he lived in and frequented.<sup>4</sup> Suppositions as to his feelings in his family situation abound.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Antoine Adam et al., "Cosmorama arduan" in Rimbaud, Paris: Hachette, 1968, pp. 36-37. (Hereafter, Adam, Rimbaud.)

<sup>2</sup>Matarasso, La Vie, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Claudel, "Préface" to Pascal Pia's edition of Arthur Rimbaud, Poésies Complètes, Paris: Gallimard, Le Livre de Poche, 1960, p. 9 (hereafter: Claudel, "Préface").

<sup>4</sup>De Graaf, Rimbaud, p. 4, quotes Berrichon's epithet for the rue Bourbon, "hanté du populaire". Starkie, Rimbaud, pp. 32-33, equally inspired by "Les Poètes de sept ans", compares the rue Bourbon to the rue Napoléon and the cours d'Orléans. Delahaye, Souvenirs, pp. 48, 69 & 73, describes some of the places he walked in with Rimbaud. Verlaine, O.C., I, 477-78, tells an anecdote about Charleville's librarians, supposed source of "Les Assis".

<sup>5</sup>Briet's view, Mme R., p. 22, emphasizing the rigidity of his upbringing, the existence of the Rimbaud's as outsiders, is fairly typical.

There is a gulf between all these impressions and Rimbaud's own evocations of this town. This gulf exists largely because the critics aim at making their view of Rimbaud's life and surroundings explain his poetry. While his actions and environment may well be reflected in his poetry, Rimbaud is not necessarily using description for its own sake. Conforming to the poetic theories of Rieser and others,<sup>6</sup> it seems that from the start of his poetic career, Rimbaud finds analogies to his state of mind in exterior objects to obtain relief from his strong emotions.

There are three main groups of poems where the poet's experiences, or the emotions in his mind, have caused him to express himself through a poetic evocation of aspects of his home town. These are: some of the early poems to September 1871, when Charleville was his environment; Charleville revisited or "seen" from Paris in the Spring and Summer of 1872; "La visite des

---

<sup>6</sup>Max Rieser, Analysis of Poetic Thinking, Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1969, suggests that under the pressure of strong emotion, which can only be cleared from the mind by finding analogies for this state of mind in the world of exterior objects and by verbally equating these emotions with these objects, the poetic mind thinks symbolically. The poet sees analogies everywhere, but does not treat subjects which are psychically indifferent to him, since he is also attempting to understand his inner self. He does not seek to express or analyse reality. The structures he describes often express thoughts and emotions. Rieser does not deny that transpositions of reality occur: experiences in real life often determine the angle of vision of analogical thinking.

C. Day Lewis, The Poet's Way of Knowledge, Cambridge University Press, 1956, p. 25, sees poetry as a record of the human mind experiencing itself, and thus a way of knowing better, of understanding our moods, feelings, passions.

Charles Mauron, Des Métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel, Paris: Corti, 1963, p. 195, again says something very similar: "Nous sommes ainsi conduits, par l'étude tout empirique des réseaux associatifs, à l'hypothèse d'une situation dramatique interne, personnelle, sans cesse modifiée par réaction à des événements internes ou externes, mais persistante et reconnaissable..."

souvenirs", recognized principally by Delahaye in some of the Illuminations. Other poems written in Charleville before the autumn of 1871 and communicating attitudes or emotions perhaps inspired by the poet's life there, are more easily discussed in connection with other towns. For example, his political preoccupations are not evident in the town poems dealing with Charleville, although they do become linked with the image of the town in his early poetry on Paris.

+

+

+

In this first group of poems, "A la musique" is the only one where Charleville is named specifically, "Place de la gare, à Charleville", being the setting indicated. However, at least nine others can be classed as poems involving Charleville: "Les Reparties de Nina", "Les Effarés", "Roman", "Le Mal", "Oraison du soir", "Les Pauvres à l'église", "Les Premières Communions", "Les Poètes de sept ans" and "Les Assis".

On June 10th 1871, Rimbaud wrote a second letter to Demeny, following his famous "Lettre du Voyant" of May. In it he urged his friend:

...brûlez, je le veux, et je crois que vous respecterez ma volonté comme celle d'un mort, brûlez tous les vers que je fus assez sot pour vous donner lors de mon séjour à Douai... (O.C., p. 255).

These poems in the "Cahier Demeny", apart from "Les Effarés", which he sent to Verlaine the following August, were never mentioned by Rimbaud to Verlaine.<sup>7</sup> They mark for Rimbaud the end of a stage in his poetic life.

---

<sup>7</sup>Verlaine, "Nouvelles notes sur Rimbaud", O.P.C., p. 976., admits that in Paris: "De ses vers passés il m'en causa peu. Il les dédaignait et me parlait de ce qu'il voulait faire dans l'avenir." This statement encompasses all these ten poems. In his "Préface" to Vanier's edition of the Poésies Complètes, 1895, O.C., II, 1280-1283, Verlaine indicates that he considers all these poems inferior to the later ones.

These early poems will not be treated in the presumed order of composition suggested by our chronology, but in the order in which they were copied by Rimbaud,<sup>8</sup> to see if he established a progression in this early view of Charleville. If we consider that this letter is a retrospective opinion from June 1871, what do "Les Reparties de Nina", "A la musique", "Les Effarés", "Roman" and "Le Mal" have in common which sets them beneath "Les Poètes de sept ans", "Oraison du soir", "Les Pauvres à l'église", "Les Assis" and "Les Premières Communions", which were not destined for incineration? They must express a tone no longer compatible with the poet's feelings in June 1871, while the others still correspond to his views at this time.

In "Les Reparties de Nina" (O.C., pp. 24-27), Rimbaud has dipped into the common stock-pot of themes for his subject. This poem indicates forcibly Rimbaud's attitude to the town as represented by Charleville. However, the only category of urban geography which applies to this poem is that of the point of view of the observer, since the mention of the town occurs only in the rejoinder. Yet the town is the environment with which the long lyrical speech by "Lui" is contrasted. The poet not only watches the unfolding of the cycle of the day in the country, of the romance,

---

<sup>8</sup>Lacoste, Poésies, pp. 13-14, notes the order of copying. The first Cahier contained: "Première soirée", "Sensation", "Le Forgeron", "Soleil et Chair", "Ophélie", "Bal des pendus", "Le Châtiment de Tartufe", "Vénus anadyomène", "Les Reparties de Nina", "A la musique", "Les Effarés", "Roman", "Morts de quatre-vingt-douze", "Le Mal", "Rages de Césars". The second Cahier contained seven sonnets related to his Belgian escapade: "Révé pour l'hiver", "Le Dormeur du val", "Au Cabaret-Vert", "La Maline", "L'Eclatante victoire de Sarrebruck", "Le Buffet", "Ma Bohème".

but participates with all his senses as " Je ".

The freshness and directness of this poem in conventional form is conveyed partly by the dancing rhythm,<sup>9</sup> partly by the rising excitement of the speech. Initially a description of a hypothetical excursion, the poem becomes a future plan as the intense, coaxing evocation of the idyll, the crowding details of country life, convince the poet of their reality. As in all day-dreams, it is plotted to the last detail to suit the desires of the dreamer.

The poet's physical affinity with nature, his desire to possess it, and the girl here, who becomes another feature of the countryside to be enjoyed--nature and the natural incarnate--is personal to him. Specific landmarks are mentioned with the definite article, giving a further sense of immediacy and of ownership of this place. Similarly, he names specific plants, " la luzerne ", " la rose églantier ", transforming them into liquid objects to be absorbed physically by the poet.

Houston has said, " Rimbaud... created a fresh voice in literature by exploiting the imagery of the commonplace". Noting Rimbaud's references to the cows, to the strong scent of the apple orchards, he remarks that, "... he also violates the Parnassian cult of linguistic purity with his provincialisms, of which he was perhaps unaware."<sup>10</sup> It is true that the image, " Une vache fientera, fière, /A chaque pas..." is certainly not Parnassian or Romantic subject matter. It is an amazingly accurate

<sup>9</sup> Verlaine, *O.C.*, II, 1282, has commented on this " rythme sautilleur avec des gentilleses à tout bout de champ."

<sup>10</sup> Houston, *The Design*, pp. 24 & 18. On page 23 he adds, " Rimbaud's lines are utterly ingenuous in their ignorance of all the complex hierarchy of poetic subjects which neo-classicism and polite society had combined to erect."

impression of the swaggering gait of cows returning to be milked, because of the anthropomorphic epithet "fière". Listed as an attraction to be viewed, it demonstrates Rimbaud's appreciation of the natural as proper and therefore beautiful.

The lighted interior, like a magic-lantern show, is indeed, as Verlaine remarked, "un intérieur à la Téniers",<sup>11</sup> and an additional touch of local colour. There is nothing more Ardennais than "Le jambon fumant", "le pot de bière", and dairy-farming. He uses a local word "claire" instead of the standard "éclaire", probably deliberately so as to emphasize the rustic, cosy atmosphere inside this hovel.

His countryside is composed of plays of light and colour. Blues, greens and whites predominate. There is an exhilarating sense of physical enjoyment and freedom. In "Ver erat..." (O.C., pp. 179-180) despite its being an exercise in Latin verse, Rimbaud already exhibits a similar physical joy in the countryside which is also warm, bright and offers freedom from the town and its duties. There is the same banal "campagne riante" imagery, which here is more subtly equated with the laughing, exhilarated girl. In many ways Rome becomes Charleville or the town.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly in "Prologue" (O.C., pp. 173-174), after a description of the sensuous joys nature offers the poet, sixteenth century Rheims is

<sup>11</sup>Verlaine, O.C., II, 1282.

<sup>12</sup>Professor H.F. Guite of the Department of Classics at McMaster University affirms that the sentiments in this poem are not "cribs" from Latin poets and would appear to represent more modern attitudes to nature or Rimbaud's own feelings.

Hackett, "Splendides villes", p. 47, discerns an example of opposition between town and country in "Jugurtha" also, the freedom of the Algerian mountains being opposed to Rome.

mentioned. At first it is presented sympathetically as a place of refuge in an idealized, loving family. Soon, pressures are exerted on the boy to shine in school, to aim for a place in life. Then, having shifted to his modern world of school and his own family, it would seem, he bursts out in schoolboy curses to assert his opposition to these values. Rheims, with its " belle cathédrale, témoin du sacre du roi Clovis ", eventually equates then with Charleville, with its place Ducale founded by Charles de Gonzague. This physical affinity with the countryside, this contempt for a niche in life, for work, is an early and enduring attitude.

In " Sensation " ( O.C., p. 6 ), the " soirs bleus d'été " call him to physical enjoyment in nature where he can wander at will, " rêveur " as in the above-mentioned poems, where he will feel " l'amour infini " and be " heureux comme avec une femme ". In " Les Reparties de Nina ", the theme of " Première soirée " has merged with those of " Sensation ", " Prologue " and " Ver erat...".

The rejoinder by " Elle" may be facile and obvious, but the word " bureau " distils the commercial, unimaginative qualities of the town. The poet has thus demonstrated in a hundred or so lyrical lines his own singularity and alienation from the town values. This last phrase, showing Nina's naiveté and incomprehension, testifies forcibly to the total inability of the poet to communicate with the representative of the town with her acceptance of the " servitudes sales " of modern times. The original title, " Ce que retient Nina ", emphasized the restrictive nature of the town.

Hackett has perceived one of Rimbaud's permanent oppositions to the town: "...the juxtaposition of the urban and the pastoral, of laws of man's civilization and nature's order, remains in differing forms and



with varying degrees of emphasis, a dominant theme in Rimbaud's work.<sup>13</sup> Wolf Schneider has explained the attraction of the town as being "freedom from the country"<sup>14</sup> that is, freedom from the chores of the country. Rimbaud's country is truly pastoral here. While he observes rustic life sympathetically, it is an outside view. He aspires instead to an idyllic nature, more vivid and sensuous than the real. The town, symbolized by "le bureau" is the restriction on his deepest needs. The localization of unnatural life and attitudes has been indicated succinctly.

In "A la musique" (O.C., pp. 21-22), the poet concentrates on society and its activities, setting the poem in the square where the bourgeois<sup>15</sup> congregate regularly on Thursday evenings. The nine quatrains, as correct and four-square as the "place taillée en mesquines pelouses", divide into two parts, indicated by the position of the observer poet. In the first five quatrains he mingles with the crowd, examining it. The people are as correct and mean as the square with its disciplined vegetation, as precise and regular, as ridiculous and full of false notes as the music.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Hackett, "Splendides villes", p. 47.

<sup>14</sup>Wolf Schneider, Babylon is Everywhere; The City as Man's Fate, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963, p. 318 (hereafter: Schneider, Babylon).

<sup>15</sup>According to Robert, the term "bourgeois", used here twice by Rimbaud, did not then have all the pejorative meanings attached to it today, simply denoting a citizen of a town who did not work with his hands, who had a certain status in the community, although it had already acquired the meaning of someone incapable of appreciating what is aesthetic or disinterested. Thus, one of its antonyms is the artist or poet, the position of Rimbaud here.

<sup>16</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 859, n. 2, notes that in Le Catalogue Rimbaud, published by the town of Charleville, the programme for the concert of July 7th, 1870 included "valse des fifres", identified as Polka-Mazurka des Fifres by Pascal.

He has selected his words extremely carefully to skewer these types and hold up to ridicule their self-important movements, their love of comfort, their conspicuous consumption and display of goods, their lack of appreciation of the aesthetic, their lack of health and vigour, hence their unsuitability for country life. " Bureaux " for bureaucrats is startlingly right, " dames " in the sense used here is a local usage, " cornacs " sums up superbly their solidity and docility as they parade in this confined area. Rimbaud catches their narrow, self-satisfied conversations: they discuss " fort sérieusement "; "... vous savez, c'est de la contrebande;--", is a snatch heard and a local touch; a pompous pronouncement begins, " En somme ! ". The title, " A la musique " is no doubt a local expression for the Thursday event. They sport " boutons clairs", " Les volants ont des airs de réclames ", and they smoke an expensive local pipe, " l'onnaing ", a brand name giving status.

This scene, while lucidly and derisively analysed, is not bitingly cynical. It is also derivative. Adam points out its close affiliation to Glatigny's " Promenade d'hiver ".<sup>17</sup> Glatigny's details must have matched Rimbaud's estimation of this society, for in a letter to Izambard in August 1870, he reintroduced a picture of the bourgeois of Charleville. The same types (big-bellied men, notaries, grocers) have the same attitudes (display of their uniforms, self-important public gestures) in the letter and poem. Bored, disappointed and alienated by his contrary ideas and ideals, condemned

---

<sup>17</sup>Rimbaud, *O.C.*, p. 859: " ... Sur la place, écoutant les accords/  
D'un orchestre guerrier, leurs beaux habits dehors,/ Mille bourgeois joyeux  
flânent avec leurs femmes,/ Dont les vastes chapeaux ont des couleurs  
infâmes../ Moi, je suis doucement les filles aux yeux doux,/..."

The plan of the poem, the setting, the showy vulgarity of the bourgeois, the introduction of "moi" who follows the girls, are very similar. It would seem that Rimbaud had merely developed the details of a set theme, as he had been trained to do with Latin verse, were it not for his letter.

to stay there, he mocks their bellicose attitude, doubts their moral conviction and would prefer to see them seated, as in " A la musique." His revelation of his inner desires for sun, relaxation, wandering at will, escape from the town, is significant.<sup>18</sup>

These desires, which counteract his feelings of being out of his element in the town, are fulfilled mentally by his day-dream in " Les Reparties de Nina " and by the content of the next four quatrains. With the transition to "moi" and after a gentle look at a younger, livelier society which is still not his, he drifts down the avenue following his real desires, away from the circumscribed square.

Despite the urgency of his desires, manifested by his devouring gaze, he cannot communicate with these confident girls who whisper together, excluding him. Well aware of his difference from these girls, whose fathers are in the square, he describes himself as non-bourgeois, " débraillé comme un étudiant." He states flatly, " Elles me trouvent drôle...". His original last line, " Et mes désirs brutaux s'accrochent à leurs lèvres...", changed by the bourgeois Izambard to the passive, " Et je sens les baisers qui me viennent aux lèvres...", condenses the fiercely physical nature of his desires, which are natural but frustrated by the unnatural society in the square. This alienation from social values in Charleville is symbolized by his drifting away from the town centre to the green trees and girls.

---

<sup>18</sup> " Vous êtes heureux, vous, de ne plus habiter Charleville ! -- Ma ville natale est supérieurement idiote entre les petites villes de province...-- parce qu'elle voit pérégriner dans ses rues deux ou trois cents de pioupious, cette benoîte population gesticule, prudhommesquement spadassine, bien autrement que les assiégés de Metz et de Strasbourg ! C'est effrayant, les épiciers retraités qui revêtent l'uniforme ! C'est épatant comme ça a du chien, les notaires, les vitriers, les percepteurs, ... ma patrie se lève !... Moi, j'aime mieux la voir assise;...

Je suis dépaycé, malade, furieux, bête, renversé; j'espérais des bains de soleil, des promenades infinies, du repos, des voyages, des aventures, des bohémienneries enfin;..." ( O. C., p. 238 ).

Verlaine, summing up these early poems in 1895, notes their slightness yet their charm, their extraordinary use of significant detail, their still gentle raillery.<sup>19</sup> In "Les Poètes maudits", perhaps unaware of these very early poems, he comments on the form of Rimbaud's first work. These comments apply to these poems too:

Son vers, solidement campé, use rarement d'artifices. Peu de césures libertines, moins encore de rejets. Le choix des mots est toujours exquis, quelquefois pédant à dessein. La langue est nette et reste claire quand l'idée se fonce ou que le sens s'obscurcit. Rimes très honorables. 20

The formal correctness, the derivative nature of the themes, indicate a yearning to belong, a certain willingness still to play the poetic and social game, which explain the comparatively gentle attack so far. The horizons of escape extend only as far as the local countryside and the local girls. However, the extraordinarily precise details indicate his lucid vision, his verbal capabilities and the intensity of his desires, which make him different from his society.

"Les Effarés" (O.C., pp. 27-28), although socially critical, is resigned and somewhat sentimental rather than biting, with a universality lacking in the local detail of the previous two poems. Yet, as Hackett says:

Rimbaud n'avait pas besoin de chercher plus loin que dans sa ville natale les cinq enfants de son poème... des amis du "poète de sept ans", ce sont des garçons miséreux qu'il a connus dans les tristes rues de Charleville. 21

---

<sup>19</sup> Verlaine, O.C., II, 1287: "Suivent des choses plus jolies que belles et non... pur et haut génie: toutefois, quand je dis jolies, je n'entends pas dire fades ni banales,... Cela signifie pleines de détails plutôt charmants, âprement et gentiment sauvages,..."

<sup>20</sup> Verlaine, O.C., I, 476, "Les Poètes maudits".

<sup>21</sup> C.A. Hackett, Rimbaud l'enfant, Paris: Corti, 1948, p. 75, (hereafter: Hackett, L'Enfant.)

He sees very clearly that the whole poem is symbolic and capable of being read on several levels:

...les poèmes de Rimbaud sont à la fois des images et des rêves... Cette opposition entre un bonheur rêvé et une tristesse réelle est particulièrement frappante dans les Effarés... De ce côté du grillage, c'est un monde de misère et de haillons: tout jusqu'aux couleurs, le blanc et le noir, est froid; et pour seul chant, il y a le vent d'hiver... De l'autre côté, c'est un monde de bonheur; les couleurs, jaunes, rouges, sont vives; tout chante: le boulanger, les grillons, le pain; il y a de la chaleur, des parfums, et des lumières qui dansent; c'est un monde de rêve...<sup>22</sup>

The poet is an omniscient observer perceiving both sides of this diptych which is divided by the grid of the ventilator. His sympathies are undoubtedly with the children. Noulet has remarked: " ... deux choses ont toujours échappé à ses sarcasmes, la nature et l'enfance".<sup>23</sup> Here, while he describes the baker's actions and appearance in glowing terms, he does not enter into his feelings, apart from imparting his self-satisfaction. This is not a two-way mirror. The baker does not see the children. Rimbaud's senses fuse with those of the children to form one mass of yearning flesh, so riveted by the inside scene that they are impervious to their real misery, etched by Rimbaud in his overview. Their look unifies all the details.

The town has two roles, able to deprive or fulfill. This dichotomy is indicated by the songs as well as by the clair-obscur effects. The baker " chante un vieil air ", the type of song indicating his communal roots. The children, " chantant des choses/Entre les trous,/ Mais bien bas,--", are lost and in awe. They cannot sing in unison with the baker, crickets

---

<sup>22</sup>Hackett, L'Enfant, p. 79.

<sup>23</sup> Noulet, Premier Visage, p. 370.

and bread, they cannot communicate their needs. As in " Le Mal " and " Les Pauvres à l'église ", they pray stupidly, inspired by a glorious sight, to one who is indifferent to or ignorant of their needs. Their yearning to be on the inside is so intense that as the climax of the ceremony is reached they strain so hard towards its beauty and comfort, that "... ils crèvent leur culotte,/ -- Et que leur linge blanc tremblote/ Au vent d'hiver." This pathetic and ridiculous sight echoes the ridiculous aspect of the boy in the eyes of the girls at the end of " A la musique ".

Verlaine admired this poem and sums up best its impact and originality.<sup>24</sup> The hugoesque tinge of the word "effaré" and the topic of wretched children, common at the time as a poetic theme, are counterbalanced by the gentle caricature, which lifts this poem from the maudlin level of a Coppée to a universal picture of alienation in a small town and of the happiness possible in the world, behind the social obstacles, symbolized by the baker creating the staff of life behind his grid.

" Roman" ( O.C., pp. 29-30 ) presents a daydream reversing the situation in " A la musique ". It depicts the delights of a small town in summer for a love-sick adolescent. The poet is represented as the impersonal " on " or " vous", viewed tenderly but ironically as he drifts down the avenue lined with green lime trees, intoxicated by love. Abandoning the frivolous attractions, "bocks", "bière", local delicacies, the glitter of the commercial centre, represented by the cafés, too harsh for his sentimental mood, he dreams in the natural light of the stars in the balmy air.

---

<sup>24</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, 480-481, " Les Poètes maudits", comments: "Pour le moment c'est la Grâce qui nous appelle, une grâce particulière, inconnue certes jusqu'ici, où le bizarre et l'étrange salent et poivent l'extrême douceur, la simplicité divine de la pensée et du style... Nous ne connaissons pour notre part dans aucune littérature quelque chose d'un

The title itself is ironic. This is a romance, by implication unrealizable. The view of the teasing girl, protected by her bourgeois father and seen in the artificial, modern light of a lamp-post, is a sobering glimpse of his real-life frustration in communicating with girls, seen as the purveyors of happiness.

The dream is of a gentle, sentimental relationship, unlike the brutal, possessive urges of "A la musique". It is evoked in coyly expressed commonplaces. Aided by the facile device of repetitions the whole seems like a drawing room ballad, although the schoolboy slang expression, "mauvais goût" is a dissonance, giving a wry twist to this sugary sentiment. The cyclic return to the cafés, the partial recapitulation, indicate the conventionality of this type of dream.

Some details in the poem are originally sketched or expressed:

"Le coeur fou Robinsonne..", and "un tout petit chiffon/ D'azur sombre...", for example, but the poem as a whole is disarmingly regular, divided evenly into four parts, well rhymed, indicating the lighthearted joys of the average adolescent in a small town. While the poet might wish to belong to this society, indicated by the detailed evocation of what happens in such romances, down to the detail of one's friends greeting one's success with scorn, it is a nostalgic but ironic outsider's view of a small town summer.<sup>25</sup>

"Le Mal" (O.C., p. 30), showing the interior of a Church in a provincial town in wartime, suggests that the source for the visual aspects of the Church scenes is Charleville. The poet takes an overview which

---

peu farouche et de si tendre, de gentiment caricatural et de si cordial, et de si bon, et d'un jet franc, sonore, magistral, comme les Effarés... nous dirions, c'est du Goya pire et meilleur."

<sup>25</sup>In his letter to Izambard of August 25th, 1870, Rimbaud, O.C., p. 239, Rimbaud encloses a poem by Louisa Siefert with the same note of tender regret which contains the line: "C'en est fini pour moi du céleste roman/ Que toute jeune fille à mon âge imagine..." It is a possible source.

allows him to see two sides of the triptich from the centre panel. The strong note of protest is rooted in the lines, "-Pauvres morts! dans l'été, dans l'herbe, dans ta joie,/ Nature! ô toi qui fis ces hommes saintement!" This is the central panel and the rallying point for the poet who sides with the natural laws of life.

The terrible slaughter of the battle scenes, the rulers' mocking indifference to human life are presented with views of large masses, sharply contrasted in bright primary colours. These are exactly the pictures of battle that would be seen on postcards by these mothers. As they turn to their traditional comfort and aid, God and his Church, another sharp contrast is set up between the richness of the Church furnishings and the abject poverty of these black-bonneted women who do not own a purse and tie their offering in their handkerchiefs. Rimbaud equates God's indifference to human suffering with that of the temporal rulers. They are condemned. These women, a common sight in provincial Churches and hence Rimbaud's fellow citizens, represent the moral cowardice and stupidity of these blind followers of order. They are also reproved.<sup>26</sup> The attack is thus against the passivity of Christian doctrine. Like "Le Juste", "Pleureur des Oliviers" (O.C., p. 54), these women can only weep. They offer the traditional widow's mite, but they will not be blessed.

The sonnet form disciplines and condenses this savage attack on all rulers and subservient followers unable to see that human happiness and allegiance is required by natural law.

---

<sup>26</sup> Etienne et Gaucière, Rimbaud, Paris: Gallimard, 1950, p. 46, commenting of this reproof, are of the opinion that, "Accablé de souffrances par son Dieu, le fidèle est assez veule pour l'adorer. Rimbaud n'a pas assez d'injures pour cette résignation." The attack is in fact against all accepted authority and the people who accept it.



What these five poems have in common, apart from the impeccably correct style by contemporary standards, is the poet's empathy with the rejected or alienated in this small town: "Les effarés", the boy poet who cannot communicate his different values, and the gaily sacrificed soldiers. Society is thus indicted. These rejected ones all seek happiness, symbolized by light, colour and detailed images of nature, natural products and activities. The wealth of detailed imagery appeals to the senses and to the imagination. There is always an ironic, omniscient observer as well as a sympathizer with one group in this society. In the end, this observer always indicates the destruction of the carefully created dream. The hungry one is left in an unfulfilled position.

Until "Le Mal", the poet's position is indeterminate. While he ridicules and disapproves of the society and values of his town, his attack is not really savage. There is sometimes a hint of nostalgia for this town life, a yearning to communicate with this society. In "Le Mal" this hope for acceptance or this sympathy for the poor and needy has gone. The poet's rejection and condemnation of his fellow citizens with their bovine acceptance of the status quo is categorical.

The architecture of the town does not interest him. Its lay-out is simple: a restrictive centre where he is not at home, a green avenue, scene of tentative overtures to the town girls, leading to the countryside, analogous to his real desires. The idyllic symbols are always light, coloured, tender and warm, whereas the town is either seen at dusk or as a dark interior.

At this stage, Charleville is represented almost exclusively by its society, acting in opposition to the poet's natural desires, which are seen as morally right. Weighed and found wanting in the face of his dreams, society represents modern man's law in conflict with that of eternal nature.

If one examines the "Cahier Demy" in the light of these five analyses, it appears that Rimbaud has grouped his poems according to their theme or tone. The first two poems in the "Cahier" indicate analogies with his deepest desires, the next two express his social and political beliefs, followed by two poetic exercises. The group from "Vénus anadyomène" to "Roman" conveys his opposition to the physical condition and mental attitude of man in modern society compared to man obeying natural law. The poet's adherence to strict form indicates the narrowness of his horizon of evasion and the yearning to belong in this society. The absolute rejection of this society and acceptance of his singularity begin with "Le Mal".

The dating of the next five poems is uncertain as our chronology indicates. They are treated in an order which indicates a progressive increase in aggression against Charleville.

"Oraison du soir" (O.C., p. 39) is again in the conventional sonnet form.<sup>27</sup> It is set in a café, an essential gathering place in a town and one to which Rimbaud was attached in real life. In "Roman", cafés were dazzling, receptive places, giving an illusion of fulfillment and belonging. Here their festive air has gone. "Je" is the object of attention. The café and its society act as a backcloth for his moods. Beer was a local preference in Charleville, and the use of the word "chope" serves to suggest the identity of this town.

---

<sup>27</sup> Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 35, implies that the use of the sonnet form seems to be a self-discipline imposed by Rimbaud to hold himself together in his growing revolt: "... ce poème à forme fixe, presque un symbole de la règle et de la contrainte en matière de versification, se met à proliférer sous sa plume, au moment où son bouleversement moral laisserait prévoir au contraire un effort de libération dans tous les ordres de la pensée." By his count, from July to December 1870, 14 out of 17 poems composed are sonnets, with a great proportion of "rimes riches".

The poet presents himself as an innocent victim, "un ange aux  
aux mains d'un barbier". His slouching position betrays his resignation  
and lack of positive direction.<sup>28</sup> His "Gambier", the smoky atmosphere, his  
excessive drinking, reflect his defiance and the haziness of his thoughts.  
He is confusedly seeking his way. The fluctuation between his burning  
desires and wounded despair<sup>29</sup> is conveyed in terms designed to shock<sup>30</sup> not  
only the townspeople but traditional poets. The use of terms like "hypogastre",  
not acceptable poetically, has the same shock value. These images show his  
alienation from the common herd, which is represented by the barber out  
to lop his moral strength. Both images are taken from nature, minutely  
and accurately observed. The first is deliberately unpleasant but horribly  
exact. The second image likens his wounded feelings to the flowing of sap  
from the slashed cortex of a tree. Both convey exactly the violence and  
unusual quality of his moods, his inability, as a passive victim, to do  
more than suffer in silence his swarming desires and despair.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>In a letter to Izambard, 2 November 1870, he expresses this  
resignation: "Je meurs, je me décompose dans la platitude, dans la  
mauvaiseté, dans la grisaille... Mais je resterai, je resterai." (O.C., p. 245).  
The atmosphere and attitude are clearly that of the poem.

<sup>29</sup>He wrote to Demeny the following April: "... Ne sachant rien de ce  
qu'il faut savoir, résolu à ne rien faire de ce qu'il faut faire, je suis  
condamné, dès toujours, pour jamais". (O.C., p. 246).

<sup>30</sup>"Tels que les excréments chauds d'un vieux colombier,/ Mille Rêves  
en moi font de douces brûlures:/ Puis par instants mon coeur triste est  
comme un aubier/ Qu'ensanglante l'or jeune et sombre des coulures."

<sup>31</sup>In August 1871, he elaborated to Demeny on his life and attitude  
in Charleville, and on the attacks he suffered there: "Situation du prévenu:  
j'ai quitté depuis plus d'un an la vie ordinaire, pour ce que vous savez,  
Enfermé sans cesse dans cette inqualifiable contrée ardennaise, ne fréquentant  
pas un homme, recueilli dans un travail infâme, inepte, obstiné, mystérieux,  
ne répondant que par le silence aux questions, aux apostrophes grossières et  
méchantes, ... j'ai fini par provoquer d'atroces résolutions d'une mère...  
inflexible..." (O.C., pp. 258-59). This letter indicates his real desires  
and despair at this time.

Verlaine comments on this new, wry, aggressively realistic tone:

" Goguenard et pince-sans-rire, M. Arthur Rimbaud l'est, quand cela lui convient, au premier chef, tout en demeurant le grand poète que Dieu l'a fait. A preuve l'Oraison du soir."<sup>32</sup> The important phrase is, " quand cela lui convient". The final savage image of himself, likened, in an impassive and harmonious line, to gentle Jesus relieving himself into the brown skies, suits Rimbaud very well indeed to express his resentment of the meek followers and his bitterness against authority, represented here by God. The title is a further blasphemy, the prayer being the " peeing" into the sky, abode of God. As he champions natural law, the more natural the activity, the more it flings his resentment in the face of this society, to whom it is shocking.

The town, represented by its cafés, not only continues to act as a brake on his desires, but also as the wrongheaded judge of his anti-social, blasphemous acts. To add the final paradox, this is an exceptionally well rhymed sonnet.

The poem appears to be autobiographical. It reflects his despair and anti-social resentment in Charleville, which he demonstrated by his way of life from the summer of 1870.<sup>33</sup> This aggressive attitude was also caused by his desperate and fruitless search for wider horizons in Paris and Belgium in 1870-71. The style of the poem appears to be a preliminary result of the ideas expressed in the " Lettre du Voyant" in May 1871.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, "Les Poètes maudits", 477.

<sup>33</sup>Briet, Mme R., p. 26, notes his anti-social physical negligence at this time. Rimbaud's letter to Izambard, May 1871, O.C., p. 248, describes his deliberate degeneration: "... je me fais cyniquement entretenir; je déterre d'anciens imbéciles de collège; tout ce que je puis inventer de bête, de sale, de mauvais...je le leur livre: on me paie en bocks et en filles."

<sup>34</sup>His more lucid view of his relation to this society has led him to see himself as a poet, their opposite therefore. His view of the true poet obliges him to " faire l'âme monstrueuse".

With his wider travels and the hardening of his opposition to Charleville, the analogies of young, ethereal girls in white peignoirs in a luminous countryside no longer fit his needs. The countryside has become, "cette inqualifiable contrée ardennaise", and nature is reduced to the image of the heliotrope in this poem. "Mille Rêves" need escape and assuagement now. The attack on God, a higher target than his fellow citizens, is explained by his deeper understanding of the true cause of the sub-human condition of this society. Many of his poems from this period are blasphemous.

"Les Pauvres à l'église" (O.C., pp. 45-46) is situated in a Church. The poet takes a detached but very searching overview, concentrating on the assembled society. Throughout he emphasizes their deformities, their dirtiness, their passive resignation or futile hope as they turn to indifferent or weak gods. It is a harsher development of "Le Mal".

This society is constantly likened to animals, especially cattle, but not to the cattle admired in "Les Reparties de Nina". Their breath stinks; "une collection de vieilles à fanons" is a rare and exact image of the physiognomy of certain old ladies, but is savagely mocking. He is disgusted by their faces and the deformed noises that issue from them. Similarly, the description of the poor women with their "espèces d'enfants" is starkly realistic. Although he is socially perceptive in his summary of the misery of their private lives, their real comforts in Church, Rimbaud shows not an ounce of the pity he felt for "Les Effarés". He notes the differences in the external appearance of rich and poor and the social causes of their illnesses, the contrast between the sumptuous ornaments in the Church and the wretched ugliness of the people and their lives. However, they are all equally sick. Even the stained glass Jesus has the same yellow cast to his skin, the same dreamy passivity as many of this congregation.

The Church is thus seen as a "Farce prostrée et sombre", as the rein on man's real potential. Because this society, victimized as it is, will not revolt as the poet has revolted, it is guilty and deserving of its physical miseries which are lucidly, almost exultantly described, using neologisms, exact physical terms and rare words to pin down their degeneration. Verlaine, a reformed Catholic, felt obliged to condemn its message, yet he appreciated the beauties of this poem. He seized on the right adjective for its tone. It is brutal.<sup>35</sup> The poem is also impeccably correct in form.

The sense of outrage against the Church, its God and the men who accept or perpetrate its false message is developed in "Les Premières Communions" ( O.C., pp. 60-65 ). All these violently anti-clerical poems are an indirect attack on the government of Napoleon III which worked hand-in-glove with the Church. They are also, as Frohock states, a specific attack on the citizens of his home town who applied their false standards to him.<sup>36</sup> This poem, while it shocked the pious Verlaine in 1895, who noted its anti-bourgeois values, its blasphemy, is recognized by him to be a poetic masterpiece.<sup>37</sup>

This poem is in the same narrative tone by an omniscient observer as the previous one. Again the quivering rage is honed by conventional versification and the poet's use of quasi-photographic detail. The first

<sup>35</sup> Verlaine, O.C., II, 1280, "Préface" to Vanier's edition of 1895: "...j'eusse négligé cette pièce brutale ayant pourtant ceci qui est très beau,..." Les malades du foie,/Font baiser leurs longs doigts jaunes aux bénitiers...."

<sup>36</sup> Frohock, Poetic Practice, p. 64: "... in addition to being an attack on Christianity, through the Eucharist, it is also one upon the modern world for falling short of an ideal. It is impossible not to take this poem, along with the other poems of the same year on this subject, to be a rejection of the Church, but perhaps less of the Church in general than of the specific examples of it with which, as an unwilling citizen of Charleville Rimbaud had to live."

<sup>37</sup> Verlaine, O.C., II, 1280.

section contrasts the attitude to and of the church in the country to that of the town population, which is largely represented by one girl in the other sections.<sup>38</sup> While he disapproves of "les divins babillages", in the country, nonetheless, "la pierre sent toujours la terre maternelle." The natural vegetation outside the country church is evoked in exquisite detail, the use of "fuioureux" not only denoting the presence of cows but localizing the Church in the Ardennes. A detail emphasizes the roots in the local soil of these peasants: "Tous les cent ans on rend ces granges respectables/ Par un badigeon d'eau bleue et de lait caillé". Thus the Church is a negligible part of their lives. Theirs is a sunny world of natural values. They know their role in life. They are down-to-earth, comfortable in their popular language and amusements. Even the priest has a healthy reaction to their dance music.<sup>39</sup>

The town, whose unhealthy ugliness is evoked in graphic detail by Rimbaud, pushes the deprived, yellow little girl to assuage her desires for love and light in the only beautiful place available to her, the Church. The unnaturally coloured, beautiful window, the same qualities in the words of the mass, which explain her attraction, are superbly condensed

<sup>38</sup>Adam, in Rimbaud, *O.C.*, p. 911, remarks, "Son intention est évidente d'associer l'église et la campagne, dans une même impression de vie et de pureté."

<sup>39</sup>The place of the country church in the natural life of the peasant is indicated by: "On paie au Prêtre un toit ombré d'une charmille/ Pour qu'il laisse au soleil tous ces fronts brunissants." The girls know their natural role in life: "Les filles vont toujours à l'église, contentes/ De s'entendre appeler garces par les garçons." The popular pleasures of these people are evoked vividly by the use of popular, vigorous language: "faire du genre", "garces", "au chic du garnison", which is school slang, "blousés neufs", which is a concise neologism, "gueuler". These peasants are at a healthy distance from religious mysticism.

and suggested in the lines " Adonaï!...--Dans les terminaisons latines,/ Des cieux moirés de vert baignent les Fronts vermeils/ Et tâchés du sang pur des célestes poitrines,/ De grands linges neigeux tombent sur les soleils!"

This is the first time that Rimbaud actually depicts the physical environment of the town. The savagely realistic evocation of sordid detail appeals to the perceptions of the reader and produces a physically revolting impression of lack of air and sickness.<sup>40</sup> The lurid red and black effects, linked with these qualities of city life, are already in evidence here. Artificial light always seems to indicate a miserable atmosphere for Rimbaud.

Part VIII draws the conclusion from this etching of human misery in the unnatural environment of the town, dependent on the unnatural authority and comfort of the Church. In "Soleil et Chair" (O.C., p. 8), Rimbaud exclaimed, " la route est amère,/Depuis que l'autre Dieu nous attelle à sa croix;". Later, in the same poem, he remarked scornfully, "La femme ne sait plus même être Courtisane!" Although the message in this last section is obscurely worded in the spitting out of hatred of Jesus, it plainly implies that the human race, and women particularly, are poisoned by the urge towards mystic aspects of love exemplified by the Church's portrayal of Jesus, and are no longer capable of natural, physical love.

---

<sup>40</sup>The clair-obscur effects of the town environment are reminiscent of the environment of those other victims "Les Effarés". The unhealthy aspect is brought out by images like, " Descendre dans la cour où séchait une blouse,/ Spectre blanc, et lever les spectres noirs des toits." The flat, prosaic statement, " Elle passa sa nuit sainte dans les latrines," is very aggressive. The sinister vine, in the courtyard with its poisonous atmosphere, compares unfavorably with the country plants and open spaces. The heart shaped light comments savagely the bleeding heart of Jesus. It is a vision of hell.



In this poem, the restrictive, unnatural qualities of the town parallel those of its Church, which are disguised under a beautiful but artificial exterior. Rimbaud despises these townspeople, ignorant and willing victims of their environment and contrasts the country life as more healthy and natural. However, he is not using the country as an analogy for his own desires. Instead, his seething resentment at the town and the Church's restrictions on his liberty is turned against them savagely in a polemic, the implication being that man needs a natural environment, roots in the soil, natural beauty, to achieve a natural expression of love, uncontaminated by a sense of sin.

"Les Poètes de sept ans" (O.C., pp. 43-45) is considered to be an autobiographical work by most of Rimbaud's critics.<sup>41</sup> This is a fair enough view, provided that one keeps in mind that this is an interpretation of his childhood by an adolescent whose remarks are coloured by imagination and his present attitude. He selects what suits him at the moment of writing and invents, to a certain extent, how he would like to have been as a child.

The poet is still the ubiquitous observer. His interest still lies mainly in Charleville, with the boy's view of his mother, his apartment, his neighbours, his quarter, his church, of what he finds poetic, stimulating or repulsive there. The use of "il" disguises the personal element to a certain extent and universalizes the experience. However, Bernard says, "Ce poème fait bien sentir comment l'incompréhension de sa mère a attisé la révolte d'Arthur, en même temps qu'elle le forçait à l'hypocrisie."<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 393, says: "...il s'agit bien évidemment d'un poème autobiographique." Noulet, Premier Visage, p. 90, agrees. Adam, "Charlestown", Rimbaud, p. 71, notes the influence of Rimbaud's childhood reading on his inspiration: "C'est dans les lectures de ses tous jeunes ans qu'il a trouvé l'univers de ses rêves, de grands déserts, des forêts, des savanes."

<sup>42</sup> Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 393.

The word "Mère" is capitalized which makes her a symbol of maternal authority. She also represents the attitudes of the bourgeois in the square in "A la musique", the rich ladies in "Les Pauvres à l'église", Nina, the father in "Roman", with their middle class values of hard work, duty to Church and State and keeping to one's class. The boy's attitude simply reverses these inflexible standards. The whole poem is in opposition to the mother and also to the "ville maternelle".<sup>43</sup>

What emerges from his detailed, sensuous imagery of his town environment is an impression of acute physical discomfort, restriction, disease, ugliness, excessive heat or cold. It is not the boy's natural element. He provokes visions as a direct result of this restriction on his movements and desires. His other stimulation and affinity is with the rough, uninhibited people, the opposite of the proper townspeople and therefore disgusting to them. The pitilessly detailed evocation of the poor, filthy children is no doubt an analogy to his own position, deformed and sickened by his environment. It is not a love of the natural which motivates this description but a desire to shock. It is an attack on his fellow citizens. The freedom and animal brutality of his encounter with the eight year old girl, evoked with all the physical sensations and the flat statement of fact: "Car elle ne portait jamais de pantalons;" is a very perceptive passage.

---

<sup>43</sup> Michel Tibert, La Ville, Paris: Classiques Hachette, 1973, p. 8 (hereafter: Tibert, La Ville) notes that Jung sees in the town, "... un symbole maternel, une femme qui renferme en elle ses habitants comme autant d'enfants." Rimbaud did see in the town a positive, comforting symbol of maternity in "Soleil et Chair" in Cybele, goddess crowned with towers, nurse of natural, antique man. In "Prologue", the mother is at first idealized and as comforting as the town, but rapidly changes. Her presumed insistence on a useful existence for the boy causes his revolt. In "Les Poètes de sept ans", the town is equated with the mother, but this is a modern woman, corrupted by the Church, by modern, town values. There is no comfort to be had in this town. The dream of escape, the compensations, while not towns, have certain ideal maternal qualities, but the town and mother in the poem represent "la réalité rugueuse" and are condemned.

This is an appreciation of the natural, with the same sentiment, presented more directly, as in "Soleil et Chair": natural man is chaste and whole, as for unnatural, modern man, " Il a des vêtements, parce qu'il n'est plus chaste." The attitude to the workers is perhaps connected to Rimbaud's present attitude to political events in Paris, although he does seek the rough and tumble of the quarter as a result of restrictions at home. He needs freedom and frankness and natural activities, not " le bleu regard qui ment" and the reading of the Bible.

He contrasts this compulsory Bible reading with his own adventures, imagined and " read" in his visions. This is his " roman". It is no longer the sentimental small-town romance desired in " Roman". The place to which he escapes is not the familiar countryside around Charleville, but far away. These visions, the only points of bright light in the poem, are hypnotic, sensuous and highly suggestive because of their rocking, exalting rhythms, their rare and exact vocabulary, their harmonious sounds, their extraordinary enlargement of this dim, cramped environment.<sup>44</sup> There is no longer any desire to be accompanied by some idealized girl from the town. Hope for redemption of or acceptance by some of the town's citizenry has gone. The boy can no longer communicate with anyone here and instead of stupidly yearning for integration, he savagely attacks their values.

The role of the town in this poem is to demonstrate its opposition to natural law, its restrictive qualities, its tendency to deform men. The more squalid the detailed image of it, the more the boy's imaginary world gains in rightness and appeal, the more his escape seems justified.

---

<sup>44</sup>For example, in the line, "—Il rêvait la prairie amoureuse, où des houles ", a rocking, lulling rhythm is produced by its exact division into four equal parts. A tender sound is produced by its liquid l's and r's, the repeated ou's. The emotional reverberations of the words and their visual impact give an impression of endless, welcoming nature where maternal feelings are manifested.

