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Rimbaud's letters, 1870-1873

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RIMBAUD'S LETTERS 1870-1873

by

NORMAN H. LEWIS

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in French in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy, The City University of New York.**

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Introduction

Rimbaud's Letters 1870-1873

In this dissertation I will examine the letters of Rimbaud written between 1870 and 1873. It was during these years that Rimbaud produced his most significant work, and his letters enunciate his concern with both practical and theoretical issues in poetry. Although certain letters from this period have received extensive attention (most notably the two "Lettres du Voyant" of May, 1871), the others have been virtually overlooked.¹ Like letters by other nineteenth-century poets (such as Keats, Dickinson, and Hölderlin²), Rimbaud's letters, particularly those addressed to Banville, Izambard, Demy, Delahaye and Verlaine, furnish us with essential details of the generation and revision of poetry and poetic theory. They also deal with social, political, and philosophical issues. The broad range of their content, as well as their transitional place in the poet's career make them worth careful scrutiny.

This study of Rimbaud's letters has several tasks. Specifically, I will attempt to show their pivotal position in relation to the poet's literary development during these years. The increased suppleness of the prose in these letters, as well as their revolutionary statements, combine to help us better understand how Rimbaud's work evolved from the Poésies to Les Illuminations. The large number of allusions and references to contemporary life in the correspondence also needs to be explored; this research will shed light on important literary developments of the nineteenth century as well as on the growth of Rimbaud's views.³ Finally, the letters need to be examined from the point of view of interactivity. Since the letter is intended as a specific statement to a specific person in time, we must look at correspondence differently than other kinds of writing. Voltaire said about the letter "Other genres have rules, this one only secrets."⁴ If we consider the issue of interactivity we must also look at these letters in terms of interactive editing.⁵

Many of the letters from 1870-1873 contained poems which were intended to be commented upon by the recipients. In the 1870 letter to Banville, he writes:

Je ne suis pas connu; qu'importe? les
poètes sont frères. Ces vers croient; ils
aiment; ils espèrent: c'est tout. (237)⁶

In the "Lettres du Voyant" he adds urgent pleas for the recipients to respond to the poetry he has enclosed. Thus the letter serves as a medium for displaying and eliciting a response to the poet's work. We know, for example, that Demeny and Delahaye both "copied" poems of Rimbaud; it is necessary to explore the history of these copies---their faithfulness to the originals, any editing or response, and whether or not their copies were ever seen by the poet. We can also speculate about the letters and poetry sent to Verlaine⁷; in what ways did the two poets use correspondence as a means for exchanging and editing poetry?

I would suggest that the letter served as an ideal medium for the exchange of literary ideas, particularly in Rimbaud's case. It was during these years that he felt himself to be a prisoner in his own home; the letters functioned as missives to an outside world that he himself could not participate in. The language, in accordance with this idea of imprisonment, is sometimes encoded (as in the letter to Delahaye, "Parmerde, Jumphe 72"). The coding of language, the coining of new words and expressions, and the use of pseudonyms ("Alcide Bava" in the second letter to Banville, for example) are common in the letters of this period. In addition to their atmosphere of escape and adolescence, we must also examine these falsifications and neologisms in their relation to the growing metamorphoses and transfigurations of Rimbaud's "literary" language.*

Although many themes recur in the letters, I will focus on four major ones: "voyance", linguistic coding and neologisms, the poet's reading, and his ideas about revolution.

The theme of "voyance" in the letters has been treated more thoroughly in the critical literature than any other theme in Rimbaud's correspondence. This is the logical place, therefore, to begin my examination of the letters and to review their critical history.

The issue of "voyance" is somewhat further complicated by Rimbaud's own developing views about its qualities and powers. In the first "lettre du voyant", written to Izambard, Rimbaud mentions the term almost indirectly, equating it with the vocation of the poet:

Je veux être poète et je travaille à me rendre voyant: vous ne comprendrez pas du tout, et je ne saurais presque vous expliquer(249).

His "failure" to define the term here can be contrasted with his amplification on the theme several days later in the second "lettre du voyant" addressed to Paul Demeny:

Je dis qu'il faut être voyant , se faire voyant. Le Poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens(251).

In the final letters of this group, as in the disillusioned view of "voyance" that we see in Une Saison en Enfer, Rimbaud shows us still another view of the subject.

The second theme I shall explore is that of the linguistic novelty with which these letters are imbued. Rimbaud not only declares his intention of "reinventing language," but shows us how he will go about this task. Although the previously mentioned "lettres du voyant" exhibit some linguistic experimentation, the letters of 1872 and 1873 push this to its extreme limits.

Writing to Delahaye in 1872, Rimbaud shows how the "deregulation of the senses" is proceeding in a linguistic frame:

C'est le plus délicat et le plus
tremblant des habits, que l'ivresse par la
vertu de cette sauge des glaciers,
l'absomphe(265)!

This experimentation and play with language, the invention of words and their interplay with standard syntax and vocabulary show us how the poet will wrest the more traditional aspects of language, particularly poetic language, from its ordinary direction in Les Illuminations. Letters to Delahaye in the following year, as well as fragments from the letters to Verlaine, show us how far these epistolary verbal experiments were pushed.

We can see already how these first two themes become intertwined in the letters. Whether "voyance" is interpreted as a manifestation of Rimbaud's orphic tendencies, or whether the necessary "encrepulement" entails debauchery and drugs, the results are visible in the texts of the letters from 1871-1873.

The third theme I wish to examine in this thesis is that of Rimbaud's reading during this period. Rimbaud's earliest letters to Izambard indicate the voracity of his literary appetite. Ransacking his mentor's eclectic library, Rimbaud became acquainted with a broad spectrum of writers, from Rabelais to Hugo. Letters of the years 1871-2 indicate a new interest in populist, even socialist literature. Other letters (especially those addressed to Delahaye) from this period show how Rimbaud was attempting to extend his grasp of other languages, literatures, and even entirely different subjects.

The final theme I plan to study in the letters is that of revolution. Here too it will be necessary to review the critical material first, particularly those works which deal with Rimbaud's involvement with the Paris Commune of 1871.⁹ Revolution may be considered in its political sense, but many of Rimbaud's letters show that he also understood and foresaw revolution in many other areas--literary, social, even sensory. Here too we must examine Rimbaud's more general view of progress, within the larger framework of his idea of "history". Once again we may see that Rimbaud's conception of the poet was evolving in the years 1870-1873 from that of passive transcriber of nature to forceful, even militant leader of the future.

In thus rearranging civil priorities, Rimbaud envisioned a more egalitarian society:

L'art éternel aurait ses fonctions,
comme les poètes sont citoyens. La poésie ne
rythmera pas l'action; elle sera en avant.
Ces poètes seront! Quand sera brisé l'infini
servage de la femme, quand elle vivra pour
elle et par elle,-- l'homme, jusqu'ici
abominable,--lui ayant donné son renvoi, elle
sera poète, elle aussi(252)!

In my consideration of these four varied themes throughout the letters, I hope to have shown how they were all intertwined; we cannot examine Rimbaud's views of "voyance" without also considering his concepts of revolution. Nor can we begin to treat the poet's use of neologism until we have examined the books that he read. In all four cases, it is the correspondence which gives us the most direct access to these different areas.

Notes

(1) Gerald Schaeffer's definitive edition of the two "Lettres du voyant" (1975) set a new standard for scholarship in this area. The notes in the Bernard/Guyaux Garnier edition (1981) are thorough, but include only selected letters. Adam's notes for the second Pléiade edition (1972) and Rolland de Renévill/Jules Mouquet's first edition (1946) both have excellent but condensed information on the letters. A number of recent critical articles on the letters are included in the accompanying bibliography (see Guyaux, Dumoncel, Chocheyras, Mouret, Nykrog, Rhodes Peschel). Work on letters and correspondence has recently been the focus of attention in such works as Janet Altman's Epistolarity (1982), The Nantes Colloquium on Correspondence held in the same year, the 1984 issue of the Revue des Sciences Humaines (no. 195), and the 1986 Yale French Studies (no. 71), "Men/Women of Letters".

(2)for Keats, see The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821., edited by Hyder Edward Rollins. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Dickinson: The Letters of Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Johnson. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Hölderlin: see William Burford and C. Middleton, The Poet's Vocation: Selections from the Letters of Hölderlin, Rimbaud and Hart Crane. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.

(3)The long lists of authors Rimbaud mentions in his correspondence need to be thoroughly examined; in addition, work on such issues as politics, social thought of the 1870's, feminism, education, and literary journals, as discussed in the letters, would help to understand larger issues in both Rimbaud and the broader spectrum of nineteenth-century French literature.

(4)As quoted in Yale French Studies, no 71: ("Men/Women of Letters"), 1986. p. 173.

(5) Some works, such as Wayne Koestenbaum's Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration (New York: Routledge, 1989), have begun to examine the issue of interactive writing/editing, but there is only a brief mention of Rimbaud. The work concentrates on English writers. Little use is made of the correspondence. Another recent work which deals with similar subject material is Richard Lehmann's Three Literary Friendships: Byron and Shelley, Rimbaud and Verlaine, Robert Frost and Edward Thomas. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984.

(6) All quotations from Rimbaud will be from the (1972) Pléiade edition of his complete works, edited by Antoine Adam.

(7) Only three complete letters from Rimbaud to Verlaine survive; Mathilde Verlaine burned the majority.

(8) Rimbaud scholarship which has focused on language (Ascione, Brunel, Dobay-Rifelj) has tended to overlook the letters as a source for additional information about the poet's use of neologism, patois and slang.

(9) See particularly Décaudin, Edwards, Gaspar, and Ross.

Chapter One

Rimbaud and Voyance

The concept of "Voyance" in Rimbaud's work has been much examined. One of the earliest studies, by Rolland de Ren  ville, used voyance as an organizing principle in interpreting all of the poet's work (Rimbaud le voyant, 1929). Still others have examined the issue in a historical framework (Bays, Eigeldinger) and have concluded that Rimbaud inherited many aspects of "voyance" from previous generations of poets.¹ While these provide useful approaches to the topic, I would like to attempt a narrower analysis of the letters themselves to see in what ways the term arises, how it is used, and why it has special significance in the correspondence.

The first definition of what Rimbaud calls "Voyance" occurs in the letter to Izambard of May 13, 1871; the epistolary context seems important. The letter here provided a heuristic and linguistically unrestrained genre for the expression of the poet's nascent ideas. In addition, it is significant that Rimbaud's first ideas on "voyance" are addressed to his former teacher and poetic mentor. In the first part of the letter, Izambard is chastised for his participation

in the world of the bourgeoisie. Izambard had been Rimbaud's instructor and friend at the Collège de Charleville from 1870 to 1871, at which time he left to take up another post at Douai. Even the opening of the letter reveals Rimbaud's alienation and reaction to Izambard's "betrayal":

Cher Monsieur!
 Vous revoilà professeur. On se doit à la
 Société, m'avez-vous dit; vous faites partie
 des corps enseignants: vous roulez dans la
 bonne ornière...(Rimbaud 248)²

Although Izambard was only a few years older than Rimbaud, the distance separating them (now also spatial) is emphasized by the younger poet's recalcitrant and anti-establishment stance at the beginning of the letter. This is thus part of the framework in which we must interpret Rimbaud's later statements on "voyance." Unlike his former teacher and confidant, Rimbaud is unwilling to "roll" in the good paths of society. It is from this idea that he will develop the concept of "voyance" in the letter.

A letter written to Izambard in the previous year shows how much Rimbaud's attitude to him had evolved.

--Oh! J'espère en vous comme en ma mère;
 vous m'avez toujours été comme un frère...
 (240)

Izambard's presence at Charleville had fostered this bond; he had not only taught Rimbaud at school, but had encouraged him to read and write

poetry. When Rimbaud first ran away, it was Izambard and his family who sheltered and cared for the young poet. But by May of 1871, the poet's reaction to his formerly idolized mentor was tinged with spite and anger. Izambard, in accepting the post at Douai, had abandoned Rimbaud as his father had. In the letter of May 13, Rimbaud writes to him with filial mockery. After chiding Izambard for becoming a proper member of bourgeois society, Rimbaud recounts in rather school-boyish terms how he has established a dominant position at school by bullying the other boys, and how he has been rewarded with beer and women (248). He thus tries to demonstrate his freedom from Izambard, as he does throughout the letter ("Travailler maintenant, jamais, jamais; je suis en grève."; "Vous n'êtes pas enseignant pour moi.[249]") The fact that his first statement of "voyance" is embedded in this declaration of independence seems an important indication of its significance.

On an even more personal note, Rimbaud attacks Izambard's poetry in the letter. An entire paragraph is devoted to this attack, in which Rimbaud tries to distinguish between Izambard's poetry ("poésie subjective") and his own ("poésie objective"). Rimbaud's famous "JE est un autre", if seen in the context of this letter, can thus take on additional significance. His criticism of Izambard begins, in this paragraph, with a further disparaging reference to his

bourgeois position. Rimbaud's attack goes from the personal to the poetic:

Mais vous finirez toujours comme un satisfait qui n'a rien fait, n'ayant rien voulu faire. Sans compter que votre poésie subjective sera toujours horriblement fadasse(248).

Rimbaud says that the seeds of "objective poetry" are even in the unenlightened Izambard, and that one day, all poets will produce this poetry. At this point, Rimbaud avows that he will become a "worker"; it is unclear whether he means as a poet, a revolutionary, or both, since his sympathies with the Communards are mentioned in the same breath. Nevertheless, it is clear that his progressivism here extends to revolutionary ideas about the nature of poetic creation. It is at this juncture that the statement of the "voyant" appears:

Maintenant, je m'encrapule le plus possible. Pourquoi? Je veux être poète, et je travaille à me rendre voyant: vous ne comprendrez pas du tout et je ne sais rien vous expliquer. Il s'agit d'arriver à l'inconnu par le dérèglement de tous les sens(249).

By placing the often-quoted "voyant" statement in its context, we can see that it refers to a number of other issues beyond the commonly-ascribed "ars poetica" of the young prophet-poet. To see it solely as such would give it a disguised meaning, for Rimbaud expresses many complex ideas at this point in the letter. First, there is the entire vector of

paternal (and poetic) authority; the spirit of rebelliousness, poetic superiority, and distancing. Bloom, in The Anxiety of Influence, has described it as *askesis*³, and a number of critics have seen this primal struggle between Baudelaire and Rimbaud or Verlaine and Rimbaud⁴. It is obvious that Izambard, in his paternal/fraternal role as mentor and poet represented a challenge to the adolescent Rimbaud. Thus, one of the most basic ideas of "voyance" is born out of an oedipal challenge to the father. Although the previous paragraph is devoted to ideals of work, in the last sentence Rimbaud gives notice that he is "on strike." Thus, the statement "Maintenant je m'encrapule..." takes on a different meaning in the context of the letter. Instead of "working" (as a poet or a fighter for the revolution), Rimbaud is determined to "see" in the metaphysical sense (the correlation between the verb "voir" and the noun "voyant" being strong indeed: the English cognate "seer" also reflects this linguistic confluence.)

But the formula that Rimbaud gives here abounds with contradictions. To be a poet/seer, in fact, he must work...but not in the ordinary sense. "Encrapulement" sounds the first original note in this statement; it is complemented by his desire for a "dis-ordering of all the senses". Here, the idea of "voyance" takes on a new meaning. If, for Leconte de

Lisle and others, the term had already been applied to poetry, it had never been stretched so far as to include the purposeful miring of the body and the undoing of the senses. Suzanne Bernard's comments:

Il semble...que Rimbaud ne doit qu'à lui-même sa théorie de l'entraînement à la Voyance par le dérèglement de tous les sens...(546)

Thus the spirit of rebellion in which this entire letter is framed extends to the originality of Rimbaud's definition of "voyance". The fact that he claims he is unable to explain it to Izambard, and that the older man would not understand it in any case shows Rimbaud's attitude clearly.

