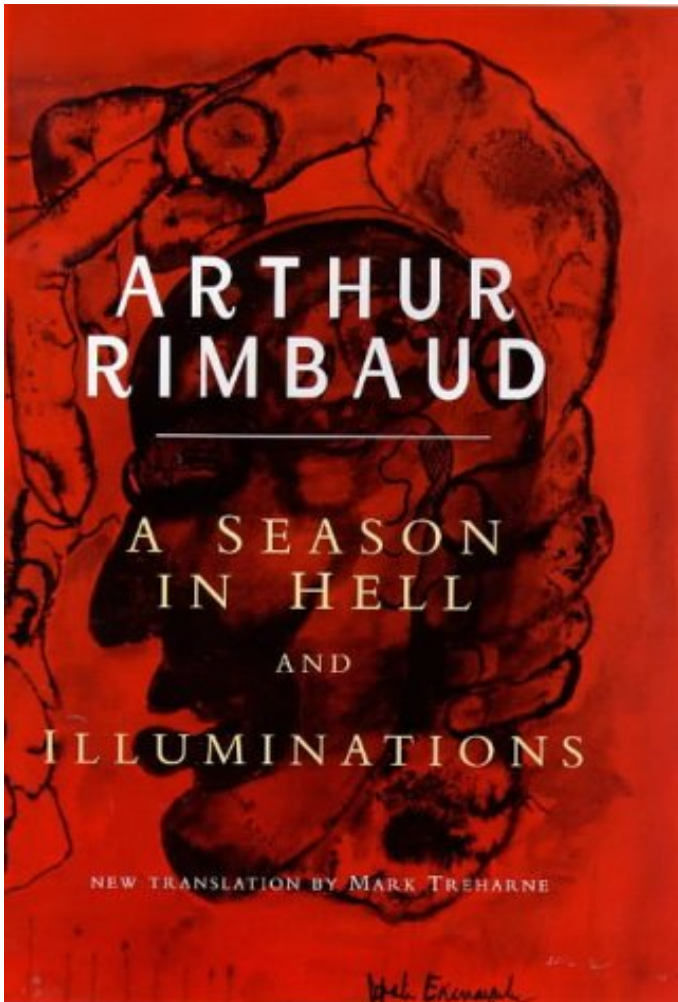

Arthur Rimbaud

A Season In Hell And Illuminations



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Description

«Iluminações - Uma Cerveja no Inferno, é um dos casos especiais em que a poesia caminha por lugares muito elevados. Cesariny encontra, uma vez mais, Rimbaud, numa edição bilingue, a dois tons. A voz já se ouve atravessando o deserto e a floresta para além da Abissínia».

Insightful reviews

Ben: I am going to try to make this review brief, particularly as I've already reviewed about 4 other translations of Rimbaud's poetry (by Varèse, Fowlie, Mason and Schmidt) and in my last review of one of these (of Schmidt's treatment of Rimbaud) I made a concise comparison of each of the different translations, really putting my support behind Mason's translation, finding Fowlie too literal and feeling that Schmidt took too many liberties in his translation.

Bertrand Mathieu's translation of *A Season in Hell & Illuminations*, to me, comes closest to Schmidt's. In many poems the reader gets the essence of Rimbaud, but I feel it is Mathieu's voice that is most commonly communicated on the page. Of course, I am basing this largely off of other translations that I have read. Mathieu's translation came out in 1991 (pre-Mason [2002]) and in his postscript he draws some comparisons between his interpretations and those of Varèse and Fowlie, arguing that their approach erred too often on the side of conservatism. I don't disagree with him here, but I think that he and Schmidt tend too often to err on the other side of the line, missing that very delicate balance that Mason best achieves.

I think that what I found most objectionable about Mathieu's translation was his attempt to push the language of Rimbaud forward into the late 20th century, using modern street slang that he felt would today be most in tune with the punk slang often used by the little poète maudit, translating *l'ami* as "the buddy" rather than as "the friend" and *les seins* as "titties" rather than "breasts" (just looking at one poem -- "Vigils" -- which Mathieu translates as 'Night-Watches,' for one example that I found particularly sophomoric in its style). Another thing that bothered me was that he translated "ennui" as "boredom" throughout, as have many translators of Rimbaud, but I take the position of James McGowan in his translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* that ennui is something more "forceful" than boredom and that it should just be left as is, especially as the word is well enough known in American English. In other places I felt that Mathieu stripped the beauty out of certain phrases, such as the opening lines of *Une Saison en Enfer*, which has been translated by others as follows:

Varèse: "Once, if I remember well, my life was a feast where all hearts opened and all wines flowed."