"Les Assis" attacks the librarians of Charleville in a savagely humorous fashion.<sup>45</sup> They become symbols of all that is ugly, morally and physically apathetic and deformed, in fact, of all that he hates violently in society, and hence, since he is confined there, in Charleville. The poet still takes an overview. He talks in a conversational tone to the listener, "vous", who is also the poet. The poem is skilfully and carefully worded, has great verve, uses rare words, technical terms or neologisms to convey the unwholesomeness of these men: "Le sinciput plaqué de hargnosités vagues/ Comme les floraisons lépreuses des vieux murs." It is condensed, carefully dosed venom. The climate inside this restricted place is dark and decaying. The poet exaggerates normal eccentricities of appearance into monstrous deformities. It ends in a paroxysm of rage, of verbal virtuosity, of visual distortion, of outrageously and logically scabrous detail with a description of their dream:

De vrais petits amours de chaises en lisière  
Par lesquelles de fiers bureaux seront bordés:

Des fleurs d'encre crachant des pollens en virgule  
Les bercent, le long des calices accroupis  
Tels qu'au fil des glaçons le vol des libellules  
--Et leur membre s'agace à des barbes d'épis.

The fact that the librarians were unwilling to find books for him is not enough to explain this raging poem, "savamment outré" as Verlaine says.<sup>46</sup> They have become symbols of all that opposes his happiness in Charleville so that their wickedness is monstrous. Even their coat buttons magically transform into "...des prunelles fauves/ Qui vous accrochent l'oeil du fond des corridors!", as in a nightmare in the labyrinths of the mind.

<sup>45</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, 477-478, "Les Poètes maudits", recounts the source of this poem.

<sup>46</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, 479.

Since they are the cowardly upholders of the status quo, Rimbaud finds the most prurient details with which to attack them in order to undermine their authority and shock them. Ascione and Chambon, noting the hidden as well as the overt implications of inadequate or perverted sexuality in these men, assume that Rimbaud's eroticism is one of the driving forces of his poetry. They may be right. Certainly, in these ten poems, one of Rimbaud's deepest desires emerges as joyful sexual freedom without the stigma of sin. The fact that the Church and society forbid the free expression of sexuality is one of the causes of Rimbaud's condemnation of them. In the later poems treated here, one of the reasons why society is lashed with scatological or sexual language is their upholding of this false morality. In many poems of the period which are not essentially town poems, the same type of attack is made on society, and thus they can also be interpreted as anti-Charleville poems.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup>Marc Ascione et Jean-Pierre Chambon, "Les 'zolismes' de Rimbaud", Europe, (mai-juin 1973), p. 126, in a controversial article, have convincingly demonstrated the disguised allusions to their perverted sexuality achieved by Rimbaud's rare knowledge of ambiguous sexual connotations of everyday words. They say, p. 129, "L'érotisme adolescent n'est pas 'une des principales sources' de son inspiration, mais de loin la principale."

In "Le Châtiment de Tartufe", they find more disguised references to perverted sexuality, (p. 124). In "Accroupissements", the object of wrath and ridicule is again a priest in a fetid, dirty interior. In his long piece "Un Coeur sous une soutane", apart from the obvious ridicule of the Church and its adherents, Rimbaud attacks its deformation of seminary boys. Ascione "Les Zolismes", pp. 118-123, finds it is shot through with disguised sexual jokes: "un coeur" equating with penis, for example. On p. 120 the article sums up, "Au total, Un Coeur sous une soutane est une pochade obscène...".

Such disguised references not only indicate the "âcre hypocrisie" forced on Rimbaud by his environment but his rage and disgust at its unnatural attitudes to this fundamental and natural urge. He therefore condemns this society morally through these accusations and implications of sexual deformity or perversion.

Houston says of these last poems treated:

With "Les Assis", "Les Premières Communions" and "Les Poètes de sept ans" we reach the high point of Rimbaud's poems about Charleville, which are so memorable in their rich provincial colour and ingeniously detailed imagery... Rimbaud succeeded in transforming his native village into one of those strange places of literary geography which have their own unmistakable physical and moral atmosphere... few French poets have had Rimbaud's sense of landscape and none has created out of a nondescript town and its surroundings so persistent a world as that of his earliest poems. 48

It is true as we have seen.

Chabot, talking of the psychology of towns and echoing Rieser's theory that poetry presents analogues to the personal feelings of the poet, explains the intensity and appeal of this rather common type of town:

Mais si nous voulons saisir cette psychologie subtile, c'est à la littérature, aux oeuvres d'art que nous devons nous adresser... Tel homme de lettres a peint un quartier; mais quelle cité ne renferme pas de haute société guindée, de bouges hideux, de petite bourgeoisie envieuse ? Ailleurs, c'est une déception personnelle, une rancœur dont toute une ville est rendue responsable. 49

With regard to Rimbaud's Charleville, there is no question of transposition of reality to the point where the identity of the town is uncertain in these poems. There is no doubt that many of the details of the place, people and surrounding countryside were quite real. What we see however, is a betrayal of Rimbaud's own feelings and reactions to these details, and a testing of their ability to provide him with happiness. Thus, apart from its countryside, Charleville is always negative here since it is opposed to Nature and natural law and produces unhappiness for the poet.

The message of these town poems, the role of the town in these poems and the emotion they evoke in the poet are not radically different from "Soleil et Chair" to "Les Assis". What is different is Rimbaud's

<sup>48</sup>Houston, The Design, p. 53.

<sup>49</sup>Georges Chabot, Les Villes, Paris: Armand Colin, 1952, p. 174.

expression of his view of this town as he develops as a poet. He moves from Parnassian or even Romantic vocabulary, and occasionally theme, to the liberation of his individuality by the use of more commonplace, more direct vocabulary, a looser, more conversational style. He always adheres to rules of versification acceptable at the time. The early view of Charleville ends with an explosion of savage, obscene or socially unacceptable vocabulary, rare words, neologisms, startlingly new and exact images. His use of colloquial or local words<sup>50</sup> would appear to be a deliberate device rather than ignorance of their local range. They are used almost exclusively in the country scenes to localize them in the Ardennes, to impart a sense of comfortable belonging. Occasionally they are used to localize a town or townsman, for example, the bourgeois in "A la musique" or the café in "Oraison du soir". The viewer, who at first was gently mocking, perhaps wistfully attempting to integrate, steadily becomes more openly aggressive in his opposition to this society. At the same time, his horizons widen, analogies to his desires become more complex, more exactly defined, appealing more and more to the perceptions of the listener rather than simply to his imagination. ~~The idyll in the country with a girl is no longer sufficient~~ to compensate for his increasingly harsh and detailed view of this town. "Mille Rêves" must now be realized in faraway, dazzling places seen only in visions. The search for an ideal, happy place has been confirmed as being far from Charleville. The ultimate statement of his attitude in Charleville at this time appears in the fragment, "Le Juste restait droit..." (O.C., p. 53): "Je suis celui qui souffre et qui s'est révolté!"

---

<sup>50</sup>I am grateful to Charles Bruneau's article, "Le Patois de Rimbaud," La Grive 53 (avril 1947), pp. 1-6, for his explanation of the local use and meanings of the words "darne", "fuireux", "onnaing" (hereafter: Bruneau, "Le Patois").

The first group of poems treated here is separated from the second by the Franco-Prussian war, Rimbaud's wanderings in Belgium and Paris, and perhaps by the Commune. The increasing reflection and independence induced by these events resulted in the closest statements we possess to a poetic manifesto by Rimbaud: the poem to Banville, "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs", where he demands "du nouveau" and gives examples of it; the two "Lettres du Voyant", where Rimbaud talks of a new life, of a new concept of poetry and the poet's role, of "là-bas", of visions, of the unknown, of new language, of the necessity of cultivating and knowing one's own soul. The poems enclosed in these letters or perhaps composed shortly after them: "Les Poètes de sept ans", "Les Premières Communions", "Les Assis", "Le Coeur supplicié",<sup>51</sup> "Accroupissements", "Les Pauvres à l'église", may be examples of this new method. At this stage, perhaps this only amounts to delving more analytically inside his own mind, to finding analogies to his moods and opinions, to breaking old forms from within by using unacceptable vocabulary. impeccably rhymed, to noting the hallucinations he had probably experienced by this point in his life.<sup>52</sup> The development of his searching inner eye is the cause of the more biting attack on Charleville in the later poems.

---

<sup>51</sup> Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes, edited by Rolland de Rénéville, Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1946, p. 649, feels that "Le Coeur supplicié" reflects Rimbaud's feelings and experiences in Charleville (hereafter, Rimbaud, O.C., ed. René.). Since most critics see references to Parisian experiences in this poem, it will be discussed in the chapter on Paris.

<sup>52</sup> Delahaye, Rimbaud, pp. 48-49, remembers that in the summer of 1871 Rimbaud said: "Toute la littérature c'est cela! Et nous n'avons qu'à ouvrir nos sens, fixer avec des mots ce qu'ils ont reçu, nous n'avons qu'à écouter la conscience de tout ce que nous éprouvons, quoi que ce soit, et fixer par des mots ce qu'elle nous dit qu'il lui arrive." He observes: "...la préoccupation formiste...devait, sinon disparaître entièrement, du moins céder presque toute la place à une autre, celle de voir, d'entendre, de sentir,...de noter." Although the form is intact in the poems so far looked at, the intensity of the vision and the analysis increases progressively, although Rimbaud always had an extraordinary eye for detail.



In these early poems on Charleville it is largely society which interests Rimbaud. His rare accounts of the physical aspects of the town, as in "Les Premières Communions", are related to its physical and moral effects on its inhabitants. Conversely, in "A la musique", society has created Place de la gare in its own image. His town is well peopled. In the end its society is weighed and found wanting. Thus Charleville always provokes feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction. The whole aim of the poet is to escape to a region which matches the landscape of his singular mind. As he becomes more singular, this region changes from the bright, fresh countryside near Charleville to visions of a splendid natural beauty far away.

+

+

+

In June 1872, Rimbaud wrote from Paris to Delahaye in Charleville:

Oui, surprenante est l'existence dans le cosmorama Arduan. La province, où on se nourrit de farineux et de boue, où l'on boit du vin du cru et de la bière du pays, ce n'est pas ce que [je] regrette... Mais ce lieu-ci; distillation, composition, tout étroitesse; et l'été accablant: ...J'ai une soif à craindre la gangrène: les rivières ardennaises et belges, les cavernes, voilà ce que je regrette. (O.C., pp. 265-266).

Rivière and others remark on Rimbaud's strange restlessness wherever he was, his constant looking backward or forward.<sup>53</sup> When Charleville was his home, when he was making desperate efforts to escape it, there was no question of return to a former place except to the imagined, idyllic antique world.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup>Jacques Rivière, Rimbaud, Paris: Kra, 1930, p. 34, says: "L'endroit où il se trouve a pour lui quelque chose de brûlant." Fowle, Rimbaud, p. 175, speaking of how the Illuminations reflect Rimbaud's real life, echoes this remark by Rivière. Delahaye, Souvenirs, p. 139, stated: "Il eut toute sa vie des désirs de retour... vers quoi? Vers tout."

<sup>54</sup>See Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 7-8, "Soleil et Chair". Many critics see this poem as a derivative exercise designed to dazzle the Parnassians. Yet, as we have seen, its sentiments were remarkably close to Rimbaud's deepest feelings, throughout his early period, about the proper role of man in the world.

When banished to Charleville at Mathilde's insistence, Rimbaud let his poems become "prières", his letters "martyriques".<sup>55</sup> Yet his letter to Delahaye shows that his sufferings in Paris turned his thoughts, if not to Charleville, then to its surrounding countryside. He is confused, balancing regrets for and bitterness against Verlaine and Paris against a hatred of Charleville, yet a devouring need for the comfort and peace its region can offer.

Since these ambivalent feelings seek resolution and assuagement, it is not surprising that in the Vers Nouveaux, written during this period, there are several poems evoking his family and Charleville's countryside. The earliest date appearing on these poems is May, hence they were copied in Paris. Only internal evidence assigns some of them to Charleville. Of the poems that have been recognized by critics as recollections or evocations of the Charleville region, Bernard indicates "Comédie de la soif", "Fêtes de la patience" and "Honte".<sup>56</sup> Hackett sees "Entends comme brame..." as a Charleville poem used as an attack on Verlaine.<sup>57</sup> Bonnefoy feels "Age d'or" derives its inspiration from his family situation.<sup>58</sup> Lacoste finds references to Rimbaud's family in "Honte" and "Mémoire".<sup>59</sup> Adam sees in "Larme", "La Rivière de cassis", "Bonne pensée du matin", evocations of wanderings in the Ardennes.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup>See Verlaine, O.C., I, 973, Letter of April 1872 to Rimbaud, and Verlaine, O.C., I, 974, letter of May 1872 to Rimbaud.

<sup>56</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 146.

<sup>57</sup>Hackett, Autour de Rimbaud, Paris: Klincksieck, 1967, p. 43 ( hereafter: Hackett, Autour de Rimbaud ).

<sup>58</sup>Yves Bonnefoy, " La Poésie objective", Two Cities 4, 15 May, 1960, p. 13.

<sup>59</sup>Lacoste, Poésies, p. 47.

<sup>60</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 925, states: " Le monde dans lequel il vivait, c'étaient les paysages de son pays d'Ardenne, un monde de bois et de rivières, de prairies et de sources...".

For the most part Rimbaud's critics are interested in dating these poems, determining the location of composition from internal evidence to aid in this dating, or in studying the transpositions of reality produced by this new, hallucinated or impressionistic style. Since these are anti-town poems they cannot be analysed according to categories of urban geography for urban imagery or theme. Whether the town opposed in these poems is Charleville or Paris, and it is probable that it is both, since at this time Rimbaud was caught between two fires, he retreats in his poetry to the only comfort or happiness left to him-- nature. Our interest in the Vers Nouveaux lies in determining Rimbaud's attitude to nature as a refuge from the town at this solitary, defeated moment in his life. Is his response to nature similar to that in the earlier Charleville poems, producing similar analogies to this state of mind concerning the town? Assuming that allusions to his family and local landmarks exist here, how are these memories or references used? To answer these questions "Larme" and "Comédie de la soif" will be examined as representative examples of Rimbaud's preoccupations at this time--nature and nostalgia.

It is of course possible that the Vers Nouveaux as a whole are simply an exercise in his new poetics, that Rimbaud's preoccupation with the town at this point is minimal because of his absorption in the landscapes of his mind and their development by "un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens" (O.C., p. 251). It is possible that these poems represent an attempt to reach the unknown and that he is presenting this unknown place to "faire sentir, palper, écouter." However, one does not treat a subject to which one is psychically indifferent. The fact that Rimbaud employs new insights and techniques, perhaps also influenced by the style of Verlaine and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, to express what he found "là-bas", does not alter his presentation of analogies to his emotion.

In "Alchimie du verbe", (O.C., p. 106), Rimbaud recounts one of his follies:

Depuis longtemps je me vantais de posséder tous les paysages possibles... je me flattai d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les sens. Je réservais la traduction.  
Ce fut d'abord une étude. J'écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l'inexprimable. Je fixais des vertiges.

An altered version of "Larme" follows this statement and can be read as an example of this cryptic description of method and content. Ruff shows great insight into the method of reading this poetry:

Il faut pénétrer dans cet univers avant de chercher à le comprendre et pour cela la première condition est de ne pas perdre de vue que "tout se passe ici dans l'esprit"... L'impression qui domine est de douceur triste et de pureté aérienne... la Nature qui était alors un paradis à sa portée, est maintenant un paradis à recréer. 61

Is "Larme" one of the landscapes Rimbaud had flattered himself he possessed? Does it represent a landscape in the imagination that Rimbaud could create with his poetic language permeable to all the senses, a landscape called up and arranged at will? Written in Paris or in the Ardennes, it seems to reflect in a general way the topography of the Ardennes region of water, woods, fields, mist, described by Adam. "Je", although anonymous, is much in evidence, so that it is an introspective poem, a paysage d'âme.

In the first stanza of "Larme" (O.C., p. 72), the impressions are of misty, damp greenness, languor and silence. The isolation is total. The scene is spatially and temporally disoriented and disconcerting with the objects named with the definite article, implying their recognition by the reader, when in fact, they are unknown to him and unrelated spatially to each other in this poem. There is a feeling of banishment yet also a sense of indifferent acceptance of the place. While the poet's thirst is slaked,

---

<sup>61</sup>Ruff, Rimbaud, pp., 131, 132 & 133.

there are none of the vigorous movements or bright lights associated with nature in "Les Reparties de Nina", for example. The poet is in an abject, uncomfortable position and seems to remain immobile for a very long time while he listlessly notes the impressions of nature which match his mood.

In the second stanza, he asks two dispirited questions. In the first question, "boire" and "jeune Oise"<sup>62</sup> are no doubt symbolic words. The scene is strangely still and denuded, echoing the lack of fulfillment to be expected from the water of the "jeune Oise". This absence of sounds, colours and sunny light in this natural setting is simply and exactly defined. The second question seems to contrast "la gourde de colocase" and its offering to "cette jeune Oise", which, since it is young, presumably offers a healthy, pure but uninteresting liquid. The "colocase", a tropical plant with trumpet-shaped flowers, a word changed to "loin de ma case", a primitive, tropical hut, in "Alchimie du verbe", seems to suggest that the golden liquid it offered came from an exciting, faraway place. This liquid is insipid, unhealthy and therefore also rejected. It is difficult not to see an analogy to the place he is in, the Ardennes countryside, contrasted with his high hopes and subsequent disappointment in Paris.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup>"Cette jeune Oise", according to Goffin, cited by Adam in Rimbaud, *O.C.*, p. 927, n. 2, is l'Alloire, near Roche. However, beyond localizing this landscape in the Ardennes, his involved explanation does little to clarify the symbolism here.

<sup>63</sup>In "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs" (*O.C.*, pp. 57-58), the white hunter, that is, the Parnassian poet, is accused of describing insipid flowers, even when he pretends to be observing nature from a primitive hut in an exotic country. He is not familiar with the exotic flora of these regions and presents them as if they were Roses or Lilies. In fact he might as well describe French flowers, symbolized by the Oise: "Toi, même assis là-bas, dans une / Cabane de bambous, -- .../.../ Tu torcherai des floraisons / Dignes d'Oises extravagantes!.../" The connection between this imagery and that of "Larme" seems evident and reinforces the idea that a literary criticism is also involved in "Larme", or a condemnation of Paris and its poets.

Both are now rejected. The poet's mortal weariness or his disgust prevented him from tasting them.

The recollection of the golden liquid is followed by storm imagery. Is it a recollection of the poet's stormy passage in Paris, since, he moves from evocations of dark shapes to visions of architecture? These visions are contrasted: "Des colonnades sous la nuit bleue", an impression of elegant, harmonious beauty, "des gares", being stridently modern. They vanish and the result of this storm is seen in the landscape. The woodland water is wasted as it sinks into the sterile sand, the wind blows icicles into the ponds.<sup>64</sup> The poet wonders why he did not drink when he had the opportunity. The more poignant ending in "Alchimie du verbe", shows the same failure and despair, the same ambiguity of reason too. As Rimbaud warned: "Je réservais la traduction".

Bernard, admitting the difficulty of understanding "Larme", says:

En tout cas, sa puissance poétique est indéniable, et elle est d'autant plus forte que dans cette évocation de paysage nous voyons s'associer des souvenirs réels, sans doute, mais aussi des sentiments qui, pour être exprimés de façon symbolique, n'en montrent pas moins (le cri final en témoigne) une recherche de tout autre chose que de simples artifices rythmiques.<sup>65</sup>

It is true that the dancing rhythm of "Les Reparties de Nina", the impeccably correct form of the earlier poems, have gone. Typographically, "Larme" is arranged in quatrains and looks regular at a glance. A reading gives a very different impression. He is using hendecasyllables. Assonances replace rhymes.

---

<sup>64</sup> Delahaye has an anecdote of a walk with Rimbaud when they dislodged icicles from the reeds around a pond. Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 430, mentions it. However, while the memory of this incident may have inspired this image in the poem, the tone of the occasion as well as the circumstances are completely different. The first occasion was happy, here it is a cold, sterile image to match his mood.

<sup>65</sup> Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 429, n. 1.

The phrases are divided irregularly to follow the random impressions noted, or to give the listless, conversational tone of the questions. The overwhelming impression from "Larme" is one of loss, defeated enterprise, solitude, and yet, the poet is surrounded by the presumed objects of his desires: a watery landscape. It becomes evident that this landscape is evoked to match his mood. The form matches the uncertain, weary contours of his mind.

Bernard remarks that "Comédie de la soif" (O.C., pp. 73-74) is a quasi-autobiographic poem.<sup>66</sup> Arranged like a play or a series of tableaux, it passes in review the possibilities of escape from the poet's dejected suffering, and his devouring thirst. These possibilities are symbolized. They are, for the most part, options he has already tested and lost or rejected.

Firstly the poet turns to his ancestors or relatives who symbolize his roots in the soil of the Ardennes. They represent precisely the sort of life led by the country boys extolled in "Les Premières Communions". There is a total lack of comprehension between the poet and these people now. His rejection of rural living around Charleville is thus made clear. Next, he turns to an exploratory type of poetry and rejects that too. "Les amis", urging him to drink precisely the drinks he had discovered with Verlaine, Cros and Forain, in the Paris cafés, are refused with the words, "Plus ces paysages./ Qu'est l'ivresse, Amis?" This recalls his attitude towards absinth expressed in the letter to Delahaye and the drink's dual effects, presented this time in a pure, resigned tone instead of the forcefully poetic

---

<sup>66</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 431, n. 1.

or slangily coarse terms of the letter. The tone here is "grêle et fluet", as Verlaine remarked. The friends and the drinking were real enough in Rimbaud's life in Paris. They are used symbolically here to indicate his mood of resigned abnegation.

In section four of this poem, "Le Pauvre songe", he daydreams about a future peace and relief from his thirst. The image chosen as analogy for this sweet contentment is "...un Soir... Où je boirai tranquille/ En quelque vieille Ville,/ Et mourrai plus content:/ Puisque je suis patient!" This patience and need for tranquillity is the hallmark of all the Vers Nouveaux. The peaceful old town evoked here recalls the solid, protective qualities of Rheims in "Prologue".<sup>67</sup> Charleville was never defined in these terms earlier, although it is always evening in Charleville when the poet seeks consolation for his frustrated desires.<sup>68</sup> He is cynical enough or depressed enough to recognize the futility of this daydream and of vagabondage: "Jamais l'auberge verte/ Ne peut bien m'être ouverte." "L'auberge verte" is a symbol of peace, fulfillment. His pessimism and dejection are extreme. It is not surprising therefore that the conclusion of this poem leads to his real urge at the moment, not to the towns, old habits or new horizons, but to oblivion and dissolution of his tortured self in the earth in the dim damp forests.

---

<sup>67</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 433, n. 13, rightly points out that the poet's exhaustion leads him, like "le bateau ivre", to dream of "anciens parapets."

<sup>68</sup>Marc Eigeldinger, "L'Image crépusculaire dans la poésie de Rimbaud", La Revue des lettres modernes 3, (1971), p. 11, commenting on "le bateau ivre", strengthens the parallel made by Bernard and catches the tone of this poem: "Si le crépuscule n'est pas nécessairement pour le "bateau ivre" le moment de l'échec, de la défaite, il est à coup sûr le temps de nostalgies et du renoncement, le temps où le geste désabusé de l'enfant succède au voyage périlleux..."



The style of "Larme" and "Comédie de la soif" is best summed up by Verlaine who is of the opinion that Rimbaud's poetic inspiration diminished in Paris. He preferred the local or coarse flavour of Rimbaud's language, the direct, detailed imagery, hallmarks of Rimbaud's later Charleville poems which have disappeared with his distance from Charleville or his defeated return.<sup>69</sup> After stating his enormous admiration for "Le Bateau ivre", Verlaine says:

Après quelque séjour à Paris, puis diverses pérégrinations plus ou moins effrayantes, M. Rimbaud vira de bord et travailla (lui!) dans le naïf, le très et le trop simple, n'usant plus que d'assonances, de mots vagues, de phrases enfantines ou populaires. Il accomplit ainsi des prodiges de ténuité de flou vrai, de charmant presque inappréciable à force d'être grêle et fluët... Mais le poète disparaissait. -- Nous entendons parler du poète correct. Un prosateur étonnant s'ensuivit.<sup>70</sup>

This astonishing prose writing certainly encompasses "Les Déserts de l'amour". A fragment which seems to recount two dreams: one set in the country, where Delahaye recognizes details of country houses and people Rimbaud knew;<sup>71</sup> the other is set in a town. Both relate the nightmarish frustration, the despair, the dissolving of the happiness of an adolescent. A girl, symbol of happiness, features in both dreams, and regardless of whether the scene is set in the country region, reminiscent of Charleville, or the town, reminiscent of Paris, she escapes. Seeing happiness flee, the orphaned, alienated boy weeps like a child. This loss is recounted with calm, resigned despair: "...il faut sincèrement désirer que cette âme, égarée parmi nous tous, et qui veut la mort, ce semble, rencontre en cet instant-là

---

<sup>69</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, 475, "Ardennais, il possédait, en plus d'un joli accent de terroir trop vite perdu, le don d'assimilation prompt propre aux gens de ce pays-là, -- ce qui peut expliquer le rapide dessèchement, sous le soleil bête de Paris, de sa veine, pour parler comme nos pères, dont le langage direct et correct n'avait pas toujours tort..."

<sup>70</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, 488.

<sup>71</sup>Adam, Rimbaud, O.C., 1022-23, n. 2, gives the details of Delahaye's testimony about the real features of this dream-like scene.

des consolations sérieuses..."(O.C., p. 159), a sentiment reminiscent of the final lines of "Honte" and to a certain extent, of "Comédie de la soif". Bernard sums up these fragments concisely: "une transposition de l'échec."<sup>72</sup>

Defeat is precisely the mood of the two poems treated here. The poet has lost all his aggressivity, all his ability to lose himself in glorious visions of faraway places when his desires were frustrated. These poems are analogies of his despair and mortal weariness. They betray a yearning for oblivion and tranquillity, fragmentation of the self, relief from his symbolic thirst. He is in a no-man's land which he describes through imagery recalling the Charleville region.

In this connection, Bernard quotes Littré's definition of "cosmorama": "une espèce d'optique où l'on voit des tableaux représentant les principales villes...du monde". She adds, "donc quelque chose d'assez semblable au diorama".<sup>73</sup> Rimbaud creates a cosmorama of the Ardennes by means of his personal, emotional vision of the Ardennes and Paris at this moment. The result is enchantingly poetic and moving. It is carefully structured to produce the "dying fall" effects of the rhythm,<sup>74</sup> the pure watery visions, the sense of loss, the simple, childlike tone.

This return to nature is not the joyous escape which reflected his pressing desires in the early poems. Instead, it is a desire to lose himself

<sup>72</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 451, n. 15.

<sup>73</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 553, n. 3.

<sup>74</sup>For example, in the line, "Ormeaux sans voix, gazon sans fleurs, ciel couvert," the repetition of the word "sans", the matching of the four syllable phrases syllable for syllable, the simplicity of the words and the lack of articles give a hollow, echoing effect, a sense of desolation. Then, the bare three syllable group, "ciel couvert" adds a sad, falling note, a sense of inadequacy and loss.

in oblivion from suffering. As an antidote to Paris, his nature images provide an opposed physical environment and thus what he needs. However, they do not comfort him. As a reflection of the Ardennes they are, no doubt, accurately registered impressions of landscape, but instead of providing soaring, splendid impressions of nature to compensate for his banishment, they reflect very faithfully his innermost feelings of mournful sadness, weariness, desire for oblivion and repose. They therefore have little to do with Charleville but a great deal to do with his personal relationship with Verlaine. What remains from the earlier reactions to Charleville is simply the reflex of turning to nature when in distress. These rustic images, many of them memories, are used now to underline his total resignation and despair.

+

+ . +

Critics have glimpsed memories of real events and sights from Charleville in some of the Illuminations: "Après le déluge", "Enfance", "Ornières", "Fleurs" and "Jeunesse". These are isolated images, related to Rimbaud's biography. They are transpositions of reality and used for quite other purposes than personal delectation or description for its own sake.

In "Jeunesse I" (O.C., p. 147), the narrator says, "Les calculs de côté, l'inévitable descente du ciel, et la visite des souvenirs et la séance des rythmes occupent la demeure, la tête et le monde de l'esprit." In section IV of the same poem, speaking of "l'oeuvre" and "le travail", he states:

...toutes les possibilités harmoniques et architecturales s'émouvront autour de ton siège. ... Ta mémoire et tes sens ne seront que la nourriture de ton impulsion créatrice. Quant au monde, quand tu sortiras, que sera-t-il devenu ? En tout cas, rien des apparences actuelles.

In these poems we see this "visite des souvenirs", this work, the role of this memory and the senses to nourish the overriding creative impulse which

will change the face of the world. The memories or sensations experienced initially in Charleville are used to create new visions for this great work.

Delahaye was not far wrong when he stated that Rimbaud did not invent his impressions, that many of these poems were constructed of memories,<sup>75</sup> which are inextricably mingled in his hallucinations.<sup>76</sup> As he notes perceptively, explaining the title of Illuminations, " ...les souvenirs ne sont-ils pas eux-mêmes des venues subites de lumière?"<sup>77</sup> He speaks of the "Tableaux de vie mentale" which are the Illuminations, where:

l'auteur...cherche toujours la multiplicité, l'intensité des couleurs et l'inattendu de leur disposition. Artifice de peintre; mais il y a aussi le fond de l'oeuvre (stimulation de la vie psychique) plus troublant. Le coloriste..., le psychologue... tous deux voulant aller immensément plus loin que leurs inspirations. 78

Delahaye substantiates his observations on Rimbaud's creative method in the Illuminations by recounting details of the real, often trivial events reflected in these prose poems, all memories from their schoolboy wanderings in and around Charleville.

Thus, in "Enfance II" (O.C., p. 123), he recalls the wallflowers they picked together in the "pré Réole",<sup>79</sup> the general's house, " dite du général Noiset, située sur la route de Flandre, près de Charleville."

<sup>75</sup> Delahaye, Souvenirs, p. 69, n. 1., " Beaucoup de ces poèmes furent composés avec le souvenir ( choses vues, sentiments passagers, fragments de lectures)..."

<sup>76</sup> Delahaye, Rimbaud, p. 37, n. 11: " Rimbaud ne cherche guère à 'inventer'. Partisan catégorique de l'observation, il se sert plutôt de choses réelles et qu'il a connues, mais souvent les déplace de l'ensemble éprouvé, les scinde en parties utilisables dans un sens nouveau."

<sup>77</sup> Delahaye, Rimbaud, p. 49, n. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Delahaye, Souvenirs, p. 69, n. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Delahaye, Souvenirs, p. 69, n. 1. "...des graminées et des fleurs, ...je me souviens d'en avoir cueilli là, avec lui, des bouquets pendant le printemps de '71, d'où 'le rempart aux giroflées'".

This mention of the flowers, linked with a reference to antique burial customs, leads through a series of freely associated images, many of them possibly memories, which all suggest death, absence or loss. They may be, as Adam suggests "ses rêveries d'enfance".<sup>80</sup> Emotions felt in childhood have become linked to objects seen in childhood, although initially the object and the emotion may not have coincided. This section has, in any case wider emotional reverberations than those caused by a description of flowers growing on a rampart.

Delahaye relates "Ornières" (O.C., p. 135) to Rimbaud's recollection of the visit of an American circus to Charleville.<sup>81</sup> Adam feels that the poem may have been inspired by a picture, since the spatial relations indicated arrange the scene like a picture.<sup>82</sup> All one can say is that the poem is composed of a series of freely associated images of great beauty which seem to have their starting point in the memory of some procession.

Similarly, "Fleurs" (O.C., p. 141) is an evocation of forms of flowers, or an hallucinated transposition of a crowd in a theatre, or an analogy of an ideal world which is more pure and dazzling than the real. Delahaye recalls Rimbaud lying in the grass examining flowers at close range and feels that this is the source of inspiration. He could equally well have cited Rimbaud's supposed statement about the necessity of changing society by destruction, after seeing the destruction of L'Allée aux Tilleuls.

<sup>80</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p. 980.

<sup>81</sup> Delahaye, Souvenirs, pp. 48-50; "... ils avaient fait quelques démonstrations engageantes, notamment quelques cavalcades... avec ses animaux les plus remarquables et ses accessoires de théâtre les plus opulents.. les Illuminations, bien plus tard, devaient reproduire une série d'images très nettes, mais emmagasinées, gardées inconsciemment... ce qu'il avait oublié pendant au moins quatre ans, il les revoyait tout à coup dans les miroitements d'un chemin mouillé."

<sup>82</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p. 993.

Delahaye recounts that when asked what would replace this society, Rimbaud picked a flower as answer.<sup>83</sup> Rimbaud's extraordinarily sensuous appreciation of flowers has persisted from his earliest poems. The hallucinated vision of flowers in this poem is merely the condensation and elaboration of these earlier predilections as he has become more mature, complex and aware of the shades of feeling in his mind and the ideal place man needs to perfect himself.

Other critics have also established links between Rimbaud's childhood memories or emotions and the images in these poems. For example, Yves Denis convincingly interprets the whole of "Après le déluge" (O.C., pp. 121-122) as an allegory of the Commune. As such, the hare symbolizes the cowardly bourgeois thanking God for delivery from this peril.<sup>84</sup> Denis asks:

--Que peut être la "Grande maison de vitres encore ruisselante", sinon l'école?--Pourtant, il est au moins un enfant qui refusera cette éducation surveillée, et qui échappera, en "claquant la porte", du benoît asile de la famille, de l'école, et de la religion: Rimbaud lui-même...<sup>85</sup>

If Denis' interpretation is correct, then this town, composed of bourgeois resuming their commercial activities after the Commune, is a haven for moral cowardice and lack of comprehension of man's true role. Denis

<sup>83</sup> Delahaye, Souvenirs, pp. 73-74, quotes Rimbaud's remarks: "--Regarde. Où achèteras-tu un objet de luxe, ou d'art, d'une structure plus savante? Quand toutes nos institutions sociales auraient disparu la nature nous offrirait toujours, en variété infinie, des millions de bijoux."

<sup>84</sup> Yves Denis, "Glose d'un texte de Rimbaud: 'Après le déluge'", Les Temps modernes, (janvier 1968), pp. 1261-1276. On p. 1275 he cites a parallel symbol in a poem by Hugo, Grandes Oreilles, 1872, which reinforces his argument. (Hereafter: Denis, "Après le déluge".)

<sup>85</sup> Denis, "Après le déluge", p. 1265.

continues his commentary:

Les esprits bas, obtus, de Charleville et d'ailleurs, ne le comprennent pas; ils le blâment ou le plaignent. Mais lui se sent compris et approuvé de tous les esprits élevés et sensibles ("les girouettes et les coqs des clochers de partout") qui, eux, savent l'avenir et le temps qu'il fera demain. 86

Thus we have the same complaints about restrictions, narrow-mindedness lack of comprehension, moral cowardice as in the first set of poems about Charleville. Set against dazzling nature imagery, as in the earliest poems, the town and its society in "Après le déluge" is an old theme presented with his new, all-enveloping, exact yet delirious vision.

What is interesting in this recapitulation in the prose poems of memories or themes from Charleville when it was his environment, is that they are either analogies for a sense of well-being and abandonment in nature, or they are analogies for a sense of rejection, repression or loss. These feelings reflect his attitudes and analogies to Charleville in his earliest poems. What has changed completely, in retrospect, is not his attitude but his reaction to this town. He now needs a clean sweep of the whole world to create his ideal society anew there. Reflections of this ideal place are found in "Fleurs", where the natural imagery is more complex and dazzling than in his earlier natural antitheses to Charleville. His style has also changed drastically, the prose indicating his individuality, his revolt, his detachment from pressures to conform, his capacity to seize and amalgamate rapid and wide-ranging perceptions and memories.

Rimbaud's memories of Charleville reflected here contain his enduring attitudes not only to Charleville but to towns and the proper role of man in society. The early Charleville poems are thus seminal works.

---

<sup>86</sup>Denis, "Après le déluge", p. 1266

## II

### PARIS

From spring 1870, Rimbaud's poetic and personal aspirations, sharpened by his aversion to Charleville, gravitated towards events and prominent figures in Paris. Many of his poems until summer 1872 reflect this preoccupation. However, in this period, apart from poems on Charleville already discussed, he also produced poems inspired by his carefree wanderings in Belgium. These poems, not only because of their theme and tone, but also because of their chronological position in his work, can be seen as antidotes for these Parisian experiences. For this reason, while contemporaneous in Rimbaud's life, his poems inspired by Paris are treated in this study before his poetic evocation of the Belgian towns.

Frohock has suggested that Rimbaud was drawn as much as driven to Paris.<sup>1</sup> The magnet was the unnaturally pre-eminent position of Paris in French life, a phenomenon attacked by Rousseau and echoed by several social observers in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Heine's analogies of

---

<sup>1</sup>Frohock, Poetic Practice, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Heine, cited by Schneider, Babylon, p. 225, said: "Paris is actually France; the latter is merely the environment of Paris. Everyone who wins fame in the provinces soon migrates to the capital, the foyer of all that is light and brilliant. France is like a garden where all the most beautiful flowers have been picked in order to collect them into a bouquet -- and this bouquet is Paris."



brilliance, flowers, massing of beauty, echo Rimbaud's epithets for his antitheses of Charleville. Rimbaud's reading and acquaintances in Charleville may have given him this glittering impression of Paris.

As early as January 1870, Rimbaud was attempting to make his way with his pen.<sup>3</sup> By May, the poems enclosed in his letter to Banville were slanted towards Parnassian aesthetics. He declared himself a convinced Parnassian and in flattering, cajoling terms begged Banville to include "Credo in unam" in the next issue of Le Parnasse Contemporain. However, as with his derivative early poems, this letter may contain the truth about his deepest convictions and intentions.<sup>4</sup> By August, the war had clipped his wings, at the same time heightening his conviction that social change was imminent. Rimbaud revealed his real concerns to Izambard.<sup>5</sup> They were: derision for established society, lack of freedom of movement, lack of the books and newspapers which had in many ways shaped his present opinions. He hinted mysteriously at future plans. Within a few days he was imprisoned at Mazas, begging Izambard to secure his release. Soon, in Douai, he was cultivating Demeny, writing articles in provincial newspapers critical of the régime. He had mocked both Demeny and provincial journalism in his earlier letter. In fact, he

---

<sup>3</sup>"Les Etrennes des orphelins", O.C., pp. 3-6, had been published in La Revue pour tous in January, 1870. It is strongly derivative, with an eye to the tone of this publication, and yet, compassion for the innocent and deprived is one of Rimbaud's permanent characteristics.

<sup>4</sup>For example, he says: "Anch'io, messieurs du journal, je serai Parnassien! -- Je ne sais ce que j'ai là...qui veut monter...--Je jure, cher maître, d'adorer toujours les deux déesses, Muse et Liberté...Ces vers croient; ils aiment; ils espèrent: c'est tout." O.C., pp. 236-37.

<sup>5</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 238-40. Letter of August 25th, 1870.

was doing everything within his power to establish himself at the centre of life as he perceived it: in Paris, as a political writer or poet. Trips to Paris the following year may have had literary as well as political motivation. By September 1871, he had attained his goal.

Rimbaud's Paris poems fall loosely into four groups. There are the poems written in Charleville from 1864 to the fall of the Empire, where his understanding of the importance of Paris for his own social and personal happiness and that of mankind is slowly developed and defined. There is the poetry inspired by the Commune when he had gained some personal experience of Paris and revolution as reality, which are followed by poems written in the summer of 1871 to promote his establishment in Paris. There is the poetry composed in or about Paris in 1871-72. Then there is the retrospective view of Paris glimpsed in Une Saison en enfer and perhaps in the Illuminations. Analyzed in these loosely chronological divisions, the development and expansion of Rimbaud's view of the town and Paris from that of his early view of Charleville can be traced.

+

+                      +

A violently anti-clerical attitude had been allied with revolutionary, republican activity in France since at least 1789. The Parnassians were mostly atheist and republican. In many of Rimbaud's poems from Charleville, strongly anti-clerical sentiments are linked to republican beliefs. In studying these early poems, we may ask ourselves how far they are merely derivative or occasional poems, with an eye to the people in Paris it was necessary to impress. Was there more than a hint

of the Vicar of Bray in Rimbaud, as Etiemble suggests?<sup>6</sup> How do these anti-clerical, republican or revolutionary convictions develop in his poetry? How enduring is his apparent ideal of social harmony and brotherhood, his vision of the perfectability of man in a natural environment? Particularly, how are these sentiments related to his view of Paris and the role of a capital city.

In his early youth, Rimbaud's horizon is limited to provincial towns, his ambitions to being a rentier. Paris is mentioned with indifference in his "Prologue".<sup>7</sup> Later, his schooling and his verbal abilities enabled him to write in any accepted style to any tune, as Etiemble states. Beneath their apparent conformity, his early exercises illustrate his widening critical vision.

A Latin ode to the Prince Imperial, congratulating him on his first communion, has disappeared. A spontaneous gesture by Rimbaud, it was clearly conformist, kowtowing to the Church and the Bonaparte dynasty. His other Latin exercises, written later under school supervision, show a less reverent attitude despite impeccably correct form and superficial conformity.

In "Jugurtha", (O.C., pp. 184-6), Rimbaud drew a parallel between Roman and modern French history. From the beginning of the poem, Rimbaud's sympathy with the defenders of liberty, Jugurtha / Abd-el-Khader,

<sup>6</sup>Etiemble, in Genèse, p. 59, says bluntly: "Grands poètes, petits journaux, il n'est personne que Rimbaud ne sollicite, entre 1869 et 1871. Capable de se plier à toutes les disciplines, à tous les styles, il écrit comme sur commande, livrant à chaque revue, à chaque journal, ce qu'il croit qui plaira."

<sup>7</sup>Attacking the futility of geography lessons as preparation for his future place in life, he says: "On a, il est vrai, besoin de savoir que Paris est en France, mais on ne demande pas à quel degré de latitude." (O.C., p. 173). Paris is as remote as Rome or Babylon.

against a tyrannical, venal city or state, Rome / Paris, is evident. Rome's colonizing policies, her levying of tribute, her materialism, her military aggression are all well-known historical facts, although not learned from Latin poets, who were adulatory. Sallust, however, mentions Rome's venality.<sup>8</sup> In Rimbaud's diatribe against Rome, Jugurtha personifies the city, condemns her oppressive, immoral and proud character and lashes her with the words "urbs meretrix", a common epithet for large cities, especially Paris, in nineteenth century French writing.<sup>9</sup> He thus equates Rome with a contemporary view of Paris.

It is surprising to find Jugurtha, in reality defeated, imprisoned, yet remaining defiant, urging Abd-el-Khader to welcome defeat by France,

---

<sup>8</sup> Sallustius Crispus C., *De Bello Jugurthino*, ed. Capes, Oxford University Press, 1897, 8, 1: "Roma omnia venalia esse". In 13, 6-9 and 29, 1, 2, and 3, the same accusation is made. Professor H.F. Guite of the Department of Classics at McMaster University affirms that Rimbaud is creating neo-Latin verse, not piecing together verses or phrases from classical Latin texts, that his portrayal of Rome appears to be his own interpretation, perhaps gleaned from his knowledge of Roman history. The sympathy shown for the oppressed is original in that it is not found in classical Latin verse.

<sup>9</sup> In "L'Orgie parisienne", Paris is personified as "la putain Paris" and "la rouge courtisane". Pierre Citron, *La Poésie de Paris dans la littérature française de Rousseau à Baudelaire*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1961, (hereafter: Citron, *Paris*), II, 7, says: "...l'essentiel du mythe n'est pas que Paris puisse, par le jeu d'une convention du style, être représenté comme une personne; il est que Paris soit une personne." On p. 11 he notes the growth of the conception of Paris as a corrupt being: "Un autre groupe d'images, le plus important peut-être, naît dès 1832 -- avec les premières déceptions sur le triomphe politique remporté aux Trois-Jours... c'est celui de Paris prostituée. Ce terme met l'accent sur la versatilité, la frivolité, et une sorte de vénalité intellectuelle du peuple ou de la société de Paris, qui dans tous les domaines, politique, mondain, artistique, vend ses applaudissements contre des flatteries et des amusements."

to become the friend of France,<sup>10</sup> praised in glowing terms as a liberator. The poem has been turned as a compliment to Napoleon III and his expansionist policies, contradicting the strong invective of the first part of the poem and Rimbaud's private sentiments.<sup>11</sup> Rimbaud no longer advocates resistance to retain one's autonomy but an aggressive war for acquisition of territory, subjugation and exploitation of a society, and presents this conquest as a liberation, a prelude to a new and better age. Either Rimbaud is hypocritically willing to compromise himself for academic recognition or the conclusion of this poem is savagely ironic, since in the main body of the poem he has drawn the parallel so clearly between Rome and Paris from the viewpoint of the conquered.

Another set piece, "Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI", (O.C., pp. 175-78), is an exercise in pastiche. Obligated to speak through Charles d'Orléans, Rimbaud pleads convincingly for Villon's life and evokes historical Paris in late medieval French. As an example of historical urban geography it is very complete. The climate in all seasons, day and night, is referred to, the architecture of the houses is sketched, mention of places is made, for local colour, and interiors with medieval décor are portrayed. The economic condition, the moral character, the place in society, is given from the King, through the Churchmen, the legal profession, the rich bourgeois, to the poor, who are the most vividly and sympathetically depicted.

<sup>10</sup>Historically, this is what happened with Abd-el-Khader. Brogan, The French, p. 85, says: "...by 1848, it did not seem absurd to think of France as restoring the Roman peace to Roman Africa." Rimbaud therefore, echoes current attitudes.

<sup>11</sup>If Delahaye can be believed, Rimbaud at age thirteen stated: "Napoléon III mérite les galères." Souvenirs, p. 45.

Rimbaud has used his numerous sources skilfully. The place names are culled from Villon's poetry, but despite this plundering of vocabulary and phrases, some of his tableaux are original. For example, the very stark, clair-obscur image of the architecture of medieval Paris which recalls the style of "Les Effarés". Similarly, his underlining of Villon's physical deprivation by presenting a glowing picture of an interior, recalls both "Les Effarés" and "Les Reparties de Nina". Joy on the return of spring is one of the topoi of medieval literature, yet Rimbaud revitalizes this theme by bringing spring into the squalid atmosphere of the old town.