In the second part of the paragraph, Rimbaud proclaims himself a poet by a process of mystical self-recognition:

Les souffrances sont énormes, mais il faut être fort, être né poète, et je me suis reconnu poète. Ce n'est pas du tout ma faute(249).

The question of the origin of the "voyant" poet is an important one. Rimbaud discusses the whole theme of origins in detail in the second letter; however, even here he is laying the foundations for his theories of poetic origin. He says that although hard work is necessary, one must be born a poet. In this sense, his views come closest to the historical notion of the poet as seer. However, the wording of the definition, especially at this point, begins to take on

new and expansive meaning. Although he has once before addressed the issue of self and other in the letter (in his discussion of objective/subjective poetry), he now begins to play with these concepts in such a way as to lead to his more complete statements of "voyance" that examines both poet and poem. "Je me suis reconnu poète" gives us some sense of the subject/object shift that he will incorporate into his theory, but the next lines are the most crucial:

C'est faux de dire: Je pense. On devrait
dire: On me pense. Pardon du jeu de mots.
JE est un autre. Tant pis pour le bois qui se
trouve violon, et nargue aux inconscients,
qui ergotent sur ce qu'ils ignorent tout à
fait(249).

This objectification of reality seems to be one of the aims of the "voyant". "On me pense" is Rimbaud's response to Descartes' "Je pense donc je suis." This new objectification is a way of seeing the self from outside the self, and thus it prefigures the alienation of modern art. Who is the thinker("on") who brings about the idea of the self? As Rimbaud shows in the next paragraph of the letter, the subjective persona of I is replaced by another. These two differing selves have been the subject of much critical speculation.⁶ The important thing to note here is the splitting of the original self. The result is that two distinct selves are formed; one is in an objective form and it is in this mode that poetry must be written. Too much subjectivism leads to the weakness that Rimbaud

has identified in Izambard's work. The objective self must be trained and cultivated through the contradictory disordering of the senses and the imposition of poetic discipline. The "JE" here may represent the "born poet" that Rimbaud claims he is; but the objective other must go about the task of exploring the universe of ideas (including the unknown) and then incorporate them into poetry. This is not a schizophrenic stance, for in the end both elements are necessary if the poem is to emerge. Rimbaud shows how the unknowing wood and the violin created from it are both the result and producer of transformation. Similarly, in the letter to Demy, he writes "Si le cuivre s'éveille clairon, il n'y a rien de sa faute (250)." Thus, the material and the instrument are fatefully intertwined. If we return to the idea of the poet as "voyant", we may see the analogy in the idea of "JE est un autre." Like the raw matter shaped into the musical instrument, the poet is the crude receptor of images, who must transform and shape these into writing. He participates in a twofold process by reconstructing the lost world of the senses. In order to do this, however, he must first disorder the senses, mirroring himself in the experiences which will allow the poet to perceive the unknown. The maniacal wanderers at the end of Baudelaire's "Le Voyage" seem to express the same sentiments:

Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cer-
 veau,
 Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel,
 qu'importe?
 Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!
 (Baudelaire 127)

Although Baudelaire's image is more religiously dichotomized, and the force driving him to the unknown seems to come from a different inspiration, both poets see similar objectives and difficulties for the poet's search. Perhaps this helps to explicate a line in the second letter to Demeny:

...Baudelaire reste le premier voyant,
 roi des poètes, un vrai Dieu(253).

In the words "Pardon du jeu de mots" and "nargue aux inconscients..." we recognize further aspects of Rimbaud in his letters. I will deal with his delight in coining words and his use of neologism in the letters in a separate chapter, but here I would point to the fact that "JE est un autre" is surrounded in the original text by ironic and even humorous language. Again, this aspect of the famous self/other dichotomy needs to be reconsidered in its context. The play on words may have to do with the conflation of the French verb "panse" (to dress, as a wound) and the verb "pense", or it may be the parody of Descartes already mentioned, or even just the extraordinarily reversed syntax. In the sentence following the radical "JE...", Rimbaud uses a rather banal and almost dis-

missive expression to introduce his next idea ("Tant pis..."): this is somewhat, but not altogether revised in the letter to Demeny ("...il n'y a rien de sa faute"). As for "nargue aux inconscients...", here again Rimbaud's strong anti-bourgeois tone is combined with his fascination by such odd but effective words as "ergotent" and the internal repetition of the "g" and "n" sounds in various combinations (leading into the *enseignant* of the final paragraph). Thus Rimbaud's word play and experimentation in this portion of the letter reflect some of the "voyant" theories he has already stated. By irony and self-distancing, we return to the dichotomized objective/subjective self.

It is in this final paragraph, with its opening disparagement of Izambard as teacher, that we see the dichotomized self again in terms of criticism and poetic analysis. After his initial denunciation, Rimbaud then goes on to ask for Izambard's advice about the poem that he includes, "Le Coeur supplicié":

Vous n'êtes pas enseignant pour moi. Je vous donne ceci: est-ce de la satire, comme vous diriez! Est-ce de la poésie? C'est de la fantaisie, toujours. --- Mais, je vous en supplie, ne soulignez ni du crayon, ni trop de la pensée:

[LE COEUR SUPPLICIE]

Ca ne veut pas rien dire.

REPONDEZ-MOI: chez M. Deverrière, pour A.R.
Bonjour du coeur, ARTH. RIMBAUD (249)

Rimbaud's inclusion of "Le Coeur supplicié" at this point is significant in the context of the first "Voyant" letter. His statements to Izambard show that he wanted critical reaction to the poem but was nevertheless reluctant to have it edited by his former teacher. The poem itself, certainly one of Rimbaud's most experimental, did seem to defy categorization. Are we to see this as the first "voyant" poem? The phrase "Ça ne veut pas rien dire" has been explicated by the critics in a number of ways⁹, but it seems as obvious as the capital letters that follow it and plead for an answer: Rimbaud does not want Izambard to dismiss the poem on the basis of its superficially bizarre appearance. The word "fantaisie" can only begin to express the mixture of deep personal feeling combined with the exotic diction at the heart of this poem. The poem also demonstrates two of the main principles of "voyance." "Encrapulement" is everywhere in the depraved and sensual bacchanal. At the same time, the self is seen as another. It is in this sense that the poet questions his heart in the last line:

Comment agir, ô coeur volé?

Sending the same poem to Demeny on June 10, 1871, (now renamed "Le Coeur du pître"), Rimbaud frames it with a different commentary, in which the poem's radical style is somewhat more thoroughly explained:

Voici...un motif à dessins drôles;
c'est une antithèse aux douces vignettes

pérenelles où batifolent les cupidons, où
s'essorrent les coeurs panachés de flammes,
fleurs vertes, oiseaux mouillés, promontoires
de Leucade, etc...(255)

"Voyance" is thus illustrated most completely
by the poem itself, and the letter to Izambard builds
to this literary conclusion.

The letter to Paul Demeny of May 15, 1871
takes these same principles of "voyance" and expands
them. The tone changes radically, as Rimbaud is no
longer writing to his former schoolteacher, but to a
friend and fellow poet. Rimbaud writes more instruc-
tively and less defiantly in this second letter. His
initial ideas have been amplified and broadly
developed. The poet's concepts of "voyance," in partic-
ular, undergo significant transformations.

Rimbaud prefaces the letter by announcing his
prophetic intentions:

J'ai resolu de vous donner une heure
de littérature nouvelle (249).

This new literature is partly his own (three
poems are included, in addition to the decidedly
literary language of the letter itself), and partly a
brief history and projection of the future history of
poetry. In this way, Rimbaud both theorizes and
illustrates his ideas of "voyance."

He begins the letter by a "contemporary"
poem: "Chant de guerre parisien." Based (loosely) on

the events of 1871, the poem evokes a feeling of actuality (Rimbaud mentions Thiers and Picard), but the language is equally revolutionary:

O Mai! quels délirants culs-nus! (40)

In eight stanzas of four octosyllabic lines each, Rimbaud recreates the chaos and tumult of the anarchic spring of 1871.

Governments topple, but the language is that of flowers: this is also a poem based on spring, and its imagery recurs in the most unexpected places:

Thiers et Picard sont des Eros,
Des enleveurs d'héliotropes;...

Et couché dans les glaïeuls, Favre...(40)

Thus, Rimbaud interweaves topical situations with the "classical" imagery of poetry, preparing the reader for more didactic statements of this principle.

It is also important to look at the function of poetry embedded in prose in these letters. Although the poems illustrate the principles of "voyance," they also represent an effort by Rimbaud to enter into a cooperative editorial venture with his readers. This is shown at the end of the letter to Izambard, where he asks his mentor to comment on "Le Coeur supplicié"; it continues through the editorial collaboration with Verlaine in 1873. The letter is not simply the carrier of a poem; it surrounds it with its context. This is particularly important to understand in the "voyant" letters. If the first letter to Izambard had ended

without "Le Coeur supplicié," the effect of Rimbaud's statements on the nature of poetry would have been greatly reduced. Similarly, here, by opening the letter with "Chant de guerre," Rimbaud has provided a poetic framework for the ideas that he will illustrate throughout the letter.

The next paragraph begins by reintroducing the theme of genre:

--Voici de la prose sur l'avenir de la poésie:¹⁰--(250)

Rimbaud then offers a brief, biased history of the decline of verse from the Greeks to the Romantics, with the sole exception of Racine. Rimbaud's brush is broad here; but, again, if we read this part of the letter in the light of the definition of "voyance", we may begin to understand his wholesale condemnation:

...tout est prose rimée, un jeu, un avachissement et gloire d'innombrables générations idiotes...(250)

If his recapitulation of the history of poetry is deliberately provocative, Rimbaud's praise of the romantics is generous. It is in this context that he now announces his idea of self and other to Demyen:

Car JE est un autre(250).

The addition of the word "car" at the beginning of this phrase is important. Rimbaud reinforces his idea here with a connective, linking it to the discussion of the history of poetry throughout the

letter to Demeny. Again, looking at the statement from within the total context of the letter, we are brought to see the pivotal place of "voyance" in this poetic universe. In this paragraph, Rimbaud takes this principle of self/other, and shows how it forms the basic structure of his work:

...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, ou vient d'un bond sur
la scène (250).

The musical basis of voyance is here reiterated, as it was in the previous transformational images of wood into violin and brass into trumpet. Here, the poet himself is the instrument of creation. With one sweep of the bow, music unexpectedly takes shape. The poet watches over all of this disinterestedly. His chief role is to bring the idea from one realm to another. Rimbaud personifies his thought: "I watch it, I listen to it". This objectification and distance is necessary for poetic production. Voyance thus encompasses the dichotomy between inspiration and artistic creation.

In the next paragraph, Rimbaud interweaves the two themes that he has already introduced by suggesting that the reason for the decline in the history of poetry was this inability to find and explore the self. [here referred to as "(le) Moi"] His solution is exuberant and simple: sweep away the moldy skeletons of the past, and begin the task of "Voyance".

Rimbaud then continues his cultural history of the world, returning to the example of the Greeks to show a society in which poetry and action were inextricably mixed. Since that time, man has been sleepwalking, and no true poet has come forward:

...telle allait la marche, l'homme ne se travaillant pas; n'étant pas encore éveillé, ou pas encore dans la plénitude du grand songe. Des fonctionnaires, des écrivains: auteur, créateur, poète, cet homme n'a jamais existé(251)!

The true poet, according to Rimbaud, must undergo an intense search for self-knowledge as well as a cultivation of the most extreme points of his personality. In this portion of the letter, he expands on some of the ideas of voyance which he merely put forth in the letter to Izambard. Here, for example, Rimbaud describes the descent into one's own personal hell for the sake of poetry:

--Mais il s'agit de faire l'âme monstrueuse: à l'instar des comprachicos¹¹, quoi! Imaginez un homme s'implantant et se cultivant des verrues sur le visage (251).

This deformity, in turn, will transform the poet into a seer: ["Je dis qu'il faut être voyant, se faire voyant." (251)]

In the following paragraph, Rimbaud expounds on this notion of monstrosity and voyance; they are necessary corollaries. The "dérèglement de tous les sens" in the letter to Izambard has now become "long, immense et raisonné". This expansion of his principle

to show how the poet achieves "voyance" focuses attention on the process as well as on the result. The poet must search deeply within himself, must experience madness and other mental extremes, until finally he reaches the goal of voyance:

Car il arrive à l'inconnu(251)!

But the contribution of the individual poet is only a part of the history that Rimbaud envisions. After becoming an adept at voyance, the individual poet, crazed by his knowledge and the exertion of superhuman force, now must himself become swallowed up in the ongoing history of poetry:

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! (251)

The role of the individual poet [voyant] is here seen in the perspective of the history of poetry; he is a laborer in a continuous field of activity. Rimbaud thus aligns the progressive political ideals of 1871 with his poetic theory. He writes to Demy as a champion of the new. There is also a more personal, more urgent tone in his definition of voyance; the combination of an onrush of new ideas with the force of epistolary style works to bring about a new style---one that prefigures the prose of Les Illuminations:

Le Poète se fait voyant par un long,
immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les

sens. Toutes les formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui-même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons, pour n'en garder que les quintessences. Ineffable torture où il a besoin de toute la foi, de toute la force surhumaine, où il devient entre tous le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit, --et le suprême Savant(251)!

We also hear echoes in this passage of the rhetoric of political tracts which Rimbaud at this time was reading; the passion was not just for the love of poetry but part of a greater struggle in which all men needed both faith and superhuman force. In these ideas, he was in harmony with such contemporary social theorists as Fourier and Victor Cousin.¹² Thus Rimbaud's theory of "voyance" incorporates popular contemporary oratory and the keen enthusiasm of youthful correspondence.

The second part of this statement carries the idea of voyance beyond the task of discovery. Here Rimbaud tells Demeny that in order to discover the unknown, the poet must first lose his mind and his senses, and ultimately himself.

This loss of the self and its replacement by others can now be seen in the light of the famous "JE est un autre" as well as the context of French social thought in the 1870's.¹³

The subordination and dismissal of the self are here depicted as a sublime death; the poet surrenders his mind and body for the sake of his art; others [workers] will succeed him and take up the task

of poetry. The voyant is able to foresee not only his individual future but the entire future of history and of poetry.

It is after this complex and penetrating definition of the voyant [some six minutes later, according to Rimbaud: again the letter acts as a record of the moment of writing itself] that Rimbaud inserts his second poem to Demeny, "Mes petites amoureuses."

In the next section of the letter, Rimbaud expands his definition of the poet-voyant. Like Prometheus, he is a "stealer of fire." Rimbaud again asserts that the poet has a responsibility that extends beyond the range of humanity itself. Here we can find mythological parallels with Orpheus:

Il est chargé de l'humanité, des animaux même; il 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 l'informe. Trouver une langue;--Du reste, toute parole étant idée, le temps d'un langage universel viendra(252)!

Like Orpheus he must invest even the mute subjects of nature with a voice. His poem to Banville of August, 1871, "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos des fleurs," reflects these concerns. That this new idiom is brought back from Hell points to other parallels with Orpheus ¹⁴.

In his definition of this new language, Rimbaud shows how it will rise above the standard limita-

tions of language as we know it. In truly reflecting its ideational origins, language will become a means of communication that transcends the mere use of words and speech:

Cette langue sera de l'âme pour l'âme,
résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs, de la
pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant. Le
poète définirait la quantité d'inconnu
s'éveillant en son temps dans l'âme
universelle(252).

The dream of a new language certainly did not originate with Rimbaud; but in his definitions of the functions of this language, Rimbaud shows how he will poetically express the ideas he is writing to Demy in [epistolary] prose. Language will be synesthetic: it will reflect the true realm and correspondence of the senses.¹⁵ It will be a language of the soul, and a universal language, and thus will be understood by a different segment of that part of us which now responds to poetry (the cerebral)...and by a different (larger) segment of the population. In the next few paragraphs of the letter, Rimbaud goes on to show how this new language will also be the language of progress and the future. Rimbaud's ideas of progress and of history are heuristic: he has already stated that each new generation of poets will pick up where the previous "workers" have stopped. Now he combines this with the optimistic faith of the Fourierist¹⁶ as well as the voyant's function as annotator and "multiplier" (252) of progress. The future poet, like his ancient

Greek predecessor, will thus partake of eternity and will enter into a community of all mankind:

L'art éternel aurait ses fonctions,
comme les poètes sont citoyens. La poésie ne
rhythmera plus l'action; elle sera en
avant(252).