Schmidt: "Once, if my memory serves me well, my life was a banquet where every heart revealed itself, where every wine flowed."

Fowlie: "Long ago, if my memory serves me well, my life was a banquet where everyone's heart was generous, and where all wines flowed."

Mason: "Long ago, if my memory serves, life was a feast where every heart was open, where every wine flowed."

And now Mathieu's: "A while back, if I remember right, my life was one long party where all hearts were open wide, where all wines kept flowing."

As stated early on, one gets a faint essence of Rimbaud, but what one is really reading here, I feel, is Mathieu. It's not bad, but it's not the Rimbaud that I've come to know and love. So why do I give it such a high rating -- 4.5 stars, let's say?

Well, first, it still does have the essence of Rimbaud and that counts for something, even if the language has become somewhat mangled. Second, I quite enjoy having the English and French texts side-by-side (a favored feature that can also be found in the translations of Fowlie and Varèse). And, finally, I really enjoyed the translator's preface and postscript. I learned some new things about Rimbaud's life from these, but the veracity of some things is questionable as certain key biographical details that Mathieu includes completely conflict with points made in the other translations that I have read. I think I will probably read Enid Starkie's biography of Rimbaud at some point and try to see what light she can offer. Of course, Rimbaud is not a poet who can easily be pinned down and the stories included by Mathieu, while different from those of other translators, are very interesting nonetheless -- missing pieces to a jigsaw puzzle that will never be complete. And Mathieu's postscript is also valuable in the sense that it, unlike other translations, points the reader toward works that influenced the young Rimbaud, including the works of Swedenborg, Eliphas Levi and the novels of Balzac. Quite interesting and worthy of further investigation.

If only for the preface and postscript, this is a work worth reading, but I would not recommend it to one discovering Rimbaud (by way of some translator) for the first time. These poems need to be read (particularly as the prose poem was still so novel at the time -- employed very well by Rimbaud, but first and equally well by Baudelaire), but start with Mason or even Fowlie, and move on from there. So much for the brief review that I had set out to write at the beginning.

Hilary: *A Season in Hell & Illuminations* was a book that I was introduced to in the dead of night. I was handed the text and asked to read and, being me, proceeded to open to random pages and read aloud in an impassioned tone. When read like this - in the middle of the night with all of its magic and attractions, the text is like fire.

Rimbaud's words alternatively scorch and caress, they raise up the most enlivened fancies and play out dark fantasies unlike anything else one could ever be exposed to. Rimbaud becomes the Father of all that is brutal and metal, he becomes the embodiment of debauchery and dark poetry; in this light he is pure electricity, and being that, strange, mysterious, and wonderful.

In the light of day, his prose loses some of that intensity. He becomes something tamer, better understood. In light of the preface, Rimbaud runs the risk of even failing to be purely Rimbaudian - he is human, after all, and simply a man, behind a desk, writing... I feel he loses his allure in this light, rather than gains it. Yes, he is human, but the legend is so much more fun and eagerly traced...?

I struggle between giving this novel three stars or four - in the right conditions, he is truly incredible and quite the beloved read. For now, I shall settle with three, and perhaps increase upon a later date.

Andy: When I was a mere slip of a boy and my flesh tasted like chicken and goth had not quite creeped into non-existence I would sulk in dimly lit buses reading Rimbaud. "Illuminations" reminds me of Baudelaire's "Paris Spleen" in that these are not poems so much as they are prose pieces, little snatches of light of varying shades. This is good reading on rainy nights.

T.: whereas i will be able to delight in what Rimbaud used to be doing in lots of of those pieces, I type of simply felt like i used to be analyzing the ravings of a 19 12 months previous boy who used to be in love with an older man. Because, well, that is primarily what a Season in Hell is. However, Rimbaud's use of the poetic image, displaced position (that's what i will name it considering the fact that i do not be aware of if it has a precise literary term), and his abstraction of the noun in Illuminations certainly redeemed this booklet in my eyes. It not felt petulant and whiny like A Season in Hell, yet moved directly to trap related subject matters in a extra picturesque and surreal manner.

Redsteve: i can't stand this translation. Too many Americanisms: "buddies", "clobbered", "little buddy", "mind-blowing jive". remember that the translator is attempting to make Rimbaud accessible to trendy Americans, yet i might a lot really he simply caught to translating French into the English of an analogous period.

Autumn: i learn this in the course of my own season in hell that i presumed might by no means end. it was once reliable to grasp that rimbaud and i've a few issues in common.

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