Rimbaud shows that Paris is the spiritual as well as physical home of Villon, a sheltering town in some ways, a source of his inspiration. He also shows that society is divided, that the higher echelons do not understand the poet's role nor the brotherly love among the poor. The poet is deprived, excluded. Rimbaud's thesis is that the poet must be tolerated as a superior being and a blessing to the society which condemns his anti-social behaviour. This message is not necessarily dictated by the set topic and seems to express Rimbaud's personal conviction as well as the Romantic view of the poet suffering for his art. However, it is not mental torment but physical deprivation which is caused by an uncomprehending society. Here Paris is the necessary historic background for this argument. However, its architecture and society have been suggested through sense perceptions, convincingly and in detail, revitalized by Rimbaud's personal identification with the role of the poet in Parisian society and by the impetus given to historical views of Paris in the nineteenth century, by Hugo for example.

In these exercises, Paris has been localized as the seat of French policy and poetic life. Class division in this society is made evident. Sympathy is expressed for the poor, the oppressed. The criticism is always veiled, lip-service being paid to the ruling regime. In every case Paris is viewed in a past age, through historical analogies, and hence distanced. The style of these poems is as impeccable as the superficial correspondance to historical facts and official attitudes. And yet, a disturbing sense is imparted that all is not right with these official attitudes.

By July, 1870, war fever was widespread.<sup>12</sup> Discontent with the Empire was expressed by the "intellectuals", the great literary salons, the Academies, the University, and with the slackening of censorship, a virulent Republican press. By this time, Rimbaud had composed "Le Forgeron" and "Morts de quatre-vingt douze", both historical, quasi-legendary evocations of the revolutionary spirit in France.

"Le Forgeron", (O.C., pp. 15-20), is set in Paris in June, 1792, at a crisis in French history. In Verlaine's estimation the poem is over-long and inspired by the reading of outdated historians.<sup>13</sup> But Verlaine's view is retrospective. At the time, the sentiments expressed

<sup>12</sup>France had been smarting from the defeat of Austria by Prussia at Sadowa in 1866 and at the weak performance of France in this six weeks war.

<sup>13</sup>Verlaine, O.C., II, 1281, "Preface" to Vanier's edition of 1895: "...un trop long poème: "Le Forgeron",...où vraiment c'est par trop démocsoc [sic] par trop démodé, même en 1870, où ce fut écrit;...cette chose faite à coups de 'mauvaises lectures' dans des manuels surannés ou de trop moisiss historiens? Je ne m'empresse pas moins d'ajouter qu'il y a là encore de très remarquables vers..."

were actually lively and topical. The evocation of the revolutionary spirit, the feeling of solidarity with the oppressed mass of workers, the hope for new possibilities for mankind, were ideas much in vogue in Republican circles at the time.<sup>14</sup> The poem is a transparent allegory of the dissatisfaction of the workers with Napoleon III, and of the need for another revolution.

The interest of "Le Forgeron" for this study lies in Rimbaud's recognition of Paris as the site of the revolution, his identification of the Tuileries, the Bastille and the Louvre as architectural symbols of oppression, although they are also historically necessary and add a touch of local colour. Many critics have spoken of Rimbaud's debt to Hugo in this poem. This identification of corrupt sites is one such debt. French literature after 1830 had also given him this sense of identification with the people and the images for the revolutionary sites. Similarly, the symbolic opposition of the dark shadow cast by the corrupt sites

---

<sup>14</sup>R.B. Rose, "The Paris Commune: the Last Episode of the French Revolution or the First Dictatorship of the Proletariat?", in Kamenka, Paris Commune, p. 13, quotes an orator in November, 1870, when France had foundered: "We need men of 1793...Marats, Dantons, Robespierres...Belleville will save Europe, only we need at Belleville a man of 1793". These sentiments, in evidence before the war, reached their climax in the Commune. (Hereafter: Rose in Kamenka, Paris Commune). Matarasso mentions that in 1869, Rimbaud had written on the French Revolution in a school essay: "Danton, Saint-Just, Couthon, Robespierre, les jeunes vous attendent!" The glorification of "la canaille" also began before the war. There was a famous song by La Bordas, "La Canaille", La Vie, p. 33.



and the glorious sun of revolution is a literary commonplace after 1830.<sup>15</sup>

More original is Rimbaud's approval of the destruction of these architectural symbols of evil and their supporters in order that the people, represented by the blacksmith, may achieve transcendence, enjoy the idyll of brotherly love in a natural, fruitful setting.<sup>16</sup> He contrasts this vision with the urban misery of the masses who are oppressed and brutalized by the Church and State, polemically linked here, as in "Le Mal".<sup>17</sup>

In this poem, Paris is seen as the source of hunger and repression, the dark site of the degeneration of both the oppressed and the oppressors he abhors: bourgeois, courtiers, Church, Monarchy, authority in any form. Simultaneously, it is the glorious site of revolution, hope

<sup>15</sup>Citron, Paris, II, 278, says: "Il [Hugo] s'oppose au Paris qui travaille et qui pense, au Paris qui ressent comme un déshonneur tout contact avec Louis-Napoléon ou ses partisans: Le Louvre, Le Champ-de-Mars, Notre Dame surtout, sont pollués par leur présence." On p. 243, he points out that: "Paris en vient à être considéré sinon comme une émeute permanente, du moins comme une virtualité permanente d'émeute." He notes a new image employed by Rimbaud in this poem: "Les combats des Trois-Jours ont encore ennobli des éléments matériels -- ...les pavés...", pp. 233-34. On p. 235 he notes the sun / shadow antithesis: "Le soleil sur Paris -- déjà chanté auparavant par Hugo, Gautier et Sainte-Beuve -- prend avec les Trois-Jours une importance accrue et une tonalité nouvelle, glorieuse et révolutionnaire." The whole message of the poem is contained in the blacksmith's recollection: "Nous marchions au soleil, front haut, -- comme cela, -- / Dans Paris!..." (O.C., p. 17.)

<sup>16</sup>As Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 33, says: "Exercice de style et cri de coeur à la fois, il nous montre Rimbaud prêt à la première rupture, à la première mutation."

<sup>17</sup>Strong contrasts are set up between the ideal man living naturally and his misery and degeneration in modern society in the town, and between both these situations and the corruption of the oppressors, represented by the unhealthy, cowardly king and the artificial splendours of the Tuileries.

and love, for, as Peschel says,<sup>18</sup> Rimbaud works with "rays of love". The rift in society is illustrated by the language of the blacksmith, which is vulgar, firm and expresses natural feelings, opposed to the precious tones of the ruling classes mimicked by the smith. They cannot or will not communicate with or love the workers.

St. Aubyn sums up well the impact of this poem;

While the poem 'Le Forgeron' is mediocre poetry, the words of the blacksmith addressed to Louis XVI may reveal many of the social themes which Rimbaud will continue to expound and develop right through Une Saison en enfer...Progress here must include increased knowledge and greater liberty for Man; for the workers of the world.<sup>19</sup>

Paris must become again the site of revolution to free the oppressed and restore them to themselves, to their naturally good instincts and aspirations.

"Morts de quatre-vingt-douze" (O.C., pp. 20-21), is another occasional poem. To emphasize his derision and disgust for the bourgeois upholders of the present régime, their contempt for human life that would be sacrificed to save the dynasty, Rimbaud also harks back to the legendary heroes called on by De Cassagnac. For him they are not the followers of the new Bonaparte. Inspired by love and a sense of brotherhood, hungry

---

<sup>18</sup>Enid Rhodes Peschel, "Violence and Vision: A study of William Blake and Rimbaud", Revue de la Littérature Comparée, XLVI (1972), 385. The blacksmith says: "Nous avons quelque chose au cœur comme l'amour", (p. 16). This feeling of fraternity is characteristic of French revolution in the nineteenth century. Brogan, The French, p. 93, speaks of "the flowering of the spirit of fraternity" in 1848: "For the first result of the ending of the drab, unenterprising materialistic rule of Louis-Philippe was a restoration of faith, 1789 was come again;..."

<sup>19</sup>Frédéric St. Aubyn, "The Social Consciousness of Rimbaud", Yale French Studies, II, no. 2 (1949), 27.

and violent, like the blacksmith, their eyes are turned to a future which has not materialized: "Qui.../... brisiez le joug qui pèse / Sur l'âme et sur le front de toute l'humanité; / ...Vous dont les coeurs sautaient d'amour sous les haillons, /." This controlled sonnet is impeccably rhymed and savagely ironic. De Cassagnac has recalled the spirit of 1792 which is precisely what will crush the Bonapartes and their sycophants when this spirit is revived in the people.<sup>20</sup>

"Rages de Césars" (O.C., p. 31) and "L'Eclatante victoire de Sarrebruck" (O.C., p. 34), were both composed after Rimbaud's abortive trip to Paris, after the defeat and capture of Napoleon III at Sedan and after the declaration of the Republic. These events had emboldened him in his public declarations and brought him from the golden haze of romantic legend face to face with contemporary events. He now cites and satirizes contemporary events and figures directly, influenced no longer by literature but by pamphlets, news, cartoons and other ephemera. The conventional sonnet form is still used to condense his derision, to hold his rage in check.

Both poems violently attack the Emperor, mocking his cheap successes, rejoicing in his defeat which clears the way for social change: "La Liberté revit!" While he identifies the villains, Ollivier and

---

<sup>20</sup>As Rose, in Kamenka, Paris Commune, p. 18, says: "In the months after Sedan, Gambetta's desperate resistance campaign by calling on Frenchmen to remember Valmy and the military miracles accomplished by the First Republic in 1792, closely identified republicanism and patriotism...but in the process it inevitably helped to create a revolutionary as well as a republican consciousness." Rimbaud's sonnet a few months earlier already illustrates this fact.

and especially Napoleon III, the plural title of the first poem indicates that the Emperor is a symbol of oppression as are the royal residences of the Tuileries and Saint-Cloud.

Rimbaud has moved rapidly from a myopic condemnation of Charleville's society as cause of his frustrations to an understanding that the degeneration of this society is caused by oppression and indoctrination by Church and State, that the blight on society originates in Paris and can only be cured there. In his poetry he has progressed from an evocation of historical and legendary events and figures which show his solidarity with the oppressed, and from lip-service paid to the régime, to a veiled attack on the same régime by establishing historical parallels, then to a direct attack on contemporary events and figures.

Rimbaud had still not experienced life in Paris. His inability to communicate with his fellow citizens or establishment figures, contrasted with meaningful communication via certain books and newspapers from Paris, led him to believe that only in Paris could he be understood and accepted and gain his rightful place among the poets in the vanguard of action. Thus social, literary and personal needs intertwined to propel him to Paris.

+

+

+

As our chronology shows, Rimbaud's active involvement in events of the Paris Commune and the exact dates of his Parisian poems evoking this period are the subject of much speculation and dissension among critics and biographers. The only certainties are that Rimbaud was in Paris in February and early March 1871, that he wrote a letter to Demy in April about his experiences there, that he composed five long

poems with Paris as theme, three of which were written before the final bloody defeat of the Commune, and two soon afterwards.<sup>21</sup> It seems certain that regardless of the extent of his active participation in the Commune and the resistance to the Prussians, his full sympathy, as reflected in his poetry, was with the Commune and the Parisian resistance.

Since "L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple", (O.C., pp. 47-49), is an occasional poem, it is difficult to understand the significance of the architecture noted, the society indicated, the wounds Paris received, the future of Paris envisaged by the poet, unless this poem is placed in the context of the disturbed events of its time. Most critics interpret this poem as a condemnation of the Versaillais and the cowardly bourgeois who welcomed the return to order after the crushing of the Commune.<sup>22</sup> Starkie and Ruff, more convincingly, see this poem as Rimbaud's reaction to Paris after his trip there in February / March

<sup>21</sup>"Chant de guerre parisien" was enclosed in a letter to Demy of May 15th, 1871. "Amants de Paris" and "Mort de Paris", one and two hundred hexameters respectively, are mentioned in the same letter, (O.C., p. 252) and are lost without trace. "L'Orgie parisienne" was sent to Verlaine in September 1871. "Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie" is undated but seems to be inspired by events during and at the end of the Commune. Verlaine knew it and mentions its loss in 1884 in "Les Poètes maudits", O.C., I, 487. It has since been found.

<sup>22</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 400, n. 1; Brogan, The French, p. 157; Gascar, La Commune, p. 45; Hackett, "Splendides Villes", p. 47; Ruchon, Rimbaud, p. 80; Tibert, La Ville, p. 58; Verlaine, "Les Poètes maudits", O.C., I, 486.

1871, after the Armistice but before the declaration of the Commune.<sup>23</sup> It is inspired by a sense of betrayal at the peace treaty, by his moral disgust with the bourgeois society re-established in Paris who accepted this peace and resumed their old life, by his violent presentiment of the coming revolution which would cleanse Paris of these parasites. Communard ideas had been published in the press and attempts at insurrection had obviously been current for some time in Paris.

In this poem Rimbaud takes an overview of society and sites in Paris while addressing an apostrophe to the cowardly, pleasure-seeking bourgeois in a sardonic tone which soon mounts to a fury.<sup>24</sup> For the first eight quatrains of this externally conventional poem ( apart from the frequent enjambement and a few liberties at the caesuras) the poet is the impersonal voice of wrath. Then " Le Poète " is introduced when Paris is personified as a fallen and ravaged woman. The wider reason for his furious invective at the sight of their appetites, pleasures and

<sup>23</sup> Starkie, Rimbaud, pp. 94-95: " ... a description of the riff-raff that Rimbaud saw streaming into Paris when the siege by the Germans was raised..." Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 58, says: " Le peuple a le sentiment qu'après avoir été trahi dans la guerre il l'est encore dans cette paix dictée en partie par la crainte d'un bouleversement social." He cites Edmond de Goncourt's account of this period: " Un curieux défilé, que celui de tous les gens, hommes et femmes, revenant du Pont de Neuilly. Tout le monde est bardé de sacs, de nécessaires, de poches, qu'on voit gonflées de quelque chose qui se mange..." He adds, p. 59: " ... tout suggère que le poème a son origine dans le séjour d'hiver à Paris. Loin d'évoquer une défaite de la Révolution, il en fait sonner la menace..." He cites also Delahaye's account of Rimbaud's disgusted remark on his return in March: " On ne pense qu'à manger. Paris n'est plus qu'un estomac." However, Chambon, " Rimbaud versaillais?", p. 559, quotes an article from a London newspaper after the Commune giving similar impressions of the falling back of the general population into the old round of pleasure.

<sup>24</sup> Ruchon, Rimbaud, p. 80, notes that: " ... peu à peu, sous le coup de son exaltation, il oublie la réalité dont il est partie et nous jette en pleine apocalypse."

deformities becomes clear. Paris represents his ideals, his hopes for the resurrection of man. She was wounded by, then purged of the barbaric Prussians, only to be besmirched and bled by these parasites. "Le Poète" reappears irregularly throughout the poem. Ahearn rightly sees the role of this symbolic poet:

...Rimbaud blames the evils of Paris on the repressive society which the Commune aimed to overthrow and asserts that his role as poet is to assume and express the suffering and continuing will to revolt of the exploited urban masses...<sup>25</sup>

Paris is localized and the theme is made topical by references to real places and events: "les palais morts" being the abandoned ministries boarded up against "la rougeur des bombes" or burned by the fires caused by this shelling. "Les boulevards qu'un soir comblèrent les Barbares", is a recollection of the triumphal march by the Prussians down the Champs-Élysées, perhaps witnessed by Rimbaud. Adam sees the phrase, "Le cri des maisons d'or vous réclame..." as a reference to "La Maison Dorée," a fashionable restaurant.<sup>26</sup> These topical references occur early in the poem. Paris with her blue skies, her arteries purged of traces of the barbarians by the sun, is seen as a kind of New Jerusalem.

It is a sardonic image. Instead of becoming a Paradise on her liberation, Paris has been reoccupied by the morally corrupt who exhibit their gross appetites. They are attacked in a frenzy of invective, using repetition, imperatives, in a whirl of epithets emphasizing their degen-

<sup>25</sup>Ahearn, "Imagination", p. 524.

<sup>26</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. 893, n. 9.

eration, as were "Les Assis".<sup>27</sup> The physical tortures which await them are evoked exultantly with visceral accuracy.<sup>28</sup> Paris, also a person, a prostitute, on the contrary, will shake off this vermin and rise again. She is capable of love in the widest and most human sense. Her role is to grow into the Future, to inaugurate the advent of new man.<sup>29</sup> Although she is like a running ulcer at this moment, foul in contrast to Rimbaud's ideal of beauty -- nature, she is still splendid, the epithet Rimbaud always applies to attractive, morally good cities, as in "Soleil et chair". Her sufferings have redeemed her. When she sounds the trumpet call for action, the poet will attack her enemies. She is still the site of revolution, the hope for the Future, for the liberation of mankind from this disgusting society.<sup>30</sup>

Bernard feels that the last quatrain is out of place.<sup>31</sup> It is an apocalyptic, infernal vision of the moral vices of the old social life which have invaded Paris: "...les orgies / Pleurent leur ancien rôle aux anciens lupanars; / Et les gaz en délire, aux murailles rougies, / Flambent

<sup>27</sup>For example: "Syphilitiques, fous, rois, pantins, ventriloques..."

<sup>28</sup>"Et quand vous serez bas, geignant sur vos entrailles, / Les flancs morts, réclament votre argent, éperdus..."

<sup>29</sup>"O cité douloureuse, ô cité quasi morte, / La tête et les deux seins jetés vers l'Avenir / Ouvrant sur ta pâleur ses milliards de portes..." "Corps remagnétisé..."

<sup>30</sup>Quoique ce soit affreux de te revoir couverte / Ainsi; quoiqu'on n'ait fait jamais d'une cité / Ulcère plus puant à la Nature verte, / Le Poète te dit: 'Splendide est ta Beauté;' / L'orage te sacra suprême poésie; / L'immense remuement des forces te secourt; / Ton oeuvre bout, la mort gronde, Cité choisie!"

<sup>31</sup>Bernard, *Oeuvres*, p. 401. It is true that the poem was reconstituted from memory by Verlaine, and may be incomplete, inaccurate, or touched up by him.



sinistrement vers les azurs blafards!" The cries and groans, the delirious light, the flames, represent the Biblical hell of medieval pictures. The colours, reversed in order from the beginning of the poem, again have a symbolic value. The evil red, licking towards the washed out azure, must be eliminated by "Le Poète", who must restore the azure of the initial impression of Paris. It is perhaps more in its place than Bernard supposes.

As has been suggested by most critics, the poem is strongly derivative. Leconte de Lisle's "Sacre de Paris", Hugo's "Joyeuse Vie" and "Les Châtiments", some of Baudelaire's poems have been cited as influences. Many of the moral qualities and architectural features of Paris mentioned by Rimbaud were commonplace in French revolutionary poetry after 1830.<sup>32</sup> This accumulation of so many accepted myths and symbols for Paris in one poem adds deep emotional reverberations to the poem and allows the poet, mentally at least, to merge fraternally with the masses who hold these beliefs and who will purge Paris. This poem is full of sound, of cries, groans and shrieks of suffering and rage. Auditive imagery is used also to express the unnatural, dislocated movement of this society he abhors: "Ecoutez sauter aux nuits ardentes/ Les idiots râleurs." These unpleasant wailings and rattlings imply a moral judgment.

---

<sup>32</sup>Citron, Paris, notes that the boulevards symbolize two aspects of the Empire, crime and frivolous pleasure. "C'est le Paris qui dépense et s'amuse au prix de la souffrance du peuple", (II, 278). "Lupanars" was a common epithet in Baudelaire's time to symbolize the town as a whole, (II, 347). The idea of Paris as a modern Babylon was current as early as 1829, (I, 216). Paris was endowed with the qualities of the phoenix after 1830, (I, 239). Her supernatural strength and endurance is allied to her personification after 1830, (I, 244). As French thought remained Biblical and Greco-Roman, there are numerous comparisons of Paris to holy, quasi-mythical cities, especially to Jerusalem, (II, 112).

As Tibert says:

...la violence de l'imprécation dépasse de beaucoup la dimension du pamphlet. Les grandes figures mythiques liées à la ville, la mère, la prostituée, transfigurent la capitale, mélange de sainteté et d'abjection frénétique.<sup>33</sup>

Rimbaud's violent attack on this society, the sensuous, forceful imagery, compel the reader's participation in this poem. As Delahaye remarks, his cry for the violent overthrow of the society he detests is part of the atmosphere of the age.<sup>34</sup> The appropriateness of this language is best described by Sansot when, speaking of the style of revolutionary poetry, he says:

Mais la violence du ton a une autre valeur symbolique...Il faut que la parole, par sa violence manifeste, soit digne de la violence latente de ceux qui furent opprimés silencieusement...Son rôle comme celui de la violence physique, est bien de purifier...<sup>35</sup>

The whole poem is an ecstatic vision of man's future progress through violent revolution in Paris, hallowed site of revolution, and of punishment of this corrupt, torturing society. According to Delahaye, on his return to Charleville, Rimbaud greeted the declaration of the Commune with shouts to the local bourgeois of "L'Ordre...est vaincu!"<sup>36</sup> The image in the last quatrain of a defeated return to former degeneration by Paris, was about to be obliterated by the actual uprising of the Commune.

<sup>33</sup>Tibert, La Ville, p. 58.

<sup>34</sup>Delahaye, Rimbaud, p. 163, "Rendons-nous compte que Rimbaud vit à une époque où règnent encore les légendes révolutionnaires et où l'on croit à la seule efficacité d'une action rapide et violente."

<sup>35</sup>Sansot, Poétique de la ville, Paris: Klincksieck, 1971, p. 105.

<sup>36</sup>Delahaye, Souvenirs, p. 103.

As G rald Schaeffer, commenting on the Lettres du Voyant,

remarks:

On l'a trop souvent n glig , la lettre II s'ouvre avec un po me, "Chant de guerre parisien" [...] Psaume ou chant pieux, l'expression sarcastique,  tablit un lien entre trois textes que Rimbaud juge dignes d'accompagner -- en  cho? en contrepoint? -- ses propos th oriques.<sup>37</sup>

"Chant de guerre parisien" (O.C., pp. 39-40), is not only another attack on a certain section of French society, a celebration of a violent social struggle in Paris, but an example of his new method of composing poetry "en avant de l'action".

Rimbaud gives his usual overview. He identifies with the people in their miserable hovels. He lampoons the Versaillais allied with the "Ruraux" who bombard the courageous Communards from the green suburban properties of the rich bourgeois. The situation is localized by stressing the joyful season and naming the month and the places bombarded. However, his confusion of the roles of these suburbs in the struggle indicates his lack of real knowledge of these places. Similarly, while satirizing the hated, cowardly leaders of the Versaillais, his comments are well-worn jokes, freely circulated in newspapers and cartoons of the time.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>Rimbaud, Lettres du Voyant, ed. G rald Schaeffer, Gen ve: Droz et Paris: Minard, 1975, p. 149 (hereafter: Rimbaud; Lettres).

<sup>38</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 881 and p. 882, n. 1, points out these facts. The Versaillais were firing from Meudon onto Bagneux. The political figures mentioned were those most hated by the Communards and Republicans. Their caricatures were on sale at newspaper kiosks. His reference to Favre's public crocodile tears was as well-worn a joke as was that of Napoleon III's lack-lustre gaze in "Rages de C sars." The pun on Thiers and Picard: "Thiers et Picard sont des Eros", is frivolous rather than biting wit.

What is important is that this poem is a thin, topical comment, making a display of the trivial, vulgar or carefree aspects of this struggle. Rimbaud's view of revolutionary Paris has thus changed considerably since he wrote "Le Forgeron". It might seem that Rimbaud is reflecting the mood of the Commune, "a festival of the people",<sup>39</sup> that the frivolous tone of much of this poem, the consecration by naming of new sites of revolutionary activity, create an occasional poem of ephemeral interest. It is conceived in simple contrasts of Versailles / Communards, moral weakness / courage, set against a symbolic skyscape of lurid red and yellow skies, flowering in an antithesis of spring, with bursting bombs. Rimbaud composes a revolutionary poem by retaining regular quatrains, composing poetically acceptable octosyllabic lines with regular hemistiches, using many "rimes riches". Its violence and novelty stem from these shallow or regular qualities. It is an attempt to destroy old poetic forms, old social rules, from within the conventional structure,<sup>40</sup> just as the Communards were fighting from within the conventional structure of society. His comment in the margin of the poem: "Quelles rimes!, ô! quelles rimes!", points out sarcastically the unconventional words rhymed so impeccably. As Schaeffer says: "...tout terme bas et choquant s'insère dans la vieille forme pour la faire craquer plus sûrement."<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup>Rose, in Kamenka, Paris Commune, p. 27, notes: "...the Commune was a great festival of the people...The uprising of 18 March may be seen as a great festival of deconstructurisation."

<sup>40</sup>"Le Coeur de pître" no doubt has a similar aim.

<sup>41</sup>Rimbaud's comment is not mentioned in other editions of his works. Schaeffer, working from the manuscript, includes it in Rimbaud, Lettres, p. 134. Schaeffer in Rimbaud, Lettres, pp. 152-153.

Rimbaud indicates his solidarity with the struggling masses in Paris, not by giving a richly detailed picture or deeply analysed account of their struggle, but by corrupting a seemingly slight, conventional poem by a kind of guerrilla warfare, and is thus "en avant de l'action". The intention and tone of this poem are precisely those of the Commune. It is a "psaume d'actualité", the beginning of Rimbaud's struggle to create a new world through poetry.

In "Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie" (O.C., pp. 49-51), the final image of her chained hands, soon to lose their tan, symbol of healthy, natural activity in the sun, itself a symbol of revolution, soon to be tortured and bled, indicates that this poem relates to the reprisals after the defeat of the Commune. Ruff notes the solemn, respectful tone of the poem.<sup>42</sup>

Several critics have noted its relation to the Parnassian theme of praise of women's hands. It is a rejection of this effete theme, an opting for natural, strong, useful, loving hands opposed to the white and carmine useless hands of conformist ladies. A moral judgment as well as a literary judgment is involved.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup>Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 79: "Les vers ont la même vigueur nerveuse, les mêmes singularités de vocabulaire, la même tension que les autres, mais ils se distinguent par la gravité du ton, exempt de bouffonnerie, ce qui laisse supposer qu'ils ont été écrits après la défaite."

<sup>43</sup>Michel Décaudin, "Rimbaud et la Commune: Essai de mise au point", Travaux de linguistique et littérature, (janvier, 1968), p. 138, asks: "N'assiste-t-on pas... à la dérision du thème parnassien des mains de la femme aimée dans une vibrante et puissante antiphrase." There is an analogy with the theme of "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs" which rejects Parnassian flowers in favour of useful and new flowers, (Hereafter, Décaudin, "Rimbaud et la Commune".)

The entire spirit and hope of the revolution is condensed in the quatrain which refers directly to Paris: "Elles ont pâli, merveilleuses, / Au grand soleil d'amour chargé, / Sur le bronze des mitrailleuses / A travers Paris insurgé!" Jeanne-Marie is not an ordinary woman, tending babies, selling oranges, nor an extraordinary woman trafficking in diamonds, nor a decorative bourgeois woman or "cocotte". She symbolizes all the qualities hoped for and seen in the Paris of "L'Orgie parisienne": love, supernatural strength, active striving for progress for her fellow oppressed, purity, dazzling beauty, a capacity to brutally destroy the parasites who feed on and subjugate her. She receives the same fate as the "pétroleuses", as the women who fought on the barricades and who formed a female battalion in May.

Jeanne-Marie is the symbol of Communard Paris, of the Republic, portrayed as a statuesque, draped, bare-breasted figure, mythic, a Cybele incarnate, in numerous cartoons and paintings after 1830.<sup>44</sup> This conception has merged with the new outlook on woman's role and destiny which flowered in the Commune, and the actual, active, strong role of many women in the Commune. Jeanne-Marie encompasses all these symbols and memories of the people.

---

44

For example, "The Executioner", a cartoon by Pilotell, shows Thiers assisted by Favre, amputating Alsace-Lorraine, the arm of a despairing France, who is exactly this type of woman. Her only hope is in the rising sun, labelled the social republic, in The Communards of Paris, ed. Stewart Edwards, London: Thames and Hudson, 1973, p. 19 (hereafter: Edwards, The Communards of Paris). A cartoon by Daumier shows a similar, gigantic, beautiful female figure, of the Republic this time, entering a room from which Thiers and his ministers flee at the start of the Commune, The Communards of Paris, p. 10. Delacroix's famous "Liberty Leading the People" is the perfect example of this figure of which Jeanne-Marie seems to be a reflection.

The poem is a respectful, beautifully poetic statement, with new, vital imagery merging with old symbols, a hymn to the possibilities for Paris and mankind, destroyed by the defeat of the Commune.

At some point during the Commune, Rimbaud composed a "Constitution Communiste".<sup>45</sup> Delahaye remarks that Rimbaud

...voulait, avant de se décider pour la sensation pure, avant d'aller aux exclusives recherches du "moi", donner à l'idée, c'est-à-dire, à la poétique et à la sociologie, une satisfaction qu'il jugeait leur devoir. Et il écrivit son projet de constitution... Bientôt... c'est par désespoir qu'il veut s'ensevelir dans l'exclusive contemplation de sa vie mentale; réfléchissant le monde extérieur tout en restant farouchement isolé.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps "Le Coeur de pître" (O.C., pp. 46-47), enclosed in the letter of May 13th to Izambard, reflects external reality while illustrating Rimbaud's aggressive loneliness at this point. While many critics see this poem as the exteriorization of some disgusting, personal experience in Paris, they differ widely in their description of this experience.<sup>47</sup> At the time it was composed, the end of the Commune with its bloodbath was in the future. Rimbaud himself, announcing his new outlook on the role of the poet and the nature of true poetry, remarked: "Ça ne veut pas rien dire," (O.C., p. 249). Later, when he sent this poem to Demeny he said: "...c'est une antithèse aux douces vignettes pérenelles où batifolent les cupidons, où s'essorient les coeurs panachés de flammes,

<sup>45</sup>Delahaye, Rimbaud, p. 38.

<sup>46</sup>Delahaye, Rimbaud, pp. 126 and 129.

<sup>47</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, pp. 398-99, summarizes most of these legends and options. Chambon, "Rimbaud versaillais?", pp. 557-558, quotes Choury to prove that all these interpretations based on his supposed experiences in the barracks at Babylone or the Château d'Eau could not have happened. They were however possible under the Versaillais system of organization of troops. He concludes: "Ce coeur qui battait pour la Commune et la Révolution prolétarienne lui a été volé par les Versaillais."

fleurs vertes, oiseaux mouillés, promontoires de Leucade, etc...", (O.C., p. 255). The poem is a technically correct triolet, used ironically here, considering the content of the poem.

As Bernard says, what is important is "...l'écoeurement manifesté par Arthur, et qui n'est pas seulement physique, mais surtout moral..."<sup>48</sup> Using military or naval references, invented words, images of physical pain, disgust and corruption, Rimbaud reflects his own unwilling corruption, his desperate search for escape and purification. This poem is also an aggressive act. The state of his heart here is not that different from that in "Oraison du soir", that of the girl in "Les Premières Communions", or that presumed in "L'Orgie parisienne". He is more desperate here and more defeated or hostile. Rolland de Rénéville's contention that the poem reflects his state of mind in Charleville at this time is valid.<sup>49</sup> However, Rimbaud's state of mind in Charleville is inevitably affected by events in Paris at this point.

What is equally important, as Starkie notes,<sup>50</sup> is that this

<sup>48</sup>Bernard, *Oeuvres*, p. 399.

<sup>49</sup>Rénéville in Rimbaud, *O.C.*, ed. René., p. 649, claims that it "ne reflète peut-être que l'exaspération et la révolte du poète à l'égard des bourgeois ardennais, dont il provoquait les quolibets et les propos mal-séants par son attitude et l'étalage de ses convictions révolutionnaires. Comment le poète conservera-t-il la force d'agir, lorsque ses ennemis lui auront volé son cœur? Telle est, semble-t-il, l'interrogation qui traverse le poème, et en commande la genèse et les développements."

<sup>50</sup>Starkie, *Rimbaud*, pp. 80-81: "One realizes immediately that a world of experience separates "Cœur supplicié" from all his earlier work... It is only after this experience that we find in him a disgust of life, an inability to accept it as it is, coupled with a desire to escape from reality -- either into the past of his childhood, when he had been innocent and pure; or into the beyond where there was neither vice nor sin; or else



high-point of his personal disgust and despair marks a drastic turning point in Rimbaud's involvement with society and in his poetic ambitions. His letter to Demy in June, 1871, asking him to burn the poetry given to him the previous fall, marks the beginning of Rimbaud's new life.

The failure of the Commune cannot be held totally responsible for this metamorphosis. As Decaudin says:

...par le nombre des poèmes comme par leur caractère, la Commune ne semble pas être au coeur de l'inspiration de Rimbaud pendant le printemps de 1871. Elle a certes contribué pour une part nullement négligible à nourrir sa fureur agressive, sa révolte se reconnaît en toute révolte, mais si elle passe par la Commune, elle ne s'y enferme pas.<sup>51</sup>

His letter in April reflects quite different preoccupations from political ones.<sup>52</sup> Even his violently political "L'Orgie parisienne" has strong literary sources of inspiration and develops new poetic vocabulary and imagery. The Future he anticipates has little relationship with the practical goals of the Commune, which he certainly understood, if Delahaye's memory is sound.<sup>53</sup> He transcends these aims to create glorious visions of a new Jerusalem, peopled with god-like men and women living fraternally and freely. The Church, the State and the corrupt

---

into a world of his own creating, where there was nothing but beauty. He was fully conscious, himself, of the great change that had taken place in him, and that his earlier poems were false, based as they were on derivative experience."

<sup>51</sup>Decaudin, "Rimbaud et la Commune", p. 138.

<sup>52</sup>To Demy, O.C., pp. 246-7, he mentions the books he had seen in Paris in February, admittedly, mostly political literature. Regretting the lack of serious literature and theatre, he mocks it all in the phrase: "-- Les choses du jour étaient Le Mot d'Ordre et les fantaisies, admirables, de Vallès et de Vermersch au Cri du Peuple. Telle était la littérature, -- ...Et que la littérature belge nous emporte sous son aisselle."

<sup>53</sup>Delahaye, Rimbaud, p. 129.

society upholding them will have been swept away in a holocaust by "Le Poète" and the People.

The failure of the Commune did not turn him away from Paris.

Before its failure, he wrote to Izambard:

Je serai un travailleur; c'est l'idée qui me retient, quand les colères folles me poussent vers la bataille de Paris, -- où tant de travailleurs meurent pourtant encore tandis que je vous écris!... Je veux être poète, et je travaille à me rendre voyant...et je me suis reconnu poète. (O.C., pp. 248-249.)

Poetry has superseded the active, political participation by this point.

Although his letter to Demeny, (O.C., pp. 249-254), is tinged with Communard ideas, displaying a remarkable knowledge of modern Parisian poets and the historical development of poetry, Rimbaud insists on his efforts to become a true poet, a "voyant".<sup>54</sup> As the theatre of poetic activity is Paris, he is determined to go there. The poet, based in Paris, will be a kind of social leader, or reformer, because of his new poetry and his insights. Rimbaud seems to have learned from his Communard experiences that this is the way in which he is most fitted to lead.

Thus, in August, his poem to Banville, "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs" is not only an illustration of his new method and

---

<sup>54</sup> For example: "Donc le poète est vraiment voleur de feu. Il est chargé de l'humanité, des animaux même;..." "...Le poète définirait la quantité d'inconnu s'éveillant en son temps dans l'âme universelle; il donnerait plus -- que la formule de sa pensée, que la notation de sa marche au Progrès! Enormité devenant norme, absorbée par tous, il serait vraiment un multiplicateur de progrès." "L'Art éternel aurait ses fonctions, comme les poètes sont citoyens. La Poésie ne rythmera plus l'action; elle sera en avant." "Ces poètes seront! Quand sera brisé l'infini servage de la femme,...elle sera poète, elle aussi!" "En attendant demandons aux poètes du nouveau, -- idées et formes."

vision, but also an attempt to establish himself in Paris. His letter to Demeny in August,<sup>55</sup> his letters and poems to Verlaine, his composition of "Le Bateau ivre",<sup>56</sup> were all intended to place him in the company of the poets, in Paris. By September he was in Paris, his "Bateau ivre" had the success he had hoped, he had relative material stability, he was ready to compose his great work, to lead humanity "en avant de l'action", to forge a new path for himself.

+

+

+

Yves Bonnefoy gives perhaps the most lucid biographical explanation for the meagre amount of poetry which Rimbaud actually composed during this year in Paris:

Car le voici "à Paris" maintenant, et il ne faut pas oublier tout ce que ces mots peuvent apporter de malentendu. Le Paris que voulait Rimbaud est celui de Baudelaire et de la Commune; la Cité Sainte où poésie et révolte ont révélé leur identité. Mais le Paris qu'il rejoint n'est guère ce haut lieu de la poésie objective. Il ressemble bien plus à celui qu'il croyait aimer en 1870, avec Izambard, quand de plus violentes exigences n'avaient pas encore détruit en lui le naïf respect des littérateurs. Un monde, d'ailleurs étroit -- mais Rimbaud n'en sortira guère -- de poètes médiocres et satisfaits, bohèmes, cultivant la Beauté et l'Art. Rimbaud dut le haïr d'un seul coup, ne se sentant pas un "artiste". Et s'il a vite paru chercher l'attitude, afficher la rusterie, ce fut aussi

---

<sup>55</sup>"...Je veux travailler libre; mais à Paris, que j'aime. Tenez: je suis un piéton, rien de plus; j'arrive dans la ville immense sans aucune ressource matérielle:...Je suis à Paris: il me faut une économie positive!" (O.C., p. 259).

<sup>56</sup>Etiemble, Le Mythe de Rimbaud, II, Structure du mythe, Paris: Gallimard, 1952, p. 77, while admitting that "Le Bateau ivre" is the symbol of "le poète déréglé", of "l'homme seul sur l'océan des âges", maintains that: "Aiguillonné par son désir d'être imprimé, Rimbaud aurait choisi le symbole qui faisait fureur, dans les milieux et les recueils parnassiens."

pour juger et pour injurier le faux désordre et l'illusoire révolte. La médiocrité "esthétique" est l'impureté la plus grave. Rimbaud lui opposa une affirmation éthique, le long immense dérèglement.<sup>57</sup>

After this initial disappointment, the poems Rimbaud did produce are composed according to his new method, not only being "accessible à tous les sens", but written with increasingly radical departures in use of language and poetic techniques, produced under the effect of this derangement of all the senses by the life he chose to live. The town poems which remain from this period are few and seem connected somewhat tenuously to his feelings about urban society or Paris. There is no question of his examining the town as an entity.

Taken chronologically, "Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur..." (O.C., p. 71), was probably composed soon after his arrival in Paris,<sup>58</sup> since it is still regular, apart from enjambements and certain liberties with the caesuras, as were the three poems from the Commune. After an initial dispirited question indicating that he is indifferent to the idea of revenge, the whole poem is, in fact, a long cry for vengeance, for elemental destruction, beginning with the social sources of repression, "Industriels, princes, sénat..." and expanding, as the paroxysm of rage and despair runs its course, to encompass whole continents, the whole

---

<sup>57</sup> Yves Bonnefoy, Rimbaud par lui-même, Paris: Aux Editions du Seuil, 1961, p. 61 (hereafter: Bonnefoy, Rimbaud.)

<sup>58</sup> Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 926 n. 2 and Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 442, both agree, interpreting the poem as a recollection of the Commune. Adam states: "Cette pièce exprime les désirs impuissants de vengeance des Communards écrasés, et leurs rêves."

world and all the creatures in it. The same contrast between the oppressors and those Rimbaud doubtfully now considers his brothers, is established as in "Chant de guerre parisien". The unleashed natural forces take over the role of "Le Poète" and the people in "L'Orgie parisienne". The poet now watches helplessly or ecstatically, in the grip of his vision, until he himself is threatened physically by the disintegrating earth. Then, as is frequent in these visionary poems, the inferno of "tout enfer renversant/ Tout ordre", dissipates. Upon his dazed return to earth, the poet says enigmatically, "Ce n'est rien! j'y suis! j'y suis toujours."

Critics have seen in this poem references and images relating it to events of the Commune, for example, the "mille meurtres" of Bloody Week. This may be so, yet, all revolutions are characterized by blood, fire, shrieks of rage, reversal of order, Rimbaud's addition of erupting volcanoes, tidal waves, earthquakes, the effacing of whole cursed races and lands is a mythic, apocalyptic vision which far surpasses the worst excesses of the Commune. Even if memories of the defeat of the Commune are at the root of this poem, even if such colossal, visionary exaggeration is needed to express its wickedness, it exceeds a vision of the fate of Paris to such an extent that it cannot be discussed in terms of the town beyond the naïve statement that Paris has augmented Rimbaud's apparent desires for a clean sweep of society.

The Album Zutique was never intended as a volume of serious poetry, being a collection of word games, puns, parodies, skits, composed by the members of this circle. However, Rimbaud's entries are interesting for his view of Paris and his interaction with the Parisian poets.

Following the example of the other contributors, Rimbaud's poems are mainly parodies of certain poets of the day.<sup>59</sup> In the case of Coppée and Belmontet particularly, Rimbaud is savagely malicious. In fact, the parody of Belmontet, (O.C., p. 215), an old target, attacks all the Parnassians through this poet, and is derisive enough to have drawn a reprimand.<sup>60</sup> In the "Lettre du Voyant" to Demeny, Rimbaud blames Hugo's failure to become a "voyant" on his use of "Trop de Belmontet et de Lamennais, de Jehovahs et de colonnes, vieilles énormités crevées", (O.C., p. 253). Is this his present opinion of the Parnassians? Does this discovery that his idols had feet of clay, could not become true poets, explain his savage need to purge the whole world in "Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur..."? As Matarasso and Petitfils say: "Rimbaud est le rieur à froid."<sup>61</sup>

In the same letter to Demeny, Coppée is classed as one of "les talents" (O.C., p. 254). The explanation of these often obscene, always ridiculous parodies in the Album no doubt lies in Rimbaud's emulation

<sup>59</sup>His chief victim is François Coppée with eight poems. Louis Ratisbonne, Armand Sylvestre, Louis-Xavier de Ricard, Léon Dierx, Verlaine, Belmontet are parodied once each. In the case of Sylvestre, Dierx and Verlaine, one feels that he does not despise these poets.

<sup>60</sup>Matarasso et Petitfils, "Rimbaud, Verlaine, Germain Nouveau et L'Album Zutique", Mercure de France, CCCXLII (mai 1961), pp. 19-20, explain: "Belmontet...unfarouche bonapartiste et un classique enragé...Rimbaud en qualifiant ce médiocre personnage d'"architype Parnassien", a voulu se moquer de ses compagnons si attachés à la forme qu'on les appelait les "néo-classiques." L'allusion ne passa pas inaperçue; sous son texte une main anonyme a tracé ce mot qui en dit long: 'Assez'." (Hereafter: Matarasso et Petitfils, "L'Album Zutique".)

<sup>61</sup>Matarasso et Petitfils, "L'Album Zutique", p. 16.

of Verlaine who was a dedicated writer of "coppées" before he met Rimbaud.<sup>62</sup>

Parodying Promenades et Intérieurs, Rimbaud has sketched Paris street scenes and social situations. In "Etat de siège?" (O.C., p. 212), Rimbaud mocks the commonplace in modern Parisian life: "Le pauvre possillon, sous le dais de fer blanc"; the prosaic qualities of the "poetic touches": "La lune se bercer parmi la verte ouate"; the pity for the physical discomforts of the worker: "Et de son aine en flamme écarte la sacoche". He adds gratuitously the political satire of the title but is obliged to create the atmosphere, the common, realistic details himself. Despite the ridiculous details chosen, Rimbaud's verbal gifts and observant eye create a type of confidential familiar poetry equal or superior to that of Coppée. Perfectly aware of the details of modern Paris, Rimbaud could have exploited them, as did many of the poets of this period, including Lautréamont, who wrote about the omnibus. "Les Soirs d'été..." (O.C., p. 214), is an excellent parody of these everyday elements of Paris, despite the buffoonery. As Bernard says, comparing Rimbaud's efforts to those of Cros: "Rimbaud a plus de mal à éteindre son originalité propre."<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup>In a letter to Léon Valade, July 14th, 1871, O.C., I, 956-57, Verlaine parodies Promenades et Intérieurs: "Bien souvent dédaigneux des plaisirs de mon âge, / J'évoque le bonheur des femmes de ménage. / Ayant changé de sexe en esprit bien souvent, / Un cabas à mon bras et mon nez digne au vent, / J'ai débattu les prix avec les revendeuses..."

<sup>63</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 542. Pascal Pia, Album Zutique, Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1962, p. 108, is harsher, seeing instead of an improved style a lack of ability to parody. He says of "Etat de Siège?": "Ce dizain de Rimbaud, signé François Coppée, ne rap - pelle guère les vers du poète qu'il prétend pasticher." He repeats this criticism, p. 144.

The other entries in the Album have limited possibilities as continuing themes. "Conneries II", "Paris" (O.C., p. 211), is a word game listing prominent figures and sights in Paris.<sup>64</sup> Rimbaud was obviously poking sly fun with these juxtapositions, yet simultaneously indicating the prosaic, commercial aspects of Paris, which are therefore also derided.

The remainder of Rimbaud's contributions are political satires ridiculing Napoleon III and his family. "Ressouvenir" (O.C., p. 217) another "coppée", evokes the lavish festivities in Paris on the birth of the Prince Imperial. He has caught Coppée's tone but added a sharper note of social criticism, given the contrast between the lavish decorations: "...où des N d'or et de neige/ Aux grilles du palais, aux gradins du manège,/ Eclatent, tricolorement enrubannés," and the shabbiness of the crowd: "Dans le remous public des grands chapeaux fanés,/ Des chauds gilets à fleurs, des vieilles redingotes, / Et des chants d'ouvriers anciens dans les gargotes", while the Emperor walks miraculously and unpityingly over the mass of shawls with the holy Spanish woman.