Rimbaud has repeatedly emphasized the ability of the voyant to see into the future. Poetry can no longer be a poetry of the moment, but must be able to lead us into the future. The search for a new form of expression is combined with the search for the unknown and the two will culminate in a new poetry. Poetry can no longer be mimetic ("...ne rhythmera plus l'action"); in its experimental quest it must prefigure future action. It will be new in other ways too. In the next paragraph, Rimbaud shows how women, poetically disenfranchised, will also contribute to the future of poetry:

Ces poètes seront! Quand sera brisé
l'infini servage de la femme, quand elle
vivra pour elle et par elle, l'homme--
jusqu'ici abominable,--lui ayant donné son
renvoi, elle sera poète, elle aussi! La
femme trouvera de l'inconnu! Ses mondes
d'idées différeront-ils des nôtres?--Elle
trouvera des choses étranges, insondables,
repoussantes, délicieuses; nous les
prendrons, nous les comprendrons(252).

Voyance has led Rimbaud to foresee the importance of women in poetry, which has been denied even in our own century, and is only now coming to be accepted. If his ideas here are visionary, the next few paragraphs show how doctrinaire Rimbaud could be in certain

views of voyance. In these paragraphs, he reviews the history of nineteenth century poetry and evaluates its leading poets in terms of their ability or inability to see into the future and to transform their poetic technique accordingly. Although the first wave of Romantics were voyants, they were so in spite of themselves; the second wave (Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Banville) are "très voyants," with Baudelaire a God among them. However, even Baudelaire did not go far enough in the innovation of poetic form, and Rimbaud chides him for his aestheticism¹⁷. In the long and extremely varied list that follows, Rimbaud mentions and quickly analyzes the names and work of some of his contemporaries. He concludes with the name of Verlaine, a Parnassian but a true "voyant" (254), and we gain from this encyclopedic vision a view of nineteenth-century poetry from within as well as a valuable record of Rimbaud's own awareness of poetry and poetic history.

After this long and rather disorganized discussion, Rimbaud summarizes his letter to Demy by saying: "Ainsi je travaille à me rendre voyant.(254)," and he concludes with a "pious song," "Accroupissements," an anti-clerical and scatological poem. Is this meant to illustrate his views on voyance? The poem's regular meter and rhyme would seem to contradict this view, but his treatment of a "forbidden" subject in

such a traditional framework might be seen as an experiment.¹⁰ The letter ends with pleas to his friend to quickly respond; thus we see the importance of interactivity in the shaping of his ideas on voyance. He seemingly asks Demeny for his views not only on poetry but on the views of voyance propounded in the letter.

The two "voyant" letters thus provide us with interesting material for observation and comparison. The letter to Izambard sketches out the main ideas of an aesthetic and poetic theory that Rimbaud expands in the letter to Demeny. The tone varies considerably; the letter addressed to his former mentor is rebellious and condemnatory; the one addressed to his friend and fellow poet follows the idea of "voyance" more closely in its historical context and delineates a plan for its future.

In both letters, we can observe a number of similar traits in Rimbaud's definition of voyance. These include the following:

1) Distinction between self and other:

In both letters, Rimbaud emphasizes a division of the self as one of the prime signifiers of the state of voyance. We may see this as an expression of the difference between the daily self and the poetic self; it may be that the poet needs complete dissolution of the ego in order to face his poetic and prophetic function. What seems relevant here is the

presentation of this idea in letter form. For here, the other (Izambard, Demyen) is also the recipient of the letter. Rimbaud's insistence on his correspondent's participation in the acts of reading and responding to his letters underlines this position. Thus the duality of the self as a key concept in the poet's idea of voyance is initially seen as the dichotomy between his own self and that of his correspondent. Can the correspondent understand these ideas? Rimbaud seems to be testing his initial theories here by putting them into letter [dialogical] form.

2) Heightening of the senses:

In the letter to Izambard, Rimbaud posits the necessity of a disordering of the senses; in the letter to Demyen, he adds the idea of an ordered disorder. In both letters, he advocates the stimulation of the senses to the furthest possible degree, and through the most extreme means. The hyperesthesia that results is the voyant's key to the new and unknown worlds that he is meant to penetrate, and, as a poet, to translate into poetic language. Both letters mention the necessity for this state and the debauchery that it entails, but the letter to Demyen is much more explicit in the description of the means the poet must use to arrive at the state of voyance.

3) Search for the new:

Closely allied with the expanding role of the senses, the voyant must engage in a constant search for

the new. In the letter to Demeny, Rimbaud calls for both formal and textual novelty:

...demandons aux poètes du
nouveau, --idées et formes. Tous les habiles
croiraient bientôt avoir satisfait à cette
demande. --Ce n'est pas cela(252)!¹⁹

4)Confraternity of poets:

In some ways, this concept goes back to medieval times [cf Villon]; in others, it is fixed in the time in which Rimbaud formulates his theories of voyance. Like all other members of society, the poet, until now overlooked or denigrated, will be a valued participant in the community. He will contribute the gift of foresight and vision, and this is necessary for the future of the human race. The cultivation of voyance is not seen as an arcane aesthetic practice, but as a necessity for arriving at this future state. As Rimbaud shows in the letters to Demeny and Verlaine, the poet must interact with other poets if his work is to succeed. In the letter to Demeny of May 15, 1871, he pleads for evaluation and response.

5)The future; progress:

As mentioned above, progress is a key to voyance. Each poet adds his own individual contribution to the future of poetry and thus participates in the natural progress of humanity. Rimbaud's vision of this future is clearly related to the progressive ideas of Fourier, Saint-Simon and others that had begun to cap-

ture the French imagination. The swiftly accelerating technology of the 1870's also lent impetus to these ideas: if such progress was made manifest in the industrial world, why not in poetry as well?²⁰

6) New language/new form:

Rimbaud sees the dilemma of the voyant in linguistic as well as poetic terms. Until he can invent an appropriate language to capture the novelty of his ideas, he will not fulfill the other conditions of voyance. The language will be "of the soul and for the soul"(252): an inner language that will be able to record the most subtle of parallels. Rimbaud's vision of new poetic forms may seem somewhat contradicted by the inclusion of formally standard poems in these two letters; interestingly, it is in the prose of the letters themselves that we may discern the direction of future poetic change.

Chapter One: Notes

(1) In his introduction to Schaeffer's edition of the Letters of May 13 and May 15, Marc Eigeldinger gives a most detailed analysis of the concept of "voyance" before Rimbaud. He begins with the distinctions made in the Bible between prophet and seer, and then progresses to the Ancient Greeks and Romans who also dichotomized these functions, occasionally fusing them with the poetic one. Plato saw the poet creating within a mode of delirium and demonic possession. (in Schaeffer 18) The Latin word "vates," signifying the oracular poet, underwent a significant change from perjorative to laudatory meaning by the end of the classical age of Roman poetry. Here, Eigeldinger interjects an interesting note about an early poem of Rimbaud's in Latin:

Rimbaud, dans un poème latin composé à l'âge de seize ans, imagine Apollon lui enjoignant en lettres de feu son destin de poète: Tu vates eris, et il est pénétré par l'inspiration qui le brûle de sa chaleur solaire. (in Schaeffer 21)

The concept of "voyance" continued to be addressed in Western literature by such diverse figures as François de Sales, Voltaire, and Rousseau. The generation of German Romantics, beginning with Novalis, and progressing through Hölderlin, reshaped many of the important concepts of poetic inspiration. In Rimbaud's own country and century, writers such as Michelet, Hugo, Balzac, and Gautier put forth important theories of "voyance." Less well-known writers also produced tracts on the subject of poetic divination; these included Victor de Laprade, Fabre d'Olivet, Jean-Augustin Chaho, and Eliphas Lévi. Whether Rimbaud absorbed concepts from his predecessors is not the point of my thesis; instead, I wish to show how his invention of theory is inextricably linked to his composition of the letters.

(2) All citations from Rimbaud refer to the second Pléiade edition of the complete work, published in 1972, and edited by Antoine Adam.

(3) Bloom describes *askesis* as the following:
 ... a movement of self-purgation which intends the attainment of a state of solitude; I take the term, general as it is, particularly from the practice of pre-Socratic shamans like Empedocles. The later poet does not, as in *kenosis*, undergo a

revisionary movement of emptying, but of curtailing ; he yields up part of his own human and imaginative endowment, so as to separate himself from others, including the precursor, and he does this in his poem by stationing it in regard to the parent-poem as to make that poem undergo an *askesis* too; the precursor's endowment is also truncated (15).

(4) For a discussion of the possible relationship between Baudelaire and Rimbaud, see André Guyaux's article entitled , "Baudelaire a-t-il influencé Rimbaud?" in Bérénice 6 (1981). Of the many works on Rimbaud's relationship to Verlaine, perhaps the most interesting, from a textual point of view, is still Henri Peyre's Rimbaud vu par Verlaine (Paris: Nizet, 1975).

(5) "Bernard" in the text will refer to Suzanne Bernard's excellent notes to the Garnier edition of Rimbaud's works (Paris, 1960). This edition was revised by André Guyaux in 1982.

(6) See such works as Karen Dillman's The Subject in Rimbaud: from Self to "Je" (New York: Lang, 1984) or the article by Jean-Claude Dumoncel entitled "Je est un autre: Une Saison dans le Tractatus"; Poétique November 1983; 14 (56): 483-4.

Robert Greer Cohn, for example, interprets this from a psychosocial perspective:

The well-known summation "Je est un autre"--which refers to the impersonal, original, objective cosmically-rooted self, the other behind the social "I"--simultaneously asserted both his being at odds with society, his uniqueness, and, in another direction, his being at odds with himself, constituting what would be, if pathological, schizophrenia. But fortunately for art his power of integration was as strong as the menacing split, and...he did face himself with a courage seldom equaled on a spiritual terrain, the irrefutable proof being the granitic presence of his work (9).

- (7) Bernard says of the word-play here:

Rimbaud ne recule pas devant le calembour involontaire (sur penser et panser) pour essayer de se faire comprendre, de souligner cette sorte de passivité qui fait qu'il n'est pour rien dans le jaillissement de sa pensée, qu'il ne la contrôle pas. En somme, il retrouve (bien avant les Surréalistes) la vieille conception de l'inspiration qui s'empare du vates (546, note 6).

(8) The poem's original title was supplanted several months later in the "Recueil Demy." This manuscript of several poems by Rimbaud had been recopied in his friend's neater hand. In this collection, the poem was entitled "Le Coeur du pitre". The first change of title corresponds perhaps to Rimbaud's growth of both feeling and poetic technique. The substitution of the figure of a clown for the original, more Parnassian adjective ("supplicié") reflects Rimbaud's continuing effort to incorporate new words into the language of poetry. At the same time, it is interesting to observe Mallarmé's use of the same word in a poem of 1864, "Le Pitre chatié". Still more resemblances to contemporary images in poetry are suggested in the notes to this poem by Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (in Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes; Pléiade, 1965.):

Il n'est pas impossible que ce sonnet ait pris naissance dans un écho prolongé du Vieux Saltimbanque, ce poème en prose de Baudelaire, publié d'abord dans La Revue Fantaisiste, et dans lequel Baudelaire compare le poète au vieux saltimbanque(1417).

In Verlaine's later copy, the title "Le Coeur volé" appears. Subsequent published versions use this title for the poem. Was the final title the result of an interactive literary collaboration with Verlaine? It is possible. Several recent works have addressed the issue of literary collaboration, particularly in the light of gay studies. These include Wayne Koestenbaum's Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration. (1988) and Richard Lehmann's Three Literary Friendships (1984). The ambivalent "volé" (which in English may be translated as either "flying" or "stolen") gives even more support to Rimbaud's theory of a "new language" for poetry.

[The information concerning manuscripts for this note was gleaned from the editions of Bernard, Bernard and Guyaux, Adam, Mouquet and Rolland de Renévill as well as from letters of Rimbaud, Demy, Izambard and Delahaye. However, much of the material is contradicted by other claims; there is still clarification and research needed in this area. Other comments on the three titles are my own.]

9) On the way this phrase has been misread, see particularly the article by Per Nykrog, "Ça ne veut pas rien dire": sur la lettre de Rimbaud à Georges Izambard (13) mai 1871.", in Romanic Review 1983 Jan 74 (1): 54-66.

10) It is interesting to compare this statement to one made at the close of a previous letter to Demy (April 17, 1871)), in which he says "Telle était la littérature,--du 25 février au 10 mars" (Rimbaud 247), or to the opening of this letter ("J'ai résolu de vous donner une heure de littérature nouvelle" [249]). These statements all show that the letters served as a means of defining literature itself between the two correspondents. The epistolary mode was an apt one for the exchange of current literary information as well as theory. Interwoven with this theme is one of genre itself. The subtext of these statements seems to be: What is poetry/prose? How do we define contemporary literature in its various aspects? etc.

(11) Bernard gives us the following explanation:

Le mot comprachicos est une allusion évidente à L'Homme qui rit de Hugo (publié en 1869): le mot s'applique chez Hugo à des voleurs d'enfants qui mutilaient leurs victimes pour en faire des monstres et pouvoir gagner de l'argent à les exhiber (549, note 7).

12) That Rimbaud was acquainted with various social and political theorists of the time is evident, if only from consulting the lists of his readings in other letters (see Chapter Three). His experiences in Paris during the spring of 1871 no doubt also gave him direct access to the ideas of such writers as Fourier, Proudhon and Saint-Simon, whose theories were being put into practice during the Commune.

13) Keith Taylor, in The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists, brings out the issue of the individual's place in a newly-envisioned collective society:

The social origins of these ideas are not difficult to discern: the vision of a future state of harmony was born amidst conditions which were quite obviously lacking in harmony. Revolutionary upheaval, socio-economic dislocation caused by new mechanised methods of capitalistic production, the decline of traditional sources of legitimacy and authority--these were painful

facts of life for those groups, such as the artisans and handicraft workers, whose life style and mode of work were threatened more directly by the pressure of change....[This new harmony] would also involve the rejection of individualism (equated with a conflict of interests) and its replacement by some more collective form of organisation.

The idea of an alternative to individualism can be clarified more precisely by examining three further concepts which were essential ingredients of the early socialists, and which served as components of the broader notion of harmony: association, community, and co-operation (5).

This convergence of socio-political and literary theories has recently begun to be explored in more detail in such works as Jonathan Arac's Macro-politics of Nineteenth-Century Literature (1991) and Kristin Ross' The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune (1988).

14) The subject of orphism in nineteenth-century French poetry has been treated in such works as Gwendolyn Bays' The Orphic Vision: Seer Poets from Novalis to Rimbaud (1964), Georges Cattaut's Orphisme et prophéties chez les poètes français (1850-1950) (1965), and Hermine Riffaterre's L'Orphisme dans la poésie romantique: thèmes et styles surnaturalistes (1970).

15) Baudelaire's theories of synesthesia and universal analogy have been well-explored. The sonnet, "Correspondances", in Les Fleurs du mal, provides the most obvious poetic examples ("Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants, / Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies," [11]). His critical writings also contain many allusions to these ideas. In his 1861 article on "Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser", Baudelaire discusses this effect in music:

Le lecteur sait quel but nous poursuivons: démontrer que la véritable musique suggère des idées analogues dans des cerveaux différents...car ce qui serait vraiment surprenant, c'est que le son ne pût pas suggérer la couleur, que les couleurs ne pussent pas donner l'idée d'une mélodie, et que le son et la couleur fussent impropres à traduire des idées; les choses s'étant toujours exprimées par une analogie réciproque, depuis le jour où Dieu a proféré le monde comme une complexe et indivisible totalité (1213).