Obviously, mockery of the deposed Emperor was still a favourite theme at this time in this circle. Napoleon III was one of Verlaine's "bêtes noires", since in September 1872, they composed another "coppée" in London for Regamey's album. "L'Enfant qui ramassa les balles..."

---

<sup>64</sup>They are mostly advertisers, woven around a mass-murderer and his victim, Augier (the bourgeois social dramatist), Vuilliot (the Catholic author of Les Odeurs de Paris), and also Mendès, André Gill and Eugène Manuel; the last two, members of the circle.



(O.C., p. 217). It is difficult to determine if Rimbaud still retained his interest in political activities or was merely pandering to Verlaine's interest at this point.

Rimbaud seems to have integrated socially with this group, to have adopted their amusements, to have been influenced by Verlaine's preferences. His excellence in these biting accurate parodies of Coppée, despite Pia's opinion, combined with a total absence of evocations of Parisian society and scenes in his poetry of the period, indicate perhaps a serious rejection and mockery, not only of Coppée but of Parisian society, poets and sights. A tender verse on Rimbaud in Paris by Cabaner, with the refrain, "Enfant, que fais-tu sur la terre? /-J'attends, j'attends, j'attends!..."<sup>65</sup> perhaps reflects best Rimbaud's patience and determination while working at his new method of poetry through cultivation of his own mind. This new approach reached fruition the following summer in the Vers Nouveaux.

As mentioned earlier, it is extremely difficult to categorize these poems as evocations either of Charleville or Paris. They appear to be landscapes of his mind, analogies for his personal feelings and thoughts, whether experienced in Charleville or in Paris. Yet they present remarkable parallels with what we know of events in his life at this time. Several of these poems deserve attention here. "Bonne pensée du matin", as a possible evocation of Paris, "Jeune ménage", "Honte" and

---

<sup>65</sup>Cited by Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 1053-1054.

" O saisons, ô châteaux...", as possible evocations of his private, emotional relationship with Verlaine, the only " vrai poète" in Paris, and his lover by this time. It would seem also that "Chanson de la plus haute tour" demonstrates Rimbaud's resigned patience, yet anguish, in exile in Charleville, yearning for Paris.

" Chanson de la plus haute tour" (O.C., pp. 77-78) is the second of a group of four poems entitled "Fêtes de la patience." Adam, while stating that " Rien n'autorise à penser particulièrement à Verlaine,"<sup>66</sup> agrees with Bernard's impression that " Rimbaud fait ici un retour sur lui-même, ... sur l'échec de son expérience parisienne, sur sa patience douloureuse et sa solitude." She finds an echo of one of Verlaine's poems in " Est-ce qu'on prie, La Vierge Marie?"<sup>67</sup>

The fact that Rimbaud chose to sing, in a poem which has many of the formal attributes of a folk song, of the universal themes of folk song: lost love, banishment, abandonment, loneliness, idle youth, a wasted life, renunciation of a place or person loved, faithful waiting, obscure needs, does not exclude the possibility that these themes correspond to his own position at the moment. It is a lament. The situation of "je", the singer, is so similar to Rimbaud's own, as we know it at this time, that despite Adam's opinion, it seems like a transparent allegory of his waiting in Charleville, yearning for Paris, but only as the abode of a lover. He is looking for a message, for rescue, as he waits in his lonely look-out tower or prison, as in a medieval tale.

" Bonne pensée du matin" (O.C., p. 76) has been hailed by several

<sup>66</sup>Adam, in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 934.

<sup>67</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 436, n.l. and p. 437.

critics as an evocation of dawn in Paris,<sup>68</sup> as a poetic pendant to his "Lettre de Jumps" to Delahaye.<sup>69</sup> Adam contradicts this view, seeing it as an evocation of the Ardennes countryside.<sup>70</sup> In "Alchimie du verbe" (O.C., pp. 106-107), this poem follows "Larme" and the phrase, "J'écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l'inexprimable. Je fixais des vertiges." It is an example of one of his follies, written at a time when he was besotted by "La vieillesse poétique", when "l'hallucination simple" was a normal state. The poem is indeed a good example of hallucinated vision transforming commonplace sights and the use of themes of old, simple folk literature. Given the natural settings, even if they are hallucinated visions, one could surmise that they present a view of the countryside. One could further surmise from the poem's serene tone that this nature imagery and these references to themes of folk tales reflect a certainty of future joy, a more hopeful attitude than in the previous poem.

The first stanza could evoke either dawn in the country or in Paris. What is sure is that the speaker is looking towards a mythic land of happiness and exotic delights in the west where honest workers are already preparing a beautiful ceiling for a room in a town. They are subjects of a Babylonian king, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar, the great city builder. It is tempting, though perhaps foolhardy, to see beneath these mythic and random localizations and activities, the activities of Verlaine and Forain in Paris, which is to the west of the Ardennes, preparing a room for Rimbaud, where he would laugh again under the false skies, the ceilings, contrasted with

---

<sup>68</sup> Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 434, for example, says: "Ce poème... paraît avoir été écrit à Paris..." She relates it to the letter to Delahaye.

<sup>69</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p. 266: "Le mois passé... Il y avait des arbres énormes sous ma fenêtre étroite. A trois heures du matin, la bougie pâlit: tous les oiseaux crient à la fois dans les arbres: c'est fini... Il me fallait regarder les arbres, le ciel, saisis par cette heure indicible..."

<sup>70</sup> Adam, in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 931.

the natural skies and dawn in the Ardennes. They are subjects of the Emperor who directed Haussman to reconstruct Paris on a grandiose scale.

Venus, goddess of love, is therefore invoked and begged to leave fulfilled lovers, to succour these workers so that they will remain peaceful and strong until their midday bathe in the sea. This last line is unexpected. One expects instead the completion of the work, so that unfulfilled lovers may be happy again under the painted ceilings.

Yves Denis has suggested a convincing gloss for this line. He sees it as a play on the words " la mer/l'amer"<sup>71</sup> If it is indeed a private joke, then it is very disconcerting for the interpretation of Rimbaud's poetry, as Denis feels.<sup>72</sup> It means that this delicately suggestive poem contains at the end a joke, a private message to Rimbaud's drinking friends in Paris, expressing his desire to be with them again in the cafés. It also means that the message of the last line fits with our interpretation of the text.

The images of dawn, of mythical, strong workers, of goddesses of love, which appeal to the collective unconscious, are, as suspected, analogies with Rimbaud's own position in relation to Verlaine and Paris. The poem is a code in a new manner. Rimbaud, in the Ardennes, aware of the plans afoot for his return to Paris, anxious for the resumption of their old relationship

<sup>71</sup>Yves Denis, " Le bain dans la mer à midi", Les Temps modernes, (May 1969), p. 2068 (hereafter: Denis, "Le bain"). He backs his statement by citing a letter from Forain to Verlaine: " Où est le temps où nous t'attendions, Rimbaud et moi, dans un petit café de la rue Drouot, en fumant des pipes de terre, que nous humections avec nombreux bitter-curaçaos,..."

<sup>72</sup>Denis, "Le bain", pp. 2068-69, says: " Quoi qu'il en soit, la révélation de ce calembour risque de décevoir, s'ils l'acceptent, pas mal d'admirateurs du "Voyant",... Et pourtant les calembours, les anagrammes, les contrepèteries et autres jeux de mots, c'est aussi Rimbaud, le camarade des hommes de lettres et des artistes bohèmes, facétieux et gouailleurs, devant lesquels le jeune paysan des Ardennes ne voulait pas paraître en reste d'esprit ( fut-il du plus mauvais goût),..."

and activities, finds delicate analogies in nature and folk symbolism for his universal situation of the banished but favoured lover, and creates as well a delicate song which appeals to the poetic imagination.<sup>73</sup>

It now seems possible to acknowledge the autobiographical content, the message of mourning of "Chanson de la plus haute tour", which is also set in a suggestive and evocative folk-song form, universal in its themes. Verlaine's designation of these songs as prayers, makes sense now. Similarly, "Honte" can legitimately be read as an evocation of the trouble Rimbaud caused in the Verlaine household and of his own pain and guilt. "Jeune ménage" has also been interpreted as autobiographical, and with reason. However, some critics see "le malin rat" as Rimbaud, others, as Mathilde. Adam sums up its emotional and biographical content:

...il semble que Jeune Ménage, écrit le 27 juin 1872, quelques jours avant le grand départ, évoque les journées de tension extrême que Rimbaud vit alors: un ménage, des esprits malfaisants, un malin rat qui interviendra dans la vie du ménage, un feu follet qui éclatera soudain...l'atmosphère de rêve est telle que toute explication précise serait vaine.<sup>74</sup>

It is really no surprise now to find that the hauntingly evocative

"O saisons, ô châteaux..." (O.C., pp. 88-89) has a strong sexual undercurrent and is completely concerned with Rimbaud's relations with Verlaine.

As Adam sums it up:

Il s'explique par l'explosion de joie sensuelle qui se produisit quand Rimbaud vécut de nouveau avec Verlaine... Il a cherché la définition du bonheur. Et voici qu'il le trouve, maintenant que Verlaine lui propose son désir. Il s'abandonne corps et âme. Il renonce à lutter.<sup>75</sup>

The small amount of poetry produced by Rimbaud's stay in Paris from

<sup>73</sup> Denis, "Le bain", p. 2068, acknowledges its poetic appeal: "La Mer: Midi!...J'aurais été bien malchanceux de ne pouvoir rien tirer de ces deux merveilleux vocables, carrefours de tant de voies de l'imagination poétique."

<sup>74</sup> Adam, in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 936.

<sup>75</sup> Adam, in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 947.

September 1871 seems very personal, concentrating not on the city in any of its geographical aspects, not on social conflict, not even on questions of poetry, although Rimbaud had obviously abandoned the Parnassian aesthetic. Instead it reflects Rimbaud's personal relationships with a small group of poets and artists and finally with one poet, Verlaine. Despair, perhaps caused by his perception of the real qualities of Paris, the collapse of another of his illusions, is first displayed in the destructive and delirious "Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur...", a visionary wish-fulfillment which falls back into reality at the end. Rimbaud's recollection or evocation of Parisian sights and society is restricted to private parodies. They represent a style of poetry he scorns, but also, a way of being accepted into this group, a protective colouring. His own aspirations are reflected in the Vers Nouveaux where he experiments with varied rhythms, simple, universal themes which appeal strongly to the poetic imagination. By this point in his poetic career, Paris is no longer a town for him but simply the place from which he has been exiled by his lover, whom he yearns to rejoin. The individuality of this place is of such small importance that for later recollections of his relationship with Verlaine, his new sun, when the site changes to London or Brussels, it is equally imprecise in the poetry.

+

+

+

Many of Rimbaud's retrospective views of large industrial towns are undifferentiated by details. They symbolize any modern Babylon. The river, the crowded streets, the human misery, the mud, the glaring red light, the grey skies, are common to both London and Paris. However, these urban features will be discussed in the last chapter on composite towns, since many critics claim to recognize a transposition of London in the Illuminations.

It should be borne in mind, at that point, that many of these features claimed as London characteristics could equally well be transpositions of the Parisian landscape and climate of the 1870s.

What remains in Rimbaud's prose poems of Paris as localized site of social evil, as revolutionary site, as site of his personal joys, sorrows and literary inspirations? Firstly, an evocation in "Adieu" (O.C., p. 116) of the alienation, physical and mental suffering, lack of human charity, experienced by the poet in some large city. The climate of this city is that of hell. It is as immense as he described Paris to Demeny in August 1871, flaming, muddy, all epithets carrying moral judgments on the corruption of this personified vampire queen. It is a necropolis of dead hopes, emotions, minds and of diseased bodies. Bonnefoy relates this evocation to Rimbaud's experiences in Paris in February/March 1871.<sup>76</sup> Adam sees it as an evocation of London.<sup>77</sup> What really matters is that Rimbaud suffered in both these great cities and has come to view them as death-dealing, morally disgusting, hostile. It is true that if this poem states his practical plans for the future, then Paris is the city evoked here, since despite his memory of its misery, his ship, accustomed to the fogs of the western world, did anchor there in the winter of 1873/74.

In Illuminations Paris is named twice. In "Vies III" (O.C., p. 129), Rimbaud states, "Dans un vieux passage à Paris on m'a enseigné les sciences classiques." Adam and Bernard both relate this reference to the passage Choiseul, Lemerre's address, gathering place of the Parnassian poets.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Bonnefoy, Rimbaud, p. 260.

<sup>77</sup> Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 971.

<sup>78</sup> Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 987, n. 2 and Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 491, n. 10.

the exact location is immaterial and contravenes the poet's intention of giving free range to the imagination. The image of an old, unidentified passageway in an old section of Paris as source of his vast knowledge, opens up the poem more than specific designation. Most of the places cited in this catalogue of lives can be seen to follow the peregrinations of Rimbaud's life, from the attic at Roche to the passage Choiseul to the Orient of his new prose poems and poetic method.

In "Villes II" (O.C., pp. 137-138), part of a city is compared to one of the most notable features of Paris for tourists after the 1860s, the brilliance and elegance of the new, wide streets created by Haussman. Rimbaud says: "Le faubourg, aussi élégant qu'une belle rue de Paris, est favorisé d'un air de lumière." Since the title of the poem is plural, since comparison with other real places occurs in this poem, and since the narrator asserts, "Pour l'étranger de notre temps la reconnaissance est impossible," it is evident that this poem is not about either Paris or London. These identified architectural features are used as yardsticks. Representing the most modern, brilliant, elegant or gigantic wonders known in the west, the comparison of the unknown places serves to indicate how far Rimbaud's creations surpass them. It is evident that the effect of architecture similar to but even more dazzling than these known marvels, assembled in one spot in this poem, would be overpoweringly impressive to the contemporary tourist.

De Graaf asserts that this particular poem is an evocation or poetic transposition of the Paris exhibition of 1878.<sup>79</sup> The massing on one site of the most marvellous, fantastic constructions, is, of course,

---

<sup>79</sup>De Graaf, "Une Clé", p. 268: "... au lieu de devoir reconstituer l'amalgame de toutes sortes de villes, Rimbaud peut l'avoir trouvé tout fait au Champ de Mars."



exactly the purpose of such an exhibition, just as Rimbaud's poem is such an exhibition. Even if De Graaf is right, and some of his documentation presents convincing parallels to the imagery of "Villes II", this poem still does not represent Paris but another artificial world, unnaturally and temporarily elevated in Paris.<sup>80</sup> Since most critics relate this poem to London, these sources will be discussed more thoroughly in the last chapter.

+

+ +

Rimbaud's Paris then, seen through his poetry, is at first the mecca for realization of his poetic ambitions, the site of glorious revolutionary activity, the source of hope for a new social order which will be the antithesis of that of Charleville. It is also recognized as the seat of political, social and religious oppression, and is therefore the localized site of evil which has caused the degeneration of man in society. During the war and the Commune, it is attacked as a hell of sickness and depravity, inhabited by a cowardly society, but is also deemed capable of rising again, of being purged by the new women and true poets, and by the people. It is therefore the chosen site for transcendence of the people. Specific monuments, specific people are named as symbols or sources of liberation or oppression. Later, Paris becomes less a town than a nondescript place for the working out of Rimbaud's own place among the poets, for his personal relationship with Verlaine. In the end, happiness becomes concentrated on this one figure. Paris evaporates to become merely the point on the globe where Verlaine is.

In the prose poems, apart from two fleeting references, Paris is

---

<sup>80</sup>Ch. de Mazade, article in La Revue des deux mondes, 1er mai 1878, cited by De Graaf, "Une Clé", p. 269: "... ces quartiers métamorphosés sont une cité nouvelle, le caravansérail des nations industrielles... Paris, pour quelques mois, va appartenir à tout le monde excepté aux Parisiens."

unrecognizable. The ideas of harmony, brotherhood, social reform led by the poet, are revived and flower in the Illuminations when the poet was probably no longer in Paris, but these ideas withered away while he was there in 1871-72. While these ideas certainly gained impetus and definition from Rimbaud's recognition of the role of Paris in the fate of French society, this theme has surpassed this localized realm in the Illuminations to become a universal problem no longer attached to the role of any particular town in men's lives. This enlargement to global proportions of the problem and the solution of society's ills was already evident in "Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur...". Now liberated from regular poetic form and a regular view of the world by his visionary practices, Rimbaud is often creating another world. This other world will be discussed in the last chapter. Whenever the theme of the town as site of social evil or social reform occurs in later chapters, it should be remembered that this was originally a Charleville theme, rapidly identified with the real site of action, Paris, before it assumed these wider proportions.

Gaspar has said perceptively of Rimbaud:

La nature, le peuple, ce sont les deux seuls milieux où l'adolescent a le sentiment d'être accepté, les deux seuls éléments dans lesquels il puisse se fondre...Au sein de la famille, de la société bourgeoise, il est en procès.

Pour Rimbaud, qui a passé une partie de son enfance à la campagne, la nature promet plus sûrement la libération et la réhabilitation que ce peuple, dont, à cause de son étroite éducation de petit-bourgeois, il ignore tout. 81

It was to nature, to restore himself to himself, to escape this society which had, in the final analysis, stifled him, that Rimbaud ran with Verlaine in July 1872.

---

<sup>81</sup> Gaspar, La Commune, p. 41.

### III

#### BELGIAN TOWNS

Vivre à deux pas d'une frontière peut profondément influencer 'une vision du monde'. La Belgique est pour Rimbaud un des premiers 'au-delà' qui se sont offerts à son imagination... <sup>1</sup>

In this way Jacques Plessen sums up the effect of Belgium's proximity on Rimbaud's perception of his world. However, it was not only to Rimbaud's imagination that Belgium offered itself. Delahaye's reminiscences, references in some of the early Charleville poetry, indicate that in his early adolescence Rimbaud often crossed the border into Belgium. In fact, until his departure for the east, Rimbaud often visited the Belgian towns. Indeed some of the more dramatic or important incidents in his life, judging by the stress laid on them by his biographers, took place in Brussels.

Surprisingly, despite his familiarity with certain Belgian towns, Rimbaud composed poetry concerning these towns on only two occasions; during or shortly after his second escapade in October, 1870, and after his flight from Paris with Verlaine in July and August 1872. Although some of the Illuminations contain imagery which certain critics equate with Rimbaud's experiences in Belgium, these images, if they are

---

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Plessen, Promenade et poésie: l'expérience de la marche et du mouvement dans l'oeuvre de Rimbaud, La Haye et Paris: Mouton, 1967, p. 283, n. \*\* (hereafter: Plessen, Promenade).

transpositions of Belgian experiences, relate to these two high-points in his emotional life.

In the following analyses of these two groups of poems, we will discuss what the Belgian towns represent for Rimbaud in the poetry produced on these occasions, and how the tone of these poems differs from that of those contemporaneous with them, composed in Paris or Charleville.

+

+                    +

Delahaye recounts that he and Rimbaud often crossed the border in the course of their walks together.<sup>2</sup> They would buy tobacco at the first Belgian village, open the packages and thus avoid customs duty on their return. "Les Douaniers" (O.C., p. 38), reflects these expeditions across a frontier with no natural or linguistic boundaries. "A la musique" (O.C., pp. 21-22), refers to the same activity by the Carolopolitains "-- vous savez, c'est de la contrebande; -- ". In the same poem, Rimbaud's sketch of the bourgeois with his "bedaine flamande", smoking the contraband tobacco in an expensive pipe, hints at his awareness of a different physical type, addicted to physical comforts, over there. In "Les Douaniers", the lines: "Ils signalent aux lois modernes les faunesses, / Ils empoignent les Fausts et les Diavolos. / 'Pas de ça, les anciens! Déposez les ballots!'", despite their heavy sarcasm, and whatever the real thrust of this poem, indicate that Rimbaud's conception of Belgium at this point was of a

---

<sup>2</sup>Delahaye, Souvenirs, pp. 150-52.

fantasy land in some respects, proffering creature comforts and suitable for illegal or exciting deeds. It was also a refuge, offering the outdoor, wandering life he craved, a contrast to the restrictive atmosphere of Charleville.

In "Les Douaniers", Rimbaud mentions "...les Soldats des Traités / Qui tailladent l'azur frontière à grands coups d'hâche." Judging by Claudel's poetic line describing Rimbaud's environment: "...et toujours à l'horizon la ligne légendaire des forêts...",<sup>3</sup> this qualification of the frontier seems accurate enough in its impression. Yet, judging by Rimbaud's use of the colour blue in previous poems, "azur" here seems to have a symbolic value, suggesting unlimited physical freedom or a promise of infinite possibilities for the fulfillment of aspirations.<sup>4</sup> In all probability, "Les Douaniers" was composed after his first escapade in Belgium. Did the other side of this blue frontier, reflected in the Belgian sonnets, fulfill the desires evident in the earlier Charleville poems and so

<sup>3</sup>Claudel, "Préface", p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>For example, in "Les Etrences des orphelins" (O.C., p. 6), Rimbaud contrasts a happy, fulfilled world to the cold misery of the orphans with the evocation: "Par la fenêtre on voit là-bas un beau ciel bleu; / La nature s'éveille et de rayons s'enivre...". In "Sensation" (O.C., p. 6), it is the blue evening which attracts Rimbaud to go out into nature to seek relief from his pain. In "Soleil et Chair" (O.C., p. 7), the colour blue is allied with universal harmony and love: "La terre berçant l'homme, et tout l'Océan bleu / Et tous les animaux aimaient, aimaient en Dieu." Later, expressing man's search for knowledge and transcendence he asks, "Pourquoi l'azur muet et l'espace insondable?... Si l'on montait toujours, que verrait-on là-haut?" (O.C., p. 9). In "Les Reparties de Nina" (O.C., p. 24), they will go to find their happiness "Aux frais rayons / Du bon matin bleu..." The orchards are "Les bons vergers à l'herbe bleue..." (O.C., p. 26). In many of these illustrations blue is thus allied with goodness, beauty, aspirations for wider boundaries. In "Le Mal", (O.C., p. 30), good and evil are symbolized by colour: "Tandis que les crachats rouges de la mitraille / Sifflent tout le jour par l'infini du ciel bleu;".

suggest his symbolic use of this colour epithet in "Les Douaniers"?

Seven sonnets are enclosed in the second Cahier Demy: "Rêvé pour l'hiver", "Le Dormeur du val", "Au Cabaret-Vert", "La Maline", "L'Eclatante victoire de Sarrebruck", "Le Buffet" and "Ma Bohème". This separate grouping does not necessarily imply that they were all composed during or inspired by this trip to Belgium, although all but the last are dated October. Beyond the fact that they are all regular sonnets by nineteenth century standards, do they really have themes in common or a special tone, not evident in other sonnets of this period?

"Rêvé pour l'hiver" (O.C., pp. 31-32), dated "En Wagon, le 7 octobre [18]70.",<sup>5</sup> is not a town poem but sets the mood for the Belgian poems. The narrator confides his daydream, tenderly and a little naïvely, directly to "Elle". It is projected for the winter, mentioned as "la saison du confort" in "Adieu" (O.C., p. 116). It stresses throughout the insulated comfort of this dream carriage with its soft cushions and soft fabric. Triggered by his real situation in a railway carriage, the poem also reflects his own temporary isolation from the world, and thus represents a double wish-fulfillment. The colours blue and pink<sup>6</sup> are those

<sup>5</sup>Since Rimbaud probably left Charleville on October 2nd, he had already enjoyed five days of freedom, which had affected his mood before he chose to compose this poem.

<sup>6</sup>For example: in "Les Etrennes des orphelins" (O.C., p. 5), "Ils se croient endormis dans un paradis rose..." and "Près du lit maternel, sous un beau rayon rose, / Là, sur le grand tapis, resplendit quelque chose...", (O.C., p. 6). In "Soleil et chair", "...le sang rose des arbres verts / Dans les veines de Pan mettaient un univers;" (O.C., p. 7) Man may be created by nature, "...vivante créature, / Pour aimer dans la rose, et croître dans les blés?..." (O.C., p. 9). In "Les Reparties de Nina", the poet is "...Ivre du sang / Qui coule, bleu, sous ta peau blanche / Aux tons rosés:".

used in other poems of this period to symbolize anticipation of happiness. Other requirements for fulfillment at this time are included: a compliant girl, light, easy communication, physical contact. Unlike the situation in "Les Reparties de Nina" and "Les Effarés", the young are on the inside in this bright, cosy world, separated from the dark, hostile, deformed outside world by the window. Again, colour symbolism is used for this opposition: "Ces monstruosités hargneuses, populace / De démons noirs et de loups noirs." Also unlike "Les Reparties de Nina" or "Les Effarés", there is no rebuff or falling back into harsh reality here, probably because his temporary reality is satisfying in itself. The mood is tender, serene, even teasing, showing a rare, expansive side of Rimbaud.

Bernard notes that this poem is derivative, therefore, "...cette 'Elle' peut très bien être une figure imaginaire, un pur prétexte littéraire."<sup>7</sup> Is Rimbaud so steeped in Parnassian poetry, or so anxious to integrate himself into the literary world of Paris, that even during this escapade to Belgium, indulging in expression of his personal daydreams, these Parnassian themes infiltrate or dictate his selection of analogies to his own moods and secret desires? It would seem so. Is this true for the other sonnets?

"Le Dormeur du val" (O.C., p. 32), is not a town poem, nor necessarily a Belgian poem, except perhaps because of its place of composi-

---

<sup>7</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 379, mentions its resemblance to Banville's "A Une Muse folle", which also refers to winter, cushions, soft material and the insulating windowpane, in a poem concerning lovers.

tion. Like the previous sonnet, it is derivative.<sup>8</sup> Rimbaud's reverence for nature, his hatred for war and its unnatural destruction of human life have led him to select from Romantic and Parnassian works themes and images which express his own convictions. His personal stamp is evident here in the quasi-photographic detail, use of colour, light effects, verbs denoting physical movement, to symbolize the basic opposition of vibrant, joyful nature to unnatural death.

The only Belgian town evoked by Rimbaud in this group of sonnets is Charleroi. It is mentioned specifically in "Au Cabaret-Vert" (O.C., pp. 32-33), "La Maline" (O.C., p. 33), and in "L'Eclatante victoire de Sarrebruck" (O.C., p. 34), where, in a sarcastic subtitle, "Gravure belge brillamment coloriée, se vend à Charleroi, 35 centimes", Rimbaud underlines, by his use of crude primary colours and the mention of the price, the cheapness of the now defeated Emperor's highly touted victory.

It appears that Rimbaud's trip to Belgium did have a practical purpose: to find work as a journalist. At Charleroi he had clumsily approached Monsieur Des Essarts for work and had been refused.<sup>9</sup> Verlaine's poetic

<sup>8</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 869, agrees with Claude Duchet that Rimbaud could not have witnessed such a scene. He cites convincingly some of its sources as a passage from Lélia and another from "Dolorosa mater" published in Le Parnasse by Dierx. He quotes: "Il gît, les bras en croix, dans l'herbe enseveli, / Comme un blessé perdant tout son sang..." However as Adam remarks, neither one refers to a soldier killed in war. Quinet reminisced about finding the body of a soldier when he was young, and Hugo's "Souvenir de la nuit du quatre" has the line: "L'enfant avait reçu deux balles dans la tête."

<sup>9</sup>Matarasso, La Vie, p. 50, states: "Parvenu à Charleroi, il se fit annoncer chez le père d'un autre ami du collège, le sénateur Des Essarts, directeur du Journal de Charleroi, et, d'emblée, lui demanda une place de rédacteur en chef...l'ayant entendu qualifier de 'vendus', de 'pourris' et de 'charognes' tous les hommes politiques, il l'éconduisit gentiment." De Graaf, Rimbaud, p. 34, tells a similar story.



impressions of Charleroi the following year sketch its noisiness, its glaring industrial squalor, its sinister atmosphere.<sup>10</sup> None of Rimbaud's personal disappointments nor such jarringly unpleasant impressions mar his euphoric happiness reflected in the two Charleroi sonnets.

Despite their probable sources of inspiration in a real restaurant, as well as in Parnassian literature,<sup>11</sup> Rimbaud has created here a new note in poetry by his euphoric yet vibrantly perceptive condensation of the sensations experienced in the commonplace Flemish restaurant. "La Maline" seems to be a variant of "Au Cabaret-Vert", inspired less by literature and more by his own little adventure.

Both poems are narrated directly to the reader in an anecdotal, confiding tone and are quite precisely localized. "Au Cabaret-Vert" even tells the point he had reached in his trip: "Depuis huit jours, j'avais déchiré mes bottines / Aux cailloux des chemins. J'entrais à Charleroi. / --Au Cabaret-Vert:...", and the time of day, "cinq heures du soir." The

<sup>10</sup>Verlaine, *O.C.*, I, 264-65, "Charleroi": "Plutôt des bouges / Que des maisons. / Quels horizons / De forges rouges! / ... / Parfums sinistres! / Qu'est-ce que c'est? / Quoi bruissait / Comme des sistres? / Sites brutaux! / Oh! votre haleine, / Sueur humaine, / Cris des métaux! / Dans l'herbe noire / Les Kobolds vont. / Le vent profond / Pleure, on veut croire. /"

<sup>11</sup>De Graaf, *Rimbaud*, p. 35, notes that: "M. Goffin a poussé ses recherches...jusque dans un établissement qui actuellement s'appelle 'La Maison verte', ayant été jadis une 'auberge de rouliers avec la façade verte et les meubles peints en vert.'" Bernard, *Oeuvres*, p. 381, cites Banville's "Ballade pour la servante de cabaret": "Le cabaret flamboyant de Montrouge / Où la servante a des yeux libertins!" and the line from the same poem, "un doux baiser, pris et donné sans bruit," as possible sources for "Au Cabaret-Vert". Adam, in *Rimbaud, O.C.*, p. 871, quotes from the Parnassian Jules Forni's "Ma Chope": "A travers le soleil, je regarde la bière / L'écume immaculée arrive sur le bord..." as a parallel to the last lines of "Au Cabaret-Vert".

evening was also the time of day at which he explored Charleville. "La Maline" is dated "Charleroi" and the meal is described only as "Belge". Both poems describe in sensuous detail the simple physical pleasures offered by these restaurants and serving girls and convey in sensuous detail the poet's rare feeling of being comfortable inside his skin, of being physically at ease and mentally stimulated at the same time.

In "Au Cabaret-Vert" the precise details of the temperature of the ham, its rosy pink and white colour, its coloured plate, its garlic flavouring, the expansive gesture of stretching his legs under the table, the naïve character of the tapestry, the laughter of the provocative, Rubenesque girl, combine graphically and yet also symbolically to convey the atmosphere. The colours mentioned are literally true, but because of the pleasure Rimbaud takes in naming them, they seem to symbolize his happiness. Similarly, the immense mug of beer glowing in the late afternoon sunlight, derivative or not as an image, symbolizes his own brimming happiness.

The language of the poem, by its sensuous recollection of food, drink, commonplace furnishings, by its use of non-poetic words, like "tétons" and "gousse d'ail" is far removed from Parnassian vocabulary. The aside, " --Celle-là, ce n'est pas un baiser qui l'épeure!--", apart from the use of a local form of "appeure", is a colloquial, good-humoured snatch of conversation of the type doubtless indulged in by the carters who frequented this establishment. The cosiness of the atmosphere is enhanced by the familiarity and the local flavour of the language. One feels that Rimbaud, having escaped over the frontier from the restrictive atmosphere of Charleville and after the fiasco of the escape to Paris is restored

to himself here. His restoration is symbolized, appropriately enough, by the atmosphere of a restaurant.

In "La Maline" all the senses are similarly stimulated by his selection of objects to mention. The society of the town is again reduced to one serving girl just as his experiences in all the Belgian towns he passed through telescope to the interior of two rather ordinary, very similar restaurants. While the restaurant and the girl differ in exact detail, in both cases they are comforting, welcoming, sensuously appealing, and in the case of the girl, actively encouraging. "La Maline", like Nina, is like a fruit to be consumed, with her cheek "un velours de pêche rose et blanc", the same colours as the ham in the previous sonnet. There is no irony nor brutality, the poet presents an indulgent, amused and even enchanted view of the girl.

The language of this sonnet, like that of "Au Cabaret-Vert", is sprinkled with colloquialisms and local expressions. There is a similar but more naïve aside: "--Puis, comme ça, -- bien sûr, pour avoir un baiser, -- ", matching the more child-like aspect of this girl. The words "maline", "malinement", represent the current local pronunciation. "Une froid" and "pour m'aiser" were common expressions in Belgian French according to Bruneau.<sup>12</sup> Adam notes that the French in the Ardennes made fun of the excessive use of "donc" by the Belgians.<sup>13</sup> This colloquial or local lang-

---

<sup>12</sup>Bruneau, "Le Patois", p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 871.

uage adds an intimate homely flavour to the poems.

"Le Buffet" (O.C., pp. 34-35) could be a close-up of a dresser seen in Belgium, perhaps in one of these restaurants. However, massive cupboards full of surprises and old family treasures seem to be one of Rimbaud's personal symbols of anticipated pleasures and of a protected feeling in a loving family.<sup>14</sup> While in no sense a town poem, "Le Buffet" represents the essence of Rimbaud's conception of the Belgian "au-delà" and its towns -- the sense of finally being accepted on the inside, of being in a stable world.

Starkie sums up these Belgian sonnets:

In spite of hunger and hardship, these two weeks of liberty, of untrammelled wandering seemed to have been the happiest that Rimbaud had ever spent...There is no bitterness or coarseness to be found in the poems which resulted from them; there is only the expression of celestial happiness, of joy in freedom, and of delight in mere living.<sup>15</sup>

She specifically mentions "la Bohème" (O.C., p. 35). While again not a town poem, it encompasses Rimbaud's main preoccupations while traversing these Belgian towns: a preoccupation with poetic themes, even a tendency to view his own experiences, to select from them for poetic expression, from the modern French poetry in which he was steeped; a great desire for tender affection, physical contact and comfort from a woman; a strong need for freedom from restraint combined with a need for physical activity, for

---

<sup>14</sup>In "Les Etrennes des orphelins", (O.C., p. 5), a similar cupboard is described in a scene recalling the joys of family life, full of glowing colours: "... on rêvait bien des fois / Aux mystères dormant entre ses flancs de bois, / Et l'on croyait ouïr, au fond de la serrure / Béante, un bruit lointain, vague et joyeux murmure.../

<sup>15</sup>Starkie, Rimbaud, p. 66.

exploring even further across the blue horizon, in a natural or simple setting.<sup>16</sup> Thus all his thwarted desires expressed to Izambard in August were fulfilled:

...j'espérais des bains de soleil, des promenades infinies, du repos, des voyages, des aventures, des bohémieries enfin: j'espérais surtout des journaux, des livres...Paris se moque de nous joliment: (O.C., p. 238).

He has been compensated for the narrowness of Charleville and the rejection by Paris.

It is true that this poem is subtitled "Fantaisie," which causes Adam to relate it more generally to Rimbaud's love of walking in the Ardennes,<sup>17</sup> and to insist that there is more fantasy than reality in this sonnet. It is certainly fantasy, as are all these sonnets, in the sense that Rimbaud has only selected and burnished those impressions which matched his innermost desires. It would be foolish to deny the literary aspirations of Rimbaud in composing these poems. Similarly, the literary sources are undeniable. However, Rimbaud's noting of sensuous detail, his use of colour to symbolize his states of mind, his fresh use of language, make these evocations of Belgian towns fully his own experiences, despite his linking of these experiences with snatches of contemporary poetry and his external conformism by his use of the sonnet form.

---

<sup>16</sup>His absorption with poetry is resumed in: "J'allais sous le ciel, Muse! et j'étais ton féal;". His dream of romantic love is gently mocked in: "Oh! la! la! que d'amours splendides j'ai rêvées." His love of freedom and natural, physical pleasures is condensed in: "Ces bons soirs de septembre où je sentais des gouttes/ De rosée à mon front, comme un vin de vigueur;/...un pied près de mon coeur!"

<sup>17</sup>Adam, Rimbaud, O.C., p. 873.

Charleroi, the epitome of his Belgian towns, is "Les Effarés" reversed. The poet, in a delicately coloured, warm, light, cosy interior is encouraged, cosseted, able to communicate, to relax his body and expand his senses, to accept and enjoy the good, simple physical pleasures of life. There is no yearning for transcendence, merely pure delight in natural, physical sensations. In this world, while the décors are no doubt accurate, literal descriptions in many cases, the commonplace objects take on a heightened lustre, as in old Flemish painting, because of the poet's intense pleasure. They are insulated from the outside world, suspended in time in a private world of perfect happiness, as was the poet in reality. These framed moments are fresh, vital, a little naïve.

As far as urban geography is concerned, there is still no interest in architecture, topography or geology. As travelling insulates him from society and its pressures, he evinces no interest in either social problems or society. The narrator addresses the reader directly and intimately recounts his private, physical impressions of interiors, his daydreams. The language, often colloquial, local or down-to-earth, gives local colour and the restorative, tranquil flavour of the experience.

There is a sense of sustained joy running through all these sonnets, found even in "Le Dormeur du val", in its statement of the supreme joy of life which renders the death of the soldier so reprehensible. All but the sources of his joy have been excluded from these sonnets. Therefore, Belgium becomes or is seen as the land beyond the blue frontier where one is granted physical comfort, freedom, adventure. The towns restore the poet's inner stability and are thus an antidote or antithesis to Charleville and Paris. They are magic towns akin

to fantasy towns, but based on selective perception of reality, so that

"Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,  
Luxe, calme et volupté."

+

+

+

On July 6th, 1872, Rimbaud left Paris with Verlaine, in a flight which led them by a circuitous route to Brussels. Critics disagree about their collusion in advance in this escapade and the reasons for Rimbaud's abandonment of Paris.<sup>18</sup> It would seem that Paris had proved to be a disappointment as a centre for new poetry, it had lost its role as revolutionary centre, and as Rimbaud's "Lettre de Jemphe" indicated, its stifling of his physical if not mental resources made him yearn for "les rivières ardennaises et belges, les cavernes," (O.C., p. 265). Memories of Belgium as a land of infinite possibilities, physical comfort, tranquil beauty, may have drawn him there. The Belgian towns

---

<sup>18</sup>Ruff, Rimbaud, p. 145, quotes Rimbaud's statement to Verlaine: "J'en ai assez de Paris, de toi et de tout. Je pars en Belgique." He states: "Le point important pour lui, c'est de partir, avec ou sans Verlaine." Other critics have different interpretations. Bonnefoy, Rimbaud, p. 87, remarks: "...il est vrai, si nous croyons le récit que nous a laissé son compagnon, ce voyage commence comme une fugue et par des farces de collégiens. C'est pourtant, je n'en doute pas, une grave décision que Rimbaud a prise, et un noble projet, aussi important que celui du Voyant naguère, qui vit désormais dans son coeur."

The fact remains that Rimbaud did urge Verlaine to accompany him and that Verlaine did follow him, whether or not, Gascar, La Commune, p. 90, is right that: "Rimbaud semble n'agir que par calcul, dans cette affaire; il a besoin d'un compagnon de voyage qui ait l'air d'un Monsieur ...et qui règle les frais. Car, pour Rimbaud, il importe avant tout, de voyager. Le voyage libère...vous permet de vivre hors de toute société ...goût des horizons et des peuples inconnus? Sans doute. Mais d'abord, volonté d'absence;..."

had offered room to dream, without the falling back into harsh reality typified by one of the few joys discovered in Paris, absinth.<sup>19</sup>

Verlaine's "Paysages belges" trace their movements from town to town in Belgium with Brussels serving as base. His letters from London give an impression of an opulent, animated Brussels, an exciting, varied life during their stay.<sup>20</sup> Rimbaud's impressions of Belgian towns, experienced in the company of Verlaine, are contained in no more than three poems from the Vers Nouveaux. All the three are subject to the usual disputes among his critics about dating and sources.

"Bruxelles" (O.C., pp. 82-83), is dated July and localized on the Boulevard du Régent. Critical comment about this poem amounts to an admission that Rimbaud's impressions are disconcerting in their heterogeneity.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. 265, "C'est le plus délicat et le plus tremblant des habits, que l'ivresse par la vertu de cette sauge de glaciers, l'absomphe. Mais pour, après, se coucher dans la merde!" "Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur..." exemplifies his exhausted, bewildered fall into reality.

<sup>20</sup>Verlaine, O.C., I, 994-995. "A Lepelletier, octobre, 1872": "...je déclare Bruxelles une très charmante grande ville (400,000 habitants) plus belle et plus riche en beaucoup d'endroits que Paris, regorgeant de splendides cafés, restaurants, théâtres et bals et autres lieux."

Verlaine, O.C., I, 984. "A Blémont, 22 7bre '72", "...j'ai des notes excessivement curieuses sur la Belgique, y ayant vécu un peu de toutes les vies pendant trois mois à peu près..."

<sup>21</sup>Lacoste, Poésies, p. 46, speaking of "Jeune Ménage", "Le loup criait..." and "Bruxelles": "Il faut bien convenir que ces 'poèmes' n'ont pas pu être composés que dans un état très voisin du delirium tremens..." Houston, The Design, p. 103: "'Bruxelles' is a rambling association of exotic images which has no great poetic merit, but it is amusing in its outrageous use of accepted false lines." Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 440, n. 1, "A vrai dire, nous avons plutôt là une suite d'impressions et de coq-à-l'âne qu'un poème vraiment pensé. Rimbaud est tout à la joie de découvrir la 'liberté libre' avec Verlaine." Whitaker, Structure, p. 60,



Of all the Vers Nouveaux, "Bruxelles" is the freest, both stylistically and in its use of freely associated impressions. The poem contains no discernible memories evident in other poems of the same period, nor references to specific situations in his personal life with Verlaine. Adam, speaking of all the Vers Nouveaux, notes this free thought association and withholding of the translation:

Le résultat, qu'il a clairement voulu, c'est une impression d'écoulements fluides, de miroitements insaisissables... Rimbaud poussait très loin, et plus loin que Verlaine, l'audace d'une poésie qui renonçait aux structures nettes de l'intelligence. Les libres associations auxquelles il s'abandonnait ne nous étaient pas expliquées. Elles posent aujourd'hui, pour le lecteur exigeant, des questions dont la réponse n'apparaît pas toujours... Rien, nous le sentons, n'est gratuit dans cette poésie tissée d'impressions spontanées. Mais le poète ne se croit pas tenu de justifier les libres associations auxquelles il s'abandonne.<sup>22</sup>

As our chronology indicates, some critics think it was written in July 1872, when he succeeded in escaping from Paris, with Verlaine, to a land which promised an atmosphere conducive to the composition of poetry.<sup>23</sup>

---

believing, with Adam, that nothing is gratuitous, attempts to find a thread beneath the scattered images, and catches one of its moods, joyful expectation: "Une cascade d'images de la demeure apparentées entre elles jaillit tout d'un coup dans "Bruxelles"; ce sont toujours les mêmes pré-occupations chez Rimbaud, centrées autour de la demeure: la 'cage de la petite veuve', le kiosque où une folle affection retient une personne inconnue, les 'calmes maisons; anciennes passions' semblent attendre, comme la Maison des jeunes mariés, un renouveau, une ouverture; elles invitent presque le trouble et l'éveil par leur assoupissement paresseux."

<sup>22</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. XXXI.

<sup>23</sup>Verlaine, commenting in 1895 on Rimbaud's poetic development said: "Tel est le livre qui vient de paraître chez Vanier, le plus complet possible au point de vue des vers traditionnels, ajouterai-je, car Rimbaud fit ensuite, c'est-à-dire tout de suite après sa fuite libre, non sa reconduite (cette fois-ci) de Paris, sa fuite en quelque sorte triomphale, de Paris, des vers libres superbes, encore clairs, puis telles très belles proses qu'il fallait." "Arthur Rimbaud; Chronique", O.C., II, 1296. "Bruxelles" is surely one of these superb free verse poems,

This was a land of infinite horizons, a natural simple environment, offering love, physical pleasures and the fulfillment of his desires. Others place it after the sentencing of Verlaine and after Rimbaud's release from hospital into a stunningly beautiful and serene world. The poem conveys a mood of surprised joy, yet physical lassitude and displays a certain trance-like vision. Both mood and vision are conceivable in either situation. Since it is undoubtedly a town poem, it is necessary to examine these impressions in some detail, to become Adam's demanding reader, in order to determine Rimbaud's view of Brussels, regardless of the date of composition.

The entire poem gives the impression of the narrator as passive instrument<sup>24</sup> as he sits on the Boulevard du Régent, from where he could see the Palais Royal, the Palais ducal, the Palais des Académies, the park. He registers the scenes before his eyes as well as the various sense impressions which impinge on his consciousness in an apparently random fashion. As Plessen points out, the whole poem is a theatrical performance<sup>25</sup> as the boulevard becomes a stage setting.

---

<sup>24</sup>This attitude matches his statement to Demy, *O.C.*, p. 250; "...j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée: je la regarde, je l'écoute: je lance un coup d'archet: la symphonie fait son remuement dans les profondeurs, on vient d'un bond sur la scène."

<sup>25</sup>Plessen, *Promenade*, pp. 219-220, says: "Nous pouvons isoler un premier groupe où s'affirme la volonté du poète de se tenir à l'écart du spectacle observé, qu'il ne fait alors qu'admirer du dehors... premier en date..." *Bruxelles*!..Notons simplement que pour un poète plein d'imagination un boulevard peu animé peut être la scène où vont se jouer 'tout drame et toute comédie'." Bernard, *Oeuvres*, p. 441, n. 9, also remarks: "Rimbaud voit dans ce boulevard silencieux le lieu de réunion des scènes qu'il imagine déjà peut-être s'il songe à écrire des poèmes sur les 'villes'. Cette fin est toutefois extrêmement obscure."

The poem is therefore in many ways an exercise.<sup>26</sup> Under the new impetus given to his senses by his flight to Brussels, Rimbaud attempts to theatricalize reality. Chambers says, echoing Plessen and Adam,

Si le théâtre réussit à abolir l'opposition de la nature et de la culture, c'est que depuis longtemps la vision rimbaldienne dramatise la vie des hommes en même temps qu'elle théâtralise la nature. Ainsi dans "Bruxelles"...<sup>27</sup>

It seems that one should drift with Rimbaud's images to enjoy the spectacle, rather than attempt to read into them hidden allusions to his private life in Brussels and thus risk missing his perceptual impression of this town.<sup>28</sup>

The initial impression is one of vibrant purplish-red colour stretching out as far as a fabulous, classical edifice. The mention of Jupiter enlarges the scene far beyond the real Brussels, to render it mythical, grandiose, dazzling, remote in time. Perhaps the sight of these real neo-classical palaces and the park, inspired their identification with Jupiter, god of the earth and the sky, whose site in Rome was the Capitol, also situated on a hill, as were these palaces and the park in

<sup>26</sup>Rimbaud, in "Alchimie du Verbe", O.C., pp. 106 and 110, speaking of his former composition and life said: "Ce fut d'abord une étude," and "Je devins un opéra fabuleux." Both statements seem to apply to this poem, which illustrates this account.

<sup>27</sup>Ross Chambers, "Rimbaud et le regard créateur", Saggi e Ricerche de Letteratura Francese X (1969), p. 223.

<sup>28</sup>Jacques Borel, noting the attempt at objectivity by Verlaine in "Ariettes oubliées" and "Paysages Belges", notes that it is still possible to "saisir des allusions à l'événement", however, "C'est là précisément ramener cette poésie à ce dont elle se détourne, expression d'un fait divers, aveu sentimental, effusion lyrique; lui faire dire ce qu'elle se refuse à dire...; bref, aller à contre-courant d'un art de sensation et d'impression où, l'événement aboli, les apparences du monde dénouées, c'est, non point la réalité qui devient imaginaire, mais l'imaginaire qui apparaît seul comme réalité." Verlaine, O.C., I, 223-224, "Notice" par Jacques Borel. These remarks apply equally to this poem.

Brussels. "Toi" possibly relates to Jupiter, mingling his intensely blue skies with the colours of the flowers. The qualification of "presque de Sahara", disconcertingly enlarges the horizon further, on an exotic, remote, yet geographically real plane, and Sahara blue could refer to the cloudless blue skies over the desert. Brussels encompasses all these places and thus becomes a shifting world.

The second stanza examines the vegetation and animal life which is merged with the architecture of this town, which is a curious and disorientating mixture of local plants (like the roses) exotic plants (like the lianas) and unreal plants (like the "sapin du soleil"). It is probable that flocks of birds would inhabit the parks, but hardly the widow finch,<sup>29</sup> an exotic African bird frequently kept in aviaries for its plumage; hence the cage, suggested by the twining of the proliferating vegetation. The words "jeux enclos" are very ambiguous suggesting private games but also theatrical spotlights, supplied by the sun. As in the first quatrain, there is thus an enlarging of local horizons, but also, metamorphosis of these birds, by the dual meaning of "troupes", into actors. The exclamation "ô iaio, iaio!..." echoes onomatopoeically the joyous birdsong, but is also a borrowing of a cry of triumph from Aristophanes,<sup>30</sup> author of The Birds. Thus the boulevard becomes a stage for this chorus

<sup>29</sup>As Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 937-938, says, certain critics have related this widow in a cage, this madwoman, to Verlaine, even the "fenêtre du duc" to the headquarters of the Brussels police. Fongaro, "Les Echos", p. 265, resumes all these theories with which he agrees.

<sup>30</sup>Aristophanes, Lysistrata, ll. 1299 and Ecclesiazousae, ll. 1180. The Birds was a theatrical fantasy.

dressed as birds, or these birds seem to be a chorus of actors. They echo the mood of the poet or narrator, as well as the atmosphere of the town, which is joyful and triumphant.

The dash returns the narrator to the scenes before his eyes: "calmes maisons" which instantly suggest their former dramas, "anciennes passions!". The scenes and actors in some of these passions are then evoked rather elliptically. "Kiosque de la Folle par affection", could be a summer-house glimpsed in the park and related to Juana la loca, whose husband, Philippe le Beau held his court in Brussels, just as much as it could be Ophelia, suggested by Adam.<sup>31</sup> The view through the roses of the balconies which adorned many of these houses, suggests Juliet, Shakespeare's heroine presumably.<sup>32</sup>

The next quatrain is interesting in that the narrator, after the dash, following the pattern in this poem, seems to come out of his reverie and embroider on the previous free association without explaining it. Thus, "La Juliette" is repeated, then the machinery of this staging is allowed to show, "ça rappelle l'Henriette". The method of "la pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant" is bare. "L'Henriette" remains a mystery however. It does rhyme with Juliette, suggested presumably by the

---

<sup>31</sup>Adam, in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 938, n. 2.

<sup>32</sup>Romeo and Juliet was in the repertory of the Théâtre de la Monnaie, Marcel Vanhamme, Bruxelles: de bourg rural à cité mondiale. Anvers, Bruxelles: Mercurius, 1968, p. 357 (hereafter: Vanhamme, Bruxelles).

balconies. Also, there were several Henriettes in French and Belgian history as well as in literature.<sup>33</sup> The fact that only a comma separates this name from the mention of the railway station does not necessarily indicate, as several critics suppose, that it is the name of a railway station. In the whole poem, punctuation is used for dramatic or rhythmic purposes rather than to maintain clarity in syntax. It is true that La Gare du Midi in Brussels was situated in fields with a spacious flowery square in front of it, while La Gare du Nord was situated on the hill near the botanical gardens and this boulevard.<sup>34</sup> The poetry and promise of this station is more important than its exact name or identification. It is "charmante", perhaps because it leads to enchanting horizons, perhaps because it is in the heart of a mountain amid fruitful nature, where a thousand blue devils dance in the air. This last phrase is infinitely suggestive and inexplicable. The blue shapes and dancing movement, by analogy with earlier Belgian poems, together with their merging into natural scenery, suggest this station's offering of fulfillment and happiness.

Another visually suggestive, harmonic, but incomprehensible

---

<sup>33</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 441, n. 6, mentions Gengoux's claim that the source of these lines was "La Voie lactée" from Banville's Cariatides, where Molière is represented by Henriette from the Femmes Savantes, Shakespeare by Juliette. She dismisses this source since she believes that "l'Henriette" is a railway station. However, despite the fact that it may be a coincidence that both poets, needing theatrical allusions, choose these rhyming names, given Rimbaud's previous uses of Banville as a source, it seems likely that Gengoux has found the correct wisp of memory and literary inspiration.

<sup>34</sup>Vanhamme, Bruxelles, pp. 288-290, describes these stations in some detail.

quatrain follows. The green bench is a stage property of the boulevard. The "paradis d'orange" meant a sheltered harbour from a storm in seventeenth century French, and with this meaning, is an analogy for Rimbaud's own feelings about Brussels. However, "le paradis" is also a gallery in a theatre where a white Irishwoman singing with the guitar would be more appropriate. The babbling children and twittering caged birds heard in the Guyanese dining room are inexplicable, despite Duflandre's explanation that a girls' school was situated on this boulevard.<sup>35</sup> These further references to nationality again widen the horizons of this scene, making it still more exotic. Since the adjectives themselves have pleasing sounds as assonances, and mingle with the evocation of the sounds of human voices, birds and a musical instrument, this is sufficient explanation for their presence here.

The eye falling on the anonymous Duke's window leads to references to snail poison or perhaps a plant. Since snails are not poisonous, perhaps Rimbaud recalls a slow poison used or suffered by some Duke. This reference leads to the box-wood "ici-bas", a spatial reference, which signals the spectator's return to his actual physical situation on the boulevard, after his free mental wandering.

The boulevard is greeted ecstatically in a simple child-like phrase, this happiness being allied with silence as in "La Maline". Only in this last stanza does the poet concentrate on the initial setting. In a reverent apostrophe to the Boulevard du Régent, he acknowledges that

---

<sup>35</sup>Mentioned by Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 938, n. 6.

now that his mental creation of his "opéra fabuleux" has ceased, this silent boulevard was the scene of all possible drama and comedy, gathered from all parts to be concentrated here by the poet. It is therefore admirable and capable of giving happiness in its own right. As in the first Belgian sonnets, there is no disillusionment in this return to reality, merely a happy stupor.

The poem is localized specifically in the stage setting. This boulevard is seen and heard intermittently by the narrator. He uses its real architecture, climate, vegetation, birdlife, perhaps the rare passer-by, as points of departure for fabulous metamorphoses and wide-ranging associations in time and space. These elements are all congregated here for the sensuous enjoyment of the passive audience or director of this entertainment. The language of the poem in its sensuous detail, use of colours, words with ambiguous meanings, use of local vocabulary like "fesses" (flexible stems), is designed to enchant and disorientate the reader, above all to convey an impression of joy in life in a world offering endless possibilities. Such is Brussels - a town where nature and man's creations have merged to create a harmonious world, where men animals and flowers sing their joy under the sun and blue sky.

Adam feels that "Est-elle almée?..." (O.C., p. 83) is another impression of Brussels, and that since it bears so many similarities to "Bruxelles" they are obviously contemporary, written in 1872.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 937: "...il convient de rapprocher "Bruxelles" et "Est-elle almée?" qui est, nous le verrons, la description d'une grande ville, Bruxelles évidemment, et qui contient même une phrase littéralement semblable à celle-ci dans "Bruxelles": 'C'est trop beau! trop!' Or l'autographe de "Est-elle almée?" porte une date, et c'est 'juillet 1872'".



It is true that there are similarities in these two poems, although this one is not a direct continuation or a part of "Bruxelles", since this time Rimbaud is experimenting with the hendecasyllabic line, loosely assonanced.

Adam's summary of the poem is restricted to the first quatrain. He explains the second quatrain with Delahaye's statement that Rimbaud comes to himself and feels obliged to explain his imaginative flight. This was a common occurrence in "Bruxelles" after the dash, although, as here, the gloss led to more free association rather than a clarification. Adam explains:

Une almée est une danseuse de l'Inde. L'expression peut paraître obscure, mais les deux vers qu'elle introduit l'expliquent. "Elle", c'est la grande ville que Rimbaud a sous les yeux. Nous sommes en pleine nuit. Au lever du jour, la grande ville s'évanouira-t-elle comme les mouvements des danseuses orientales, des danseuses-fleurs?<sup>37</sup>

Is Brussels actually seen at night in the first quatrain? It would appear that the narrator is observing the town from a height and seeing a panoramic view. He is detached yet enchanted by its metamorphoses. It is this physical distance, rather than mental drifting, which allows him to visualize its shape and pulsating movement as an exotic dancer, an enormous, dazzling flower. He wonders if the evening, ("les premières heures bleues" surely by analogy with "les soirs bleus d'été" is the evening), will cause the town to wither and die, as do flowers. Alternatively, when it is illuminated, will it consume itself like a firework? At the moment it is a dazzling vista, "splendide" being Rimbaud's epithet.

---

<sup>37</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 938-939, n. 1.

for towns which attract him.

The second quatrain is cryptic. "C'est nécessaire" certainly leads to theatrical or fairytale imagery of lighted festivals at night with throngs of costumed figures, all set on the high seas. Perhaps this stanza conveys the dual nature of this enormously prosperous, vital city. By day or night it is a festival, bringing enchanting entertainment.

Mounin, speaking of the development of modern poetry says:

...De Poe à Breton -- la poésie s'est donné des règles qui contenaient en elles-mêmes une possibilité d'échec inaperçue: en condamnant le discursif, le didactique, le narratif et le descriptif, pour ne dire croyait-elle que le vécu individuel le plus authentique...on éliminait de plus en plus les références à la situation.<sup>38</sup>

His remark applies to these two impressions of Brussels. Brussels is the backdrop for Rimbaud's joy, for sensuous pleasure, ultimately for his own "opéra fabuleux", produced by his vital drive for metamorphosis and wider horizons. He selects analogies for his state of mind from the stimulating sights or sounds which lead to free, imaginative and essentially private associations. The poem is therefore hermetic. However, by experiencing the poem as entertainment, the reader also senses the joy, the soaring sensuous excitement of this city. Despite the radical change in mode of expression between these two poems, and his earlier Belgian sonnets, now repudiated by his letter of June, 1871, to Demeny, the Belgian towns are still seen as sources of repose, sensuous pleasure, opening of new vistas and freedom from the restrictions of society. They

---

<sup>38</sup> Georges Mounin, Communication poétique, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p. 269.

are still characteristically bathed in blue light, sunny sources of fulfillment.

"O saisons, ô châteaux..." (O.C., pp. 88-89), has been identified by several critics with Rimbaud's Belgian experiences. While it is not a town poem, it does indicate Rimbaud's soaring joy, located specifically in his abandonment to Verlaine's physical love. As Adam said, the meaning could not be clearer.<sup>39</sup> Its radiant joy, its expansive, simple acceptance of physical delight equated with complete happiness, indicates that this poem might have been composed in Belgium, although the Ardennais or Walloon expression "le coq gaulois" does not necessarily confirm this as true.

In "Alchimie du verbe" (O.C., p. 111), where this poem appears in a modified form, Rimbaud recounts: "Le Bonheur! Sa dent, douce à la mort, m'avertissait au chant du coq, - ... - dans les plus sombres villes." The Belgian towns were in reality often gloomy, industrialized conglomerations. Rimbaud's supreme joy is rooted in the presence of Verlaine which transforms these towns, so that the analogies selected from them express his own happiness in Verlaine. The town is a back-drop or treasure house of stimuli and analogies.

As in the first set of Belgian sonnets, there is no desire for metaphysical transcendence, no interest in society at large nor in social causes. Rimbaud's former, rather puritanical justification of his sexual desires by the linking of the need for free sexual expression with the need for social and political and religious liberation has disappeared,

---

<sup>39</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 947.

as has all aggressivity and hidden obscenity. This poem is truly erotic for its own sake and not for purposes of social criticism. The poet accepts the necessity of true commitment even as far as foreseeing possible future pain. Love and sexual expression are now seen as a personal, private experience for personal happiness.

+

+

+

Critics have identified references to the Belgian towns and experiences in two of the Illuminations. In "Vies III" (O.C., p. 129), the phrase: "A quelque fête de nuit dans une cité du Nord, j'ai rencontré toutes les femmes des anciens peintres.", appears in a catalogue of places where the narrator has acquired his knowledge of the world. This statement is seen by d'Eaubonne as a recollection of the fair-ground at Saint-Gilles, visited by Verlaine and Rimbaud in 1872.<sup>40</sup> Adam relates this phrase to the Flemish paintings seen possibly in museums in Antwerp.<sup>41</sup> However, the most credible view is postulated by Bernard who feels that despite their underlay of biographical experience, all these places are symbolic.<sup>42</sup> This phrase symbolizes his understanding, perhaps gained in Brussels, of the meaning of physical pleasure. In the context of this

<sup>40</sup> Françoise d'Eaubonne, Verlaine et Rimbaud, Paris: Albin Michel, 1960, p. 124: "...Le champ de foire s'appelle Saint-Gilles... Tandis que devant les visages féminins qui dansent entre les estaminets, Téniers, Rembrandt et Breughels descendus de leur cadre, Rimbaud enregistre: 'A une fête, dans une cité du Nord, j'ai rencontré les femmes de tous les anciens peintres.'" (Hereafter, d'Eaubonne, Verlaine et Rimbaud.)

<sup>41</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p. 987, n. 2: "On peut imaginer que Rimbaud veut dire simplement que dans cette ville qu'il ne nomme pas -- serait-ce Anvers? -- il a vu au musée des portraits des femmes de quelques anciens peintres."

<sup>42</sup> Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 491, n. 9: "Mais les détails du texte

poem, the poet deliberately leaves this phrase open to varied interpretations, the whole catalogue suggesting the acquisition of universal and somewhat esoteric knowledge anywhere in the world. Identification of this place and these women is contradictory to the poet's aim of generalizing personal experiences.

Adam very convincingly remarks that "Phrases" (O.C., pp. 131-32), appears to be composed of two separate poems.<sup>43</sup> Several critics recognize the second poem, with its phrases separated by asterisks, as the re-creation of memories of the Belgian towns. Chadwick and Bernard see the first section as an evocation of a Belgian or Ardennais landscape seen in a rainy July. Chadwick says:

Il est impossible de croire que cette description impressionniste d'une scène champêtre typiquement flamande date de juillet 1874, car à ce moment-là Rimbaud se trouvait à Londres... En juillet 1872, au contraire, il vagabondait à travers la campagne de la France du nord et de Belgique en compagnie de Verlaine.<sup>44</sup>

The localization in the French or Flemish Ardennes is possible. As Bernard notes, the retting of flax was an Ardennais activity,<sup>45</sup> although Rimbaud may be using a technical term to indicate that the flowers are blighted by the cold drizzle. The fact that Rimbaud was in Belgium in 1872 does not automatically date this poem from this time. In fact, the analogies of a dismal, blighted landscape, with its overcast sky, the

---

sont beaucoup plus fantaisistes que dans le texte précédent, et peut-être symboliques, bien que pouvant rappeler certaines données biographiques..."

<sup>43</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 989.

<sup>44</sup>Chadwick, Etudes sur Rimbaud, p. 112.

<sup>45</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 497, n. 6.

taste of ashes in the air, the cynical question of why it is not already Christmas, all reflect the lonely mood of the poet. Similarly, these elements tend to indicate that if this is a recollection of Belgium, then this is a much later poem, when the sunny idyll with Verlaine had been destroyed. It is a new vision of Belgium, echoing the misery of "Ouvriers" and "Dimanche", both reminiscent of London.

The phrase, "Pendant que les fonds publics s'écoulent en fêtes de fraternité, il sonne une cloche de feu rose dans les nuages", is a beautiful isolated image, not localized. Several critics see it as an evocation of the "Fête nationale" in Belgium, either on July 14th or 21st, in 1872.<sup>46</sup>

This impression of public festivity, by its recollection of joy and its colour symbolism, recalls the joyous Belgian towns of earlier poems. Enclosed with these other phrases which evoke a dismal, solitary, blighted existence under a dismal northern skyline, it would appear, that this phrase also evokes a Belgium which has changed its nature as

<sup>46</sup> Guiraud, "L'Evolution", pp. 209-210, says: "Cette cloche de feu rose dans les nuages, ces fonds publics s'écoulant en fêtes de fraternité, c'est un feu d'artifice de 14 juillet qui rapproché des "fleurs rouies", de "la bruine des canaux par les champs" désigne une ville du nord de la France.

Or le 14 juillet 1872 le couple venait de quitter Paris et gagnait la Belgique à pied; il se trouvait ce jour-là très vraisemblablement à Arras ou à Charleville. Il pourrait s'agir aussi du 21 juillet, fête nationale belge, à Bruxelles.

Le 14 juillet 1873, Rimbaud est à Bruxelles blessé, et d'ailleurs la rupture est consommée; le 14 juillet 1874 il est à Londres avec Germain Nouveau. Juillet 1872 est donc la seule date qu'on peut fixer pour ce texte, et cela en conformité avec l'évolution stylistique." Chadwick, Etudes sur Rimbaud, p. 112, agrees. Both Adam, Rimbaud, O.C., pp. 189-190, and Bernard, Oeuvres, pp. 496-497, agree with the localization and season without specifying a date.

the poet's state of mind and emotional situation have changed. He is now lonely, alienated, bitter, apathetic, detached from the public joy. Despite the critics' dismissal of July 1873 as a possible date of composition, it would appear to be a likely date for these recollections, if they reflect biography. The poet is once more on the outside.

+

+

+

The Belgian towns are then different in essence from both Paris and Charleville. As Plessen observes:

...en allant à Paris le jeune poète est à la recherche du centre de la vie (et la vraie vie c'est la littérature telle qu'on la pratique à Paris), tandis que, s'il se dirige vers la Belgique, il espère échapper à l'encerclement étouffant de la patrie française.<sup>47</sup>

Charleville was alienating, he could not find communion nor communication there. While nature, dreams of an "ailleurs" over the horizon or in a mythic, golden age, blue and sunny in both cases, were some compensation,<sup>48</sup> he soon concluded that the true cause of his own unhappiness, lay in oppression by Church and State, whose seat of operation was Paris. Anarchic revolution through physical violence and through poetry was necessary. He was drawn to the centre for both activities.

As Plessen says:

La Commune est la plus évidente manifestation de ces fissures qui menaçaient le vieil édifice social. Mais la science, elle aussi, avait ouvert des brèches béantes dans la traditionnelle vision du monde... le poète sera incapable de croire à la belle ordonnance du monde

<sup>47</sup>Plessen, Promenade, p. 283, n. \*\*.

<sup>48</sup>See "Soleil et chair" and the visions of "Les Poètes de sept ans."

et de l'espace telle que la concevait encore le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle avant les grandes découvertes astronomiques et physiques.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, like all men of his age, Rimbaud is a man who has lost his centre. He is a frontiersman.

It was after the disappointments of Paris as centre, in 1870, and 1872, that Rimbaud sought the Belgian towns. There he selected and created his own stable, sunny, cosy world, by excluding all but the sources of joy, by placing himself on the inside and refusing to look out at society, by theatricalizing both nature and the town to create his own insulated, ideal world. Belgium is in many ways a day-dream, despite the reality of his presence there and the allusions to real sights. It is certainly a compensatory refuge from the harsh realities of Paris and Charleville, a rejection of both these towns. As a man in search of his centre, Rimbaud creates it or finds it on a physical level in the Belgian towns. Poems like "Bruxelles" indicate Rimbaud's increasing preoccupation with his inner world, a search for a centre, or an ideal town, in his own mind. The later prose poems continue this process of interiorization.

---

<sup>49</sup>Plessen, Promenade, p. 283.



#### IV

##### THE COMPOSITE TOWNS OF THE PROSE POEMS

In Un Mangeur d'opium, the mind is compared to a palimpsest whose successive layers of impressions are never effaced, with the difference that each layer of experience or each sentiment registered in the human mind is the product of an individual consciousness. However disparate these impressions may appear, if they were revealed simultaneously, the pattern of their arrangement would form a harmonious whole. De Quincey mentions possible causes of simultaneous revival of all these layers of impressions, some of which have been suggested as causes of Rimbaud's inspiration in the Illuminations:

'Oui, lecteur, innombrables sont les poèmes de joie ou de chagrin qui se sont gravés successivement sur le palimpseste de votre cerveau,... leurs couches incessantes se sont accumulées et se sont, chacune à son tour, recouvertes d'oubli. Mais à l'heure de la mort, ou bien dans la fièvre, ou par les recherches de l'opium, tous ces poèmes peuvent reprendre de la vie et de la force. Ils ne sont pas morts, ils dorment.<sup>1</sup>

This extended metaphor aptly describes the form and composition of Rimbaud's mind as it is revealed in the Illuminations and to a certain extent in Une Saison en enfer.<sup>2</sup> These prose poems appear to be palimpsest

---

<sup>1</sup>Charles Baudelaire, Un Mangeur d'opium, VIII, "Le Palimpseste", Oeuvres Complètes, Paris: Gallimard, 1954, p. 541, (hereafter, O.C.).

<sup>2</sup>It is not suggested that this revelation of the possibilities of the mind in Baudelaire's translation of De Quincey and in Les Paradis artificiels is the direct inspiration for Rimbaud's experiments in composition of new poetry. He certainly knew this work and admired Baudelaire as "le premier voyant, roi des poètes, un vrai Dieu." (O.C., p. 253.)

pages of Rimbaud's impressions of his existence with all their layers simultaneously made visible. They form complex yet coherent patterns under the impetus of some creative drive or liberating force.<sup>3</sup> As a product of Rimbaud's mind, each poem has its own internal coherence. Ultimately, what is perhaps revealed in these poems is a complex mind and existence.

In the Illuminations, Rimbaud's obsession with memories or visions of urban landscapes and experiences reaches its climax. Of these forty-two poems, seven are completely preoccupied with urban imagery.<sup>4</sup> Many others contain images of urban architecture, memories or evocations of towns either experienced personally or in reading, and earlier states of mind or attitudes occasioned by actual towns.<sup>5</sup> All these poems are important for our study of the town in Rimbaud's work. Their general format and the critical problems they present must be discussed here before we proceed to analyse

<sup>3</sup>In several of these poems, statements of the actual experience of revival of these layers of consciousness, or a resumé of his sources, method and hopes for his work are given. In "Veillées II", (O.C., p. 139), he speaks of "--Rêve intense et rapide de groupes sentimentaux avec des êtres de tous les caractères parmi toutes les apparences", which seems to sum up the scope of the vision and state of mind required for this creation. In "Vies IV", (O.C., p. 148), the speaker exhorts an unknown creator: "Mais tu te mettras à ce travail: toutes les possibilités harmoniques et architecturales s'émouvront autour de ton siège. Des êtres parfaits, imprévus, s'offriront à tes expériences. Dans tes environs affluera rêveusement la curiosité d'anciennes foules et de luxes oisifs. Ta mémoire et tes sens ne seront que la nourriture de ton impulsion créatrice. Quand au monde, quand tu sortiras, que sera-t-il devenu? En tout cas, rien des apparences actuelles."

<sup>4</sup>"Ouvriers", "Les Ponts", "Ville", "Villes, Ce sont les villes...", (hereafter: "Villes I"), "Villes, L'acropole officielle...", (hereafter: "Villes II"), "Métropolitain" and "Promontoire".

<sup>5</sup>"Après le déluge", "Enfance", "Parade", "Being Beauteous", "Vies", "Départ", "A une raison", "Phrases", "Ornières", "Vagabonds", "Veillées", "Aube", "Fleurs", "Fête d'hiver", "Fairies I", "Jeunesse", "Scènes", "Soir historique", "Bottom", "Dévotion", and "Démocratie".

their individual aspects.

Hackett, comparing them to earlier town poems, remarks that "...the treatment is more general, as is indicated by the titles themselves, ...Instead of the localised tableaux of the early poems, we have vast kaleidoscopic visions."<sup>6</sup> Contrary to his early poetry, his more general treatment and the amalgamation of disparate imagery in these poems prevents them from being neatly labelled with the name of a town, or placed within a framework of biographical detail. They are composite poems and composite towns, and moreover, as Rimbaud cried in "Nuit de l'enfer", "Décidément, nous sommes hors du monde."

The palimpsest does not yield up its images as simply as they were originally recorded. As they latch on to other apparently unrelated impressions, this superposition produces new patterns and relationships, inevitably distorting the original matter. These obsessive and composite urban metaphors, liberated from the mind which has recorded them, are Rimbaud's creations of new towns.

Dissension among Rimbaud's critics also reaches its climax with the Illuminations, and to a lesser extent with Une Saison en enfer. Attempting to classify these somewhat chaotic and disorientating syntheses, in which memories of the real landscape of the world seem to metamorphose into original, otherworldly visions, they focus on two aspects of the problem: the dating of these poems, and the disentangling of the real from the visionary aspects of these poems.

As our chronology indicates, when Rimbaud probably began the Illuminations, and certainly Une Saison en enfer, he had visited London,

---

<sup>6</sup>Hackett, "Splendides villes", p. 48.

which is recognized by critics as the primary urban source in these poems. It is possible that by the time he had completed them, he had travelled as far as Java, and that this accounts for his oriental landscapes.<sup>7</sup> While it is in the Illuminations that Rimbaud's verbal geographic horizons widen to name towns and especially countries from all over the world, he had never visited Damascus, Carthage, Brooklyn, Japan, Byzantium or Africa, any more than he had seen the sea when he composed "Le Bateau ivre" or examined the exotic flora mentioned in "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs". These towns and countries are evoked with equal conviction and effect as the supposed "real sources".

While irrefutable recognition of certain towns in the poetry would help to ascertain the date of composition of the poem in relation to Rimbaud's travels, there is no evidence in the poems as to whether these details are memories or immediate transcriptions of experience. Even this much evidence of source is therefore of limited help in exact dating.

In the Illuminations, the same group of urban features has been identified by different critics as corresponding closely to several very different towns.<sup>8</sup> It would seem that an air of versimilitude is the most

<sup>7</sup>Adam, "L'Enigme", p. 226, calls the Illuminations, "...le livre des souvenirs de Rimbaud le voyageur...", and relates "Démocratie" to Java.

<sup>8</sup>"Promontoire", (O.C., pp. 148-9), evokes Scarborough, according to De Graaf, "Scarborough", pp. 91-3, and Underwood, "R. et l'Ang.", pp. 31-2, who also sees a comparison to the new London embankments. Alice Halicka, Hier: Souvenirs, Paris: Editions du Pavois, 1946, pp. 187-8, sees in the same poem, "...une description de New-York prophétique, surprenante de vérité. Chaque phrase correspond à une réalité." She proceeds to analyse the poem and match each detail with a New York landmark. In a general way, they do match. Roland Mortier, "Deux rêveries devant le promontoire: Hugo et Rimbaud", Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Bruxelles, 48 (1970), pp. 123-135, finds a literary source in Hugo's obsession with promontories as gateways to the infinite. (Hereafter: Mortier, "Deux rêveries".)

one can expect as indication of source or memory. Rimbaud's sources are not used for a guide-bookish description, but rather they are deliberately unidentified and presented as unknown or fantastic places, and combined with other strange or fictitious elements to create new vistas for the imagination. The identification of these sources does not explain the impact of these poems. The intermingling of "real" with "imaginary" is the essence of this poetry, as is the disorientation in time and space effected by this deliberate non-localization.

The final answers to these questions of dates and sources are not in sight. Fortunately, the essential questions posed by this study can all be answered independently of our knowledge of exact dates of composition or exact sources. How is the town presented by Rimbaud in each poem? What are the areas of urban geography which interest him? What analogy does this urban imagery have with the contents of Rimbaud's mind? What does the town represent for Rimbaud in each poem? What is the role of urban imagery in the poem and perhaps in his concept of his poetry?

A parable from Baudelaire's translation of De Quincey suggests the necessary approach to the towns in Rimbaud's prose poems:

Un homme de génie, mélancolique, misanthrope, et voulant se venger de l'injustice de son siècle, jette un jour au feu toutes ses oeuvres encore manuscrites. Et comme on lui reprochait cet effroyable holocauste fait à la haine, qui, d'ailleurs, était le sacrifice de toutes ses propres espérances, il répondit: 'Qu'importe? ce qui était important, c'était que des choses fussent créées; elles ont été créées, donc elles sont.'<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, since Rimbaud's town poems and images have been created, they

---

<sup>9</sup>Baudelaire, O.C., p. 541.

exist. However ephemeral the vision, inspiration or interest may have been for Rimbaud, at the moment when he recorded his images, they were of vital importance to him. This poetic legacy interests us as a permanent source of suggestion and poetic vision.

Since these are composite towns which are remembered or created in these prose poems, classification of the town poems presents some difficulty and shifts according to the aspect of the town selected as classifier. The town poems can be considered from the viewpoint of all the categories of urban geography selected earlier. Similarly, as in the early poems, these town poems are also used for purposes of theatricalization of reality, for social commentary, for escape and therapy, for comment on nature and the natural, as an analogy to personal emotions or as a demonstration of his poetic discoveries. In these later poems, given the variety yet anonymity of the town features of each poem, there is the added area of discussion of Rimbaud's attitude to a certain type of town rather than to a particular town.

It was decided that each of the poems completely preoccupied with urban imagery, ("Ouvriers", "Les Ponts", "Ville" , "Villes I", "Villes II", "Métropolitain" and "Promontoire"),<sup>10</sup> would be analysed as an entity, despite the inevitable overlapping of comment within these poems. The overlaps

---

<sup>10</sup>Py, Illuminations, p. XVI, asserts: "...les nécessaires recherches chronologiques n'auront de chance d'être fécondes que si elles portent non sur l'ensemble arbitraire des Illuminations, mais sur chacun des morceaux étudiés en lui-même." The same statement applies to the town in all its aspects in this poetry.

will be taken to indicate obsessive preoccupation with this aspect of the towns in this poetry. This study of these seven poems will constitute the next section of this chapter.

Since so many other poems in the Illuminations have some reference to some aspect of the town listed above, in the section following these seven analyses, the rest of the prose poems, as well as the verse poems previously described, will be aligned under the headings of urban geography and role of the town in the poems, and the findings from these analyses of the seven town poems summarized under these headings. This will give a thorough and statistically complete view of the urban themes and imagery of these composite poems.

The concluding section of this chapter will be largely speculative, attempting to offer answers as to how and why Rimbaud might have produced or arrived at these astonishing views of towns in some of these prose poems.

+

+

+

Since Rimbaud gave no indication of their order, the seven town poems will be followed through in this section according to the order in which they appear in the Oeuvres Complètes, which is in fact that of Fénéon from the first edition.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>Lacoste, Illuminations, Painted Plates, p. 139, quotes from a letter from Fénéon of April 1939: "Persuadé, à tort ou à raison, que le rang des feuillets à moi livrés avait varié au gré des manipulations qu'ils avaient subies, pourquoi me serais-je fait scrupule d'arranger à mon goût ce jeu de cartes hasardeux?" This statement underlines the discontinuous nature of these prose poems.

Adam feels that critics have read far too much into "Ouvriers", (O.C., p. 133), by placing it in a particular country, in a particular year, and by relating it to some episode in Rimbaud's life, while that which should attract our attention is the presence of a poem in the Illuminations which appears to have no symbolic meaning or deep message.<sup>12</sup> It is true that from the point of view of vocabulary and syntax, it is one of the most accessible of the Illuminations. Contrary to Adam's assessment, it presents a social situation widespread in nineteenth century industrial towns. This depiction of a particular instance would seem to broach a moral or social issue.<sup>13</sup> The plural title, without an article, already

---

<sup>12</sup>Adam, in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 991. Many critics have attempted to date and localize this poem. Chadwick, Etudes sur Rimbaud, pp. 110-111, dates it 1873 when Rimbaud was in London in February and quotes The Times to prove that there was unusual flooding of the Thames in January 1873. Starkie, Rimbaud, pp. 314-315, agrees with the localization but dates it 1874 when Rimbaud and Nouveau apparently worked for a time in a cardboard-box factory. She speculates that Rimbaud set up house with a girl after Nouveau's departure. Fowlie, Rimbaud, p. 188, finds it: "A fairly realistic picture which Rimbaud knew intimately of the north, of the Ardennes and Belgium."

Certain details do suggest London; its sprawling mass as it continually devoured its countryside because of its booming industry, population and row housing and the incredible rags worn by the poor, which continually struck foreign visitors. For example: Doré and Jerrold, London: A Pilgrimage, London: Grant and Co., 1872, pp. 35-36, (hereafter: Doré, London), sketched and remarked: "An English crowd is almost the ugliest in the world; because the poorer classes are but the copyists in costume of the rich...the poverty of the wearers has a startling abject air. It is, as I heard a stranger remark, 'misery advertised'".

<sup>13</sup>The whole poem seems to have a similar message to that of Emile in his farewell to Paris: "Adieu, donc, Paris, ville célèbre, ville de bruit, de fumée et de boue...Adieu Paris: nous cherchons l'amour, le bonheur, l'innocence; nous ne serons jamais assez loin de toi." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile, Paris: Garnier, 1964, IV, p. 444.



generalizes the couple to represent them as typical young workers in an industrial metropolis. Our inability to place the details of the landscape and climate in a definite context adds to this impression of a generalized situation. Words like "la ville", "la banlieue", despite their definite articles, and the fact that they are concrete nouns, are general and vague, and in no way evoke a particular landscape.

The urban geography is presented from the vantage point of a working boy walking in the outskirts of a large industrial town with his female companion. Since he describes her pathetic second-hand finery and her actions, she becomes part of the landscape, "une chère image", as well as representing the working poor of the town. The unseasonable south wind, the overcast sky, the recent floods are mentioned, as are memories of other climates known or dreamed about. The localization is sufficient to indicate a northern, industrial town on a river, polluted with smoke and noise, which steadily devours and blights its countryside and its citizens, who cannot escape it. As such, it resembles Verlaine's London, but also his Charleroi.<sup>14</sup> Its inhabitants are drawn to the town for opportunities for work, but become exiled and deprived there. It is the negating qualities of this town which force the boy's decision to escape to an unlocalized "elsewhere", in direct opposition by climate and atmosphere to this town.

---

<sup>14</sup> Verlaine, *O.C.*, I, "Sonnet boiteux", 510: "Londres fume et crie. O quelle ville de la Bible!" In a letter to Lepelletier, 24th September, 1872, *O.C.*, I, 988, he comments: "C'est très bien cette incroyable ville, noire comme les corbeaux et bruyante comme les canards,...immense, bien qu'au fond elle ne soit qu'un ramassis de petites villes cancanières, rivales, laides et plates,..." Charleroi was quoted in connection with the Belgian towns, p. 135.

The basic opposition is set up through a series of tensions in the seemingly simple narrative. While "La ville, avec sa fumée et ses bruits de métiers..." is not mentioned until the last paragraph, it is the essential psychological subject of the poem. It is a modern Moloch. The south wind creates the tensions as it reveals the diseased countryside, the poverty of the workers and the dissatisfaction of the boy by stirring his memories. It also reveals his isolation and alienation since it does not affect the woman in the same way. Although the narrator often speaks as "nous", implying communion with his companion, they cannot communicate. He guesses her feeling: "Cela ne devait pas fatiguer ma femme au même point que moi." Unlike the girl, he finds no source of hope or interest in the sight of the new life in the puddle. Instead, he remembers his past, his fruitless search for skills and strength in the towns, his summer despairs and escape from his childhood home. The town has not fulfilled his hopes and needs nor ever will. The opposition he invokes is not to this childhood home further south, but to "...l'autre monde, l'habitation bénie par le ciel et les ombrages!" It is a place whose sky blesses, a place which protects and comforts. It is not geographically specific, nor even real, but nonetheless condemns this town.

"Je" speaks directly to the reader. A mood of sad lassitude is produced for most of the poem. This mood is conveyed by the deliberately prosaic word order and the succession of flat direct statements. The use of "et" to produce two parallel phrases also enhances this effect of weariness, or monotony.<sup>15</sup> The parallel six syllable groups are like

---

<sup>15</sup>For example: "Un bonnet à rubans,/ et un foulard de soie"; "des jardins ravagés / et des près desséchés", which is also assonanced.

alexandrines, a rhythm which is so conventional that the echo of it in a prose poem gives a sense of confinement and dullness. The brief comment "C'était bien plus triste qu'un deuil", despite the comparison, is a statement of fact, with its penetrating sadness enhanced by the preponderance of monosyllables. It falls like a stone. The vocabulary also lays heavy stress on nouns and adjectives which emphasize collectively the desolation and debilitating effects of this atmosphere.<sup>16</sup> The device of the first person narrator gives an intimate, immediate tone, so that one witnesses the forming of the decision to escape this town.

The decisive tone of the end of the poem leads from the two animated invocations: "O cette chaude matinée de février", and "O l'autre monde...", which resemble primitive prayers by their verbless naming of the sources of inspiration. This animation contrasts with the deadened tone used to describe the town's realm. Also, the change of tense, from a past evocation to immediate future adds vitality. It is a carefully structured poem.

As Adam says, it is "Une scène très simple, émouvante et profondément humaine."<sup>17</sup> Bernard's remark that "Le réalisme de ce texte est, en tout cas, curieux, et tranche sur l'allure habituelle des Illuminations"<sup>18</sup> is justified. However, the realistic detail is not used to record a personal incident or to tell a story. "Je est un autre" here as much as in the more

<sup>16</sup>For example: "indigents absurds", "jeune misère", "triste", "deuil", "couvert", "vilains odeurs", "jardins ravagés", "prés desséchés", "fumée", "bruits", "misérables incidents", "désespoirs d'été", "horrible", "éloigné de moi", "avare pays", "des orphelins fiancés".

<sup>17</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. 991.

<sup>18</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 498, n. 1.

fantastic poems. A profound consciousness of the misery of the poor in an industrial town was necessary to compose this poem. It is the same consciousness and pity which speaks in "Délires I", "Vierge folle", (O.C., p. 103):

Parfois il parle, en une façon de patois attendri, de la mort qui fait repentir, des malheureux qui existent certainement, des travaux pénibles, des départs qui déchirent les coeurs. Dans les bouges où nous nous enivrons, il pleurerait en considérant ceux qui nous entouraient, bétail de la misère...

The couple is an example of this "bétail de la misère", of these "malheureux", and the causes of their condition are the "travaux pénibles" imposed by this industrial town. The poem echoes sentiments held by Rimbaud since the time of "Soleil et chair", that modern civilization and its towns are sterile or debilitating, an unsuitable growth medium for mankind.

Whether the impetus for this present statement was given by specific incidents and experiences in London, which is very possible, or by a distillation of observations in many industrial towns in Europe, the poem is a moral indictment and an expression of pity for the poor and the young, deprived of their rightful happiness and opportunities for growth in this desert which is the modern industrial town. Such towns are rejected in favour of another world, an oasis of clear sky and shade, not man-made but a suitable abode for man.

"Les Ponts" (O.C., pp. 133-134), was copied on the same sheet as "Ouvriers". Any thematic connection is doubtful, beyond a town location, and possibly an evocation of London, if many critics are correct.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>For example, Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 498, states: "Le terme de canal évoque Londres, ... et aussi la dimension de ces ponts tellement longs et légers... s'est-il inspiré d'une ancienne gravure?" Chadwick,

Verlaine and Nouveau, French visitors with Rimbaud to London, on their arrival both commented on the bridges, and dull, natural lighting. Doré made engravings not only of the Thames bridges but of the numerous foot-bridges spanning the canyon-like streets and the docks, another possible visual source if London is at the base of this vision.<sup>20</sup> Since most old cities owe their origins to their accessibility by river or sea, many towns visited by Rimbaud would have had numerous bridges spanning waterways.

The influence of a painting cannot be ruled out. The words "ciels" and "dessin" appear early, the arrangement of the scene in many ways resembles an artist's blocking out of masses and lines on canvas. Everything is unified by the look of the narrator, which implies that everything is there all at once, as in a picture. Rimbaud's desire to give the effect of a picture is a more probable explanation. Even if it

---

Etudes sur Rimbaud, p. 141, affirms: "L'eau large comme un bras de mer est évidemment la Tamise." Delahaye, Les Illuminations et Une Saison en enfer de Rimbaud, Paris: Messein, 1927, p. 92, finds resemblances to an old picture and thinks London is the source because of the light effects in the poem. Underwood, in his article, "R. et l'Ang.", p. 25, sees several London elements in this poem and also suggests that the scene was inspired by an illuminated manuscript seen in the British Museum. He mentions the guards noted by Verlaine, O.C., I, 1002, as the source of the "veste rouge" and "instruments de musique".

<sup>20</sup> Verlaine, O.C., I, 979, A Lepelletier, le 20 septembre, 1872: "Ponts véritablement babyloniens, avec des centaines de piles en fonte, grosses et hautes comme feu la Colonne... Il fait depuis mon arrivé un temps superbe... imagine un soleil couchant vu à travers un crêpe gris..." Jean Richepin, "G.N. et R.", p. 128, quotes a letter from Nouveau of March 26th 1874: "Londres, à l'arrivée, m'a produit une impression d'étouffement physique et moral; lumière d'éclipse, odeur de musc et de charbon dans les rues... n'en finissent pas, les ponts, et combien plus hauts de parapets qu'aux bords fleuris de la Seine;..." See also Doré, London, pp. 10, 13, 24, 32, and 131 respectively.

is a transposition of a real scene, it is staged, exaggerated to produce this impression of proliferating geometry. If it is imaginary, there is still no doubt that Rimbaud selected man-made urban forms as an analogy to the contents of his mind, or as the place he sought.

This urban scene is minutely described by an impersonal observer. He seems to have his vantage point in the centre of one of the bridges, to be looking down the wide waterway so that the banks, weighed down by the massive domed buildings, are on the edge of his vision. The sky is mentioned first, and in mineral terms. Then the eye moves to this strange tangle of bridge-like structures, and like that of a surveyor, carefully judges their form, angles of intersection, perspective and direction of movement. He strains to identify certain objects in the distance, carefully noting the ambiguities of their appearance and suggesting possible identifications. Figures are glimpsed, sounds heard, colours and lights mentioned. The eye moves downward to the water whose colours are noted. Abruptly the eye is dazzled by a white beam from the sky which seems to annihilate the whole scene. The impression is thus given that perhaps this complex scene was an optical illusion, something quite different from this urban landscape carefully described for its topography, architecture, climate, society, sounds, colour and movement.

The real problems for the reader occur when attempting to visualize this scene, to orientate himself with the aid of the reasoned details addressed to him by the narrator. It is a crowded scene and the whole effect is dizzying, as is a view from a high bridge. While the conviction remains throughout that the scene and each detail has special significance, one is left wondering what has been presented, how

one has been manipulated or guided in this poem, where everything moves and the mind tries unsuccessfully to take in everything at once.

Perhaps Wing explains best the total impact of the poem and arrives at a satisfactory explanation of the poet's purpose in presenting this scene:

The term comédie is metaphoric, suggesting that, while the vision shares the magic of spectacle, neither the external world transformed by the Poet's gaze nor the Poet's own impressions have any more enduring reality than the fatasmagoria of theatrical décor. In that sense the term points to the separation between text and external reference, as a result it indicates that the text is a self-sufficient semantic system. This suggests the independence of the verbal sequence from 'reality', and although this separation is viewed ironically, it is clearly the triumph of art; the word has disengaged itself from literal meaning and thereby acquired poetic value...The poem is its own subject, a performance in which the Poet displays his verbal skill. Behind the guise of self-denigrating irony, the reader is invited to admire the Poet's mastery.<sup>21</sup>

The town, therefore, is a gratuitous spectacle, giving material for verbal acrobatics which compel the reader to follow the dizzying motion, to peruse the harmonious patterns of its geometric structures, to perceive with as many senses as possible what are essentially beautiful, joyful images, to be finally transported into or stimulated by this world which is simply there, then simply vanishes. Richard makes a similar comment, although he feels that Rimbaud is also imparting a profoundly human vision of structures.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>Nathaniel Wing, "Rimbaud's 'Les Ponts', 'Parade', 'Scènes', : The Poem as Performance", *The French Review*, XLVI, no. 3 (February, 1973), p. 514, (hereafter: Wing, "Poem as Performance").