Rimbaud's poetic work contains numerous examples of synesthesia as well as sensory analogy. "Voyelles" provides us with examples of these exchanges:

...E, candeurs des vapeurs et des tentes,
Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombelles;
(53)

In her notes to this poem, Bernard suggests further analogies in the writings of Baudelaire and Fourier:

Rimbaud, comme beaucoup de gens, donne aux couleurs une valeur symbolique...De même Baudelaire, à la suite de Fourier, regrettait-il que personne n'eût encore dressé une gamme analogique complète des couleurs et des sentiments (Salon de 1846)....(407)

In his later poems, these techniques are even more subtly subsumed:

Entends comme brame
près des acacias
en avril la rame
viride du pois! (84)

The poem "Mémoire" is an attempt to reconstruct the past through sometimes contradictory synaesthetic messages:

L'eau claire; comme le sel des larmes
d'enfance,
L'assaut au soleil des blancheurs des
corps de femmes;
la soie, en foule et de lys pur, des
oriflammes
... ---Non...le courant d'or en marche,
meut ses bras, noirs, et lourds, et frais
surtout, d'herbe...
(86-87)

(16) The Oxford Companion to French Literature discusses both theoretical and practical applications of Fourier's ideas:

The book [Théorie des quatre mouvements, 1808] was a mixture of social philosophy, projects for economic and social reform, and a riotously imaginative picture of a universe destined to last 80,000 years...During the era of complete Harmony...the North Pole would be milder than the Riviera, the sea...would become like lemonade, and the world would contain 37 million poets equal to Homer...

In 1838, the first of a series of phalanstères was established at Condé-sur-Vesgre...Profits were to be shared, the largest share going to labour. For women, the

co-operative system implied emancipation and free love. The experiment ended in failure.

(285-286)

Rimbaud's ideas on progressivism and labor in this part of the letter also correspond to the ideas of the utopian Saint-Simonists:

They believed...that hope for the future lay in the spirit of association. To bring this about they advocated the abolition of hereditary rights, the introduction of social equality and the disappearance of the exploited classes, the furtherance of education, and the emergence of a state in which finance and industry would be on a level with science and art, with work as the touchstone of merit (Oxford, 652).

(17) In the second chapter of his work, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, Walter Benjamin discusses the social and artistic ramifications of Baudelaire's aestheticism.

Baudelaire himself, in Le Peintre de la vie moderne (1859-1860), simultaneously situates the artist in the crowd (ch.III "L'Artiste, homme du monde, homme des foules et enfant") and above it. In a later chapter (IX, "Le Dandy"), Baudelaire defends dandyism as a revolutionary pose:

Que ces hommes se fassent nommés raffinés, incroyables, beaux, lions ou dandys, tous sont issus d'une même origine; tous participent du même caractère d'opposition et de révolte; tous sont des représentants de ce qu'il y a de meilleur dans l'orgueil humain, de ce besoin, trop rare chez ceux d'aujourd'hui, de combattre et de détruire la trivialité (1179).

18) Robert Greer Cohn points out some of these remarkable effects in the poem:

Here Rimbaud combines a scatological bent with satire. Whereas the librarians of "Les Assis" were merely seated, this butt, a banal bourgeois is squatting (hence the title; note the pisse in it) over a pot for the usual purpose. The implication is similar: human inertia in a provincial town where no one is going anywhere by Rimbaud's standards....

...grelottant au clair soleil qui
plaque/
Des jaunes de brioche aux vitres de
papier;

The time is morning (the poem ends at evening). Rimbaud describes sunlight in various remarkable ways: this one is typically concrete, the way a child perceives, orally: "Si j'ai du goût, ce n'est guères/ Que pour la terre et les pierres" ("Fêtes de la faim")[96].

(19) Once again, we are reminded of the final quatrain of Baudelaire's "Le Voyage," where the voyagers' last quest is for "the unknown" and "the new (127)".

(20) A number of the prose poems in Les Illuminations deal with these issues in poetic terms. "Les Ponts," for example, in addition to foreshadowing certain techniques of the cubist painters and poets, underlines some of the analogies between technology and poetry:

Des ciels gris de cristal. Un bizarre
dessin de ponts, ceux-ci bombés, d'autres
descendant ou obliquant en angles sur les
premiers, et ces figures se renouvelant dans
les autres circuits éclairés du canal, mais
tous tellement longs et légers que les rives,
chargés de dômes, s'abaissent et
s'amoindrissent (133-134).

Chapter Two

Neologism in Rimbaud's Letters 1870-1873

"Trouver une langue": Rimbaud's avowed purpose in the second "Lettre du Voyant" is a project which can be traced to the earliest letters. The novelty of this language is present in the poems as well as in the correspondence of the adolescent Rimbaud. It is a new language in the sense that any writer creates his own diction, but in Rimbaud's letters, the richness and innovation of the vocabulary, the syntax and the structure of the sentences foreshadow and parallel the growth of linguistic change in the poetic work.

Let us examine one early example, the fragment of a letter to Léon Billuart of October 8, 1870:

à Fume (Ardennes)

J'ai soupé en humant l'odeur des
soupiraux d'où s'exhalaient les fumets des
viandes et des volailles rôties des bonnes
cuisines bourgeoises de Charleroi, puis en
allant grignoter au clair de lune une
tablette de chocolat fumacien...(245)

Written to a schoolmate during his second flight from home, this brief excerpt reveals some of the linguistic playfulness which will characterize Rimbaud's poetic experimentation during the period 1870-1873. The fugal intricacies of the sound "fume" are evident throughout the excerpt. The multiple conflation of the ordinary "fumer" (to smoke) and its

unexpressed scatological relative ("fumier"=dung), with the place-name (Fumay), the noun "fumet" (the pleasant smell of cooking), and the [invented] adjective "fumacien" (originating in Fumay) all combine to underline the linguistic cohesiveness and inventiveness of the poet. The same treatment of "souper" and "souponnaux" is further evidence in this letter of Rimbaud's attempt to combine disparate words according to phonological similarities. In similar fashion, Rimbaud juxtaposes the verb "humer" with the rhyming "fumet" in this offhand and humorous phrase.

In addition, if we examine the lengthy and complex syntax of the entire sentence, we are struck by its novelty. The comma after "Charleroi" extends this already overloaded sentence into the realm of fictional prose, and captures both the animation and hurriedness of the entire scene.

Even in Rimbaud's earliest prose works, we see evidence of his inventiveness. One of the earliest known pieces of work, the "Prologue" (formerly known as "Narration"), exhibits many of the same characteristics as the letter to Léon Billuart.

Le soleil était encore chaud;
 cependant il n'éclairait presque plus la
 terre; comme un flambeau placé devant les
 voûtes gigantesques ne les éclaire plus que
 par une faible lueur, ainsi le soleil, flam-
 beau terrestre, s'éteignant en laissant
 échapper de son corps de feu une dernière et
 faible lueur, laissant encore voir les
 feuilles vertes des arbres, les petites
 fleurs qui se flétrissaient, et le sommet
 gigantesque des pins, des peupliers et des
 chênes séculaires. Le vent rafraîchissant,

c'est-à-dire une brise fraîche, agitait les
feuilles ...Les fougères courbaient leur
front vert devant le vent... (172)

Even in this schoolboy exercise we see evidence of the linguistic innovation to come in the later prose poems: the repetition of the fricative sounds, for example, points unmistakably to a keen phonological sense. The mass and complexity of the prose syntax are extraordinary.

In a letter written to Izambard a month after the letter to Billuart, a number of these themes reappear. First, there is Rimbaud's loosened syntax. The phrase is unconfined and supple; unlike poetry from the same time period, the prose seems to carry itself forward with an ease and momentum of its own:

Je meurs, je me décompose dans la
platitude, dans la mauvaïseté, dans la
grisaille...(245)

Rimbaud does not feel the need to adhere strictly to the conventions of prose. This linguistic audacity may be a function of the genre of the letter itself. Compared to Rimbaud's poetry from this same period (for example, the neatly-rhymed verses of "La Maline" composed in October, 1870 [33]), the writer's experimentation within the epistolary form seems even more remarkable. Finally, we may note that this "experimental" prose has been placed within the setting of a letter to Rimbaud's former instructor in rhetoric. Thus, the psychological issues of convention and rebellion must also be considered.

Another prose work from this year, "Lettre de Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI," further shows the expansion and development of Rimbaud's style. Although this, like "Prologue", was meant as a school exercise (in rhetoric), its suppleness and grace not only demonstrate Rimbaud's skill in reproducing an older and freer form of French prose; it prophesies the revolutionary prose of Les Illuminations. Bernard [p58] tells us that the full title was "Lettre de Charles d'Orléans pour solliciter la grâce de Villon", and that other critics (esp. Gengoux) have traced Rimbaud's borrowings to such sources as Hugo (Notre-Dame de Paris), Banville (Gringoire), and Villon. It is nevertheless a brilliant pastiche. Rimbaud's use of anachronism and literary neologism reveal a young writer attuned to the richness and possibilities of French prose. Where the poetry of this era shows Rimbaud to be a master of the Parnassian and early Symbolist style, the prose (including the youthful Un Coeur sous une soutane) discloses his gifts for invention, humor and originality of form. His letters from this period indicate the same nascent gifts.

In the same letter to Izambard cited above (November 2, 1870), we can see the fluidity, humor, and ease of the prose in his later literary works. Each sentence moves ahead with a mixture of tones: some ironic, some self-contradictory, some comical. But in the plenitude of images and variety of diction we

discover the author of Les Illuminations and Une Saison en enfer.

Que voulez-vous, je m'entête affreuse-
ment à adorer la liberté libre, et...un tas
de choses que "ça fait pitié", n'est-ce pas?
...Allons, chapeau, capote, les deux poings
dans les poches, et sortons...(245)

This letter, (signed "ce sans-cœur de Rimbaud" [246]) is full of word play, abrupt shifts in tone (and person: from first person singular to third person to first person plural and back again), and an intuitive sense of the amplitude and variety of expression possible in prose. Does not the shifting use of person prefigure the statement "JE est un autre?" And does not the statement (from the Voyant letters) show us the innovative objectification of the narrator's persona?

In the postscript, Rimbaud continues his experimental prose, now mingling more popular idioms with his previous literary style. This technique prefigures similar passages in the later prose works.

Guerre; pas de siège de Mézières. Pour
quand? On n'en parle pas...Par ci, par là,
des francs-tirades. Abominable prurigo
d'idiotisme, tel est l'esprit de la popula-
tion. On en entend de belles, allez. C'est
dissolvant! (246)

This adroit and unexpected mixture of the levels of diction becomes even more startling when we realize that the letter is addressed to his former rhetoric teacher. The submission of this epistolary experiment to one whose profession involved the correctness of literary form shows us to what extent and in what manner Rimbaud was attempting to reformulate

his own notions of formal usage. To this, we must also add the factors of his youth and his rebelliousness in other matters; the letter deals with his flight and attempt at liberation. These ideas are framed by an innovative and somewhat self-conscious prose; over the next two years this will continue to develop and finally blossom in the still radical syntax of Les Illuminations.

The letter to Demeny of April 17, 1871 deals, for the most part, with Rimbaud's extensive and heterodox reading during the winter following his first flight from home. At the same time, the poet demonstrates the growth of his prose technique. Preceding the "Voyant" letters by a month, it gives us clues to his intellectual and linguistic development during this crucial period. The first paragraph seems to summarize his oppressive existence in the somewhat over-exaggerated style of a precocious adolescent:

Ne sachant rien de ce qu'il faut savoir,
résolu à ne faire rien de ce qu'il faut
faire, je suis condamné, dès toujours,
pour jamais. Vive aujourd'hui, vive demain!
(246)

This mixture of melancholy and hopelessness (expressed in the repetition of negative constructions) is punctuated by the wild and seemingly disconnected hopes for the present and future. The letter serves here as the perfect medium for the expression of dis-

cordant and contradictory ideas. Unlike the poetry of this period, which shows less flexibility, Rimbaud felt no stylistic restrictions in writing to his friend and fellow poet. The letter is also sprinkled with literary allusions, and Rimbaud freely inserts these as they spring to mind:

Mais j'ai apaisé la bouche d'ombre pour
un temps (246).¹

Even his advice is literary: he tells Demy to read Ecclesiastes, and then quickly jumps ahead to the present ("causons Paris" [247]). This agility and multiplicity of ideas is typical of Rimbaud; the list of works which follows amplifies our sense of the wide range of his intellect.² After the eclectic list of readings is complete, the final lines of the letter return to the more youthfully exuberant style of Rimbaud "the inventor":

En ce cas, tendons le front aux lances des
averses, l'âme à la sapience antique.
Et que la littérature belge nous emporte
sous son aisselle (247).³

This first glimpse of the epistolary style that he will expand upon a month later in the "Voyant" letters is significant. We see that the irreverent and complex innovations of the latter are already present in their germinal phase here. That they are addressed to Demy is significant: here was a fellow poet with whom Rimbaud felt comfortable. If we compare the style of this letter to that of one written a year earlier to the established poet, Banville, we notice some significant differences.

The letter to Banville of May 24, 1870, demonstrates Rimbaud's adaptability and ease in accommodating his ideas to those of his correspondent. Banville, an established poet, whose verse Izambard had lent to Rimbaud, was the editor of Le Parnasse contemporain.⁴ Rimbaud was eager to have his poems published in this review, as the letter demonstrates, and thus many of his prose statements encapsulate Parnassian ideals. There are, for example, unabashed declarations of his own Parnassian allegiance. These are uttered innocently, mixed with his undisguised and youthful exuberance at discovering himself a poet:

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(236).

Suzanne Bernard notes that "Anch'io..." is a paraphrase of Correggio's exclamation before the painting of Saint Cecilia by Raphael ("Anch'io son pittore") (544). Rimbaud thus mixes a variety of tones: the youthful, the learned, and that of the would-be Parnassian in his effort to persuade Banville to publish his work. He then copies three of his poems, "Sensation" (untitled here), "Ophélie", and "Credo in Unam" (later retitled "Soleil et chair") and ends with his own fervent credo in the brotherhood of all poets and a plea for Banville to help him. These latter sentiments foreshadow similar statements in the two Voyant letters:

--Je ne suis pas connu; qu'importe? les poètes sont frères. Ces vers croient; ils aiment; ils espèrent; c'est tout.

--Cher maître, à moi; Levez-moi un peu : je suis jeune : tendez-moi la main...(237)

The letter to Izambard of August 25, 1870, indicates how well Rimbaud is able to experiment with the elements of prose. Although the majority of this letter is devoted to an account of the poet's reading, the opening paragraphs abound with inventive neologisms, unexpected juxtapositions of formal and informal diction, and syntax that has been deliberately wrenched from its ordinary direction to reflect the author's growing realization of the possibilities of writing in prose. The second paragraph, in particular, with its vivid details of a small town on the margins of war, brings out a sense of the unbridled, carnivalesque atmosphere through its unwieldy sentence structure and reliance on popular locutions:

...[Charleville] voit pérégriner dans ses rues deux ou trois cents de pioupiou, cette benoîte population gesticule, prud'hommesquement spadassine...(238)

The repetition of the plosive "p" sound to represent the military presence creates humorous lexical confrontations. The hypocrisy of the town is evident in the author's tone and cynical diction. The use of the slang word "pioupiou" [later repeated in the poems "L'Eclatante victoire de Sarrebruck" and "Le Coeur volé"] and the lugubriously effective "prud'hommesquement spadassine" incorporates both ridicule and pomposity into this account. The end of

the paragraph, where Rimbaud names the participants in a curious list of professions and characteristics, shows how well the poet had mastered the prose art of comic description:

C'est épatant, comme ça a du chien, les notaires, les vitriers, les percepteurs, les menuisiers et tous les ventres, qui, chassé-pot au coeur, font du patrouillotisme aux portes de Mezières; ma patrie se lève! ... Moi, j'aime mieux la voir assise⁶; ne remuez pas les bottes! C'est mon principe. (238)

The neologistic "patrouillotisme" linguistically summarizes Rimbaud's disparaging attitude toward the citizens of Charleville. This paragraph can be stylistically and thematically linked to "Chant de guerre parisien," the satirical anti-militaristic lyric based on the events of the following spring, which Rimbaud enclosed in the second "Lettre du Voyant" (May 15, 1871).