<sup>22</sup>J.-P. Richard, *Poésie et Profondeur*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1955, pp. 244-45, says: "Cette comédie, c'est-à-dire ce réel rongé d'irréalité, cette architecture dépourvue de conviction matérielle et tout au fond d'elle-même dénuée de sérieux...Rimbaud lui-même les traite paradoxalement à la fois comme des fantasmagories et comme des spectacles; il souligne le fait qu'elles sont issues de lui et que sans lui elles

The fact remains that for the duration of the poem, one accepts the scene described as materially present. Each impression is either in sharp focus, or it is implied that fuzziness of impression is caused by physical distance from the observer. Since verbal skill and creation, or manipulation of our perceptions by verbal means, are at issue, this presentation of urban imagery is worth closer scrutiny.

The form of the poem, typographically one dense paragraph, contributes to the impression of a crowded scene, a condensed series of rapid and unstable visual and auditory impressions. There is too much in too little space for the mind to take it in all at once. The syntax is clear enough. The sentences give an impression of hastily recorded detail. One has to move rapidly through them to follow the rapid movement of the narrator's eyes, as each element of the sentence supplies a new, often disconcerting detail. At the same time, there are long sentences, as decorated with details as the bridges themselves, and one has to follow them without pause to the end. For the most part, the verbs are verbs of motion. By following the direction of the movement indicated, one has the same impression as from a train, such is the rapidity of presentation of detail in space, that the scenery is moving, the observer immobile. Great differences in heights and depths are noted, the architectural and natural features are extraordinary in size, length

---

n'existeraient pas, mais c'est seulement afin de les projeter hors de lui sur un écran de verre ou de papier, et de les transformer en objets spectaculaires. En faux objets, par conséquent." "...Il jette en tout cas au milieu du gouffre l'horizontalité d'un réseau très humain. Et cette humanité s'affirme aussi dans leur minceur, leur longueur, leur fragilité, dans ce caractère toujours menacé qui est le leur, et qui apparaît si bien à travers Les Ponts...Ce sont des harmonies fixées et des lieux de passage: les seuls possibles arcs-en-ciel du paysage humain." ( hereafter: Richard, Poésie et profondeur ).



or form, producing a sense of wonder as well as of constantly changing focus. Irregular flashes of colour or light or reflections from shiny surfaces strike our eyes. The culmination of the poem is the ray of light which dazzles us and makes us lose our rather fragile bearings completely. The music evoked makes one strain to perceive or join the communal festivity.

In this poem, while the structures and other features described are all separately recognizable as possible elements of towns and could be found in real towns visited by Rimbaud, their treatment here creates a totally new town because of our altered perceptions, guided by the poet. It is a more beautiful, complex town than those we know. It conveys a sense of soaring joy and importance. It is "accessible à tous les sens", and whatever its origins, it belongs in the world of poetry rather than in nineteenth century Europe. It is created and erased for our pleasure and that of the narrator, and is thus a "paysage possible", an example of "le lieu et la formule" or the palimpsest of the mind, a "painted plate".

"Ville", (O.C., p. 134), was written on the same sheet as "Les Ponts", in the same hand. In many ways, this poem is a pendant to "Ouvriers". It evokes the atmosphere and social organization inside the industrial town. Even Adam seems to agree with the other critics that this poem contains elements of Rimbaud's experiences in and impressions of London.<sup>23</sup> It is true that many of the details in this poem can be

---

<sup>23</sup>Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 992, says that this poem: "...donne l'impression que Rimbaud a, cette fois, dans l'esprit une ville réelle, qu'il l'a même sous les yeux...". Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 500, states: "...Si l'on fait le part de la transposition, il ne paraît pas douteux que Rimbaud traduit ici des impressions londoniennes." Underwood, "Reflets

related to the London of the 1870s. Adam objects to this precise localization: that there were many churches ("monuments de superstition") in London; that the generalizations about the morals, education and customs of the population are patently false when applied to London. Neither one is really valid. If this is a transposition of impressions of London, as seems likely, this circumlocution does not necessarily indicate churches. Rimbaud, a poverty-stricken tourist, scarcely speaking English, mingling with the poorest classes, could well have gained this impression of the uniformity and simplicity of the masses. The fact the Rimbaud compares these millions of people to those of "le continent", the English term for cross-Channel Europe, indicates on the contrary, a London source. Similarly the word "cottage", used to give a slight, stylistic jolt by its foreignness, also provides a hint as to the localization.

---

anglais dans l'oeuvre de Rimbaud", Revue de la littérature comparée, 34 (1960), (hereafter: Underwood, "Reflets"), pp. 548 and 543 finds numerous indications of London as source, starting with the litotes, an anglicism borrowed from St. Paul because of Rimbaud's frequentation of Protestant churches. He points out that "métropole" was a very uncommon word in France in the 1870s, but metropolis was very commonly applied to London.

The English lack of good taste and formal planning was a common observation by French visitors. Verlaine, O.C., I, 993, wrote in October, 1872: "Regent Street, le beau quartier, --heu, heu!-- La Chaussée d'Antin du temps de Louis Philippe; étalages de province, passants mis comme des sauvages endimanchés, peu de voitures, pas d'equipages, aucun! En résumé, sauf son immensité et sa très-imposante activité commerciale, presque effrayante même pour tout autre qu'un Parisien, Londres est un immense Carpentras..." He enclosed a sketch showing the lack of sequence of house numbers in a street. His sensitive description of the London poor captures the hopelessness, resignation, wraith-like appearance and potential for violence suggested in Rimbaud's poem: "...tout est petit, mince, émacié, surtout les pauvres avec leur teint pâlot, leurs traits tirés, leurs longues mains de squelettes, leur barbiche rare, leurs tristes cheveux blondasses, frisottés naturellement par la floraison des choses faibles, telles que les pommes de terre énervées dans les caves, que les fleurs de serre, que tous les étiolements. Rien ne pourra dire la douceur infâme, résignée jusqu'à l'assassinat, de ces très peu intéressants mais très beaux, 'très distingués' misérables." O.C., I, 1012.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps rash to assert that this is Rimbaud's own impression of London, related directly to the reader, the equivalent of Verlaine's impressions in letters to Lepelletier and Blémont. It has the same relationship to reality as "Ouvriers", the poet speaking through the mouth of a tourist as a social commentator and therefore judge. He describes a town which is not specifically identified, and thus it becomes a generalization or distillation of industrial and foreign metropolises. The singular title implies not only that this is a single town, but also perhaps that this is the epitome of a certain type of town.

All the geographic details in this poem are there to illustrate his social commentary. The citizen who speaks is a temporary resident, with wider views on the outside world than its permanent inhabitants. He is isolated behind the window of his cottage. Not being one of them, he can report detachedly what he observes, although the detachment does not preclude a moral judgment. The town is a world of its own in an enclosed environment. It is thought to be modern, since it is a newly constructed town with no interest in or thought for ordered planning or traditional aesthetic taste in its architecture or décor. In fact, anything traditional or harmonious in design has been deliberately avoided. To that extent, it is a typical nineteenth century industrial town. Its citizens, like its little houses, are standardized, simple, lacking stimulus. They have nothing to learn from each other and therefore have no need to communicate. Since there are no monuments to any superstitious beliefs, life is materialistic with no higher aspirations. The poet, like the inhabitants, is not too unhappy, that is, apathetic or detached, because everything is uniform. There are no choices to be made and everyone

is as isolated as he is himself in his cottage. There is no love or community feeling here. Thus far, these comments have been delivered in an ironic, amused or bemused tone, setting up a certain degree of mystification, since the culture is so alien and unidentified.

The moral condemnation of this social organization is introduced with the mention of the climate. This "épaisse et éternelle fumée de charbon", is ironically described as "notre ombre des bois, notre nuit d'été". This is the same opposition to a comforting, comfortable (and here fairy-tale land by the oblique reference to A Midsummer Night's Dream) as in "Ouvriers". The final mention of the muddy streets has a similar negative emotional charge. The city is condemned. Out of the thick pall of coal smoke emerge spectres, optical illusions, perhaps. They represent the characteristics of this city which secretes the poisonous and debilitating air, or a transformation of these bland citizens into types, as much as the sociological survey of the first part of the poem found them to be a type. They are in either case products of this pestilential place.

The city is shown to be a dark, unhealthy place, peopled with types who have been deprived of their individuality to become degenerate, miserable, impoverished and apathetic puppets, incapable of communion, communication or aspirations. Death is their deliverance and the city is death-dealing to the body and soul. It is a desert without natural light or vegetation, a universe of isolation which causes loss of self and mute, animal-like resignation to its hell.

This bitter condemnation is carefully structured to portray this vision of modern industrial cities. It is a dense poem, in one paragraph, with tightly-packed images or details, giving the impression of a teeming enclosed universe. It begins deceptively in a lightly ironic, factual

tone, with a long meandering sentence which imitates the meandering sprawl of the city. The details of this poem are recounted in an ironic fashion and not identified. Further mystification is added by the circumlocution. The falsely informative "ici" is followed by other sociological commentary in the same generalizing, factual statements and emotionally detached tone. Then, without warning, we find ourselves engulfed in the long final sentence. It seems to recapitulate the content of the earlier remarks but this time, to evoke not what is seen and deduced rationally, but what is felt in the face of this reality. It is an inner, moral vision. The movement of this sentence coils and eddies like the fog and is as disconcerting in its syntax as the spectres it exudes. They are spotlighted against this dark swirling background and listed, given an ironic nobility and larger than life stature by the personification, their relationship with mythic figures and their highlighting against this background. In contrast to the immediacy of the first comments, one feels that the view has been distanced and at the same time given heightened significance. This sentence conveys what the previous details really represent in terms of this society and social order. This pestilential air and these figures represent the city.

This sprawling, modern city is felt to be a desolate, dehumanized place, wherein one is helpless and which has blotted out the rest of the world. The poem represents the worst aspects of nineteenth century industrial towns on two levels; the first part appeals to our reason, the second to our perceptions. It is probably based on generalized experiences of London. These cities are condemned as they have condemned their inhabitants.

"Villes I" (O.C., pp. 135-136), in contrast to "Ville", appears to present a view of "l'autre monde" or "notre nuit d'été". In this sense the poem represents an escape from the industrial towns, and since it is also urban in imagery, perhaps a view of what modern cities would be like if their inhabitants retained their desire for transcendence.

As Bouillane de Lacoste remarks, it has "...toute l'incohérente fantaisie de rêve."<sup>24</sup> Of course, elements in the poem have been identified by some critics as transpositions of city architecture known by Rimbaud.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, these memories or impressions are so private or transformed, that accurate, or even possible identification is not easy. The key to an understanding of this incredible collage of towns lies in the last sentence. As Adam remarks: "Cette région" obviously lies in the mind. The poem is a

<sup>24</sup>Lacoste, Le Problème, p. 219. Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 994, sees the whole poem as "la confusion des rêves de Rimbaud."

<sup>25</sup>Chadwick, Etudes sur Rimbaud, p. 125, finds a transposition of commonplace elements of towns: "...ayant imaginé, à la place d'une ville avec ses hauts bâtiments, des chaînes de montagnes, tout est métamorphosé ensuite selon ce thème. Les voitures deviennent 'des chalets de cristal et de bois', et vues d'une fenêtre élevée, elles ressemblent à des jouets mécaniques se mouvant 'sur des rails et des poulies invisibles'; les ronds-points entourés de statues et de réverbères se transmutent en 'vieux cratères ceints de colosses et de palmiers de cuivre'; les rues se transforment en gorges et ce sont sans doute de simples receveurs d'omnibus ou de tramway qui, dans ce paysage de rêve, rappellent le héros de Roncevaux."

Adam in Rimbaud, O.C., p. 993, sees impressions of a funicular railway and the Alps in this poem.

André Dhotel, La Révolte, p. 84-85, says perceptively that "Les poèmes où Rimbaud a décrit ces établissements se présentent comme des comptes rendus d'une observation réfléchie, dont le but essentiel serait de témoigner que les villes pourvues de toute les inventions humaines peuvent être édifiées avec assez d'art pour que la nature les domine." He suggests parallels with towns in the Meuse Valley around Revin, known to Rimbaud.

Underwood, "R. et l'ang.", p. 27, equates the name Mab with fairy, a slang word for prostitute in English, and feels this meaning applies here.

mental map which has been explored, lost and is mourned. Therefore, for the reader, it is one of Rimbaud's most fantastic or visionary town poems.

In this poem, again the densely packed images are contained in one paragraph. The narrator acts as recorder and observer of this scene until the penultimate sentence, when he comments more directly as "Je". The final sentence is detached, to emphasize the loss of vision, the return to reality or individual self. The plural title could indicate that we are presented with a view of several towns superposed or a distillation of visions of towns. The paragraph is composed of short, declarative sentences. Unlike "Les Ponts", here each sentence recounts one impression or scene with no hesitancy of identification of detail. The sense of immediacy and sharpness of impression is strong, reinforced by the constant use of definite articles, possessive adjectives and proper nouns to indicate these fantastic features or figures. The whole is unified by the look and the perceptions of the narrator, who is liberal with spatial indications. These however, do not help the reader to reconstruct a coherent plan of the whole, since each element is unrelated to other elements in the complex scene, which is never completely described. These towns seem to be in the process of constant expansion as the poet constantly points out new areas to view. The reader, therefore, remains in a sensorially deprived state spatially as he strives to make a coherent mental plan. The perceptions and imagination are induced to leap rapidly from one point to another and each sentence contains as many image producing words as possible, so that the mind gives up the attempt to keep the images separate and accepts the whole scene passively without rationalization. Everything is as stated

and happens all at once.<sup>26</sup> Each image and the whole scene seem endowed with extraordinary significance, yet no explanation is given even at the end, beyond the anguished regret expressed for a glory which is gone.

The opening fanfare classifies the imagery: "Ce sont des villes." The region is described in geographic terms, both natural and urban. The images have certain characteristics which contribute to the effect of hallucination or disorientation of the reader which make him admire in awe. There are numerous nouns and verbs indicating great heights and depths. The movement of the narrator's eye obliges the reader to experience these vertical patterns and view these objects. They are grandiose geographic structures. The objects or figures noted on these structures are themselves grandiose in size, or mythical, otherworldly figures. Objects which exist only in the singular are multiplied and impossible beings are created. The vegetation is animate. They are an extraordinary people, flora and fauna living among the grandiose geological structures they deserve. All these people, animals and plants are in vigorous, joyful movement and are musically sonorous. The whole scene is an animated symphony in many ways. Bright lights, shining metallic surfaces, colours and

---

<sup>26</sup>Elizabeth Sewell, The Structure of Poetry, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951, pp. 129 and 133 states: "Suppose the image-bringing words to be concentrated in the closest possible succession -- then the mind might give up the attempt to keep the images separate. 'Les hallucinations sont innombrables', could be taken in more senses than one...where everything has become one, succession vanishes." "The sense of similarity and succession has been suppressed, but with it has been suppressed the sense of incongruity and incoherence. Once the poet has occasioned this state of mind in the reader, the latter is no longer in a position to reject any chance association of ideas as irrelevant and incoherent, and therefore will accept any idea as relevant and join it into the system; so chance has become necessity." (Hereafter, Sewell, The Structure of Poetry.)



precious stones shimmer and move, as does the water or snow and the materials of the clothing.

The whole is a scene of great harmony, joy and liberty. The ecstasy is communal, the experiences multiple. Diane protects the stags, the ideas of the people are rung out. In many ways it is the ideal world of "Soleil et chair" or even "Le Forgeron", the world "Après le déluge" with real men taking over instead of the materialistic bourgeois. Man has reached his zenith in harmony with nature. It is a New Jerusalem, Rimbaud's Orient perhaps, presented in the style of a phantasmagoria, carefully structured to maintain the disorienting yet focussed effect.

The end of this poem has the same bewildering yet less abrupt effect as that of "Les Ponts". As the poet returns to self, as he wanders in a bewildered fashion in a boulevard in Baghdad, he is losing his grasp on the "fabuleux fantômes des monts". Judging by his despair at their loss, the impossibility of return seems as certain as their reality for him. These towns were simply there. Their presence imparts joy, their loss grief. They represent both "le lieu et la formule."

"Villes II" (O.C., pp.137-138) is like a close-up version of "Villes I", in that this time, instead of taking a panoramic view, the narrator, speaking as "Je" throughout, traverses the town. He affects to be measuring, surveying, interpreting with the eye of a bewildered and awe-struck tourist. Although many of the architectural and topographical features are common to both towns: the colossal heights and depths, the grandiose buildings and multiple styles of architecture, the footbridges, the use of colours, the attention to lighting effects, the stretch of water and the snow, the larger than life figures, these towns have quite a different atmosphere from those of "Villes I". They are silent, cold,

dull, intimidating or anxiety-building, and static as the narrator traverses them. The overall impression is of a frightening labyrinth from which the tourist cannot escape as he cannot understand its organization. These towns seem to be modern possibilities for the future, since "Pour l'étranger de notre temps la reconnaissance est impossible." Here the future looks bleak.

The mass of detail in the poem has encouraged many critics to point to transpositions of reality more authoritatively than for "Villes I". Bernard sums up most of these opinions saying: "cette vision...doit d'assez nombreux détails aux souvenirs de Londres."<sup>27</sup> The Crystal Palace and the Royal Albert Hall have been suggested as sources for this dome, while the site of either the London exhibition of 1872, reported by Mallarmé, or the Paris exhibition of 1878, suggested by De Graaf, have been presented as parallels for this mass of colossal, varied architecture, or modern wonders, some still under construction, collected on one site to overawe the contemporary tourist. The phenomenal construction activity in London and its imposing buildings have been cited often.<sup>28</sup> Adam agrees that there is a real base

<sup>27</sup>Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 504.

<sup>28</sup>Underwood, "R, et l'Ang.", pp. 25, 28, and "Reflets", pp. 543, 529, identifies the parallels with the Crystal Palace, the Royal Albert Hall, the horse guards, the Whitehall Ministries, the rash of new construction constantly inaugurated by Queen Victoria, Piccadilly Circus, the Burlington Arcade, the Thames, the private squares closed to traffic in London and the fox-hunting "County set" in the home counties.

Petitfils, "L'Architecture rimbaldienne", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 2086 (24 août 1967), p. 10, relates the poem to the 1872 exhibition in Kensington Park, reported by Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes, Paris: Gallimard, 1945, pp. 680-86. Many features of the two records do correspond: the colossal Babylonian architecture, the dull light, the white sand on the ground, the cold drinks sold, the picture galleries, the gardens.

De Graaf, "Une Clé", p. 270, discussed in relation to Paris, quotes an impression of the Paris exhibition by Edmondo de Amicis in 1879, to demonstrate the parallels between details of this poem and that exhibition. They are as close as those suggested by Underwood and others.

for this imaginative conglomeration, but identifies it as Stockholm.<sup>29</sup>

Jean Richer finds a literary source in Paris futur, where Gautier proposes the enlargement of the Seine and the construction of domed buildings on the hills of Paris.<sup>30</sup>

In this dense poem, only the agglomeration and colossal scale of these architectural features surprise the reader. They resemble buildings we know and that Rimbaud knew, as he indicates by drawing comparisons with Hampton Court and Paris streets. They have been transformed by Rimbaud's multiplying, magnifying imagination, his desire to surpass by sheer size, variety and number the endeavours of all known city builders. In this sense, almost all the sources quoted are possibilities. The comparison with an exhibition is apt.

Houston says of the town poems:

...a reading of them in close succession leaves one with a feeling of mechanicalness...the verb often disappears and the preponderance of nouns is ponderous...Striking phrases here and there redeem these poems--which further suffer from sameness of imagery--but it is impossible to count them among Rimbaud's finest achievements.<sup>31</sup>

He is right about the ponderous and mechanical effect in this poem. Factual statement follows on factual statement describing massive architectural structures. There are few verbs of motion. These weighty buildings are planted there and loom over the observer. The movement of these sentences produces many parallel statements which give an impression of monotony.

---

<sup>29</sup>Adam, Rimbaud, O.C., p. 996, finds similarities to real features of Stockholm in the area around the Ridderholmskanalen: the closed stretch of water, the lampstandards, the royal chapel, the circus with arcades.

<sup>30</sup>Jean Richer, "Gautier en filigrane dans quelques Illuminations", Europe, mai-juin 1973, p. 73.

<sup>31</sup>Houston, The Design, p. 258.

The use of many abstract nouns adds to this mechanical, joyless effect since they are not image producing and weigh down the sentences.

These poems cause one to wonder if in fact the treatment is not so impressionistic that a failed urban civilization would be portrayed deliberately in mechanical phrases and dull images. Ahearn says:

...Poems like "Les Ponts" and "Villes II", ...may be seen as steps on the way to the visionary, may also be viewed by us in another light, as ultimately esthetic in emphasis, and perhaps even themselves signs of the failure of the visionary enterprise. <sup>32</sup>

"Villes II" does convey a sense of failure because of the detailed construction of an ordered yet incomprehensible universe which has no place for contemporary man, who remains unfulfilled among these ultra-modern wonders. If "Villes I" is a successful visionary experience, a discovery of the ideal town, then "Villes II" is a view of a modern urban civilization at its most grandiose, covering an abyss of nothingness, unsuited for man's habitation. The Orient of "Villes I" is a symbol of Rimbaud's dissatisfaction with the "reality" of "Ville" and "Villes II", rather than another geographic fact.

By evoking the mysterious society of these towns in this poem Rimbaud illustrates his negative reactions to these towns. The people who have created them are the sinister and faceless "on". They are authoritarian figures, forbidding like the "subalternes", all-powerful and cold like the "Nabuchodonosor norvégien", hidden like the police, rich and powerful like the nabobs. The democratic element, an abstract term, is composed of a few hundred souls. One presumes that the rest of the population is disenfranchized and tyrannized. "On" has prevented the free circulation of cabdrivers in many parts of the town, tamed nature

---

<sup>32</sup>Ahearn, "Imagination", p. 543.

and enclosed the sea within quays. These inhabitants have no communal feeling. The streets are practically deserted, the whole town is silent. The luxuries proffered are commercial: the polar drinks, instead of producing a sense of wonder are characterized by their inexplicable range of prices in strange currency. Even the diamond coach is not transporting or dazzling since it is motionless and the nabobs trudge towards it. The "gentilshommes sauvages" seem to be another superior, cold type. They pursue their "chronicles" incomprehensibly in the artificial light they have created. It is a kafkaesque town.

The puniness and baffled incomprehension of the narrator throughout this poem are contrasted with the massive, towering structures and figures, and the enormous distances he covers, to produce the leit-motiv which indicates his rejection of this town: it is all too much to understand, to measure, to traverse, as he reiterates constantly. This town alienates, disconcerts, crushes. Modern civilization, or the civilization of tomorrow, have constructed this artificial, loveless town in their own image, have omitted man's essential needs and demonstrated his present inadequacy.

"Métropolitain" (O.C., pp. 143-144) is not wholly a town poem. However, it has been related to impressions of London by most critics because of its title (the word metropolitan was a common epithet in London in the 1870s and extremely rare in France) because of certain details of towns and suburbs suggested in the first four sections, and of the specific use of Metropolitan to designate an underground railway system running in London at this time. There was no railway system of that name in Paris at that time and no underground railway. In the first three sections the poet presents a view in cross-section of a town and its suburbs seen from a train and thus metamorphosed. This is the opinion of several critics, and seems an

acceptable method of viewing this poem.<sup>33</sup>

The poem is arranged typographically and thematically into five sections, roughly equal in length and parallel in construction, terminating with a dash, followed by a noun which seems to entitle the preceding impression. By its form, the poem imitates the passage of a train through landscapes and townscapes, its halt at a station, then its departure for new vistas.

As Spencer says: "One's first impressions upon reading Rimbaud's text --- is one of movement, succession and overall instability."<sup>34</sup> This is also true of "Les Ponts" and "Villes I", which have nothing to do with metamorphosis of objects because they are viewed at speed. In all three poems, the impression of moving spectacle is achieved by the perusing of enormous heights and depths, darkness and bright light, bright colours and reflections and rapid transition from one area of visual interest to another, usually guided by verbs of motion. Sometimes, massing of details in juxtaposition, without a verb, gives the same impression of rushing speed, since lack of a verb increases the speed of a sentence. The

---

<sup>33</sup>Delahaye, Les Illuminations, p. 90, summarizes the poem: "...un petit voyage, une 'course' faite un jour à travers la cité...Par la portière du wagon supposé, le poète regarde ce qui défile dans sa tête." Starkie, Rimbaud, p. 320, sees, "a view of what can be seen as the train passes through the city, and the traveller looks out at scenes -- at different levels -- sometimes the houses and streets are above him and sometimes he overlooks dreary little backgardens and old bald-headed men working at their vegetables; sometimes dreary rows of suburban houses all the same." Her view parallels Doré's "Over London by Rail", London, p. 120, in many details. Michael Spencer's article, "A Fresh Look at Rimbaud's 'Métropolitain'", Modern Language Review, 63, no. 4 (oct. 1968), pp. 849-53, gives a detailed account of routes and sights from the Metropolitan railway in the 1870s, establishing that it was built on the cut-and-cover principle, thus Adam's objection, Rimbaud, O.C., p. 1003, is invalid. He quotes an impression of a ride by a reporter for the London Illustrated Magazine in 1893, when the line had hardly changed from the 1870s. The general impression is one of colour, noise, optical illusion, speed, and changing heights and depths: "...the Baker Street junction...On the left through the main tunnel lies the station, a medley of crimson and gold; on the right the daylight creeps in ...a harmony of blue and silver...before Praed street...the line passing through a sort of valley formed by high houses on either side." All this could

difference here is that this poem does not give the impression that all these details are crystallized around one site. One cannot look back to the same place as one could return to the sky in "Les Ponts" or glance repeatedly at the heights for more detail in "Villes I". One is rushed on relentlessly as each new paragraph introduces a new set of details unrelated topographically to the preceding ones. The intuition of the critics who feel that this is a landscape metamorphosed by the experience of speed which alters the perceptions of the viewer is very convincing. As Pichois says, "... la vitesse doue le paysage de la mobilité dont est affecté le voyageur."<sup>35</sup>

The narrator's perceptions become ours in that the random thoughts and images are presented directly without the intervention of "je". He appears to look through the window so that no frame is visible, registering as accurately as possible the scene as it flashes by, appealing to as many senses as possible.

The journey starts in "la ville". The town is presented as geographically enormous, stretching from some indigo strait to the seas of Ossian, over orange and pink sands under a wine-coloured sky. Our normal conceptions of the town have been reversed already. Its web of sparkling boulevards tilts upward at a strange angle. Their poor inhabitants who live on fruit are possibly a personal memory. It is not a bitter sociological comment despite the laconic "Rien de riche". This town is a fairy-tale world of vast coloured expanses and glittering lines. There

---

explain the dense imagery, bright colours, smoky atmosphere in parts and clair-obscur effects in this poem ( hereafter: Spencer, "Métropolitain ).

<sup>34</sup> Spencer, "Métropolitain", p. 851.

<sup>35</sup> Claude Pichois, Littérature et Progrès: Vitesse et vision du monde, Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1973, p. III.

are parallels in London for these memories and impressions.<sup>36</sup>

Thus in the first paragraph we have the bridging of vast expanses, the surging upward into daylight, a memory or impression, a terse comment and then a halt. These impressions, related in a complex statement beginning with the adverbial phrases presenting these unknown seas and sand, make us read rapidly for the resolution of the syntactical sense. The subject of the sentence, the "Boulevards", is placed relatively late, after which we can pause or slow, and this is precisely when the mind of the poet seems to wander into a memory and the train seems to slow. "Rien de riche -- la ville", is not only a terse definition, but because of its monosyllables and alliterated r's, gives the impression of a jerky, grating halt.

The second section is "la bataille". It gives a nightmarish impression of crowded streets and threatening skies in industrial cities, or of underground tunnels, if Spencer's suggestion is valid.<sup>37</sup> It is possibly a combination of both, since these industrial streets were deep, dark, imprisoning places, judging by Doré's engravings. In either case,

---

<sup>36</sup>Underwood, "R. et l'Ang.", p. 31, explains this impressionistic colouring as the result of a stormy sky over London. In "Reflets", p. 544, n. 4, he explains the crystal boulevards by the fact that the London streets had been recently macadamized and that this was a modern wonder. Adam's theory, Rimbaud, *O.C.*, p. 1003, n. 1, that this is an evocation of the straits of Singapore and the North Sea seen on the return from Java is invalid since this is one of the poems copied by Nouveau, according to Lacoste, *Illuminations, Painted Plates*, p. 107. Verlaine wrote to Lepelletier, *O.C.*, I, 1012, "Ici on a pour deux sous (one penny) trois oranges, et des poires (exquises)..." In "Laeti et Errabundi", *O.C.*, II, 78, he recalls: "La misère aussi faisait rage / Par des fois dans la phalanstère; / On ripostait par le courage, / La joie et les pommes de terre."

<sup>37</sup>Spencer, "Métropolitain", p. 850, thinks that the list of rumps, hats, ships, wheels is an impression of the driver perched on his engine. Verlaine's description of London traffic, *O.C.*, I, 979, lends weight to the theory that this is a street scene: "...l'inouïe circulation de voitures, cabs, omnibus... tramways, chemins de fer incessants sur les ponts de fonte splendides de grandeur lourde, passants incroyablement brutaux, criards..."



it is a place to rush through and flee from. It is desolate, stifling, frightening if not life-threatening. Most of the nouns and adjectives in this dark, mineral landscape suggest these qualities while the verbs suggest the threatening, chasing movement. The word order is organized so that a rapid reading is required, and a lurching movement is given to the sentence by the intercollations. They constantly throw us off the track of the subject of this verb, "fuient" which is needed to allow the sentence to resolve itself syntactically. When this subject is finally reached, it is a series of staccato monosyllables, assonanced alternately. The train jerks to a halt. The battle of city life has been demonstrated as much by the exhausting buffeting and chase of the movement of this sentence as by the images of pollution, bleakness and threatening shapes.

The next section, "la campagne", is presumably the suburbs. The command, "Lève la tête", is interesting as a comment on the interpretation of the second section since one does duck one's head in a tunnel. It seems to be a nocturnal view of lighted objects in the countryside, transformed by speed again. The clair-obscur effects give a heightened significance to the objects glimpsed.

The next section, "le ciel", is a kind of daydream. It is a hallucination or optical distortion caused by the preceding optical illusions and strange perspectives. The town is no longer important. The poet is transposing the clouds into fairylands or magic maps since so many countries or nationalities are mentioned. Otherwise, he has been transported inside his own mind by the dizzying visual impressions received so far. The horizon has widened beyond the town seen from a train to private memories or visions, possibly arrived at by looking at the clouds and the poet's free associations.

The town has a dual role in this poem: to give two contrasting

impressions of its streets and their atmosphere; to produce hallucinations in the narrator, an "impression kaléidoscopique de formes en perpétuelle évolution,"<sup>38</sup> In this way, private preoccupations can be merged with glorious and far-ranging vistas of moving, brightly coloured other worlds, appealing to all the senses, linking nature, faraway places and mythic figures into a dizzying synthesis. The ending seems to be composed of such personal memories it is inexplicable, yet nevertheless communicates a sense of joy.

"Promontoire" (O.C., pp. 148-149) again is not an evocation of a town in the strict sense of the word, despite De Graaf and Underwood's recognition of Scarborough as its source and despite its mention of town names. However, it is so preoccupied with architectural structures that it will be analysed in this section.

This time, the vantage point of the impersonal narrator is from a brig facing a promontory. This promontory is seen from dawn to evening. Its metamorphoses are perhaps caused by light changes, but even more, by the agglomerating, magnifying imagination of the narrator who is on watch. One has the impression that as he stares fixedly, the elements in this scene dissolve and merge to present constantly new vistas for the visual imagination.

The dizzying effect is produced partly by the form of the poem, which is again a single paragraph of densely packed, image producing words with multiple associations and connotations. It is also composed of only two sentences. The first sentence sets the scene and the tendency of this scene to expand and metamorphose. The second is an incredibly extended

---

<sup>38</sup>Suzanne Bernard, Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours, Paris: Nizet, 1959, (hereafter: Bernard, Le Poème en prose), p. 182.

list of these metamorphoses or new sights or features of this villa and its outbuildings on this promontory. Each subsection of this colossal sentence is divided by semicolons, which by their function link as much as divide, so that one has the impression that there are no limits to the growth or possibilities of this scene, which seems to present an infinite multiplicity of sensations.

Localization is specific at the beginning but the scene immediately assumes global proportions as well as shifting eras from mythic or historic times to the most modern, so that "fanums" and "théories" mingle with modern hotels and railways. Topographically this landmass is protean although it is always high, immense, permitting wide perspectives and vertical views. It contains various geological marvels. The architectural features of this villa and its outbuildings are similarly unstable: "fanums", modern coastal fortifications, German poplars surrounding washhouses, circular façades of hotels, which are named and do correspond to those of Scarborough, although their architecture also partakes of the most colossal constructions of Asia, Italy, America, and is thus immediately exaggerated.<sup>39</sup>

Society is varied: solemn processions, bacchanalia presumably full of mythological, festive figures, travellers and nobles who partake of the most modern luxuries in these hotels. They are groups of grandiose and somewhat remote figures. The many festivities evoked suggest communal joy.

Nature is extraordinarily beautiful and luxuriant and harmonizes with the architecture, topography and society. Everybody and everything is in constant movement.

---

<sup>39</sup> Similarly this Carthage and Venice perhaps owe their origins to a memory of Verlaine's impressions of London and its embankments; *O.C.*, I, 978 and 994: "Petites maisons noirousses, ou grands bahuts 'gothiques' et 'véniens';" "Poussé l'autre jour jusqu'à Woolwich--les docks sont inouïs : Carthage, Tyr et tout réuni, quoi!"

Bernard's statement about Rimbaud's powers of synthesis apply particularly here:

C'est le monde ... que Rimbaud ramène à soi et resserre dans ces poèmes par un puissant effort de synthèse [...] C'est une sorte de cristallisation qui attire autour du noyau initial un certain nombre d'éléments. 40

The initial view of the promontory, which is quite probably that of Scarborough, encompasses a hallucinated vision of whole continents, peoples, architectures, geological features, modern technical marvels, exotic and animate flowers and trees, from all over the world and out of it. The whole scene is presented in dynamic motion by the use of verbs of motion and by the astonishingly open sentence, capable of absorbing all new elements. Each new image or object is juxtaposed with those preceding it, while within each subsection of this sentence, the details are frequently juxtaposed rather than linked or contrasted. As Mortier notices, when the sentence does wind down finally, it is to a "... résidu de toutes les civilisations uniformisées dorénavant dans un 'modern style' à l'usage des nantis."<sup>41</sup>

The role of the town here, which assumes proportions equally as important as that in "Villes I", is to merge harmoniously with natural elements, to expand and dazzle by its multiple possibilities, to act as the pole of this radiant crystallization, then to shrink again to what it probably was in the first place, a view of the civilized luxuries of modern times.

+

+

+

---

<sup>40</sup> Bernard, Le Poème en prose, pp. 189 and 191.

<sup>41</sup> Mortier, "Deux rêveries", p. 135.

The preceding analyses show that the only common element in these poems is that they are prose poems preoccupied with urban topics. In this section of the chapter an attempt will be made to subdivide them according to the aspects of urban geography which were of interest to Rimbaud in these poems, then to classify them according to Rimbaud's main purpose in composing the poem, or the main role of the town in the poem. Within each of these subsections on an aspect of urban geography, other poems from the Illuminations, Une Saison en enfer as well as earlier verse poems previously discussed will be mentioned briefly as to their relation to the aspect under discussion.

Bernard's comments on the general implications of writing prose poetry are interesting. Although she is talking about Baudelaire, her remarks apply to later prose poets, and certainly to Rimbaud. She says:

Ce désir de variété de contrastes s'oppose au principe d'unité de ton posé par l'ancienne esthétique; on peut d'ailleurs se demander jusqu'à quel point ce goût...de tons et de genres extrêmement variés ne correspond pas à un morcellement de la personnalité, à une pluralité tout à fait opposée au sentiment classique de l'unité de l'individu. <sup>42</sup>

It is precisely this desire for multiplicity of experience, for fragmentation of the personality, for the possibility of using language without restrictions imposed by old aesthetics, to create new effects or deal with new material, that is so evident in the seven poems discussed. It is one of Rimbaud's basic tenets, seen in his statements about the need for the poet to explore his own mind, to derange and cultivate it in order to experience the widest possible variety of ways of living and perceiving, in order to reach "l'inconnu". His so-called "Lettres du Voyant" read as though Rimbaud has accidentally discovered the palimpsest of the mind and was determined to cultivate these

---

<sup>42</sup>Bernard, Le Poème en prose, p. 110.

possibilities for the purpose of creating poetry. He did not appear to consider that the "là-bas" he reached might be an amalgam of his own memories and ideas. The "inconnu" was to be recorded in a new language which would allow the reader to experience these new perceptions as completely as had the poet.

All the Illuminations can be regarded as the application of these insights and perhaps their triumph. To that extent they are a demonstration of Rimbaud's theories on poetry. Since these poems were composed at different stages in his poetic programme, it is evident why a multiplicity of attitudes or interests will be found in the poems. While it is not possible to arrange them chronologically, they can be arranged according to his attitude towards the town or to aspects of the town which interested Rimbaud when composing poetry.

The multiplicity of experience and tone is partly achieved by the poet's choice of observer or narrator. His VANTAGE POINT in these poems helps to subdivide them. It seems that when the poet speaks as "Je", whether "JE est un autre" in the sense that he speaks through the mouth of someone else, or "Je" appears to be the poet, this identified narrator is part of the scene or action which is thus limited by this individual's comprehension and actions. For this reason there is less multiplicity of sensation in these poems. They seem to be reasoned observations, sociological comments or analogies to the inadequacy or debility of contemporary man in the towns. These towns are solidly planted and the observer moves through them. The town, if not identifiable as a particular town, is an agglomeration of large, nineteenth century towns or types of towns known to us. When the poet pauses to look at the town, it threatens to engulf him in some way. The role of "Je" in these poems would seem to be to limit the scope of the view, and to indicate a place which does not present a suitable

element for man to live in. The role of the town is to show its deleterious effects on this "Je".<sup>43</sup>

In poems where the situation is impersonally presented, the observer has a fixed position, selected to give an unusual angle of vision or a panoramic view. The recorder is often the reader, since he receives these impressions as directly as the narrator. However, as the narrator has selected them, he is in that sense the stage director and can stimulate and play upon his audience's perceptions. The scene is dynamic, in contrast to the ostensibly passive viewer here, presenting more fantastic features and wider views compared to the first series of poems. It also presents no overt sociological or moral comment, although the poem does generate joy. Hence, these poems represent a world suitable for man's habitation.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup>In "Ouvriers", "Ville" and "Villes II", the poet explores the static town he condemns. It crawls on the surface pursuing him, envelops him in its fog or smoke or towers over him. In "Villes I", when the poet returns to self or reality, "Je" appears. When "Je" is implied in "Métropolitain" with the command, the return to private memories begins, in contrast to the attempt at impersonal noting of perceptions in its first two sections. "Après le déluge", "Je" calls up a new flood to destroy the panoramic and historical view of expanding commercial towns. It is a rejection and social comment. In "Enfance V", as the poet contemplates the town, it spreads like a plague. He rejects it in favour of cosmic visions. In "Vagabonds", the comment appears to be autobiographical. "Je" recounts the miseries of life in some city with his companion, en route to "le lieu et la formule". It has links with the dreams of the "Vierge folle". In "Démocratie", the "centres" are generalizations of any barracks town. They are condemned for their exploitation of humanity. In the verse poems, "Je" is used similarly to limit the area of interest and to condemn the scene.

<sup>44</sup>Many other poems in the Illuminations present similar features. Sometimes it is not towns which bring joy but mythic, benevolent figures or theatricalized landscapes. Always, the scene is dynamic, the mood happy, the position of the anonymous viewer fixed. In "Being Beauteous" a figure manifests itself to be adored. The position is "devant une neige". In "Ornières" a theatrical procession gallops through "ce coin de parc". In "Veillées II", "la muraille en face du veilleur" presents a scene of multiple experiences and geometric patterns in active metamorphosis. In "Fleurs", "D'un gradin d'or" an ambiguous, structured landscape appeals to all the senses. Absence of "Je" in the verse poetry permits a wider view.

Precise LOCALIZATION<sup>45</sup> in these poems is greatly stressed by the narrator yet continually frustrated. The identity of the town is not made clear, whether the town poem is a social comment on a town which bears strong resemblance to nineteenth century industrial conglomerations known by Rimbaud, or is a fantastic vision of some "là-bas" in direct contrast to these first towns. This must be a deliberate omission. The fact that critics feel that they can recognize certain towns in these poems is because in either group of poems the role of memory is great. No one can create in a void. In both cases the towns are generalized by the titles alone which imply that the poem represents a category or sample or epitome of certain types of town or society. Pluralization is one device used to suggest this. Another is the use of a singular noun as title, usually without an article. This applies to almost all the poems in the Illuminations, regardless of their topic, as a glance at the table of contents shows. They state a general theme and are capable of embracing everything within one category.

In the body of the poem non-specific features of towns are mentioned: "la ville", "la banlieue", "le faubourg", "le haut quartier", "les boulevards", "un bras de mer". Objects of which only one sample exists in the world are pluralized, Etnas, des Libans, for example. Comparison is made with some real place which indicates that this is not the place evoked here. For example, parts of "Villes II" are compared to Paris streets and Hampton Court. While specific types of imagery are associated with towns rejected as debilitating

---

<sup>45</sup> Localization here implies spatial relationships of objects within the poem, identification of the town by name or specific features of that particular town, foreign or local words used to localize, localization in time and orientation of the reader within the poem.



and a different set of images or qualities are associated with the "ideal" towns which bring communal joy, these images or qualities are not intended to identify a particular town, simply a type of town. The towns are described sufficiently to permit them to be recognized as suitable or unsuitable for man's habitation and happiness. This is evident in all the town references in these prose poems.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup>Towns which attracted the traveller in his search are characterized by a light, bright atmosphere, an imposing appearance and vigorous movement. They encourage freedom and one has the impression that everything in them has heightened significance. In "Mauvais Sang" the poet exclaims: "Que les villes s'allument dans le soir." In "Vierge Folle", the speaker confesses that sometimes he believes in the powers of his infernal companion, in the possibility of their leading a magical life together. The town is seen as the site of this life or else the transformation will occur in a town: "... lui me rendra forte, nous voyagerons, nous chasserons dans les déserts, nous dormirons sur les pavés des villes inconnues, sans soins, sans peines... le monde, en restant le même, me laissera à mes désirs." In "Adieu", "nous entrerons aux splendides villes" is non-specific but again imbues the towns with dazzling, hypnotic lights and implies that they are the places where life will be changed for the better. This is true of the vision of the ideal Paris in the "Commune" poems. In "Vies I", an exile in his own land evokes a place where he gained his insights: "O les énormes avenues du pays saint, les terrasses du temple." The dawn in "Aube", something marvellous yearned for, is chased through non-specific but imposing urban scenes: "A la grand'ville elle fuyait parmi les clochers et les dômes, et courant comme un mendiant sur les quais de marbre, je la chassais." "Fleurs" presents dazzling architectural structures which are transposed to the point that they could be theatrical décor and audiences, structures of flowers or alchemical changes.

Rejected towns are characterized by formlessness, mud, smoke, dim light, and are just as non-specific. In "Mauvais Sang" the speaker recalls: "Dans les villes la boue m'apparaissait soudainement rouge et noire,... je voyais une mer de flammes et de fumée au ciel; et, à gauche, et à droite, toutes les richesses flambant comme un milliard de tonnerres." "Le port de la misère" is vaguely located with similar characterization. In "Après le déluge" the town devours the dazzling, pure, natural features with its dirt and commercialism. It is identified by its "étals, estaminets," and the "Splendide-Hotel", a name adopted by many luxurious establishments. In "Enfance V" the spreading houses and filthy atmosphere characterize the "Ville monstrueuse, nuit sans fin!" In "Départ", it is the ceaseless and unpleasant noise which characterizes the rejected towns. In "Soir historique", the escape is from "nos horreurs économiques", abstract, non-localizing terms. The dim light, artificial light and sprawl of rejected towns is already evident in the verse poems. Natural bright lights are reserved for nature or the welcoming Belgian towns,

The extent to which the reader or the narrator is allowed to find his bearings within the town varies according to the category of town presented, whether it is socially and physically distressing or uplifting. In the former group, it is implied that the reader sees and experiences everything recounted by "Je". However, the lay-out of this type of town is unimportant. In "Ouvriers" and "Ville" the town is immense, sprawling, flat, and straggles into the countryside. Spatial directions given are sufficient, since it is the mood generated by the atmosphere of this town which matters.

In "Promontoire", "Villes I", "Les Ponts" and "Villes II", the spatial directions given are incomplete so that the jigsaw cannot be finished, and the reader remains in a disoriented position. The impression is given that while each object presented has special significance, the scene is capable of infinite growth and this special significance will be understood when all the details have been supplied. They are never supplied. In "Villes II" it becomes clear while reading the poem that we will be continually frustrated in attempting to make sense of this maze-like town. The disorientation produced and commented on by the narrator is the sign of its inability to provide man with fulfillment. In the other three, while ultimately they all collapse disappointingly, the scene continues to expand and present new detail until the last minute. The loss of these towns is regretted. One believed in the possibilities for infinite expansion of these marvellous and joyful scenes. The spatial disorientation of these poems contributed to this belief and fostered our desire for more dazzling details.

Thus in the first set of poems, localization is unnecessary. In the second, deliberate disorientation by naming parts of a scene causes either acceptance or rejection of this town depending on whether the reader feels that eventual completion of the pattern will be possible or not. This "rule"

holds true for the other poems in the Illuminations.<sup>47</sup>

As far as temporal orientation or localization is concerned, the only remarkable point to note is the preponderance of poems written in the present tense in the Illuminations. A sense of immediacy and urgency is thus created, a conviction that everything is there all at once or that conditions are always so in a particular town. In "Ouvriers" the past tense is used initially to evoke the memory which provokes the decision. This decision is made in the present and since it looks to the future is expressed in the future tense. The opposite pattern occurs in "Villes I". As the vision fades the poet recounts its loss in the past tense, then, asking when or how he can return to this region, he reverts to the present tense to indicate its continuing existence. This is all very normal usage. The sense of timelessness imparted by the present tenses is striking, classifying these poems as non-narrative in the strict sense of the word since there can be no attempt at storytelling without a time sequence. Instead, we are presented with a proliferating multiplicity of sensations--now. It is a simultaneity which points to cubism.

Another form of localization is the use of place names and other proper names. While this is extremely common in the Illuminations, as we have seen, they are peculiarly non-localizing, even disorientating. In "Villes II" for example, while the comparison is made with real places, the subject of the comparison is not described. Pluralization of Etna, Venus, Mab, Roland

---

<sup>47</sup>For example, in "Après le déluge" the town sprawls. The limits of its expansion are the Alps and the Pole. This blot on the face of the earth is rejected. The spreading town in "Enfance V" is similarly rejected. "Ornières" gives falsely informative, precise localizations, which are torn asunder by this marvellous parade before we are oriented. "Mystique" is an even better example of how falsely informative localization in space can nonetheless produce a feeling of satisfaction with the scene while the poem is in progress. While the scene is carefully divided using words like, "à gauche, à droite, en haut du tableau", it is still impossible to place the "prés" or "la pente du talus" accurately in the picture. Words like "ligne" and "courbe" are used in a figurative sense which disconcerts since the literal meaning is also apt in the context, but not the following abstract nouns. We are whirled

has a disconcerting effect. They are already grandiose structures and larger than life figures. This improbable multiplication of unique and marvellous objects is particularly stimulating to the imagination since these are not metaphoric statements but presentations of facts. Juxtaposition of different places as though they were interchangeable upsets all our notions of space and geography. For example, the phrase, "des "Royal" et des "Grand" de Scarbro' ou de Brooklyn," implies that civilization is now uniform throughout the world and interchangeable, but also interchanges these places and displaces them on our mental map to collect them on one site or to blur their individuality as we saw it. This technique also opens the horizons of the poem enormously. Sometimes, the town or country is already metamorphosed before it is mentioned. It then becomes part of a new metamorphosis or is used metaphorically. Thus, attaching the epithets, "louche", "norvégien" and "de rêve" to "une Venise", "un Nebuchodonosor" and "des Alleghanys et des Libans", which suggests that pluralization of these places and people is possible, implies that these are not the originals to which the scene, which is left deliberately vague, is compared. There is considerable blurring of identification and greatly enhanced suggestiveness produced by these techniques. In every case the narrator wishes to produce an impression of infinite expansion of possibilities, a place which is stupendous in its multiple possibilities and grandeur. These examples also illustrate Rimbaud's increasing desire to reach for and possess the infinite, or to create it. Such devices are very common in the joyful evocations of places suitable for man's habitation, since, ultimately, they are satisfying

---

and dazzled to the end. In "Barbare" the ultimate in non-localization is reached with the arctic flowers which are presented then immediately cancelled, "(elles n'existent pas)", but they nonetheless leave one with the desire to find out more about the scene.

images giving a sense of enormous possibilities and power. In "Ville" the Erinnyes are evoked when the inner vision takes over. In "Ouvriers" such names are absent. In "Villes II" this dream geography is used to crush the observer since he is incapable of comprehending what he is faced with. In the Illuminations, names of countries, huge geological structures and mythical or literary heroes or heroines are evoked rather than the local landmarks, names of real people and European towns of the earlier poems. The horizons have spread until Rimbaud's geography is limitless. In very few cases in the prose poems are these names employed for purposes of localization or identification.

Similarly, while everything exists in the present, not only have geographical areas and geological features been telescoped improbably onto one site, or transported on our mental map, but historical or literary periods have been compressed into this point in present time so that Rolands, Mabs, Venuses co-exist, the seas of Ossian are side by side with modern boulevards and greengrocers, the road to Damascus damning with languour, contrary to Biblical tradition, is succeeded by aristocracies which are Rhenish, Japanese and South American Indian. All the above-mentioned tendencies are found in the uplifting, visionary poems or sections of poems in the Illuminations.<sup>48</sup>

Rimbaud's use of colloquialisms and local words had been largely abandoned by the time he began the prose poems, although "flache" appears in "Ouvriers". In the bulk of the Illuminations Rimbaud's fairly frequent

---

48

"Enfance I" has a Mexican and Flemish idol; beaches there have Greek, Slav and Celtic names. The little brother is in India. In "Enfance V" cosmic forces are visualized rather than dream geography. In "Parade" this mysterious group are superior to Fakirs and Chérubin. They can transform themselves into: "Chinois, Hottentots, bohémiens, niais, hyèmes, Molochs,..." the list could obviously be expanded for ever. In five short lines in "Fête d'hiver" orchards and alleys near the Meander, nymphs from Horace, Siberian dances, Chinese girls painted by Boucher are evoked. "Soir historique" contains visions of syntheses of whole countries and continents.

use of English words and anglicisms has been seized on by some critics as an attempt by Rimbaud to situate his poems, as an indication of their London source therefore as well as place of composition. While it is true that Rimbaud did not know English before his visit there, which helps for dating these poems, these English words are not used to localize his poems nor even to supply local colour.

As we have seen, Underwood has mentioned "cottage" and the litotes "Un citoyen pas trop mécontent" in "Ville", Mabs in "Villes I" and the use of the words "métropole" and "métropolitain", as proofs of their source of inspiration. He lists the other English words and anglicisms in these prose poems.<sup>49</sup>

"Being Beauteous" for whose title Hackett seems to have found the correct source,<sup>50</sup> is a good example of Rimbaud's use of English in these texts. Longfellow's poem has nothing to do with Rimbaud's beyond supplying these arresting words for the French reader. They are interpreted correctly at the beginning of Rimbaud's text. The influence of English poetry is not an issue. These words are used as a stylistic shock device to place the reader in an unstable position since he cannot understand them nor even attempt to pronounce them correctly. They also supply an exotic touch by their foreignness and as such open the horizons of the poem, echoing the otherworldliness of the expanding figure in the poem. English words in other poems have little to do with localization since they mostly occur in poems which are not even about towns. Apart from their ability to

---

<sup>49</sup> Underwood, "R. et l'Ang.", pp. 27-28, mentions the titles "Fairy and "Bottom", "railways, clubs modernes, pier, steerage, Embankments, le turf, desperadoes, spunk" and the anglicisms "Comté, inquestionable, comforts." There are also "cottage, Royal and Grand".

<sup>50</sup> Hackett, Autour de Rimbaud, pp. 81-82, presents convincing evidence that "Footsteps of Angels" by Longfellow supplied this title.

disorient the reader a French word would have served equally well. In the earlier poems the use of neologisms, non-poetic or local words served a similar purpose. "Bottom" is the only exception since his characteristics in A Midsummer Night's Dream are also echoed in this poem. This adds an extra layer of meaning for the initiated rather than indicates a geographic source. Lack of comprehension always makes words more memorable,<sup>51</sup> and this is a stylistic device.

A desire for euphony may be at the base of some of his names. Perhaps the best example is in "Nocturne vulgaire" where the sense seems to be subordinated to the sounds and the line is very suggestive: "...va-t-on siffler pour l'orage, et les Sodomes--et les Solymes,---et les bêtes féroces et les armées,..."<sup>52</sup> It is an incantatory phrase.

The TOPOGRAPHY of these towns again is not used to localize them. On the contrary, it is an effective measure of their suitability for man's habitation. When the town is flat, as in "Ouvriers" and "Ville" or the second section of "Métropolitain", when natural features like rivers, trees, are either absent or tamed by man, then the town is rejected. In "Villes II" the terrain is as amazingly accidented as in the joyful poems, but the sea is confined, the natural vegetation is trimmed and the land to the west is cultivated. It is an unsuitable town. In "Les Ponts", "Ville I", "Promontoire" and the first section of "Métropolitain" there are enormous differences in the heights and depths built on. In the third section of "Métropolitain" also, after the terrified chase through the flat desert of streets one raises

---

<sup>51</sup>Sewall, The Structure of Poetry, p. 95 quotes Valéry: "Our memory repeats to us the speech we have not understood. In poetry the mind is active, having to make its own system." This use of English is a further example of poetic speech being a deviation from normal speech patterns.

<sup>52</sup>"Damas damnant de langueur" in "Métropolitain" is another example of this infrequent use of strongly assonanced words, alliteration or internal rhyme to produce musicality.

one's head to view bridges then looks down to the beds of rivers. Water is present in vast expanses in these poems. Other natural and active geological features abound in "Villes I" and "Promontoire", the most ecstatic of these towns. In "Villes II" only the mountainous terrain exists, the volcanoes, avalanches, craters, whole mountain ranges are absent. The difference in terrain and the presence or absence of majestic or awe-inspiring geological features are the dividing lines for judging these towns.<sup>53</sup>

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS effect the same division in Rimbaud's view of types of towns. In "Ouvriers" the sky is overcast and the temperature oppressive. The town is smoky and blights the countryside. In "Ville" the thick, smoky atmosphere blots out everything. In "Villes II" the light is dull and artificial, the ground is snowcovered, the town is cold. "Les Ponts" also has a grey sky but it sparkles. In "Villes I" and "Promontoire" and the first section of "Métropolitain" the sky is open and colourful. Light and reflections are very important aspects of these satisfying towns. They were used in the earlier poetry, as satisfying antitheses to the town.<sup>54</sup>

The ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES of the towns parallel the topography. They are inextricably linked in form with the flat debilitating area enclosed by the polluting air and lowering skies, or with the soaring and plunging

<sup>53</sup>In "Enfance V" the town is a flat spreading evil while the poet's eye sweeps from the core of the earth through all the strata to the outer cosmos in a vertical line. The countryside in "Phrases" is flat and desolate. In "Fleurs" the movement of the eye is vertical as it follows the lines of the architecture. "Scènes" is constructed on many levels. "Mystique" has mountain ranges, slopes, with the sea stacked on the highest level as in "Après le déluge". In the verse poems the towns are flat and lack vegetation and grandiose geological features.

<sup>54</sup>In "Enfance V" the town is likened to "nuit sans fin". The brightly coloured lights and reflections of the cosmos and the bowels of the earth are contrasted with its fog. In "Mauvais Sang" the red lights and black mud of the towns is a vision of hell. In "Vies I", the holy land is remembered as dazzling: "Je me souviens des heures d'argent et de soleil vers les fleuves..." This contrasts with "...une campagne aigre au ciel sobre," in "Vies II".



terrain and brightly lit, expanding spaces of the joyful poems. In the first set the architectural features are practically non-existent. The dark mass and the imprisonment of its victims are all that matters. In "Ville" the cottages are also prisons, isolating the citizenry from each other. It is a disordered, shapeless universe. In the others, the buildings and other man-made features rise up and intersect in complex, harmonious patterns. They form a network of interconnections which allow the citizens to communicate with each other. These architectural features blend harmoniously with each other and with the grandiose natural features of the terrain. Colossal structures decorated with architectural detail, they themselves often decorate other objects with their reflections, being built of shiny minerals: copper, glass, steel or marble. In the most ecstatic of the poems they emit sonorous music. They are often in the process of dynamic growth or move by feats of engineering, like the chalets. They are always high and composite in form. Their most common forms are domed buildings, spires, towering, immensely long staircases, high footbridges, long bridges spanning waterways, elaborate lampstandards, huge statues of heroes. New forms of architecture are hinted at as barbaric conceptions or unimaginable forms, but no concrete details are given. The canals suspended behind the chalets are an advanced feat of engineering. As for these chalets, as Adam suggested, funicular railways existed in Switzerland. They are evidently an attempt by the poet to create the most modern buildings possible.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup>In the verse poetry, when architectural features are mentioned they are usually named or identified. They symbolize the oppression of the citizenry, for example, the Louvre and Bastille, or they reflect the narrowness of the minds of this citizenry as "Place de la gare" in Charleville. Mention of buildings is quite rare in the early poetry.

Curiously, the architecture of the towns in the prose poems, to be harmonious, which is a requirement in man's ideal abode, must have a certain order about it, and thus has incorporated the best features of traditional architecture. In the poems where modernity is mentioned, "Ville" and "Villes II", these modern architectural features are not in harmony with nature at its freest and suffer from a lack of coherent or comprehensible plan. Commercial centres blight the town in spite of their other beauties. This was evident even in "Roman" and "Oraison du soir".

In order to be a suitable abode for man, the architecture must be dynamic in some way, an effect often achieved by teetering these high structures on the edge of some abyss, on a slope or by a waterway. When set against a background of mountains, in interesting lighting, among active geological phenomena and free, vibrant natural forms, the architecture presents the epitome of man's creation of his environment. These characteristics and their opposites for the condemned towns hold true throughout the Illuminations.<sup>56</sup>

The SOCIETY which inhabits these towns must be divided into two basic categories to match the two basic types of town, presented in the Illuminations in their most complete forms. The towns which are morally condemned are inhabited by apathetic, degenerate, materialistic or authoritarian figures. This is already evident in the early verse poems. These people are usually silent. The streets are practically deserted. The figures are separated from each other. There is no love, joy or

---

<sup>56</sup>For example, in "Vies I", the holy land has enormous avenues and terraced temples. "Aube" has palaces, belfries, domes, marble quays. "Fleurs" has emerald domes, marble terraces and mahogany pillars. The condemned places have little architecture but often close their victims in rooms as in "Vagabonds" and "Bottom", where the narrator is changed "en gros oiseau gris bleu s'essorant vers les moulures du plafond et traînant l'aile dans les ombres de la soirée".

communication there. The people who have erected the buildings and planned the town are the anonymous and sinister, "on". Sometimes the use of the passive voice has a similar effect of suggesting hostile or indifferent social organization:" La morale et la langue sont réduites...", "tout goût connu a été éludé...",( "Ville", O.C., p. 134). On the contrary, the ecstatic towns are inhabited by vigorous groups composed of larger than life, joyful figures. These groups dance, sing, play musical instruments, join in communal festivities. Physical contact, communion and love are evident among them. They have ideas which are rung out from belfries. While the condemned towns are empty, the joyful towns are thronged with people. Their towns offer them multiplicity of sensation and opportunity for free activity and they are as varied as their towns, being dazzling figures from all ages, mythic or literary figures, giants, new creations of demi-gods, colourfully and ceremoniously or theatrically costumed. They are in direct contrast to the uniform and isolated types of "Ville".

The town is only satisfactory or uplifting when NATURE in all its forms is as free and exuberant, as multiple in form and astonishing in some aspect as the architecture, geological features and topography of the ideal towns. In the latter the flora and fauna are vigorous, colourful. Plants are animate and enormous and present new forms, elegant animals bound freely in the landscape. Water flows copiously and freely. Nature is in harmony with man and other aspects of the town. The same division between multiple, vigorous natural forms and ravaged nature is used to categorize the towns throughout the Illuminations.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup>In "Fleurs" the vegetation is evoked in dazzling, mineral terms. It ends on an ecstatic note with throngs of roses surrounding a god. Copper palm trees glitter in "Villes I" and enormous flowers moo in the high pastures. "Après le déluge" presents a direct contrast between animate, luxuriant natural forms and precious stones which hide when the opposed, commercial bourgeois begin building. The glory of the holy land is remembered by "la main de la campagne sur mon épaule..." in "Vies I".

Type and method of CIRCULATION AND MOVEMENT are an important factor in classifying these towns. Any impediment to free circulation is condemned and condemns the town. Walking is not exuberant enough an activity to produce happiness. In "Ouvriers" the couple walks. In "Villes II" the nabobs walk towards their motionless carriage. In many other poems verbs of motion indicate the communal joy of the people. The carriages, architecture, flora and fauna, water and other geological features must all move vigorously in ideal towns.<sup>58</sup>

The POLITICAL ORGANIZATION of these towns links with their social organization, so that basically communal ecstasy, parades, a vigorous citizenry containing multiple types of people, denote a harmonious political situation. Any hint of oppression, restriction or exploitation denotes a town to be condemned.

The GEOLOGY of these towns has been touched on in the preceding sections. Grandiose geological features in action are an essential part of the ideal townscape. Precious stones and glossy mineral and metal surfaces are an important feature because of their colours and the light reflections they provide in the prose poems. Their presence indicates the harmony of the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdom in this place.

The LANGUAGE of the towns in the narrower sense mentioned in the introduction, the sounds produced by the towns, are an important element for their classification as places suitable or not for man. Ideal towns are pleasantly sonorous. Condemned towns are silent or raucous and their inhabitants do not communicate with each other.

---

<sup>58</sup>Parades and festivities, thronging to a glorious site or benevolent figure, decorated carriages wheeling along, are an important feature of the ecstatic poems, as are dancing and vigorous physical activity. The vigorous physical movement was a requirement for happiness in the earliest poetry.

Having discussed the areas of urban geography in the Illuminations and Rimbaud's use of images relating to one or other of these categories which convey his feelings about the town, we can now ask what is the purpose or function of the towns in these poems? What is Rimbaud's attitude to the town now?

Obviously the towns evoked in the prose poetry divide into two basic groups from a SOCIAL VIEWPOINT. They are all judged and categorized according to their ability to fulfill the needs and aspirations of man as he could be if he could attain his maximum potential. In either case, man is now seen as a city dweller. Community living is essential for his happiness and transcendence. The ideal arrangement is symbiotic: the cities are raised by man for his enjoyment, he decorates and glorifies them by his presence and activities. They provide the multiple elements which allow him to achieve his full potential.

One set of town poems provides this atmosphere, the other provides an alienating, sterile atmosphere which brutalizes man. Since Rimbaud admitted that he was searching for "le lieu et la formule", the ecstatic visions of towns can be taken to represent them. The others are their opposite and since they seem to represent his view of the present situation of man in the nineteenth century towns of industrial Europe, they could be called his occident. The former are the yardstick with which to measure the latter.

All these poems, for the same reason, are ANALOGIES OF EMOTIONS. The opposition in Rimbaud's emotions is as basic as that in the division of the towns. Any vision of a town which brings joy, peace, a feeling of community, communion and liberty is a sign of Rimbaud's happiness. It represents "la liberté dans le salut" he confessed he needed in "Mauvais Sang" (O.C., p. 99). Any view which represents scenes of isolation, desolation, deprivation causes his unhappiness and is to be condemned and evaded.

The ecstatic poems and visions are in many ways a REFUGE OR ANTIDOTE to the misery of life in condemned towns as the invocation in "Ouvriers" and "Ville" indicates. It is not only to ideal towns that Rimbaudescares. The majority of the poems in the Illuminations display the same transporting features as these ideal town poems.<sup>59</sup> These poems have only tenuous links with urban features or society. Since they present transporting visions they surpass man's materialistic preoccupations in towns such as those in "Ville", "Ouvriers" and "Enfance V" and are another form of therapy, an antidote or commentary on the poverty of vision and imagination of contemporary urban man. They present the possibilities open to him if he could only escape the stultifying conditions in which he lives.

THEATRE, theatrical vocabulary, imagery and presentation are common features in the Illuminations.<sup>60</sup> Several critics have found theatrical sources for some of these poems.<sup>61</sup> This theatricality consists of:

<sup>59</sup> "Fleurs", "Being Beauteous", "Mystique", "Soir historique" in part, "Ornières", "Barbare" and "Génie" particularly.

<sup>60</sup> "Les Ponts", "Fleurs", "Fête d'hiver", "Scènes", "Ornières", "Parade", "Enfance II", "Bottom" are particularly reminiscent of theatre in some form. Plessen, Promenade, p. 218, notes the increasing appearance of "poésie-spectacle" in Rimbaud's later texts.

<sup>61</sup> Françoise d'Eaubonne, Verlaine et Rimbaud, p. 147, sees "Parade" as an evocation of London music-hall. Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 487, disagrees since she feels that such identification of source does not explain the text. However, this mixture of luxury and poverty, this brutality, this rapid transformation of role and the presentation of this parade as an exploitation of the emotions of the audience does correspond in mood and detail to descriptions of London music-hall turns and Penny Gaffs by Doré, London, pp. 116 and 167-68. Bernard, Oeuvres, pp. 510-11 and d'Eaubonne, Verlaine et Rimbaud, p. 136, both see "Fleurs" as a transposition of theatre in natural terms. d'Eaubonne identifies the play as La Dame aux Camélias, but Underwood "Rimbaud et les lettres Anglo-Saxonnes", Revue de la littérature comparée 1961, p. 449, refutes this. We have seen that Delahaye relates Ornières to an American circus. Underwood, "Reflets", pp. 540-1 finds a source for "L'aquarium ardent" in "Bottom" in the illumination of the aquariums at the Crystal Palace, which gives it a London source and was, in 1872, a display which partook of theatre.

the introduction of costumed or mythical figures or crowd scenes; characters who metamorphose or assume several roles; rising architectural structures, like flats, which disappear from sight to be replaced by different views, described sometimes in theatrical vocabulary; fairy-tale décors, as in opera, and choral or orchestral music is mentioned; lighting effects used like spotlights or house lights; some poems are divided into scenes, for example, "Fleurs"; frequent references to a scene as "une comédie" or "un drame". There are several oblique references to characters from dramas or to plays: Botton, Mab, Chérubin, "oiseaux-comédiens", which may refer to the chorus of Aristophanes' The Birds, and A Midsummer Night's Dream. The title of several poems suggests that a theatrical performance is being announced.

Wing's comments on "Parade" and "Scènes" can be generalized to show that whenever any of these techniques are used they are poetic devices to captivate, stimulate or mystify the reader, as does theatre, to make the imagery and movement of the poem have the same effect as theatre on an audience.<sup>62</sup> Thus theatricalization of his material is one of Rimbaud's basic methods

---

<sup>62</sup>Wing, "Poem as Performance", pp. 516-17, says: "... the description in "Parade" evokes a display of "magic" analogous in many ways to the values Rimbaud attributed to poetry in other texts and in the so-called voyant letters: ... it is the verb transformer which indicates more significantly on a level of greater generality the similarity between the poetic process and the actions of the figures described in the poem... The Poet's code is exclusively linguistic, the figures in "Parade" create gesture, costume, music, even magic and galvanic powers... the diegetic universe of the poem will create the impression that language is no longer simply the linguistic code but a far richer system of signs, including (impossibly) gesture and the transformation of matter: 'Un verbe poétique accessible à tous les sens' ".

He says of "Scènes": "Images of each type [ theatre and town] are so combined that the reader is unable to establish associative links among the groups. The series is discontinuous... The precision of geometric detail is in the end disorientating... the poem is a succession of descriptive variations suggested by the word scènes". "Poem as Performance", pp. 520-21.

for stimulating or disorientating his reader, whether it is used with town imagery, as in "Scènes" or not. Its use is confined to the ecstatic or visionary poems. Perhaps it was suggested here by frequentation of the London theatres although private theatre for escape or therapy was evident already in "Bruxelles".

Theatre is a form of escape from the deprivations imposed by unfulfilling towns. It is in the spectacle poems, "Villes I", "Les Ponts", "Promontoire" and parts of "Métropolitain" that the "je" is submerged. This escape from self, or diffusion of self in the multiplicity of experience or sensation offered by this spectacle, this escape to ideal regions or fantastic visions, urban or not, truly theatrical or not, is analogous to to the escape to nature seen in the early poetry. Now the ideal refuge for man, the therapeutic place, is seen not as natural landscape but as an ideal urban centre. Rimbaud now demands more than the pastoral idylls of the early poems or the simple, comforting inns of the Belgian towns. He needs complex structures, communal joy, more refined and luxurious entertainments and comforts,<sup>63</sup> a more colourful and grandiose nature and society, which have, moreover, merged.

The question of SOURCES for these poems or the role of memory is only relevant to the extent that London and other towns have been so frequently cited by critics as inspiration for these prose poems. Rimbaud obviously used the material at hand, consciously or unconsciously, for the basic details of his imagery, however much he may have considered himself to be "un inventeur bien autrement méritant que tous ceux qui m'ont

---

<sup>63</sup>Plessen, Promenade, p. 201, notes that in the Illuminations : "( Rimbaud prête une attention spéciale au luxe, au confort, à l'élégance. on dirait qu'il veut se dépouiller de sa vieille 'rustre' )".



précédé; un musicien même, qui ai trouvé ... la clef de l'amour," (C.C., p. 128).

Hackett's comments on Rimbaud's pigeons help us to keep in perspective the role of London or any other town in these poems.<sup>64</sup> However, many of the parallels drawn by critics between the architecture of certain real towns and details in Rimbaud's poems are convincing enough to indicate that random memory or detail supplied by this town were incorporated by Rimbaud into his creation of towns. Details from several sources are incorporated into one poem. In every case Rimbaud generalizes to represent not London, or Stockholm or Stuttgart but a compelling view of the misery of present day industrial landscapes and their prevention of man's transcendence. Conversely he uses his memories of the same places as therapy for this misery by creating spectacles of ideal towns or to actually record landscapes he had found "là-bas". Therefore, aspects of London, for example, are used both to condemn and exalt. The palimpsest of the mind gave up either type of image required according to the general category and tone of town created, analogous to the poet's state of mind at the moment of composition.

All these prose poems are a colossal display of RIMBAUD'S POETICS, of verbal acrobatics, carefully calculated to give very precise effects. Coleridge's statement, "In the truly great poets... there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word,"<sup>65</sup> is applicable to Rimbaud's prose poetry, despite the accusations of

---

<sup>64</sup>Hackett, Autour de Rimbaud, p. 95, mocks the nationalities assigned to the "pigeons écarlates" in "Vies I" by various critics, Adam making them Javanese, Underwood British, and Lacoste, Columbian. He claims that they found what they wanted to find.

<sup>65</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, edited with his Aesthetical Essays by J. Shawcross, London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, O.U.P., 1907, I, 4.

incoherence made by many critics. While it has not been possible within the confines of this thesis to demonstrate this opinion at length, it is hoped that references made throughout this chapter to choice of vocabulary, rhythm, structuring of the material, will be sufficient to bear out this judgment. The rough drafts of Une Saison en enfer suggest that a similar structuring and polishing of the Illuminations was effected. In many ways the whole of Rimbaud's prose poetry is a demonstration of the use of language to reify his emotions, ideal or dream worlds, multiple experiences in the world and social concepts. In the beginning the need to find a new language did have social reform through poetry as its impetus.

The topic of the town in the Illuminations is always a social issue. Rimbaud's condemnation of some of the towns he evokes is not at all surprising. Despite differences in detail of atmosphere they have the same dissatisfying attributes as the majority of the towns evoked by Rimbaud thus far in his poetry. They are miserable places.

What is of compelling interest is that Rimbaud, as a further development of the Belgian towns, has created whole urban environments which produce joyful emotions. They are examples of positive social commentary. They offer an ideal refuge or environment since they have managed to combine nature and man-made structures in communal harmony. Since these poems must represent "le lieu et la formule" and an analogy to the poet's own total happiness, they would be perfect poems, presenting not only the culmination of the poet's own search for personal fulfillment in the towns and through poetry, but the key to the happiness of all mankind, if they could transmit these experiences in their totality to the reader.

In the concluding section of this chapter, we will discuss how Rimbaud might have found this ideal place, why he might have sought it so determinedly, and how he would appear to be attempting to lead mankind there through these poems.

+

+

+

Starkie points the way to an interpretation of these extraordinary towns when she claims that Rimbaud and Verlaine visited the Chinese opium dens in the East End of London. She then links some of this poetry to the visions of architecture seen by De Quincey under the influence of this drug.<sup>66</sup> She quotes a passage from Un Mangeur d'opium to illustrate her point:

D'étonnantes et monstrueuses architectures se dressaient dans son cerveau, semblables à ces constructions mouvantes que l'oeil du poète aperçoit dans les nuages colorés par le soleil couchant. Mais bientôt à ces rêves de terrasses, de tours, de remparts, montant à des hauteurs inconnues et s'enfonçant dans d'immenses profondeurs, succédèrent des lacs et de vastes étendues d'eau. L'eau devint l'élément obsédant. 67

It is true that enormous architectural structures in motion, blazing skies, great heights and depths, seas, canals, waterfalls occur in many of Rimbaud's Illuminations. Baudelaire notes the same obsession with water under the influence of hashish and wonders if all drugs might not produce similar images in the mind.<sup>68</sup> In Le Poème du haschisch he generalizes the effects of

<sup>66</sup>Starkie, Rimbaud, p. 258.

Py, Illuminations, pp. XXIII-XXIV agrees: " Il ne s'agit pas d'expliquer les Illuminations par l'action de substances hallucinogènes... De l'aveu même de Michaux, elles sont plus révélatrices que créatrices... La vérité est plutôt que la drogue a amplifié, exalté en Rimbaud des dispositions personnelles...et surtout qu'elle lui a permis de mettre au point un incomparable instrument d'expression poétique dont il a joué après coup, ayant réussi...à garder le contrôle de ses facultés et à rester...à la hauteur de sa folie."

Lebeau, "La Ville", pp. 353-63, holds similar opinions on the effect of drugs, or the influence of reading Baudelaire's descriptions of their effects, on the town poems in the Illuminations. He also feels that " Rêve parisien" is an influence, despite the rigid exclusion of Nature in Baudelaire's poem, and that the inclusion of figures in Rimbaud's poems is the basic difference between his creations and those of Baudelaire and De Quincey. De Quincey is probably not a direct source. It is more likely that his account of the possibilities of the mind encouraged Rimbaud to reveal and read his own palimpsest.

<sup>67</sup> Baudelaire, O.C., p. 518.

<sup>68</sup> Baudelaire, O.C., p. 518, " Ne dirait-on pas que...le cerveau humain, sous l'empire d'un excitant, s'empare plus volontiers de certains images?"

this experience with the proviso that hashish always reflects the contents of the mind of the individual taking it.<sup>69</sup> Fretet classifies Rimbaud clinically, finding the contents of the poems similar to "tous les délires aigus confusionnels."<sup>70</sup> He does not go as far as Py, who feels that Rimbaud forged a marvellous poetic instrument out of his delusional experiences. He feels, along with many critics, that this incoherence is a sign of Rimbaud's confusion: "Son plus grand mérite est de ne rien changer au sténogramme de voyant, de ne rien arranger."<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps Temkine gives the best explanation of this need for mind-expanding drugs: "...le monde est fini, et c'est d'infini que le poète a soif."<sup>72</sup> Rimbaud himself had stated the need to reach "l'inconnu" as early as the "Lettres du Voyant". He had explored many real towns and found them wanting. "Ouvriers", "Ville", "Villes II", are an indication of the appalling sterility of the most modern urban centres. "A une raison" proclaims man's need for the infinite: "'Change nos lots, crible les fléaux, à commencer par le temps ... Elève n'importe où la substance de nos fortunes et de nos vœux.'" (O.C., p. 130). Rimbaud felt that widening horizons to take in whole countries, the cosmos, to merge the most grandiose natural phenomena and man in an all-embracing paradise were necessary. Alienated by the real towns and the route society was taking, Rimbaud appears to have found that the ideal world was nonetheless urban, and in the antipodes of the mind.

<sup>69</sup>Baudelaire, O.C., p. 445.

<sup>70</sup>Fretet, L'Aliénation poétique, Paris: Janin, 1946, p. 196.  
(Hereafter: Fretet, L'Aliénation poétique.)

<sup>71</sup>Fretet, L'Aliénation poétique, p. 202.

<sup>72</sup>Raymond Temkine, "De Baudelaire à Michaux", Europe, (avril-mai, 1967), p. 240.

He has recreated these worlds for us in this poetry.

Aldous Huxley, with a lucid account of his own controlled experiments with mescaline and an essay on the clinical and perceptual effects of mind-altering drugs, puts all the intuitions of the critics just quoted into perspective. In doing so, he suggests the reason for the attraction of these poems for so many people and the aim of Rimbaud is creating them.

In the "Lettres du Voyant" Rimbaud did not mention drugs as a method of producing "le dérèglement de tous les sens". Derangement can occur accidentally or be induced by hunger, fever, alcohol, tea, coffee, many other chemical substances, sensory deprivation such as blindfolding, incarceration, by flagellation, prolonged rhythmic chanting, anything which is capable of depressing the normal filtering process of the brain to allow entry into consciousness of biologically useless but aesthetically or spiritually valuable material.<sup>73</sup> Huxley, more scientifically and completely than Baudelaire, lists the common features of visions produced by any of these means: bright lights, intensification of all colours, moving geometric shapes, vast and complicated buildings, constantly changing landscapes, the presence of heroic figures and fabulous animals, precious stones, and above all, a sense of the heightened significance of any object in the visions.<sup>74</sup> As seen, all these features are common in Rimbaud's ideal towns.

Huxley notes the similarities of these scenes to the heavens or para-

---

<sup>73</sup>Aldous Huxley, The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974, pp. 73, 77, 81, 82, (hereafter, Huxley, Perception.)

<sup>74</sup>Huxley, Perception, p. 82, "...the landscapes, the architectures, the clustering gems, the brilliant and intricate patterns -- these, in their atmosphere of praeternatural light, praeternatural colour, and praeternatural significance are the stuff of which the mind's antipodes are made."

dises of fairy-tales, folklore and religious texts. Contrary to most other commentators on this subject, he feels that "The raw material for this creation is provided by the visual experiences of ordinary life", but these visions do not contain memories of the personal life of the "voyant": "the images are found 'out there' in the collective unconscious." "Blissful visions are generally associated with a sense of separation from the body, a feeling of de-individualization."<sup>75</sup> This statement links with Rimbaud's "JE est un autre". The fact that visual sources and the role of memory are much less convincingly demonstrated in "Villes I", "Promontoire", "Fleurs", "Mystique", adds weight to this opinion. Huxley's opinions link very directly with Jung's theory of the collective unconscious:

I am assuming that the work of art we propose to analyse, as well as being symbolic, has its source not in the personal unconsciousness of the poet, but in a sphere of unconscious mythology whose primordial images are the common heritage of mankind. I have called this sphere the collective unconscious to distinguish it from the personal unconscious.<sup>76</sup>

Rimbaud appears to have reached the antipodes of his mind in "Villes I". As seen, the poem contains most of the elements mentioned by Huxley as integral to the visionary experience, and in fact to the collective unconscious. It is extraordinary that Rimbaud succeeded in recording his perceptions with the same sense of haste, immediacy and heightened significance as

---

<sup>75</sup>Aldous Huxley, Perception, pp. 81, 77, 116. Jung, "Psychology and Literature", The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature, trans. R.F.C. Hall, Bollingen series XX, New York: Pantheon Books, 1966, (hereafter, Jung, The Spirit), pp. 101-3 says: "Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument...the ego...becoming nothing more than a helpless observer of events."

<sup>76</sup>Jung, "On the Relation of analytical psychology to poetry", in The Spirit, p. 80 (hereafter, Jung, "Analytical Psychology").

the vision was no doubt received. Why did he do this? Huxley seems to answer:

The transporting power of many works of art is attributable to the fact that their creators have painted scenes, persons, and objects which remind the beholder of what, consciously or unconsciously, he knows about the other world at the back of the mind.<sup>77</sup>

Jung states something very similar:

This is the secret of great art, and its effect upon us. The creative process, as far as we are able to follow it, consists of the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life...Therein lies the social significance of art...conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking.<sup>78</sup>

Huxley, then, has enumerated the constant elements of this antipodes of the mind, or collective unconscious, or "là-bas". Jung has explained the role of the unconscious activation of these archetypal images. Huxley goes further with his statement: "What is seen in reality leads to the antipodes."<sup>79</sup> He then lists vision-inducing arts and items: precious stones, polished metals and minerals, glass, flames, lights, particularly clair-obscur effects, gem-like pigments, illumination, effects of great distance or extreme propinquity to the subject, all lend enchantment. So do fireworks, any form of pageantry and theatrical spectacle, magic-lantern effects and phantasmagoria, which are essentially visionary arts and vision-inducing devices. The isolation of an object endows it also with absoluteness.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup>Huxley, Perception, p. 97.

<sup>78</sup>Jung, "Analytical Psychology", The Spirit, p. 82.

<sup>79</sup>Huxley, Perception, pp. 88-89.

<sup>80</sup>Huxley, Perception, pp. 123, 129, 130, 138. These statements about the transporting effects of certain plastic and performing art forms, no doubt explain the impression given that the poem is a performance in many instances, and also the intuition of Lacoste and Bernard particularly, that if Rimbaud had not actually been influenced by certain painters of his time, (possibly Turner and the early Impressionists), he parallels their efforts in his use of the "ton divisé" or the great attention he pays to light effects and

Rimbaud has attempted to lead the reader back to the antipodes of his own mind, to produce not only a record of his own visions or ideal region, but to create vision-inducing reports of visions. He has deprived the reader partially of sensory perception by his dislocation of spatial and temporal relations. He has displayed in a form as close as possible to phantasmagoria or theatre, or pageant, the rising architectures, the heroic or mythical figures and animals, the distances and close-ups, the shiny minerals and colours, the reflections and the illuminations against the dark backgrounds, the suggestion of choral chanting, which are all vision-inducing. The isolation of individual nouns in Rimbaud's later poetry, because of the concision of his style, gives them vision-inducing powers.

As MacLeish says of this poetry:

The Illuminations are not visionary poems of the sort with which literature is elsewhere familiar -- descriptions of visions, recollections of visions, accounts of visions. They are the visions themselves [...]. Their end and aim is the end and aim of vision -- to see the unseeable; not the end and aim of literature -- to represent it [...]. Are they spells to take us to the world beyond -- to bring what lies beyond back?

No reader of the Illuminations can answer that question for any other.<sup>81</sup>

As we have seen, not all the Illuminations were intended to act as spells. However, the poems which contain joyful, dynamic, proliferating imagery, many of which have urban themes, since the rising architectures are

---

fluidity of movement in his poetry. Bernard mentions his impressionistic choices of colour and compares his attitude to Turner's with regard to perception of optical effects: "My business is to draw what I see, not what I know is there." In fact Rimbaud's poems parallel the effects of certain painters because he employs the same vision inducing material in his poetry, and shares their need to "fixer la nature dans le moment de la sensation". "R.P. et I", pp. 258-59. Lacoste suggests that it was Rimbaud's new interest in painting which "n'a pas peu contribué à lui faire reprendre la plume pour composer les Illuminations." Le Problème, p. 252.

<sup>81</sup>Archibald MacLeish, Poetry and Experience, Cambridge: Riverside Press and Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1960, pp. 167 and 171. (Hereafter: Macleish, Poetry and Experience.)



so much a part of this other world of the mind, have been created by Rimbaud as the records of the region in his mind which produces his greatest joy. They are also spells to induce these or similar visions in the reader. His claim to be an inventor who had discovered something like the key to love, applies to these poems. Whether they do in fact induce visions in all readers is, as MacLeish says, a matter of individual reaction, but this does seem to have been Rimbaud's intention.

Since all the visionary and vision-inducing poems do not contain town imagery or themes, the question arises whether the town is in fact an incidental feature in the landscape of the mind. Did Rimbaud choose to incorporate the town in these poems? Do they constitute a sociological comment? Or is any such comment or impression that the town imagery has special importance which is read into these poems, another case of finding what one wants to find? It is true that Rimbaud stated in the "Lettre du Voyant" (O.C., p. 252), that: "[le poète]...devra faire sentir, palper, écouter ses inventions; si ce qu'il rapporte de là-bas a forme, il donne forme; si c'est informe, il donne de l'informe..." This implies that whatever is found in this unknown region must be reported as accurately as possible without any attempt at selection or editing of material on the part of the poet. Therefore if urban architecture featured in this region, it would be reported.

Yet these town poems do appear to represent Rimbaud's ideal towns, opposed to the condemned towns of the non-visionary prose poems, as well as being a close equivalent to Huxley's antipodes and De Quincey's rising architectures. They did exist in Rimbaud's mind, he recorded them. However, the mind selects unconsciously what appeals to it. They were cast up by the palimpsest of Rimbaud's mind because psychologically and socially

he needed them.

Jung's remark that the social significance of art lies in conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking, points to Rimbaud's need to escape to and recreate this Orient as a direct gesture of rejection of the real towns and society of his age, and as an antidote to them. Rimbaud enjoyed, privately, visions of man transcended amid beautiful landscapes and townscapes, recording them in such a way as to present the vision as accurately and completely as possible, to render this record of the visions as vision-inducing as possible. He may have felt able to help man to transcend himself by reaching these regions and by creating new cities suitable for his habitation.

In many ways, this escape to the urban landscapes at the back of the mind is the supreme form of alienation, a rejection of the world and of social concerns. Judging by Rimbaud's account of the suffering involved in "voyance" or the derangement of the mind, it can be seen as an extreme attempt at social reform of the blighted citizens of his urban age. As Jung remarks:

...the man who takes the backstreets and alleys because he cannot endure the broad highway, will be the first to discover the psychic elements that are waiting to play their part in the life of the collective.<sup>82</sup>

The poems in which memories and impressions are generalized to suggest forcibly the hell of Rimbaud's world, act as a contrast to these visions of joy and by their darkness endow the others with greater significance or brilliance. Each type of town poem therefore comments on and

---

<sup>82</sup>Jung, "Analytical Psychology", p. 83.

acts as a foil for the other. The condemned towns are an analogy of Rimbaud's dissatisfaction and frustration, his inability to endure the broad highway on which nineteenth century man had massed. The urban visions are no longer analogies to a state of mind but the replicas of the outer limits of the mind itself, to which he had retreated. Since this region can be reached by some men through the medium of Rimbaud's visionary and vision-inducing poems, they may help man to transcend himself and create towns in his new image. They are "Les Ponts" by which man crosses to the ideal region. They represent, as MacLeish says, "the farthest experience of man..."<sup>83</sup>. They supply what was most lacking in Rimbaud's industrialized and materialistic age, visions of beauty, harmony and freedom in a communal and urban setting. They are examples not only of "le lieu et la formule", but also of "la liberté dans le salut" to which every man aspires.

---

<sup>83</sup> MacLeish, Poetry and Experience, p. 171.

## CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, the detailed analyses of each town or group of town poems, while essential to emphasize the prime importance of this theme in Rimbaud's work, have tended to fragment the overall view of his attitude to the town. It was claimed in the introduction that a comparative urban geography of Rimbaud's town poems would be established at the conclusion of this research. It is now possible to compare any town poem or group of such poems with any other, according to the areas of urban geography which interested Rimbaud, to see the role of the town in any particular poem, to appreciate Rimbaud's attitude to the town or his use of urban imagery at any particular moment in his poetic career. A sweeping panoramic view of the more general issues suggested by these analyses will put the poet's preoccupation with urban themes and imagery in its true perspective.

The question of a typical rimbaldian townscape arises. What is Rimbaud's overall conception of the town and its place in his universe? The whole of Rimbaud's poetry can be seen as an existential and single-minded search for an ideal environment in which to realize his full potentiality. The poetry continually presents evocations or glimpses of this blissful place or state of mind. Conversely, it presents a rejection of places and states of being found wanting in the course of this search.

Rimbaud's town themes and images are reflections and symbols of this major preoccupation. As a man of the late nineteenth century, concerned with the nature and quality of human existence, he was obliged to scrutinize the fundamental values of western civilization in his time. These fundamental

values, and his own, were inextricably bound up with urban living.

Many of Rimbaud's poems, starting from his earliest exercises, show a common schema: a town whose physical appearance is barely mentioned, whose climate or society restricts, debilitates or isolates, is contrasted with some ideal place which offers blissful fulfillment. The ideal place is point for point the antithesis of the rejected town. The predominant metaphor is light/darkness. The happy or miserable figure in the poem, often identified as a poet, is seen as the prophet who can lead humanity to the ideal place. Because of his panoramic view of the situation, he has perceived the causes of man's degeneration in the rejected towns and sensed the way to an ideal place of which he seems to have foreknowledge.

Since harmonious, communal living was a strong priority for Rimbaud's happiness, his search had to be undertaken on behalf of his fellow man. Hence the role of "voleur de feu" he assigns the poet. The town represents therefore not only the central site of man's corruption but also the necessary site for man's transcendence. New towns must be explored or created constantly in order to discover the ideal communal centre, which must exist or be capable of being created since its image exists in Rimbaud's mind, and since his whole being craves it.

Rimbaud's own experiences in the real towns of his age were extremely unsatisfying. A study of the antitheses to these rejected towns produces as much information about these towns as do their urban images. These antitheses not only suggest the character of Rimbaud's ideal urban place, but are often other urban images. Early antitheses to the rejected towns are idyllic, pastoral scenes, peopled with compliant, romanticized girls or benevolent, mythological figures, as in "Ver erat..." or "Les Reparties de Nina". Soon, the antidote to unsatisfying towns takes the form of private

visions of dazzling, far-away landscapes, as seen in " Les Poètes de sept ans" or "Le Bateau Ivre", or the idealized towns over the blue frontier in Belgium miraculously reverse the harsh realities of existence in Charleville and Paris and are their antitheses. Later still, in the prose poems, whole poems about towns act as opposites to others, a slight shift in focus reversing the category of these towns, which have similar bases in reality, from rejected to ideal.