In the following paragraph, Rimbaud, in sharp contrast to his previous sentences, now describes his own lassitude. Once again, the accumulated weight of a series (in this case adjectives followed by a series of nouns) builds up a hyperbolic and highly effective prose recreation of his spiritual state:

Je suis dépaysé, malade, furieux, bête, renversé; j'espérais des bains de soleil, de promenades infinies, des repos, des voyages, des aventures, des bohémienneries enfin; j'espérais surtout des journaux, des livres... Rien! Rien!(238)

Lists such as this abound in Les Illuminations; one such example may be found in "Solde",

where the entire effect of the prose poem depends upon the enumeration of such disparate articles:

...A vendre les habitations et les migrations, sports, féeries et comforts parfaits, et le bruit, le mouvement et l'avenir qu'ils font...(145)

The letter contains other examples of this incongruous use of the list (a technique he may have observed in Rabelais). His description of the editor of the local newspaper is such a compendium, depending for its comic effect on the mounting accumulation of diverse occupations performed by a single individual:

...propriétaire, gérant, directeur, rédacteur en chef et rédacteur unique...
(238)

In the next paragraph, Rimbaud describes how he has avidly read the books in Izambard's library: I will treat the material of this paragraph in a subsequent chapter on reading. Rimbaud reminds his former mentor of his promise to allow the poet access to his library. Then, while discussing the volumes that he has read, Rimbaud's style modulates into an almost dialogic conversation with Izambard. There is a great fluidity and ease in this paragraph, despite the esoteric nature of the reading matter which is being discussed. By his mixture of formal and informal locutions here, Rimbaud makes the letter seem more like a conversation; well before the days of the telephone, we have an almost auditory sense of the interaction between the two. This is due, in large part, to Rim-

baud's innovative recording of his own verbal questionings:

Dites-moi un peu s'il y a jamais eu
quelque chose de plus idiot que les dessins
de Grandville?...Puis, que vous dire?...oui,
j'ai relu ce volume!...puis ce fut
tout!...Plus rien...(238)

This attempt to capture the random wanderings of the mind as one converses with a dear friend on a subject close to one's heart is successful because of Rimbaud's innovative approach to the style and conventions of prose in the letter. This, in turn, will lead to the elasticity and freedom from constraint which characterize the poet's later literary prose.

The language of both "Voyant" letters, in a parallel to the ideas which they enunciate, exhibit radical innovations in language. The opening paragraph of the letter to Izambard shows the poet in a playful and rebellious frame of mind. The inventiveness of the language is in accordance with the unorthodox poetic approach that Rimbaud will set forth in the course of the letter. He both chides his mentor for capitulating to bourgeois society, and announces his own adolescent freedom from such conventions. His boasts about school-boy exploits involving alcohol and women reveal little that is unexpected. But then, returning to Izambard, Rimbaud shows how far he is from ordinary adolescent concerns. It is in this passage that he first begins to propound the theory of voyance; here the language

reverts to the interactional prose of the letter of August, 1870. Ideas are thrown at Izambard with intense speed and directness. Rimbaud appears, through the conventions of the letter, to engage him in a dialogue. Thus, the letter, vehicle of the newly-developed theory, becomes a medium for linguistic novelty as well.

In the letter to Demeny, this interactive technique is continued and elaborated upon. Statements on the nature of voyance are interspersed with asides to his friend and fellow poet ("La suite à six minutes"...(251); "Je reprends"... (252); "Cet avenir sera matérialiste, vous le voyez"[252]), and the vocabulary and diction are free from the ordinary formality and restraint of correspondence.

Although the voyant letters present much that is remarkable in phrasing and syntax, two letters to Ernest Delahaye in particular ("Parmerde, Junphe 72" and "Laïtou, Mai 73") exemplify Rimbaud's experimental approach to language in his letters. Both letters are partially written in a private idiom in which new words, coded words, combined and fantastic words flourish. Rimbaud's close friendship with Delahaye continued throughout his life; he wrote letters to Delahaye from Africa, and their correspondence has been thoroughly documented in Delahaye témoin de Rimbaud⁶. This closeness helps to explain, to some degree, the private and coded language of these two letters. Other reasons for

Rimbaud's neologistic practice can be deduced; in some ways, the language functions as a fulfillment of his prediction at the end of the second voyant letter ("trouver une langue"; see above). In the first letter, the slang and obscenity also seem related to Rimbaud's stay in Paris, his friendship with Verlaine and his circle, and his probable consumption of absinthe ("Absomphe"). In the second letter, written a year later when Rimbaud had become a virtual prisoner in his mother's house, the neologism serves almost as code written by a prisoner. In discussing the language of the first letter, Suzanne Bernard also makes note of the larger literary circle to which Rimbaud belonged at this time, and how this language functioned as a sort of privileged ritual among its members:

Verlaine et Rimbaud (et aussi leurs amis) employaient, dans leurs lettres, une sorte d'argot particulier, que Rimbaud semble avoir affecté à la fois pour sa grossièreté, et pour le plaisir enfantin de se créer un langage à part...Encanaillement et révolte, refus de la première des conventions sociales, le langage commun (553).

Even before the body of the first letter to Delahaye, Rimbaud utilizes these newly-coined words ("Parmerde, Junphe 72"=Paris, June, 1872) to indicate where he is writing from. Since this is virtually the only letter that has survived in toto from 1872, its significance as historical evidence can not be dismissed. It tells us much about how the poet spent his days (and nights) during this time'. The letter seems to attest to Rimbaud's use of absinthe, especially as a

means of "deregulating the senses" as he had announced in the 1871 letter to Demeny. Perhaps more relevant for this chapter, however, is the inclusion of neologisms and coded words in this letter. Delahaye, unlike Demeny or Izambard, had no poetic ambitions, and Rimbaud's letters to him seem to be more casual than to the other two correspondents. The use of the "tu" form in these letters, for example, shows that there is greater intimacy here than in the letters to Demeny or Izambard. Thus the slang, obscene, and invented words that Rimbaud inserts here may be seen in a looser interactive context than those already closely examined in the two "Voyant" letters.

The opening sentence itself is a proclamation of Rimbaud's newly-found liberty and voice, both from conventional linguistic and epistolary standards:

Oui, surprenante est l'existence
dans le cosmorama Arduan (265).

Place-names ("Arduan") provided a natural source of linguistic amusement for Rimbaud, as we have already seen in the letter to Léon Billuart. Here, the conflation of "Ardennes" with the adjective "ardu" creates an effect similar to the "Fumay" of the earlier letter to Billuart. If we think of similar place-namings in Rabelais, one of Rimbaud's avowed "livres de chevet", we might observe similar antecedents for this practice. The word "cosmorama" reflects the poet's reading in another way; satirized by Balzac in Le Père Goriot, the profusion of words ending in -ama had

already seen amusing neologistic inventions. "Cosmorama" here seems to be an extension of this Balzacian play on words.⁸ Furthermore, the entire syntax of the sentence, wrenched out of ordinary usage, is a reflection both of the surprise evoked as well as the novelty by which it is invoked. In the next sentence, Rimbaud's Brueghelian vision of the country is combined with a sharp ear for vowels and nasals in juxtaposition:

La province, où on se nourrit de
farineux et de boue, où l'on boit du vin de
cru et de la bière du pays...(265)

The internal rhymes here reflect some of Rimbaud's poetic concerns in the Derniers vers. The end of the paragraph parallels the thematic concerns of "Comédie de la Soif", for example:

J'ai une soif à craindre la gangrène:
les rivières ardennaises et belges, les
cavernes, voilà ce que je regrette (265).

Compare the opening lines of "Comédie de la soif":

Nous sommes tes Grands-Parents,
Les Grands!
Couverts des froides sueurs
De la lune et des verdure,
Nos vins secs avaient du coeur!
Au soleil sans imposture
Que faut-il à l'homme? boire

MOI.-- Mourir aux fleuves barbares.
(73)

Written in May of 1872, a month before the first letter to Delahaye, we may observe some cross-influences in the styles of both poem and letter. In between the first and last sentences of his opening paragraph, Rimbaud sketches an adroit sketch of Paris in the style of a cubist montage:

Mais ce lieu-ci [Paris]: distillation, composition, tout étroitesse; et l'été accablant...(265)

Like Baudelaire before him and Apollinaire after him, we see in these lines a poetic of the modern city. The juxtaposition of disparate elements and sensations foreshadows an entire generation of Parisian poets and painters, who continued to develop this fragmentary technique. Rimbaud himself, in the poem "Bruxelles", composed a month after this letter (July, 1872), exhibits some of the these same traits of superimposition of imagery in an urban setting:

Banc vert où chante au paradis d'orage,
Sur la guitare, la blanche Irlandaise.
Puis, de la salle à manger guyanaise,
Bavardage des enfants et des cages.

Fenêtre du duc qui fais que je pense
Au poison des escargots et du buis
Qui dort ici-bas au soleil (82).

In the next paragraph, Rimbaud discourses on absinthe ("Absomphe")--its effects and the group with whom he drinks. He discusses politics and the restraints of Delahaye's own life. All of this, with the exception of the "Absomphe"/absinthe play on words, follows the conventions of epistolary style (perhaps in accordance with the conventional material it reflects). But in the following paragraph, where the poet announces his new nocturnal working habits ("Maintenant, c'est la nuit que je travaince."), we see the reassertion of a more experimental prose. In trying to capture the unexpected lyricism of the urban night, Rimbaud's language becomes less discursive and

more multi-dimensional. The world around him is described in its astonishing freshness:

A trois heures du matin, la bougie pâlit; tous les oiseaux crient à la fois dans les arbres: c'est fini. Plus de travail. Il me fallait regarder les arbres, le ciel, saisis par cette heure indicible, première du matin (286).

Bernard, in her edition of this letter, compares this paragraph to "Aube" [Illuminations] and the poem "Bonne Pensée du matin" [May, 1872], and also focuses on the mixture of two distinctly different tones in this letter:

C'est un aliage bien rimbaldien que le mélange, dans cette lettre, d'un tel sentiment de pureté frissonnante devant l'aube et de tant de termes grossiers...(554)

This paragraph also shows Rimbaud's ability to modulate the discursive phrase to parallel what he sees and hears. Soon after the lyrical praise of dawn (which itself follows earlier literary traditions)⁹, he announces the crisp arrival of the first activity of the day:

Et déjà le bruit saccadé, sonore, délicieux des tombereaux sur les boulevards...(266)

The letter is indeed punctuated by crudity ("chier", "merde", "...crachant sur les toiles", etc.), and in this way, Rimbaud intersperses a serious literary style with a popular one.

The final paragraph utilizes both obscenity and neologism in its construction:

...N'oublie pas de chier sur La Renaissance, journal littéraire et art-

istique, si tu le rencontres. J'ai évité jusqu'ici les pestes d'émigrés Caropolmerdés. Et merde aux saisons et colrage(287).

"Caropolmerdés"¹⁰ for "Carolopolitains"

seems to refer to the residents of Rimbaud's native Charleville; coupling the prefix with a scatological ending creates the desired pejorative and ridiculous effect. The word "colrage" seems to be part of a more extensive coding system, according to the notes in the Mouquet/Renéville edition:

Colrage: Sans doute mot déformé, pour courage; l'argot rimbaldo-verlainien change ou en ol. Rimbaud écrit: rendez-vol pour rendez-vous [Lettre à Delahaye, Mai 1873] De même, Verlaine: avant-gol, pour avant-goût [Lettre de Ch. de Sivry, Noël 1871](820)

This systematization of a linguistic code seems significant. This is perhaps not a part of Rimbaud's project to "find a language," yet it nevertheless represents a certain willed and consistent effort to break the conventional mode of language. Jacques Rivière has commented on this phenomenon:

Quelle anormale compétence dans la façon dont il encanaille les mots les plus bénins en leur forgeant des désinences incongrues (23).

Although we should beware of reading too much into these humorous linguistic "deformations", they may be indications of a breakdown in other linguistic formations that Rimbaud attempts in both the contemporary "Derniers Vers" and the later Saison en enfer as well as in the Illuminations. We may also examine the phenomenon of the linguistic code in terms of

interactivity among writers. This sort of jargon, coded yet informal, indicates the closeness not only between Delahaye and Rimbaud, but between Rimbaud and all the "Vilains Bonshommes" who comprised his circle, especially Verlaine.¹¹ It would be difficult, if not impossible, to trace the evolution of such a code in the poetry of several authors, but it is interesting to note at this point how it enters into Rimbaud's work as an outside force. Interactivity, in terms of the letter, is also a function of intimacy; thus, the coded language serves as a common field of linguistic activity for a number of different writers.

Rimbaud's deconstructive experimentation with language and coding continues in the letter sent from "Laitou, Mai 73" to Delahaye. Many of the same characteristics of the first code letter to Delahaye (obscurity, wit, nondiscursivity, etc.) reappear in this letter, written from the small village of Roche (called Laitou: perhaps to suggest Rimbaud's vegetative existence there or to suggest the greenery of the vegetation). Although no longer surrounded by the circle of similarly-minded writers as he was at the time he wrote the letter "Parmerde...", the experiments with language continue. Many words begin normally enough, but the ending has been invented by Rimbaud to correspond to a seemingly archaic (perhaps primordial) language.

Examples include:

innocence
 M6ress [for the periodical Le Nord-Est]
 absorculant
 rendez-vol [cf letter of "Junphe 72"]
 fraguemants
 travaince

(267-268, passim)

In addition to "Laïtou" for Roche, other place names have been reformulated; thus "Charlestown" for Charleville, "Bouillion" for "Bouillon", and "Prussmars" for residents of Prussia. He anglicizes a reference to his mother ("La mother m'a mis là dans un triste trou", 267), and later parodies her as La "mère Rimb.", satirizing her language and thrift ("ça coûte tant!").¹² Rimbaud's state of mind, his misery over his maternally-imposed imprisonment, are reflected in these rather innocent encoded words, as if he were an actual prisoner trying desperately to contact the outside world through disguised words that would elude his captors. In addition, the letter shows the poet at work on "de petites histoires en prose, titre général: Livre païen ou Livre nègre (267)".¹³

Rimbaud's use of coded language and neologism are not the only devices that he employs to show Delahaye his state of mind. Rimbaud encloses two watercolors to his correspondent. [See illustrations] Although both drawings have been noted with interest by critics¹⁴, they have not been analyzed within their proper context of the letters. Although few of the early letters contained sketches, Rimbaud's correspondence from Africa is full of these thumbnail

images. They provided a non-literary means of expression that transcended some of the difficulties of language itself. We see that in the two drawings enclosed in this text. The opening phrase of the letter ("Cher ami, tu vois mon existence actuelle dans l'aquarelle ci-dessous." [267]) shows how the drawings, rather than words, were chosen to convey the immediacy of his feelings. Indeed the first words of the letters are clearly parodies of past writings: ("O Nature! ô ma mère!" [267]). Bernard observes that these exact words occur in both Rousseau and Musset (554). The words are parodistic in several senses. First, because they echo the words of more famous literary predecessors (although used with completely different intent). Secondly, they are the reverse of his true feelings. Finally, the word "mother," used in a divine sense in the original citations, takes on an ironic twist as we learn that the poet's mother is, in fact, keeping him a prisoner at Roche. Thus, through parody, Rimbaud creates alternate meanings for his original sources. The letter weaves the theme of imprisonment throughout its course, although at times Rimbaud alternates this with other themes.

Delahaye seems to be serving as intermediary between Rimbaud and Verlaine at this point; Rimbaud's instructions in the letter make this clear. Here the language is more practical, without humor or jargon.