The poet's dream of man achieving complete happiness, in harmony with all creation, living communally amid structures created by him as projections of his ideal image, is a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, Rimbaud seems bent on reconciling his needs for a communal and structured centre with his equal need for total liberty and constant expansion of possibilities. J.-P. Richard also remarks on this fact:

...il tente d'édifier un monde sans en-dessous, un univers délivré de l'origine et de la nostalgie. Mais il réclame aussi que ce monde soit harmonieux et fraternel. Divisé entre son intention de liberté et son besoin d'architecture, incapable de se fabriquer les espaces nouveaux où ce futur monde pourrait établir ses assises---...--il ne peut que se taire et renoncer. <sup>1</sup>

Rimbaud's sources for urban images are in the towns he explored. In the early poetry about Charleville, Belgian towns or Paris, given the normal tendency of the poet to express not what he feels but what he sees in the face of reality, there is no doubt about their specific identification. These towns also represent places or states of existence which may or may not be suitable for man's happiness. The question of man's transcendence hardly arises. Physical fulfillment alone is sufficient to produce a state of euphoria. It is implied that the rejected towns could be transformed by physical or

---

<sup>1</sup>Richard, Poésie et profondeur, p. 11.

political means, the oppressive or apathetic society enlightened by the verbal demonstration by the poet of a better mode of life. The poet seems to be still yearning to belong in this society and his eventual integration still seems possible. This explains Rimbaud's adherence to the political ideals of the Commune which echoed his own revolt and desire for social change. This also explains the relatively limited range of town features condemned or celebrated and his adherence to conventional versification or Parnassian attitudes. Later, Rimbaud's increasing misery and corresponding multiplicity of desires, precipitated perhaps by the collapse of the Commune and by his increasingly acute perception of the depth and range of degeneration and oppression in the world, obliged him to create his own complete urban world or anti-world. Generalization and amalgamation of his perceptions becomes increasingly necessary to condense the multiple qualities of his progressively more complex towns, those poles of his universe which resemble more and more mythic realms: a legendary Orient or Biblical Hell.

As the real and physical with their demonstrated inadequacies seem to lose their value as sources of man's fulfillment, they diminish in importance in Rimbaud's poetry. The structure of his universe is more complex than the binary opposition of the miserable urban centres of nineteenth century Europe, ("la réalité rugueuse", "Le port de la misère", Hell, or the other rejected cities), which are diametrically opposed to the satisfying cities, ("l'azur frontière", "L'Orient", "l'inconnu" ). There is also the line which links them and which is the poet's movements or aspirations in an external or internal world, that is, his real travels and experiences or his escape into dream or his own mind. These last two elements appear to be as polarized as the two categories of towns and to complement them. Moreover, they are both intellectual or spiritual activities as well as physical realities, just as the contrasted places have both physical and mythical dimensions.

Rimbaud's movement from physical to mental, from real to mythical has the positive, active aim of converting the negative symbols into their opposites and this implies motion between the two poles by the poet. Both his physical and mental activities are destined to juxtapose the positive realms and the negative. This is done not only to provide a yardstick or criticism but to produce a final integration and an obliteration of the negative by the positive. Since both his poles appear to expand steadily as the poet defines their geography in more and more detail, and since they seem to continually recede from each other as they thus present more and more fundamental differences, more desperate measures are constantly required to effect this integration.

It was only when Rimbaud reached the outer limits of his physical and mental exploration that he was able to effect the complete, joyful integration of man with natural elements and man-made structures. As Richard remarked, this created place has no material base or space. It has no temporal base either. The ideal towns and societies which Rimbaud feverishly creates or records are evanescent. Nevertheless, since he did record them, they are a social and human document as much as are the evocations of the rejected towns of the "real" world. The Promethean poet can be seen at this point as either the "voleur de feu" serving mankind or the "poète maudit" alienated from humanity: the urban visions as either a refuge or a conquest.

These ideal realms do exist even if they elude the poet in the end. As Rimbaud said in the so-called "Lettre du Voyant" (O.C., p. 251):

Il arrive à l'inconnu, et quand, affolé, il finirait par perdre l'intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues! Qu'il crève dans son bondissement par les choses inouïes et innommables: viendront d'autres horribles travailleurs; ils commenceront par les horizons où l'autre s'est affaissé!

The poet having brought these visions to mankind, mankind, or its poets, can



continue the work of materializing these visions. Thus, the whole of Rimbaud's town poetry is a social criticism and attempt at social reform. Its movement parallels in this sense the progressive social aims of his technological age.

However, as Guy Michaud perceives: "Il s'est dressé contre la civilisation occidentale moderne, mais il en a hérité la précipitation et l'instabilité tourmentée."<sup>2</sup> Spender, noting that the priorities of despairing and visionary authors were diametrically opposed to those of their age, says:

The creative element is the individual vision of the writer who realizes in his work the decline of modern values while isolating his own individual values from the context of society. He never forgets the modern context, in fact he is always stating it, but he does so only to create the more forcibly the visions of his own isolation.<sup>3</sup>

These statements sum up in part Rimbaud's case. While he is as forward-looking and ambitious for man as many of his contemporaries, by creating his visions of an alternative world Rimbaud is producing just as forceful a counter-current while presenting a moral judgment on his age. His singularity is affirmed by his contrary ideals, but his isolation from his contemporaries becomes a positive factor since it will lead to man's true fulfillment.

The poet assumes the role of prophet and stage director. He is in the vanguard of action on account of his acute perceptions, hence his understanding of man's condition. The "Lettre du Voyant" (*O.C.*, pp. 249-54) makes this clear. It is from May 1871 that Rimbaud breaks the bonds of conventional versification and syntax, hones his vocabulary to create "a language" capable

<sup>2</sup>Guy Michaud, Message poétique du symbolisme, Paris; Nizet, 1947, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Stephen Spender, The Creative Element: A Study of Vision, Despair and Orthodoxy among some Modern Writers, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1933, p. 11.

of leading man to perceive, not rationally but with all his senses, the hitherto unknown intuitions and experiences presented by the poet.

Urban imagery now emerges as an integral part of Rimbaud's verbal expression or experimentation. If the poet's role is to make us see more clearly,<sup>4</sup> and if what we are to perceive is our human condition and possibilities, which are represented by images of urban living, then Rimbaud's creation of poetry represents the road to the discovery of the ideal town or condition of man as well as the presentation of this ideal place and state. Poetry is Rimbaud's method of showing us experiences rather than referring to them. It becomes increasingly essential for him to use untried methods of reaching the reader and involving him in the utterance of the poem in order to present his concept of communal man in an ideal environment as forcibly as new technological developments were convincing his contemporaries that man's future lay along scientific, materialistic lines.

Ultimately, Rimbaud, heralding Artaud, creates a type of théâtre total in that the poem, instead of being a minor element within the overall existential experience, attempts to become the overall existential experience of the ideal state or town, enclosing within itself and radiating the lights, the movement of all sorts, the sets, the costumes, the sounds of the ideal world. As Rimbaud said, " Je devins un opéra fabuleux" ("Alchimie du verbe", O.C., p. 110), and, " Je vais dévoiler tous les mystères: mystères religieux ou naturels, mort, naissance, avenir, passé, cosmogonie, néant. Je suis maître en fantasmagories." ("Nuit de l'enfer", O.C., p. 101 ).

---

<sup>4</sup> Graham Dunstan Martin, Language, Truth and Poetry, Edinburgh: At the University Press, 1975, p. 40, also sees this as the chief role of poetry: " If... poetry works first and foremost by evoking connotations in the readers' mind, by making such connotations more conscious than they normally are, and if some at least of these connotations are not verbal, and if some again are irreducible images of sensations, then this may explain poetry's ability to make us 'see' or 'feel' reality more clearly."

This desire to effect through poetry the total involvement of the audience in his visions of euphoric urban communities explains the intuitions of some critics about the theatricalization of much of Rimbaud's later poetry. Granted, the degree to which he succeeds completely in involving his reader may be a matter of individual perception, but this desire does appear to have been the main aim of Rimbaud's metaphysical and verbal experimentation. It is therefore inseparable from his social aims and from his preoccupation with town themes and imagery as symbols of social oppression or transcendence.

This commitment to poetry as the method of reaching happiness and leading man there not only explains Rimbaud's placing of physical involvement in the struggle of the Commune beneath the need to compose poetry ( the role of the poet in "Paris se repeuple" emphasizes this opinion) but also explains his rejection of Parnassian poetry and, in fact, of most poetry. Poetry had forgotten how to communicate since the time of the Greeks.

Nevertheless, since Rimbaud did not publish his later poetry nor make any real attempt to do so, one may wonder if it can be claimed that this communication with the reader was of such importance to him. Jung has said of the true artist:

Being essentially the instrument of his work...we have no right to expect him to interpret it for us. He has done his utmost by giving it form and must leave the interpretation to others and to the future.<sup>5</sup>

This statement also applies to other aspects of the artist's role. We have no right to expect the poet to take an interest in the propagation of his work. In these later poems, the poet's relationship with his fellow man or reader is varied but always an important aspect of the poem. The reader,

---

<sup>5</sup>Jung, "Psychology and Literature", p. 104.

at different moments, has the role of judge, awed spectator or collaborator in the creation and exploration of these town spectacles. These records were preserved by chance. Rimbaud's attitude to these poems would appear to correspond to that stated in the "Lettre du Voyant" (O.C., p. 252): "... si ce qu'il apporte de là-bas a forme, il donne forme; si c'est informe il donne de l'informe." Once he has done this his task is complete. The reader becomes an "horrible travailleur" as much as the future poets who were assigned that role.

With regard to the question of Rimbaud's desire to communicate, the statement of many critics, reinforced by Rimbaud's remark in his letter to Izambard,<sup>6</sup> that his poetry shows a steady progression from subjectivity to objectivity, deserves our attention. Eigeldinger poses the real problem here: whether Rimbaud's metaphysical concerns in his search for his ideal community led to archetypal imagery remote from his personal concerns and memories, and thus to truly objective poetry, or was concerned in fact with his own needs and memories. Eigeldinger states:

Il substitue à la conception subjective du moi une conception objective de l'être [...] "Je est un autre" trouve son explication et son prolongement dans l'inconscient collectif, tel que l'a défini la psychologie de C.G. Jung. Alors que l'inconscient personnel est constitué par les éléments et les matériaux issues de l'existence individuelle, du passé intime du moi, et qu'il correspond à un vécu de chacun des êtres, l'inconscient collectif recèle les images de la vie universelle, les représentations et les structures héritées des temps originels de l'humanité 7

It is true that the increasing generalization of his personal memories and visions in the later poetry, the multiplicity of the role of the poet, or his apparent absence, seem to indicate a wider view, a desire

---

<sup>6</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p. 248, "... vous ne voyez en votre principe que poésie subjective:..."

<sup>7</sup>Eigeldinger, La Voyance avant Rimbaud, Genève; Droz et Paris: Minard, 1973, pp. 104-105.

to present rather than convince, a submerging of the poet's personality to that of mere recorder of the place. Words denoting happiness and unhappiness, frequent in the early poetry, are gradually replaced by the direct induction of emotions by imagery appealing to the perceptions. The poetry becomes more objective in that sense. However, as we have seen, Rimbaud was intensely involved emotionally in the visions of his later poetry. The contents and imagery of the visions link directly with his earlier analogies to his strong emotions: lights, colours, luxuriant natural features, pleasant sounds, vigorous movements, merging with what offers love. The collective unconscious yields up archetypal imagery, but these archetypes correspond to the deepest emotions of all men, and all men include the recorder of these images. The fact that the recording of these visions had an altruistic aim does not preclude Rimbaud's interest in his own personal fulfillment in this ideal urban society he created. In fact, a case could be made for the increasing subjectivity of Rimbaud's poetry. As he retreated more and more inside his own mind, the internal landscapes he described, whether they contain personal memories or not, are reflections of what he needed psychologically to compensate for the deprivations of his age.

Poetry is never truly objective or subjective since it must, as a communication, cause reverberations and recognitions in the mind of others. The metaphysical content of Rimbaud's poetry, the search for and the recording of the ideal regions "là-bas", demonstrate his increasing ability to universalize, condense and communicate perceptually man's deepest urge, to find perfect happiness. This links him to all men. Rimbaud's final urban images and the formulae he uses to evoke them bear remarkable resemblances to the heavens of all religions and the goal of all spiritual quests: communion, communication, splendour, peace and love, "la liberté dans le salut". These images strike deeply into our unconscious, just as

they stirred Rimbaud deeply. Their archetypal nature does not preclude his personal concerns nor exclude generalized scraps of personal memory or perception being contained in them.

Our final question is thus suggested. Are Rimbaud's town poems merely of interest to literary or social historians? Obviously they offer more than an account of the experiences of a French, Catholic, recently urbanized boy during the European industrial revolution and a sample of the progress of French poetic style. What is the secret of their continuing appeal?

André Gide, in response to a similar query by Poésie in 1941, said:

Mais peu importe après tout ce qu'il plaît à tel ou tel de voir dans Rimbaud. Le propre d'un authentique génie poétique n'est-il pas de répondre à des questions très diverses, de prêter à maintes interprétations contradictoires, de favoriser à son sujet le mésentente, d'offrir plus qu'il ne semblait d'abord, de sorte que jamais, avec lui, l'on ne puisse s'en tenir là ? Il y a ce qu'il a voulu dire, ce que l'on croit qu'il a voulu dire; mais le plus important sans doute reste ce qu'il a dit sans le vouloir et malgré lui.  
...Rimbaud demeure un maître prestigieux dans l'art d'écrire, un inventeur de formes dont les imitateurs sans nombre n'ont pu tarir la nouveauté. 8

A third of a century later Gide's perceptive remarks still hold true. They hold true because Rimbaud was a poet. His metaphysical, social, philosophical and personal concerns are presented as an art form. We are always peripherally aware of his poetic text. Rimbaud's abandonment of and derision for old poetic forms led not to formlessness but to a new art form in poetry and to great art, which is always an inexhaustible source of inspiration, stimulus and new vistas for the imagination, protean enough to be all things to all men in all ages.

Michael Polyani, discussing the effect of great painting, explains

---

<sup>8</sup> André Gide, "Rimbaud", p. 177, in Feuillets d'automne, Paris: Mercure de France, 1949.

why it is precisely because of the art form that great works are so compelling:

...works of art are generally formed by the integration of two incompatible elements, one of these being an attempted communication, and the other, an artistic structure that contradicts the communication. The harmonious compound formed by these two elements has qualities found neither in nature nor in human affairs, and hence it can communicate no information about real facts. But it can draw on our unorganized memories and embody them in its own structure, evoking thereby deep emotions in us. The passions that the artist spent in creating his work thus generate their counterpart in us who follow him.

This is how artistic structures, being essentially detached from nature and human affairs, can grip us more firmly than our own memories can do. <sup>9</sup>

As in all poetry, the factual content of Rimbaud's work is slight. We can find out far more facts about towns from any record of urban statistics. However, the cities are man's creations on earth and have an emotional aura divorced from statistics. Rimbaud created poetry which used the town as prime symbol of two universal and absolute states: ecstasy and misery. By undertaking, in the name of mankind, a quest for the ecstatic state and city, by aligning the whole of creation and drawing it into these two states and corresponding types of city in order to illuminate and illustrate them, and especially, by pursuing this quest through a constant refinement of a language which could communicate in hitherto unknown fashions, Rimbaud created great works of art.

His later poetry, particularly, appeals to all our perceptions, involves us in its creation in the same way that medieval passion plays, total theatre, structured and enhanced basic life experiences. It is open enough, suggestive enough, with enough layers of connotation to admit us all. The poem encloses us within its framework and seems to expand to

---

<sup>9</sup>Michael Polyani, "What is a painting? ", The American Scholar, 39 (Autumn 1970), p. 669.

global proportions. It strikes deeply into our unconscious with its universal symbols and archetypal images of happiness and misery. Rimbaud's poetic journey parallels the steps of any individual on his own road towards his ideal place. His human document orders, illuminates and becomes ours.



## APPENDIX

### TOWNS IN RIMBAUD'S POETRY

This appendix simply lists the towns named by Rimbaud in his poetry. They are arranged alphabetically, then within each section, in the order in which they appear in Adam's edition of Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes. Monuments and other sites peculiar to any town are listed with that town, even if they appear in different poems. Words designating towns are also listed to indicate their frequency in the poetry. Parts of town architecture, for example "boulevards", are not included in this table however. Figures in square brackets indicate the number of times the word or noun appears in an individual poem.

+

+

+

L'acropole: [2], "Villes", p. 137.

d'Ashby ? : "Dévotion", p. 153.

Asnières: "Chant de guerre parisienne", p. 40.

Babylone: [2], "Bonne pensée du matin", p. 76, and its repetition in "Alchimie du verbe", p. 107.

Bagdad: "Villes", p. 136.

Bagneux: "Chant de guerre parisienne", p. 40.

Baigneux: "Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI", p. 176, ("vins de Baigneux")

la banlieue: [2], "Ouvriers", p. 133, and "Bottom", p. 151.

des banlieues: "Villes", p. 136.

Beaulne: "Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI", p. 177, ("vins de Beaulne").

Bethléem: "Jeune ménage", p. 81.

Beth-Saïda: "Proses évangéliques", p. 163, ("la piscine des cinq galeries", "bain populaire", "buanderie militaire", "la galerie", "une colonne", "les marches intérieures" [2], p. 163).

un bourg: "Prologue II", p. 172.

ce bourg: "Proses évangéliques", p. 163.

les bourgs: "Villes", p. 136.

Brooklyn: "Promontoire", p. 149.

Bruxelles: "Bruxelles", p. 82-83, (Boulevard du Régent, "l'Henriette,..., station du chemin de fer", p. 82).

Byzance: "Mauvais Sang", p. 94.

Cana: "Proses évangéliques", p. 163.

Capharnaüm: "Proses évangéliques", p. 163.

Carthage: "Promontoire", p. 149.

Charleroi: [3], "Au Cabaret-Vert", p. 32; "La Maline", p. 33; "L'Eclatante victoire de Sarrebruck", p. 34, (le Cabaret-vert, p. 32).

Charleville: "A la musique", p. 21 ("place de la gare", "mesquines pelouses", "les bancs verts", "des gazons verts", "les marronniers verts", pp. 21-22).

Circeto ? : "Dévotion", p. 153.

citée: "L'Orgie parisienne", p. 47, ("la Cité sainte"); "L'Homme juste", p. 54; "Adieu", p. 117, ("La cité énorme"); "Soleil et chair", p. 7, ("les splendides cités"); "Qu'est-ce pour nous...", p. 71, ("Cités"); "Vies III", p. 129, ("Une cité du Nord"); "L'Orgie parisienne", pp. 47-48, ("Une cité", "ô cité" [2], "cité" [6], (15 mentions in all).

Corinthe: "Verba Apollonii...", p. 188.

Damas: "Métropolitain", p. 144.

le faubourg: [3], "Les Poètes de sept ans", p. 44, [1]; "Villes", p. 138, [2].

Des Faubourgs: "Les Premiers Communions", II, p. 62.

Fleurus: "Morts de quatre-vingt-douze...", p. 20.

Galilée: [2], "Proses évangéliques", p. 162; "Un Coeur sous une soutane", p. 199.

Gethsémeni: "Un Coeur sous une soutane", p. 199.

la grand'ville: [2], "Chant de guerre parisienne", p. 40; "Aube", p. 140.

Habana: "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs", p. 58.

Hampton Court: "Villes", p. 137.

Inkermann: "Un Coeur sous une soutane", p. 200.

Des Khenghavars: "Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie", p. 50.

Londres: "Villes", p. 138; "Promontoire", p. 149, ("des Embankments").

Une Métropole: "Ville", p. 134; "Métropolitain", p. 143-144.

Meudon: "Chant de guerre parisienne", p. 44.

Nazareth: "Tempus erat...", p. 180.

Paramaribo: "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs", p. 60.

Paris: "Le Forgeron", [4], pp. 18-20; "L'Orgie Parisienne", [3], pp. 47-48; "Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie", p. 51; "Vies III", p. 129; "Villes", p. 138; "Prologue", p. 173; "Paris, Conneries II", p. 211; "Ressouvenir", p. 217; (13 mentions). "Le Forgeron", pp. 16-18, (Les Bastilles, ta Bastille, la Bastille, [2]); pp. 15-18, (Les Tuileries, Le Palais des Tuileries, "ces larges cours"); "Rages de Césars", p. 31, ("Aux fleurs des Tuileries"); "Le Forgeron", p. 16, ("Ton Louvre"); "L'Orgie parisienne", p. 47, ("les boulevards", "les quais"); "Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI", pp. 175-178, (Châtelet, Montfaucon [2], L'Abreuvoir Popin, la taverne Pestel, la Pomme du Pin, le Plat-d'Etain, la Cour du Parlement [2], "la fontaine Maubuy"; "Villes", p. 138, (la Sainte-Chapelle ?); "Etat de siège?", p. 212, ("la rive gauche", l'Odéon).

Parisienne: "Chant de guerre parisienne", p. 39; "L'Orgie parisienne", p. 47.

port de la misère: "Adieu", p. 117.

quartier: "Les Poètes de sept ans", p. 44, ("rumeur du quartier"); "Les Pauvres à l'église", p. 46, ("des quartiers distingués"); "Les Premiers Communions", p. 62, ("des Riches Quartiers"); "Villes", p. 138, ("le haut quartier", "quartiers", "le quartier commerçant"); (6 mentions).

Reims: "Prologue II", p. 172; ("sa belle cathédrale", p. 172).

Rome: "Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI", p. 175; "Ver erat...", p. 179, ("Roma"); "Jugurtha", p. 184-186, ("Roma", [11]); "Verba Apollonii de Marco Cicerone", pp. 188-190 ("Roma" and "romanus"); "Les Lèvres closes", [2], p. 208; (29 mentions of Rome and the Romans); "Verba Apollonii", p. 188 and 190, (Forum); "Les Lèvres closes", p. 208, ("à la Sixtine").

Saint-Cloud: "Rages de Césars", p. 31.

Samarie: "Métropolitain", p. 144; "Proses évangéliques", [3], p. 162.

Sarrebruck: "L'Eclatante victoire de Sarrebruck", p. 34.

Scarbro': "Promontoire", p. 149.

Sèvres: "Chant de guerre parisienne", p. 44.

des Sions: [see also Solyme]; "Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie", p. 50; "Les Premiers Communions", p. 62, ("Reine de Sion").

les Sodomes: "Nocturne vulgaire", p. 142.

Sorrente, la mer de: "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs", p. 158.

urbs: "Jugurtha", [4], pp. 184-186; "Verba Apollonii...", [2], pp. 188-90.

Soissons: "J'occupais un wagon...", p. 209.

Solyme: "Mauvais Sang", p. 94.

les Solymes: "Nocturne vulgaire", p. 142; "L'Homme juste...", p. 84, ("les Oliviers"); "Vies I", p. 128, ("les terrasses du temple"); "Le Loup criait", p. 89, ("au Cédron", "aux autels de Salomon"); "Proses évangéliques", p. 162, ("au temple"); "Tempus erat...", p. 187, ("et templi ligna secaret").

suburbain: "Jeunesse I", p. 147; "Ornières", p. 135, ("pastorale suburbain")

Tréguier: "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs", p. 60.

Valmy: "Morts de quatre-vingt-douze...", p. 20.

Venise: "Promontoire", p. 149.

le village: "Les Reparties de Nina", p. 26; "Un Coeur sous une soutane", p. 205, ("un riche village"); "Les Premiers Communions", p. 60, ("de villages"); "Loin des oiseaux...", pp. 72 and 106, ("des villageoises").

la ville: "Roman", p. 29; "Comédie de la soif", p. 75; "Bonne pensée du matin", p. 76; "Alchimie du verbe", p. 107; "Est-elle almée...?", p. 83; "Alchimie du verbe", p. 109; "Enfance V", p. 124; "Ouvriers", p. 133; [2], "Ville", p. 134; "Métropolitain", p. 143; [2], "Les Déserts de l'amour", p. 161; [3], "Proses évangéliques", p. 162-163; "en ville", "Parade", p. 126; "cette ville", "Un Coeur sous une soutane", p. 205.

une petite ville: "Prologue II", p. 172.

ville d'Aisne: "J'occupais un wagon...", p. 204.

Villes: [3], "Mauvais Sang", p. 94, 96-97; "La Vierge folle", p. 105; "Adieu", p. 117; "Départ", p. 129; "Villes", [2], p. 135; "Villes", p. 137. (The word "ville" occurs 31 times in his work, "grand'ville" twice, and "urbs" six times.)

Voringhem ? : "Dévotion", p. 153.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### BIBLIOGRAPHIES

#### BIBLIOGRAPHIES ON FRENCH LITERATURE

The following general bibliographies proved useful in establishing a bibliography for Rimbaud's Towns.

Klapp, Otto. Bibliographie der französischen Literaturwissenschaft. Frankfurt am Main; 1956 -

MLA International Bibliography of Books and Articles on the Modern Languages and Literatures. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1921 -

The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies. The Modern Humanistic Research Association, I-XXIV ( 1929/30 - 1972 ).

For books and articles published after 1972, the bibliographies published quarterly in La Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France were consulted.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND ICONOGRAPHIES ON RIMBAUD

Etiemble, [ René ]. Genèse du mythe 1869-1949. Vol. I of Le Mythe de Rimbaud. Bibliographie analytique et critique suivie d'un supplément aux iconographies. Deuxième édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.

Petitfils, Pierre. L'Oeuvre et le visage d'Arthur Rimbaud: Essai de bibliographie et d'iconographie. Paris: Nizet, 1949.

Petralia, Franco. Bibliographie de Rimbaud en Italie. Florence: Institut français de Florence, Edizioni Sansoni Antiquariato, 1960.

Ruchon, François. Rimbaud: Documents iconographiques. Genève: Pierre Cailler, 1946.

St. Aubyn, F. C. The William J. Jones Rimbaud Collection. Foreword by Henri Peyre. Springfield, Missouri: Southwest Missouri State College Library, 1965.

## CRITICAL EDITIONS OF RIMBAUD'S WORKS

Rimbaud, Jean Nicholas Arthur. Oeuvres Complètes. Edition établie, présentée et annotée par Antoine Adam. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. Oeuvres de Rimbaud. Sommaire bibliographique, introduction, notices, relevé de variantes et notes par Suzanne Bernard. Paris: Garnier, 1960.

\_\_\_\_\_. Oeuvres Complètes. Edited by R. de Renéville et J. Mouquet. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1946.

\_\_\_\_\_. Poésies. Edition critique, introduction et notes par H. de Bouillane de Lacoste. Paris: Mercure de France, 1939.

\_\_\_\_\_. Une Saison en enfer. Edition critique, introduction et notes par H. de Bouillane de Lacoste, Paris: Mercure de France, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_. Illuminations: Painted Plates. Edition critique, introduction et notes par H. de Bouillane de Lacoste. Paris: Mercure de France, 1949.

\_\_\_\_\_. Poésies Complètes. Préface de Paul Claudel. Edition établie par Pascal Pia. Paris: Gallimard, Le Livre de Poche, 1960.

\_\_\_\_\_. Album Zutique. Introduction, notes et commentaires de Pascal Pia. Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1962.

\_\_\_\_\_. Illuminations. Texte établi, annoté et commenté avec une introduction, un répertoire de thèmes et une bibliographie par Albert Py. Genève: Droz, 1967.

\_\_\_\_\_. Lettres du Voyant ( 13 et 15 mai). Editées et commentées par Gérald Schaeffer. Genève: Droz et Paris: Minard, 1975.

## CRITICAL STUDIES

Adam, Antoine, et al. Rimbaud. Paris: Hachette, 1968.

Bonnefoy, Yves. Rimbaud par lui-même. Collection Microcosme, Ecrivains de Toujours, no. 54., Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1961.

Bouillane de Lacoste, Henry de. Rimbaud et le problème des Illuminations. Paris: Mercure de France, 1949.

Briet, Suzanne. Madame Rimbaud: Essai de biographie. Suivi de la correspondance de Vitalie Rimbaud-Cuif dont treize lettres inédites. Paris: Minard, 1968.

- Carré, Jean-Marie. La Vie aventureuse de Jean-Arthur Rimbaud. Paris: Plon, 1926.
- Chadwick, Charles. Etudes sur Rimbaud. Paris: Nizet, 1960.
- Chauvel, Jean. L'Aventure terrestre de Rimbaud. Paris: Seghers, 1971.
- Chisholm, A. R. The Art of Arthur Rimbaud. Melbourne: At the University Press, 1930.
- Coulon, Marcel. Au Coeur de Verlaine et de Rimbaud. Paris: Le Livre, 1925.
- Delahaye, Ernest. Souvenirs familiers à propos de Rimbaud, Verlaine et Germain Nouveau. Paris: Messein, 1925.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Les Illuminations et Une Saison en enfer de Rimbaud. Paris: Messein, 1927.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Rimbaud, l'artiste et l'être moral. Paris: Messein, 1947.
- Dhotel, André. Rimbaud et la révolte moderne. Paris: Gallimard, 1952.
- Eaubonne, Françoise d'. Verlaine et Rimbaud ou la fausse évasion. Paris: Albin Michel, 1960.
- Eigeldinger, Marc. Rimbaud et le mythe solaire. Neuchâtel: A la Baconnière, 1964.
- Etiemble, [René]. Structure du mythe. Vol. II of Le Mythe de Rimbaud. Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. L'Année du centenaire. Vol. IV of Le mythe de Rimbaud. Paris: Gallimard, 1961.
- Etiemble, [René] et Yassu Gaucière. Rimbaud. Nouvelle édition. Paris: Gallimard, 1950.
- Fondane, B. Rimbaud le voyou. Paris: Denoël et Steele, 1933.
- Fontainas, A. Verlaine, Rimbaud: Ce qu'on présume de leurs relations, ce qu'on sait. Paris: Librairie de France, 1931.
- Fowlie, Wallace. Rimbaud. Revised and enlarged edition of his Rimbaud The Myth of Childhood, 1946. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Rimbaud's 'Illuminations: A Study in Angelism. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969.
- Frohock, W.M. Rimbaud's Poetic Practice: Image and Theme in the Major Poems. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Gascar, Pierre. Rimbaud et la Commune. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.



Graaf, Daniel A. De. Arthur Rimbaud, sa vie, son oeuvre. Assen: Van Gorcum et Cie., 1961.

Hackett, Cecil A. Rimbaud l'enfant. Préface de Gaston Bachelard. Paris: Corti, 1948.

\_\_\_\_\_. Autour de Rimbaud. Paris: Klincksieck, 1967.

Houston, John Porter. The Design of Rimbaud's Poetry. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963.

Izambard, Georges. Rimbaud tel que je l'ai connu. Préface et notes de H. de Bouillane de Lacoste et Pierre Izambard. Paris: Mercure de France, 1946.

Kunel, Maurice. Verlaine et Rimbaud en Belgique. Liège: Soled, 1945.

Matarasso H. et P. Petitfils. La Vie d'Arthur Rimbaud. Préface de Jean Cocteau. Paris: Hachette, 1962.

Noulet, E. Le Premier Visage de Rimbaud: Huit poèmes de jeunesse. Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1953.

Plessen, Jacques. Promenade et poésie: l'expérience de la marche et du mouvement dans l'oeuvre de Rimbaud. La Haye et Paris: Mouton, 1967.

Renéville, Rolland de. Rimbaud le voyant. Paris: Au sans Pareil, 1929.

Richer, Jean. L'Alchimie du verbe de Rimbaud ou les jeux de Jean-Arthur. Essai sur l'imagination du langage. Paris: Didier, 1972.

Rivière, Jacques. Rimbaud. Paris: Kra, 1930.

Rops, Daniel. Rimbaud: Le drame spirituel. Paris: Plon, 1936.

Ruchon, François. Jean-Arthur Rimbaud, sa vie, son oeuvre, son influence. Réimpression de l'édition de 1929. Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970.

Ruff, Marcel A. Rimbaud, l'homme et l'oeuvre. Paris: Hatier, 1968.

Starkie, Enid. Arthur Rimbaud. London: Faber and Faber, 1961.

Verbeek, E. Arthur Rimbaud: Een Pathographie. Amsterdam: Swets en Zeitlinger, 1957.

Whitaker, Marie-Joséphine. La Structure du monde imaginaire de Rimbaud. Paris: Nizet, 1972.

#### ARTICLES IN PERIODICALS

Adam, Antoine. " L'Enigme des Illuminations", La Revue des sciences humaines, 57-60 ( décembre, 1950), 222-245.

- Ahearn, Edward. "Imagination and the Real: Rimbaud and the City in Nineteenth Century Poetry", La Revue de la littérature comparée, XLVII (1973), 522-544.
- Ascione, Marc et Jean-Pierre Chambon. "Les 'zolismes' de Rimbaud", Europe, (mai-juin, 1973), 114-132.
- Bernard, Suzanne. "Rimbaud, Proust et les Impressionnistes", La Revue des sciences humaines, (avril-juin, 1955), 257-262.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "La Palette de Rimbaud", Cahiers de l'association internationale des études françaises, 12 (juin, 1960), 105-119.
- Bonnefoy, Yves. "La Poésie objective", Two Cities, 4 (May 15th, 1960), 6-15.
- Boulestreau, Nicole. "Chronologie de Rimbaud", Europe, (mai-juin, 1973), 153-170.
- Bruneau, Charles. "Le Patois de Rimbaud", La Grive, (avril, 1947), 1-6.
- Chambers, Ross. "Rimbaud et le regard créateur", Saggi e ricerche di letteratura francese, X (1969), 197-228.
- Chambon, Jean-Pierre. "Rimbaud versaillais ? (ou l'art de changer son fusil d'épaule)", Revue des deux mondes, (avril-juin, 1971), 554-560.
- Davies, Margaret. "Le Thème de la voyance dans 'Après le déluge', 'Métropolitain' et 'Barbare'", La Revue des lettres modernes, 3 (1971), 19-39.
- Décaudin, Michel. "Rimbaud et la Commune: Essai de mise au point", Travaux de linguistique et de littérature, IX (1971), 135-138.
- Denis, Yves. "Glose d'un texte de Rimbaud: 'Après le déluge'", Les Temps modernes, (janvier, 1968), 1261-1276.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Glose d'un texte de Rimbaud: 'H' ", Les Temps modernes, (avril, 1968), 1878-1887.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Glose d'un texte de Rimbaud: 'Le bain dans la mer à midi' ", Les Temps modernes, (mai, 1969), 2067-2074.
- Eigeldinger, Marc. "L'Image crépusculaire dans la poésie de Rimbaud", La Revue des lettres modernes, 3 (1971), 7-17.
- Faurisson, Robert. "A-t-on lu Rimbaud?", Bizarre 21/22 (4ème trimestre, 1961), pp. 1-48.
- Fischer Jan O. et Vladimir Stupka. "Rimbaud, poète de la vision poétique moderne", Romanistica Pragensia, 6 (1969), 59-74.

- Fongaro, Antoine. " Les Echos verlainiens chez Rimbaud et le problème des Illuminations", Revue des sciences humaines, 105 (1962), 263-272.
- \_\_\_\_\_. " Pour l'exégèse d'Illuminations", Studi francesi, 39 (sett.-dic., 1969), 491-497.
- Forestier, Louis. " Rimbaud en son temps", Europe, ( mai-juin, 1973), 4-19.
- Graaf, Daniel A. De. " Les Illuminations et la date exacte de leur composition: une nouvelle hypothèse", Revue des sciences humaines, 60 (oct.-déc., 1950), 246-254.
- \_\_\_\_\_. " Une Clé des Illuminations: l'exposition universelle de 1878", Revue des sciences humaines, 78 (avril-juin, 1955), 267-270.
- \_\_\_\_\_. " Rimbaud a-t-il séjourné à Scarborough ? ", Revue de la littérature comparée, (janv.- mars, 1957), 91-93.
- \_\_\_\_\_. " Le Point de vue de Rimbaud", Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire, 47 ( 1969), 867-872.
- Guiraud, Pierre. " L'Evolution statistique du style de Rimbaud et les Illuminations", Mercure de France, ( 1er octobre, 1954), 200-234.
- Hackett, C.A. " Rimbaud and the ' splendides villes'", L'Esprit Créateur, IX, no. 1 ( Spring, 1969), 46-53.
- Hubert, René Riese. " The Use of Reversals in Rimbaud's Illuminations ", L'Esprit Créateur, IX, no. 1 ( Spring, 1969), 9-18.
- Jones, Robert Emmet. " 'Parade' de Rimbaud; Une nouvelle interprétation", Les Lettres romanes, 20 ( 1966), 115-124.
- Lebeau, J. " Le Thème de la ville", Mercure de France, 339 ( mai-août, 1960), 359-363.
- Matarasso, H. et P. Petitfils. " Rimbaud, Verlaine, Germain Nouveau et l'Album Zutique", Mercure de France, 342 ( mai, 1961), 7-30.
- Mortier, Roland. " Deux rêveries devant le promontoire: Hugo et Rimbaud", Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Bruxelles, 48, (1970), 123-135.
- Pakenham, Michael. " Sur l'Album Zutique", Mercure de France, 342 ( août, 1961), 746-748.
- Peschel, Enid Rhodes. " Violence and Vision: A Study of William Blake and Rimbaud", Revue de la littérature comparée, XLVI ( 1972), 376-395.
- \_\_\_\_\_. " Themes of Rebellion in William Blake and Arthur Rimbaud", The French Review, XLVI, no. 4 ( March, 1973), 750-761.

- Petitfils, Pierre. " L'Architecture rimbaldienne", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 2086 ( 24 août, 1967), 10.
- Richepin, Jean. " Germain Nouveau et Rimbaud ( souvenirs inédits)", La Revue de France, ( 1er janvier, 1927), 119-143.
- Richer, Jean. " Gautier en filigrane dans quelques Illuminations", Europe, ( mai-juin, 1973), 67-76.
- Ruff, M.A. " Chronologie rimbaldienne", Etudes rimbaldiennes, 2 ( 1969), 159-170.
- St. Aubyn, Frédéric. " The Social Consciousness of Rimbaud", Yale French Studies, II, no. 2 ( 1949), 26-33.
- Soupault, Philippe. " Sur les traces de Rimbaud", Europe, ( mai-juin, 1973), 33-36.
- Spencer, Michael. " A Fresh Look at Rimbaud's 'Métropolitain' ", Modern Language Review, 63, no. 4 ( oct. 1968), 849-853.
- Ulmann, Fabrice. " L'Environnement pictural de Rimbaud", Europe, ( mai-juin, 1973), 57-60.
- Underwood, V.P. " Rimbaud et l'Angleterre", Revue de la littérature comparée, 29 ( janvier-mars, 1955), 6-35.
- \_\_\_\_\_. " Reflets anglais dans l'oeuvre de Rimbaud", Revue de la littérature comparée, 34 ( 1960), 536-560.
- \_\_\_\_\_. " Rimbaud le marin", Mercure de France, 338 ( déc., 1960), 635-648.
- \_\_\_\_\_. " Rimbaud et les lettres anglo-saxonnes", Revue de la littérature comparée, 35 ( 1961), 433-457.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Rimbaud anglicisant", Revue de la littérature comparée, 36 ( 1962), 337-368.
- Wing, Nathaniel. " Rimbaud's ' Les Ponts', ' Parade', ' Scènes', : The Poem as Performance", The French Review, XLVI, no. 3 ( Feb., 1973), 506-521.

#### BOOKS WITH REFERENCE TO RIMBAUD

- Bays, Gwendolyn. The Orphic Vision: Seer Poets from Novalis to Rimbaud. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.
- Bernard, Suzanne. Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours. Paris: Nizet, 1959.
- Eigeldinger, Marc. La Voyance avant Rimbaud. Genève: Droz et Paris: Minard, 1975.

- Fretet, Jean. "Arthur Rimbaud" in his L'Aliénation poétique, Rimbaud — Mallarmé—Proust. Paris: Janin, [1946].
- Gibson, Robert. "Rimbaud", in his Modern French Poets on Poetry. Cambridge: At the University Press, [1961].
- Gide, André. "Rimbaud", in his Feuillets d'Automne. Paris: Mercure de France, [1949].
- Halicka, Alice. Hier (Souvenirs). Paris: Editions du Pavois, 1946.
- MacLeish, Archibald. Poetry and Experience. Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1960.
- Martino, Pierre. Parnasse et Symbolisme. L'édition de 1925 remise à jour par MM. René Pintard et Claude Pichois. Paris: Armand Colin, 1958.
- Michaud, Guy. Message poétique du symbolisme. Paris: Nizet, 1947.
- Morier, Henri. "Le Style fantasmagorique", in his La Psychologie des styles. Genève: Georg, [1959].
- Raymond, Marcel. From Baudelaire to Surrealism. English translation of the 1933 edition. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1970.
- Richard, Jean-Pierre. "Rimbaud et la poésie du devenir", in his Poésie et profondeur. Paris: Editions du Seuil, [1955].
- Sewell, Elizabeth. The Structure of Poetry. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1951.
- Spender, Stephen. "The Necessity of Being Absolutely Modern", in his The Creative Element: A Study of Despair and Orthodoxy among some Modern Writers. London: Hamish Hamilton, [1933].

#### OTHER WORKS CONSULTED

- Aristophanes. Lysistrata. Erklart von Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. Zurich/Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Birds. Translated by William Arrowsmith. New York and Toronto: New American Library, The Mentor Circle Comedy, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Ecclesiastusae. Edited by R.G. Ussher. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.
- Baudelaire, Charles. Oeuvres Complètes. Texte établi et annoté par Y.-G. Le Dantec. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1954.
- Breton, André, et al. Manifestes du surréalisme. Paris: Gallimard, Collection 109, 1972.

- Brogan, D.W. The French Nation: From Napoleon to Pétain 1814-1940. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.
- Chabot, Georges. Les Villes. Paris: Armand Colin, 1952.
- Citron, Pierre. La Poésie de Paris dans la littérature française de Rousseau à Baudelaire. 2 tomes. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1961.
- Cohen, Jean. Structure du langage poétique. Paris: Flammarion, 1967.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Biographia Literaria. Edited with his Aesthetical Essays by J. Shawcross. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907.
- Coppée, François. Poésies Complètes. Paris: Lemerre, (n.d.).
- Doré, Gustave and Blanchard Jerrold. London: A Pilgrimage. London: Grant and Co., 1872, reprint ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968.
- Downey, June E. The Creative Imagination: Studies in the Psychology of Literature. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929.
- Edwards, Stewart, ( editor). The Communards of Paris, 1871. London: Thames and Hudson, Documents of Revolution Series, 1973.
- Hamilton, Edith. Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes. New York and Toronto: New American Library, 1966.
- Hampson, Norman. The Enlightenment. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, The Pelican History of European Thought 4, 1968.
- Hartnoll, Phyllis. A Concise History of the Theatre. London: Thames and Hudson, 1968.
- Henderson, W.O. The Industrialization of Europe, 1780-1914. London: Thames and Hudson, 1969.
- Huxley, Aldous. The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974.
- Jellinek, Frank. The Paris Commune of 1871. New York: Oxford University Press, 1937.
- Joxe, France. " Ville et modernité dans les Fleurs du Mal", Europe, ( avril-mai, 1967), 139-162.
- Jung, Carl G. The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature. Translated by R.F.C. Hall. New York: Pantheon Books, Bollingen Series XX, 1966.
- Kamenka, Eugene, ( editor). Paradigm for Revolution: The Paris Commune, 1871-1971. Canberra: The Australian National University Press, 1972.

- Lautréamont et Germain Nouveau. Oeuvres Complètes. Textes établis, présentés et annotés par Pierre-Olivier Walzer. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1970.
- Lewis, C. Day. The Poetic Image. London: Jonathan Cape, 1947.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Poets' Way of Knowledge. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1957.
- Lucius, Henriette. La Littérature " Visionnaire" en France du début du XVI<sup>e</sup> au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: Etude de sémantique et de littérature. Bienne: Arts Graphiques Schüler S.A., 1970.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. Oeuvres Complètes. Texte établi et annoté par Henri Mondor et G. Jean-Aubrey. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1945.
- March, Harold. " The Artist as Seer. Notes on the Esthetic Vision", Yale French Studies, no. 2 ( 1949), 44-54.
- Martin, Graham Dunstan. Language, Truth and Poetry: Notes towards a Philosophy of Literature. Edinburgh: At the University Press, 1975.
- Mauron, Charles. Des Métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel. Paris: Corti, 1963.
- Mounin, Georges. Communication poétique. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.
- Parent, Monique. Saint-John Perse et quelques devanciers: Etudes sur le poème en prose. Paris: Klincksieck, 1960.
- Pichois, Claude. Littérature et progrès: vitesse et vision du monde. Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1973.
- Polyani, Michael. " What is a painting ?", The American Scholar, 39 ( Autumn, 1970), 655-669.
- Régamey, Félix. Verlaine dessinateur. Paris: Floury, 1896.
- Rieser, Max. Analysis of Poetic Thinking. Translated by Herbert M. Schueller. Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1969.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Emile, ou de l'éducation. ed. F. and P. Richard. Paris: Garnier, 1964.
- Sallustius, Crispus C. De Bello Jugurthino. Ed. W.W. Capes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1897.
- Sansot, Pierre. Poétique de la ville. Paris: Klincksieck, 1972.
- Sayce, R.A. Style in French Prose: A Method of Analysis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958.

- Schneider, Wolf. Babylon is Everywhere: The City as Man's Fate.  
Translated by Ingeborg Sammet and John Oldenburg. London: Hodder and  
Stoughton, 1963.
- Souriau, Etienne. La Poésie française et la peinture. The Cassal Bequest  
Lecture, 1965. London: The Athlone Press, 1966.
- Talmon, J.L. Romanticism and Revolt: Europe 1815-1848. London: Thames  
and Hudson, Library of European Civilization, 1967.
- Taylor, John Russell. The Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre. Harmondsworth,  
Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970.
- Temkine, Raymonde. "De Baudelaire à Michaux", Europe, 456-457 (avril-  
mai, 1967), 234-244.
- Tibert, Michel. La Ville. Paris: Classiques Hachette, Thèmes et parcours  
littéraires, 1973.
- Underwood, V.P. Verlaine et l'Angleterre. Paris: Nizet, 1956.
- Vanhamme, Marcel. Bruxelles: De bourg rural à cité mondiale. Anvers--  
Bruzelles: Mercurius, 1968.
- Vérane, Léon. Humilis, poète errant. Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1929.
- Verlaine, ex-Madame Paul. Mémoires de ma vie. Paris: Flammarion, 1935.
- Verlaine, Paul. Oeuvres Complètes. Introduction d'Octave Nadal, études et  
notes de Jacques Borel. Texte établi par H. de Bouillane de Lacoste  
et Jacques Borel. Paris: Le Club du Meilleur Livre, 1959.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Oeuvres en proses complètes. Texte établi, présenté et annoté  
par Jacques Borel. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1972.
- Weber, Adna. The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in  
Statistics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963. Originally  
published in 1899 for Columbia University.