But on another literary theme, Rimbaud's language becomes more playful. Throughout the letter he discusses his work on the "Livre païen". At times, he tries to express its dual nature in words that almost mock his avowed purpose:

Je travaille pourtant assez régulièrement; je fais de petites histoires en prose, titre général: Livre païen, ou Livre nègre. C'est bête et innocent. O innocence! innocence; innocence, innoc...fléau (267)!

This triple repetition of the word "innocence," followed by its linguistic deformation the fourth time it appears, shows both Rimbaud's ear for linguistic pattern and effect, as well as his attempt to assault the very notion of innocence itself. In fact, Une Saison en enfer reveals the process of a stripping away of innocence, similar to the metamorphoses that Blake writes about in Songs of Innocence and Experience.

The theme of the poet's work comes and goes throughout the letter; it is evident that writing "Le Livre païen" is both a torturous yet necessary process for Rimbaud. Later in the letter, he confides to Delahaye:

Je suis abominablement gêné. Pas un livre, pas un cabaret à portée de moi, pas un incident dans la rue. Quelle horreur que cette campagne française. Mon sort dépend de ce livre pour lequel une demi-douzaine d'histoires atroces sont encore à inventer. Comment inventer des atrocités ici? Je ne t'envoie pas d'histoires, quoique j'en aie déjà trois, ça coûte tant! (268)

In this passage, we are taken along the same paths that the writer himself has followed in producing

his work. Although the unbearable isolation oppresses him, it nevertheless forces Rimbaud to confront the inner task of inventiveness. He must construct the atrocities of these stories from his own experience. Like other pejorative words in the two "voyant" letters, (e.g. "monstrueuse", "encrapulement"), the word "atrocités" conveys the powerful, nightmarish quality of thought that often gives rise to the poetic image in Rimbaud. As he points out to Delahaye, this is not an easy task. "Ça coute tant!" may indeed be a parodistic echo of his mother's thriftiness (Bernard 543), but it also seems to refer to his own labor here. Indeed, the labor is so costly that Rimbaud can not send Delahaye any "samples", as he has done with his other works.

There has been some critical conjecture as to what specific stories are here referred to; it is one of the rare temporal references that we are given to Rimbaud's prose work. The long (and ongoing) debate over the order of the prose works,¹⁵ and particularly the disputes involving the dating of Une Saison en enfer and Les Illuminations might be resolved in certain instances by a more rigorous examination of Rimbaud's correspondence, which has generally gone unnoticed in these studies. To enter into the debate at this point would be digressive, yet I nevertheless cannot help but wonder if we should assume that the "Livre païen" of May 1873 is necessarily Une Saison en enfer. The actual description of the stories and their

invention might be an account of the prose poems later included in Les Illuminations. ["Conte", for example, with its bloody atrocities and deep self-involvement.] If the title of this work is still in doubt, Rimbaud's understanding of its importance is not (" Mon sort dépend de ce livre..."). We can only imagine that by "sort", Rimbaud understood his destiny as both writer and man. Perhaps it would provide the necessary recognition for his escape from "Laitou"; perhaps these stories simply needed to be written. In any case, the inclusion of such a strong personal statement in this letter about the relationship of art and destiny shows a continuation of the epistolary statement of poetic ideas, begun in the "voyant" letters.

We may also examine the structure of the letter as an indicator of the increasing liberation of Rimbaud's poetic form in 1873. The letter, after its neologistic dateline, begins without formal salutation. The phrases at the beginning are sparse and yet dense, requiring some work on the part of the correspondent to penetrate the writer's thought. These are interspersed with mention of the two enclosed watercolors, at specific intervals, perhaps indicating Rimbaud's non-discursive sequence of image and idea. The first part of the letter ends with an elaborate, almost parodistic treatment of the typically-exaggerated formulaic closing in French correspondence:

Je te serre les main, dans l'espoir d'un
revoir que j'active autant que je puis(267).

The letter reopens again quickly, and the long post-script is the occasion for the aesthetic statements discussed above. This is followed by still another post-script, in which Rimbaud asks Delahaye to inquire about purchasing copies of Goethe and Shakespeare. Thus the line of the letter is pulsating and immediate. Rimbaud does not attempt to organize each paragraph into a distinctly related group of thoughts, nor does he feel obliged to make any clear sense of transition between them. If we examine the structure of Une Saison en enfer or Les Illuminations, we can see a number of stylistic parallels. The prose is at once lucid and arcane; it is interspersed with word play and neologism; and the pattern of thought is not always continuous.

Notes: Chapter Two

1) The reference to Hugo's "La Bouche d'ombre," a poem first published in Les Contemplations (1856), is usually taken to be an allusion to Rimbaud's mother. Adam flatly states:

La "bouche d'ombre" que Rimbaud a
apaisée, c'est sa mère (1072).

Other images of Rimbaud's mother in this letter suggest a less diabolical, but equally malevolent woman. Most of Rimbaud's biographers (including Petit-fils, Starkie) have portrayed Vitalie Rimbaud as a monstrous figure who suffocated her son, particularly at this time in his life. But some of the letters indicate that it may be necessary to reexamine these attitudes towards Madame Rimbaud. For example, in a letter written to Verlaine in 1873, we see her compassion and understanding. At the time that the tempestuous relationship between Rimbaud and Verlaine was at its height, the latter wrote several letters (including one to Madame Rimbaud) in which he announced that he would commit suicide. Madame Rimbaud, responding to Verlaine's letter, appeals to his filial sense of duty, to his common sense, and to his religious convictions. She writes out of strength and conviction, with humanity and concern:

Roche, 6 juillet, 1873

Monsieur,

Au moment où je vous écris, j'espère que le calme et la réflexion sont revenus dans votre esprit. Vous tuer, malheureux!... Faites comme moi, cher Monsieur: soyez fort et courageux contre toutes les afflictions; chassez de votre coeur toutes les mauvaises pensées, lutez, lutez sans relâche contre ce qu'on appelle l'injustice du sort; et vous verrez que le malheur se lassera de vous poursuivre, vous redeviendrez heureux...(Rimbaud 273-274)

She writes a long, compassionate letter, in the middle of which she acknowledges her distrust and suspicions of Verlaine. Nevertheless, the letter is gracious and persuasive. Other letters in the Adam edition indicate further facets of her personality. In a letter written to Mallarmé several years after Rimbaud's death, she expresses maternal concern over her daughter Isabelle's impending marriage (785). Other letters, written to such correspondents as Ernest Delahaye (784), as well as numerous letters expressing love and concern for Isabelle, support this call for a reevaluation of her character.

2) In a section of her book, Word and Figure: The Language of Nineteenth-Century French Poetry, Carol de

Dobay-Rifelj considers the inventiveness of Rimbaud's language, focusing on its juxtaposition of disparate elements:

Rimbaud is well-known for widening the scope of poetic vocabulary. Although the directions he developed had all been explored by Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine, or all three, there are, in his work both a high incidence of unconventional vocabulary and striking use of clashes between conflicting registers. ...he introduced a large number of contemporary references as well as features of everyday or lower-class life, that is, semantic fields formerly considered beneath the notice of poets. Examples would be the hair ointment and caoutchoucs of "Mes petites amoureuses" or the photographers, telegraph poles and references to public figures in "Ce qu'on dit au poète..." These would seem to belong in newspapers or advertisements rather than in poetry. A similar device is the presence of the banal and the commonplace: potatoes and fried eggs in "Ce qu'on dit...".

Innovations ...include the reproduction of speech associated with the lower classes...Like Hugo, Rimbaud is especially noted for his use of familiar or popular expressions, a violation of the standards of "formality."

...sequences of short, simple words..., terms from particular linguistic domains, like commercial or scientific vocabularies, and prosaic rhythms have similar effects(134).

Although the writer is discussing Rimbaud's poetry here, much of what she says applies equally to the letters. The richness of the text, in both cases, derives from the superimposition of unexpected levels of diction as well as a vocabulary different from that which was usual in the genre.

3) Adam points out Rimbaud's interesting incorporation of a line of Verlaine's here:

Les "lances des averses" sont une
allusion au vers de Verlaine dans "Effet de
nuit" des Poèmes saturniens:
Luisant a contresens des lances des averses.
(1073)

The crude reference to Belgian literature in the next sentence corresponds to Baudelaire's invective in Pauvre Belgique (1865). On Belgian writers, he laments:

En général, ici, le littérateur (?)
exerce un autre métier.

Du reste, pas de littérature...Un ou
deux chansonniers, singes dégoûtants des

polissonneries de Béranger. Un romancier, imitateur des copistes des singes de Champ fleury. Des savants, des annalistes ou chroniqueurs, ---c'est-à-dire---des gens qui ramassent et d'autres qui achètent à vil prix un tas de papier (compte [sic] de frais pour bâtiments et autres choses, entrées de princes, comptes rendus des séances des conseils communaux, copies d'archives) et puis revendent tout cela en bloc comme un livre d'histoire.

(Baudelaire 1375-76)

4) Le Parnasse contemporain was the work which gave its name to the Parnassian movement. Published in three installments, from 1866-1869, it contained poems by writers including Banville, Leconte de Lisle, Coppée, Verlaine, and Mallarmé. The Oxford Companion to French Literature provides the following information:

At intervals during 1866 the publisher Alphonse Lemerre issued the first series (in eighteen fascicules) of Le Parnasse contemporain, poems by members of the group, hence the name Parnassiens. The second, prepared during 1869, was delayed by the Franco-Prussian War and published in 1871. The third, in three volumes, appeared in 1876 but had lost much of its original character (539).

5) The image of sitting as a metaphor for the ossification of provincial life is repeated in the poems "Les Assis" (1871) and "Accroupissements" (included in the second "lettre du Voyant" to Demeny). In "Les Assis", the deformed town elders have become one with their chairs:

Ces vieillards ont toujours fait tresse avec
leur sièges,...

Et les Sièges leur ont des bontés: culottée
De brun, la paille cède aux angles de leurs
reins;...

Et les Assis, genoux aux dents, verts
pianistes,

[37]

The more scabrous "Accroupissements" depicts a provincial cleric ("Le frère Milotus") squatting over a chamberpot.

Both poems are united by the same idea that we see in the letter to Izambard. The French, and more particularly, the rural peasants, are content to sit "pat." Kirstin Ross, in The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune (Minnesota, 1988) discusses this idea in light of these two poems:

If the peasant population forms an obstacle to rebellion, it is not

because it is atomized (for this, in fact, is the reality of the social, what makes us human, the distance between us, but rather because of its character of being an indivisible mass--what Rimbaud calls les assis of Charleville, the seated ones, or les accroupissements, the squatting (21).

6) A 1974 book, edited by F. Eigeldinger and A. Gendre, which presents much interesting information about the work of Rimbaud's friend. It makes use of a number of Delahaye's writings, including the 1923 study, Rimbaud: L'Artiste et l'être moral.

7) Not only have Rimbaud's biographers disagreed about Rimbaud's activities in Paris, but first-hand accounts by other members of his circle also contradict each other. See, for example, Verlaine's descriptions in the "Poètes maudits" and his introductions to various works of Rimbaud; or Forain's La Comédie parisienne (1892); or Germain Nouveau's comments, in the volume edited by Jean-Marie Carré, Autour de Verlaine et de Rimbaud. (Paris, 1949).

8) See the note by P.-G. Castex in Balzac, Le Pere Goriot, Paris: Garnier 1963; revised 1981. p. 123.

9) The dawn as a subject in French poetry goes back to the "aubade" of the troubadours. Rimbaud's contemporaries had attempted variations on the traditional lyric, including Verlaine ("L'Aube à l'envers") and Baudelaire, whose "Crépuscule du matin" [the final poem in "Tableaux parisiens"] depicts a modern urban dawn.

10) "Caropolmerdés designe les Carolopolitains ou habitants de Charleville" (Bernard 553)

11) Rimbaud, Verlaine, Germain Nouveau, Charles Cros, and others constituted the group known as the "Vilains Bonshommes," a group of poets and other artists, who met on an irregular basis to both relax and work together. A collection of work, entitled the Album Zutique, was finally published in 1943, with an introduction by Pascal Pia. The poems are, for the most part, parodies of the Parnassian poets, some "signed" with their names. Obscenity and ebullience characterize these short comic verses.

Bernard, relying on an article by Matarasso and Petitfils ("Rimbaud, Verlaine, G. Nouveau et l'Album Zutique" Mercur de France, mai 1961) gives us the following information:

Cet album de quarante-huit pages est composé de poésies autographes dues à la plume gouailleuse de poètes amis de Verlaine, qui se réunissaient périodiquement pour

blaguer, fumer, boire et réciter des vers. Ce "club" se réunissait, au coin du boulevard Saint-Michel, en 1871, à l'hôtel des Etrangers où Delahaye trouva un jour Rimbaud en train de cuver son haschisch.... Le groupe des Vilains Bonshommes (ainsi s'étaient-ils nommés) avait en guise de Livre d'or un Album de facéties rimées et dessins... C'est en octobre[1871], semble-t-il, que, le groupe ayant décidé de fonder un Cercle dénommé Zutique par Charles Cros, un nouvel Album reçut, lui, le nom d' Album Zutique. Rimbaud a souvent participé, en compagnie de Verlaine, aux réunions des Vilains Bonshommes... Valade, Blémont, Mérat, Silvestre, Cabaner, Richepin, Ponchon les ont fréquentées(313-314).

But Jacques Borel, in his introduction to the "Album Zutique" in the Pléiade edition of the Oeuvres poétiques complètes of Verlaine, disagrees with some of these statements. He maintains that the Vilains Bonshommes and the Zutistes were separate groups who were opposed to each other:

Il semble bien qu'un autre album de même veine soit irrémédiablement perdu: c'est celui des "Vilains Bonshommes." Verlaine, ainsi que plusieurs Zutistes, faisait aussi partie des "Vilains Bonshommes." ... La majorité des "Vilains Bonshommes" ne fréquentait pas le cercle Zutiste. Désaccord à la fois politique et littéraire, les deux cercles ne se sont à aucun moment confondus. La sympathie de beaucoup de Zutistes pour la Commune, leurs constant railleries de la fabrication parnasienne semblent avoir choqué, et peut-être effrayé, nombre de "Vilains Bonshommes."

Peut-être l'album des "Vilains Bonshommes" fut-il détruit par un bombardement ou un incendie lors du siège de Paris ou de la Commune(163).

12) See note (1).

13) Although most Rimbaud scholars have assumed that this title refers to Une Saison en enfer, it is also possible that Rimbaud was working on prose poems later to be included in Illuminations. Many stylistic correlations with the letters and Les Illuminations seem to support this view.

14) Bonnefoy, in his Rimbaud par lui-même (Paris: Seuil, 1961) and Ruchon, in Rimbaud: Documents iconographiques (Geneva: Cailler, 1966), have reproduced a number of drawings by Rimbaud. But criti-

cal commentary on these, particularly in relation to the poetry, is sparse.

15) The 1984 Livre de Poche edition of Rimbaud's work, edited by Daniel Leuwers, for example, shows that many problems in dating the order of these two prose works still exist:

Une Saison en enfer est la seule oeuvre que Rimbaud ait lui-même publiée de son vivant. Elle a été et reste l'objet de maintes controverses.

On a longtemps voulu voir dans cette oeuvre l'"adieu" définitif de Rimbaud à la littérature...(122)

Les Illuminations ont le voile mystérieux de l'enigme. La critique littéraire s'interroge toujours sur la date de composition de ces "proses" rimbaldiennes. Le point est important: il détermine l'optique que l'on a de l'ascension créatrice d'Arthur Rimbaud. Les Illuminations sont-elles l'exercice du voyant qui les aurait composées avant Une Saison en enfer, ou la flore géniale d'un esprit qui a dépassé ses hantises adolescentes pour s'aboucher au souffle redécouvert de la poésie vraie(153)?

Chapter Three

Rimbaud's Reading 1870-1873

Rimbaud's reading habits, as revealed in the letters of 1870-1873, were eclectic. In Les Poètes maudits, Verlaine evokes the freewheeling Rimbaud and his extraordinary reading habits:

...Rimbaud, qui faisait alors sa seconde en qualité d'externe au lycée de ****¹ se livrait aux écoles buissonnières les plus énormes et quand il se sentait--enfin--fatigué d'arpenter monts, bois et plaines nuits et jours, car quel marcheur!² il venait à la bibliothèque de ladite ville et y demandait des ouvrages malsonnants aux oreilles du bibliothécaire en chef.... L'excellent bureaucrate, que ses fonctions mêmes obligeaient à délivrer à M. Arthur Rimbaud, sur la requête de ce dernier, force Contes Orientaux et libretti de Favart³, le tout entremêlé de vagues bouquins scientifiques très anciens et très rares, maugréait de se lever⁴ pour ce gamin et le renvoyait, volontiers, de bouche, à ses peu chères études: à Cicéron, à Horace, et à nous ne savons plus quels Grecs aussi. Le gamin, qui d'ailleurs connaissait et surtout appréciait infiniment mieux ses classiques que ne le faisait le birbe lui-même finit par "s'irriter", d'où le chef-d'oeuvre en question.⁵ (Verlaine, Oeuvres en prose 646)

In his Rimbaud le voyant, Rolland de Renéville gives a list of books which the Charleville librarian, M. Manquilllet, claims that Rimbaud may have consulted. These include such arcane works as:

Bartholomei, Faū energumenicus: Ejusdem Alexiacus. Paris, 1571.
L. Vair, De fascino Libri. Paris, 1583.

M. del Rio, Disquisitionum magicarum.
Lyon, 1612.

De l'Isle, Des talismans ou figures
faites sous certaines constellations pour
faire aimer et respecter les hommes, les
enricher, etc. Paris, 1636.

Abbé de Montfaucon de Villara, Le Comte
de Gabalis, ou entretiens sur les sciences
secrètes. Cologne [sans date.]

M. Dangey, Traité sur la magie, la
sortilège, les possessions, etc. Paris, 1732.

(32)

Rimbaud's close friend, Ernest Delahaye,
provides us with further evidence of the poet's reading
habits in his recollections:

Léon Deverrière, les autres amis
d'Izambard, la bibliothèque communale le
fournissaient copieusement de lecture. Dans
le même temps que Bouilhet, Daudet, Flaubert,
Edgar Poe et cent autres, il lit Proudhon,
par lui fort estimé, a trois dieux: Leconte
de Lisle, Banville, Gautier (29).

Il [Izambard] introduit Rimbaud dans la
société d'autres intellectuels: Deverrière,
Lenel, Bretagne. Alors on n'est plus au
collège, on sort des programmes du baccalauréat
pour les randonnées audacieuses parmi les
oeuvres de toutes les époques. Plus seulement
Homère, Pindare, Sophocle, Euripide et
Xénophon, mais Aristophane en entier; plus
seulement Ovide, Horace et Virgile, mais
Lucain, Juvénal, Catulle; plus seulement
Vauvenargues, Montesquieu et la Mérope de
Voltaire, mais Rousseau, Helvétius...et puis
la littérature contemporaine--poètes, roman-
ciers; Gautier après Hugo, Leconte de Lisle,
Banville après Baudelaire, et naturellement
le Parnasse; et Balzac, Champfleury, etc...
(86)

Similar recollections by Rimbaud's mentor,
Izambard, reveal other aspects of the poet's reading
habits and preferences.

But an even more important source of informa-
tion about what Rimbaud was reading during the period

1869-1873 can be found in his correspondence. Some letters from this period are particularly important in reconstructing the vast and eclectic list of works that he read. In particular:

- 1) Letter to Izambard of August 25, 1870 (In which Rimbaud, having been allowed to work his way through his mentor's library, reports on his progress.)
- 2) Letter to Demeny of April 17, 1871 (The poet discusses his reading with a fellow poet; advises Demeny on literature of the Commune [Verwersch, etc.])
- 3) The "Lettre du Voyant" of May 15, 1871 (also addressed to Demeny), in which the famous enumeration of "voyant" and "non-voyant" writers appears. Although this list is usually studied in connection with Rimbaud's theories of voyance, it can also be useful in reconstructing the poet's own reading.
- 4) Letter to Izambard of July 12, 1871 (In which the poet, anxious to raise money, develops a plan to sell works from his own and his mentor's libraries to local book-sellers.)

5)The two "code" letters to Delahaye of June 1872 and May 1873, in which a captive Rimbaud requests his friend to send him certain books.

We have already discussed the letter to Izambard of August 25, 1870 in the chapter on neologism. Rimbaud's use of such words as "pioupious," "prud'hommesquement" and "patrouillotisme" in the first paragraph sets up the irreverent framework of the letter in which we have the first important discussion of his reading. The second paragraph, in language that parallels the late prose,⁶ shows us how much the poet relied on reading as both a source of inspiration and escape:

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; j'espérais surtout des journaux, des livres...Rien! Rien! Le courrier n'envoie plus rien aux libraires; Paris se moque de nous joliment:pas un seul livre nouveau! C'est la mort!...(238)

This death sentence is occasionally broken by the local newspaper, the Courrier des Ardennes. Although Rimbaud makes light of this journal and its editor, he nevertheless recognizes the spirit of populism as its central focus. His fascination with populist literature, and particularly with that of the

Communards in the following year is a topic that I will deal with in the next chapter. Rimbaud's correspondence is a microcosm of his ambivalent attitude towards the populist ideal:

Me voilà réduit, en fait de journaux, à l'honorable Courrier des Ardennes, -- propriétaire, gérant, directeur, rédacteur en chef et rédacteur unique: A Pouillard! Ce journal résume les aspirations, les vœux et les opinions de la population: ainsi jugez! c'est du propre!...On est exilé dans sa patrie (238)!!!

His comments to Izambard reveal this ambiguity in an ironic tone. In the following paragraph, Rimbaud discloses how he has plundered the library of his mentor. He begins by obediently reiterating the permission that Izambard gave him to do this. The use of the formal second person plural ("vous") shows that despite their intimacy and slight difference in age (Rimbaud was five years younger than Izambard), the young poet maintained the student-teacher relationship. The list of books too, indicates a somewhat ambiguous body of reading matter. Mixed in with classics like Don Quixote (whose woodcut illustrations by Doré fascinate the young poet), there are childish adventure stories (Costal l'Indien by Gabriel Ferry), as well as Parnassian poetry (Les Epreuves by Sully Prudhomme). This singularly erratic list shows both the avidity of the young reader as well as his intellectual adolescence. At sixteen, his literary preferences are shaped both by circumstance and by his

transition from childhood to adulthood. Thus we find books that would more appropriately be classified as children's literature mixed with standard works of the literary "canon"; the obscure side by side with the ordinary. Once again, we must see this list in the context of the letter itself. It is not simply an inventory of Izambard's library; it is a lingua franca of discussion between the two correspondents. It is a way for Rimbaud to communicate with Izambard in the language of literary discourse; to joke with him and even to recommend his own reading list to his former mentor. Rimbaud's enumeration of the works in Izambard's library thus allows us to observe the poet's mind engaged in a literary colloquy both with his correspondent and the books themselves:

Heureusement, j'ai votre chambre:--Vous vous rappelez la permission que vous m'avez donnée.-- J'ai emporté la moitié de vos livres! J'ai pris Le Diable à Paris⁷. Dites-moi un peu s'il y a jamais eu quelque chose de plus idiot que les dessins de Grandville⁸?--J'ai Costal l'Indien⁹, j'ai La Robe de Nessus¹⁰, deux romans intéressants. Puis, que vous dire? ...J'ai lu tous vos livres, tous; il y a trois jours, je suis descendu aux Épreuves¹¹, puis aux Glaneuses¹²,--oui! j'ai relu ce volume!--puis ce fut tout!... Plus rien; votre bibliothèque. ma dernière planche de salut, était épuisée!...Le Don Quichotte¹³ m'apparut; hier, j'ai passé, deux heures durant, la revue des bois de Doré¹⁴:maintenant, je n'ai plus rien (238-239).

What is interesting to note here, in addition to the eclecticism of the reading itself, is the conversational tone used by Rimbaud. There is a constant sense of discussion and communication implicit in these

brief "book reviews", as if the book were the symbol or the signifier of the discourse itself. The continual use of "fragmentary" punctuation (the dash, the ellipsis) is also of interest. It may have been used here as an instrument of spontaneity; a written sign of the rapidity and flexibility of Rimbaud's thoughts.

Rimbaud's notes on illustration may also provide us with some more insights about the poet. Grandville (1803-1847), the ridiculed illustrator of Le Diable à Paris, was also a frequent contributor to the satirical review Charivari. His caricatures often depicted people as either animals (Les Métamorphoses du jour, 1828) or as flowers (Les Fleurs animées, 1845). In this, he would seem to have much in common with the "physiognomies" of Balzac as well as with the ideas of universal analogy in Baudelaire. The latter, however, like Rimbaud, found Grandville's work disconcerting and ill-conceived. In his Quelques Caricaturistes français (published in 1857), Baudelaire comments:

Quant à Grandville, c'est tout autre chose. Grandville est un esprit maladivement littéraire, toujours en quête de moyens bâtarde pour faire entrer dans le domaine des arts plastiques;...Mais comme il était artiste par métier et homme des lettres par la tête, il n'a jamais pu les bien exprimer....il a fini par tomber dans la vide, n'étant tout à fait ni philosophe ni artiste. Grandville a roulé pendant une grande partie de son existence sur l'idée générale de l'Analogie...Mais il ne savait pas en tirer des conséquences justes; il cahotait comme une locomotive déraillée.

(1008)

Rimbaud's criticism, far less sophisticated, is phrased in an interactive question more appropriate to the form of the letter itself:

Dites-moi un peu s'il y a jamais eu quelque chose de plus idiot que les dessins de Grandville (238)?

At the end of this paragraph, Rimbaud mentions the fact that he has just spent two hours contemplating the woodcuts of Doré for Don Quixote. These allusions, as well as later references to the engravings of Marin and the drawings of Draner and Faustin (letter to Demeny of April 17, 1871), show that Rimbaud was aware of both graphic and literary work in his reading.

His citation of both greater and lesser Parnassians in this letter (Sully Prudhomme and Demeny) might point to a certain naiveté in Rimbaud's reading. On the other hand, the letter of May 24, 1870, (written as a plea to Banville to have his poems published only a few months before the letter to Izambard), shows that Rimbaud was familiar with the writers of Le Parnasse contemporain, and with Banville in particular (whose Gringoire, loaned to him by Izambard, formed the basis of Rimbaud's early prose work, "Lettre de Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI"¹⁵). The letter to Demeny of May 15, 1871 (the second "lettre du Voyant") contains much additional information about the extent of Rimbaud's acquaintance with the Parnassian school, as well as his judgments of the individual poets. But the poets men-

tioned in the letters of 1870 reveal little commentary on the part of Rimbaud. This lack of literary analysis may indicate a more formative and eclectic phase in his reading. By contrast, the letters of 1871 show that Rimbaud was actively engaged in analyzing and evaluating both contemporary and "historical" poetry.

Rimbaud's notes on the novels he has read reflect this same suspension of judgment and show his willingness to read just about anything. The grouping of Cervantes with the contemporary novels of Ferry and Aicard points to both his avidity for books as well as to a certain ingenuousness in his selection of them. Nevertheless, the exoticism and fantasy provided by both of these nineteenth-century novels may have inspired the poet with new images for his own work. A number of writers (including Gengoux, Noulet, Bernard, Cohn) have found echoes of these mid-century potboilers in the poet's work. In a list of possible sources of "Le Bateau ivre", Suzanne Bernard cites Noulet:

De ces nombreuses sources possibles, on trouvera la liste dans l'ouvrage de Mme Noulet¹⁶. Certaines paraissent très probables, comme Les Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym de Poe, Vingt mille lieues sous les mers de J. Verne, Le Voyage de Baudelaire, Les Natchez de Chateaubriand, les voyages du capitaine Cook, surtout peut-être les oeuvres de Hugo (Les Travailleurs de la mer, Pleine Mer et Plein Ciel de La Légende des Siècles)--et, probablement des articles du Magasin pittoresque et du Tour du Monde, revues que Rimbaud a pu feuilleter soit chez lui, soit chez les demoiselles Gindre¹⁷. Mais E. Noulet a raison de souligner qu'il serait trop facile de multiplier les rapprochements...(422)

Finally, the mention of Le Diable à Paris is significant. A collaboration by a number of contemporary writers (George Sand, P.-J. Stahl, Léon Gozlan, Charles Nodier and others), the book was published by Hetzel in 1845 and subtitled "Paris et les parisiens; mœurs, coutumes, caractères et portraits des habitants de Paris"¹⁸. Several months later, Rimbaud attempted his first flight to Paris. Although I am not suggesting a direct link between the book and his escape, it may have served as a sort of "imaginary travelogue" and thus given Rimbaud a foretaste of life in the capital.¹⁹

The last part of the letter to Izambard contains two recommendations for reading from Rimbaud. Once again, we become aware of the constant interactivity of the letter; here the student calls his mentor's attention to some new reading. Their relationship is always an issue in the correspondence. A significant element here is the constantly shifting mentor/teacher-student roles. In the letters, at least, these roles may be reversed. Here, Rimbaud sends his former teacher some poetry to read, and reminds him that he is no longer a teacher:

Je vous envoie des vers; lisez cela un matin, au soleil, comme je les ai faits: vous n'êtes plus professeur, maintenant, j'espère!...(239)

In contrast, a year later, Rimbaud addresses the newly-reappointed Izambard with ironic scorn:

Vous revoilà professeur. On se doit à la Société, m'avez vous dit; vous faites

partie des corps enseignants: vous roulez
dans la bonne ornière...[in the letter of May
13, 1871] (248)

In the first letter, Rimbaud tries to establish an equality between reader and writer. He tells Izambard to read the poetry as he has: early in the morning, in the sunlight. Izambard's temporary absence from the "teaching corps" makes him an equal reader of the poetry that is to follow.

Where the first "Voyant" letter contained some of his own poetry, this one reproduces the poetry of a young contemporary from Lyons, Louisa Siefert (1845-1877). Rimbaud had already loaned some of her work to Izambard, and the latter indicated his interest in her verse. The poem which Rimbaud copies here ("Marguerite") is from her first published volume, Rayons perdus.²⁶ The poem itself may initially seem a curious choice for Rimbaud to send. It is written as a dramatic monologue and attempts to capture the feelings of a young woman who will never be able to bear children. Marguerite is her young, healthy cousin, whom she bounces on her knees as the poem proceeds. The poem ends on an elegiac note, when the young woman realizes that a portion of her life is over. Despite the apparent superficial dissimilarities between this poem and those of Rimbaud's, we can nevertheless notice a number of parallels.

The poem opens in media res, with the voice of a young woman speaking and tenderly describing the

child. The next stanzas move ever more penetratingly into the speaker's mind and show her own dark thoughts. The image of Marguerite, at first robust and healthy, becomes one of loss and regret, as it reminds the speaker of her own inability to bear such a child. The final line, "Ma vie, à dix-huit ans, compte tout un passé" (cited in Rimbaud 239) echoes Rimbaud's own poetic utterances at this time. For example, the sad, wise child, playing in a deserted Europe at the end of "Le Bateau ivre" may be seen as an analogue to the barren young woman in this poem. Rimbaud compares Siefert's lines here to those of Sophocles' Antigone. The idea of the female poet is discussed more thoroughly in the second "lettre du Voyant"; in that letter, Rimbaud blends the feminist ideas of Flora Tristan with the populist philosophies of the era, as well as with his own principles of "voyance".

The inclusion of this poem to Izambard and Rimbaud's commentary should also be examined in the context of the other poet whom he recommends: Paul Verlaine. The juxtaposition of these two poets may seem odd at first; but both represent aspects of Rimbaud's developing poetic consciousness. Verlaine's Fêtes Galantes (1869), with their evocation of the world of Watteau and Fragonard, as well as La Bonne Chanson (1870) are mentioned. Rimbaud finds the first volume especially intriguing, and once again his comments and choice of verse give us insight into the formation of his poetic and critical credo:

C'est fort bizarre, très drôle;
mais vraiment, c'est adorable. Parfois de
fortes licences: ainsi,

Et la tigresse épou---vantage d'Hyrkanie
est un vers de ce volume (240).

Rimbaud also urges Izambard to buy Verlaine's latest volume of poetry. Mouquet and Renévill's notes to the first Pléiade edition give us more information about this early recognition of Verlaine by Rimbaud, as well as the circumstances already uniting the two poets:

La Bonne Chanson, de Verlaine, avait été ainsi annoncée dans le Charge, le journal satirique hebdomadaire du caricaturiste Alfred le Petit, le 30 juillet 1870...Rimbaud lisait attentivement le Charge, à laquelle il donna son poème "Première Soirée" sous le titre: "Trois Baisers" (n° du 15 août 1870.) Il ne fait même pas allusion dans la lettre qu'il envoie à Izambard dix jours plus tard (809).

A year later, in the letter of May 15, 1871 to Demeny, Verlaine is praised as one of the only true modern "voyant" poets. Rimbaud's own first letter to Verlaine was sent in September of the same year. Unfortunately, we no longer have the original letter, but according to evidence from both Delahaye²¹ and Mathilde Verlaine²², we know that it contained the following poems:

"Les Effarés"
"Accroupissements"
"Les Douaniers"
"Le Coeur volé"
"Les Assis"

These poems had been copied by Delahaye in small round cursive letters.²³ Several days later, not yet

having heard from Verlaine, Rimbaud sent him the following poems:

"Mes Petites amoureuses"
 "Les Premières Communions"
 "Paris se repeuple" [Subtitle of
 "L'Orgie parisienne"] (260)

Although we have no record of Verlaine's response to these poems at the time, his later remarks (in Les Poètes maudits of 1883) show a curious mixture of distaste and admiration for the young poet's work:

Maintenant quel avis formuler sur les Premières Communions, poème...dont d'ailleurs nous détestons bien haut l'esprit, qui nous paraît dérivé d'une rencontre malheureuse avec le Michelet sénile et impie, le Michelet dessous les linges sales...oui, quel avis émettre sur ce morceau colossal, sinon que nous en aimons la profonde ordonnance et tous les vers sans exception?...

Paris se repeuple, écrit au lendemain de la "Semaine sanglante," fourmille de beautés (in Verlaine, Oeuvres en prose, 654).

In the letter written to Paul Demeny on April 17, 1871 (approximately one month before the "Voyant" letter and a year after the previous letter to Izambard), Rimbaud shows an altogether different side of his reading. Here, he recommends the populist and Communard works that have increasingly absorbed him since his brief escapade to Paris in February, 1871. Unlike his first two unsuccessful attempts to escape to Paris in the summer of 1870 (in the course of which he met Demeny, at Douai), Rimbaud apparently succeeded in his third attempt, arriving in Paris just before the Commune, during the Prussian siege, and retaining from this experience a feeling for the people of the capital and their plight. Whether he actually stayed in soldiers' dormitories (as some critics contend in their analyses of "Le Coeur volé") or not, he seems to have genuinely felt the grip of misery in Paris. In their introduction to the first Pléiade edition, Mouquet and Renévillie make the following comments about Rimbaud's activities and reading in 1871:

1871.--Rimbaud passe ses journées à la bibliothèque de Charleville, où, selon ses biographes, il lit les socialistes français: Proudhon, Babeuf, Saint-Simon, des romans du XVIIIe siècle, et les ouvrages d'occultisme. Il écrit les Assis pour se venger de l'attitude du bibliothécaire que ses lectures scandalisent. Le 25 février 1871, troisième fugue de Rimbaud qui vend sa montre en argent et prend le train pour Paris. Il erre dans les rues de la capitale, pendant une quinzaine de jours, dans le plus complet dénuement, et regagne à pied Charleville, à travers les lignes ennemies, en se faisant passer pour un franc-tireur...

De retour à Charleville, Rimbaud rédige un
Projet de Constitution communiste qui n'est
pas parvenu jusqu'à nous. Il en donne lec-
ture à son ami Delahaye...(xxii-xxiii)

Beginning in the second paragraph of the let-
ter of April 17, 1871 to Demeny, Rimbaud refers to his
reading:

Depuis le 12, je dépouille la cor-
respondance au Progrès des Ardennes:
aujourd'hui, il est vrai, le journal est
suspendu. Mais j'ai apaisé la bouche d'ombre
pour un temps (246).

Here we see a confluence of reading, writing,
and correspondence. In an interesting note to this let-
ter, Adam informs us that Rimbaud and Delahaye had
actually tried to contribute to this populist newspaper
but had been rejected.²⁴ According to Mouquet and
Renéville, they had used pseudonyms (Rimbaud had
adopted the name of Jean Baudry, from a contemporary
drama by Vacquerie; Delahaye, had used the quasi-
anagram of Charles Dhayle); but the editor found their
prose too wordy:

MM Jean Baudry et Charles Dhayle. ---Vos
articles m'intéressent, mais soulevez un peu
le bavolet de votre loup, s.v.p.(812)

The letter to Demeny continues with an
intimate and obscure series of references. Since
Demeny's correspondence to Rimbaud has been lost, it is
difficult to understand the third paragraph of this
letter.

Oui, vous êtes heureux, vous. Je vous dis
cela.--et ce qu'il est des misérables qui,

femme ou idée , ne trouveront pas la Soeur de charité(247).

Although Adam offers no explanation for these lines, Mouquet and Renévillie suggest that "La Soeur de charité" may be related to Rimbaud's composition of the poem "Les Soeurs de charité" in the same year [1871](812). Suzanne Bernard, in her notes to the poem, also points out this phrase in the letter of April 17 to Demeny. Her commentary suggests that Rimbaud expressed ambivalent feelings here of both misogyny and compassion (404).

The next paragraph returns us to the theme of reading. Here Rimbaud advises Demeny to read Ecclesiastes, chapters 11-12, which Rimbaud pronounces "as wise as they are romantic" ["...aussi sapients que romantiques 247."] There follows a line in quotations, which would seem to be from the Bible:

Celui-là aurait sept replis de
folie en l'âme, qui, ayant pendu ses habits
au soleil, geindrait à l'heure de la pluie.
(247)

Mouquet and Renévillie claim that they can find no such reference in the chapters which Rimbaud mentions (812), nor could I find these lines anywhere in Ecclesiastes either. The book is a lyrical one, suited to the poetic interests of both young men; it deals with problems of change, of the seasons, of folly and of ritual. Therefore, the "quote" might be a parody of Rimbaud's; an attempt to write in the Biblical mode (as he did in the "Proses évangéliques", which

most critics date contemporaneously with Une Saison en enfer). The entire question of the Bible as literary influence on Rimbaud needs to be explored. Although early twentieth-century Catholic apologists such as Claudel and Rivière saw Rimbaud's work as a religious testament, it is necessary to reevaluate some of the actual Biblical references in the poet's work. "Après le déluge", usually presented as the first of Les Illuminations, is one example of a major work whose sources may lie in the Bible. Rimbaud's recommendation that Demeny read Ecclesiastes is another piece of evidence that shows his familiarity with Biblical sources and style.

As if to belie this interest, Rimbaud immediately switches the tone of his letter to focus on contemporary literature. The next five paragraphs indeed provide a catalogue of the poet's current reading. He sums this up succinctly:

Telle était la littérature--du 25 février au 10 mars (247).

His list is eclectic: he begins with the Parnassian poets and ends by recommending Vermersch, a leading writer of the Commune. Despite their seeming diversity, there is a unity to these works: they are all concerned with the new populist, military and nationalistic issues in literature that surfaced during the Franco-Prussian War. Even the Parnassians invoked by Rimbaud have chosen their subjects from contemporary events and national sentiment:

J'ai vu quelques nouveautés chez
 Lemerre²⁵: deux poèmes de Leconte de Lisle,
Le Sacre de Paris, *Le Soir d'une bataille*²⁶.
 --De F.Coppée: *Lettre d'une Mobile*
*breton*²⁷. --Mendès: *Colère d'un franc-*
*tireur*²⁸. --A. Theuriet: *L'Invasion*²⁹. A.
 Lacaussade: *Voe Victoribus*³⁰. --Des poèmes de
 Félix Franck³¹, d'Emile Bergerat³². --Un *Siège*
de Paris, fort volume, de Claretie³³.
 J'ai lu là-bas *Le Fer rouge*, *Nouveaux*
châtiments, de Glatigny³⁴, dédié à Vac-
 querie³⁵;...(247).

The political nature of Rimbaud's reading is made even more specific in the next two paragraphs, where he mentions Vermersch³⁶ as well as the abundant magazines and newspapers that have recently appeared and which focus on the siege of Paris.

Rimbaud's reaction to the ongoing military events is shown in his writing on the graphic arts:

--que j'aie vu des ruissellements fastidieux de photographies et de dessins relatifs au Siège,--vous ne douterez jamais. On s'arrêtait aux gravures de A. Marie, les *Vengeurs*, les *Faucheurs de la Mort*; surtout aux dessins comiques de Dräner et de Faustin (247).³⁷

Rimbaud then goes on to dismiss the theatre of the day ("abomination de la désolation")³⁸ and to praise the revolutionary writings of Vallès³⁹ and Vermersch. It is at this point that he inserts his summary "Telle était la littérature...". Thus, by showing Demeny what was being sold in the bookstores and read in February and March of 1871, Rimbaud has brought to life an important epoch in French literary history. At a time when even the most entrenched Parnassians had turned to revolutionary themes, Rimbaud's mention of

these works seems to lead naturally to his own enunciation of revolutionary ideals in the next letter to Demyen (the "lettre du Voyant" of May 15, 1871). I have already focused on the letter's theoretical content and background. Here, however, I would like to read it more narrowly in its relationship to the previous letter to Demyen and in the context of Rimbaud's reading.

If we connect the "lettre du Voyant" to the letter of April 17, a number of oblique references may now become clear. The opening, for example, reveals a close continuity with its predecessor:

J'ai résolu de vous donner une heure de
littérature nouvelle. Je commence de suite
par un psaume d'actualité:

CHANT DE GUERRE PARISIEN (249-250)

Rimbaud's comments about human progress seem to stem directly from this period in which his reading included such revolutionary and Communard writers as Vallès and Vermersch. Furthermore, Rimbaud's concern with both the new and the immediate ("nouvelle...actualité") in his reading and writing reveal his effect of the Revolution of 1871 on his thinking. In discussing the influence of the Commune on Rimbaud, Suzanne Bernard writes:

On sent dans la lettre de Rimbaud à Demyen une effervescence intellectuelle que les événements récents ne faisaient qu'accroître: mais cette étrange fusion d'une délire anarchiste...et d'une foi affirmée dans un avenir "matérialiste" où l'art éternel aurait "ses fonctions"...ne rappelle-t-elle pas les rêveries utopistes des communards mêlées au plus violent délire de destruction(xxxviii-xxxix)?

It would, of course, distort the "Lettre du Voyant" to read it solely as the commentary of a young revolutionary. Indeed, critics have read this letter in so many different ways that it might be useful to note some of the more extreme positions. For example, in his 1954 edition of the letter, H. Matarasso presents the sacerdotal view that the letter is as inviolable as a Biblical text and should therefore not be subject to any sort of literary examination:

Cette lettre, écrite en lettres de feu, ne souffre pas de commentaires ni de glose (qtd. in Schaeffer 145).⁴⁰

Etiemble, on the other hand, in his effort to "demythify" Rimbaud in general, and his mystic countenance in particular, sees the letter as a banal repository of nineteenth-century commonplaces.⁴¹ In this "debunking" mode, other critics who have tried to diminish the letter's significance include Antoine Adam and Marcel Ruff. Rolland de Renéville, one of the letter's earliest commentators, attempted to find in it a synthesis of Oriental and mystical philosophies. At the same time, very few commentators have attempted to align it with the first letter (to Izambard), and almost none have put it in the framework of Rimbaud's total correspondence. Gérard Schaeffer, in his edition of 1975, presents the most recent attempt at demythification and objective analysis of the letters:

Rejetant l'ironie parfois pesante d'Etiemble, nous proposons donc une inter-

prétation aussi objective que possible et débarrassée de tout dogmatisme: ni l'Orient, ni la division de l'oeuvre rimbalienne selon les voyelles, ni les tarots n'expliquent quoi que ce soit (147).

But even Schaeffer's commentary, after a clearheaded opening (in which he emphasizes the placement and importance of the three poems in the letter), soon lapses into rather dogmatic analysis. He groups the poet's statements into opposing expressions and then begins to see patterns of three successive terms as the "real" substructure of the letter:

La triple expression--le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit-- aussitôt conclue par le suprême Savant parachève la peinture d'un poète qui, volontairement, se heurte à la Divinité pour parvenir à cet inconnu qui est aussi l'interdit, inabordable sans danger, sans châtiment (163).

This type of synthesis may serve some purpose by pointing out linguistic relationships within the letter, but it does little to further our total comprehension of the letter and of its significance. I am certainly not of the school of Matarasso and those who would see Rimbaud's work as divine and not subject to exegesis; but, on the other hand, in dealing with the letter as a purely literary text/ *ars poetica* (he likens it to such works as Maxime Ducamp's preface to Les Chants modernes⁴², and to Fabre d'Olivet's Histoire du romantisme⁴³), Schaeffer misrepresents the significance of the work's epistolary nature. I prefer to approach this canonical work by placing it within the more comprehensive context of Rimbaud's total writing

(including his correspondence), and by examining, in particular, the letter's relevance to Rimbaud's reading.

The first observation that needs to be made here is the complete absence of references to reading in the first "lettre du Voyant" to Izambard of May 13, 1871 in contrast to the overwhelming abundance of references in the letter to Demeny of May 15. Whether or not this first letter was intended as a draft for the second seems irrelevant in this respect; by writing similar ideas but using different types of development to his two correspondents, Rimbaud shows that his commentary on literature/reading itself is a significant mode of expression in the second letter. As he has done in other letters to Demeny (and to Izambard also), Rimbaud here uses the common language of books read and understood among correspondents as a way of constructing his ideas and reaffirming them through the epistolary mode. The final five paragraphs of the letter deal not only with the topic of "voyance," but also with the dialogue he wishes to set up between himself and Demeny, his reader. To overlook this fact, as most commentators have done, and to see this part of the letter purely as a literary monograph on voyance, is to distort and misrepresent the very essence of the letter. The tone is conversational, epistolary, but not necessarily didactic. Rimbaud is writing here as one reader to another; the works discussed serve as the substance for further discussion:

Lamartine est quelquefois voyant, mais étranglé par la forme vieille. --Hugo, trop cabochard, a bien du VU dans les dernières volumes: Les Misérables sont un vrai poème. J'ai Les Châtiments sous la main; Stella donne à peu près la mesure de la vue de Hugo. Trop de Belmontet⁴⁴ et de Lammenais⁴⁵, de Jéhovahs et de colonnes, vieilles énormités crevées (253).

It would be foolish to see the entire letter as a reading list; obviously the first two-thirds of the letter do present Rimbaud's views on the nature and genesis of the poetic act. However, as I have stressed in my first chapter, this discussion of voyance must be seen within the context of Rimbaud's entire correspondence. In the same way, these five final paragraphs, full of commentary on contemporary literature, must be reexamined in connection with Rimbaud's other letters. Rimbaud's previous letter to Demeny also dealt with the issues of contemporary literature. In the letter of May 15, he tells his correspondent:

J'ai résolu de vous donner une heure de littérature nouvelle. Je commence de suite par un psaume d'actualité...(here follows the poem "Chant de guerre parisien")
--Voici de la prose sur l'avenir de la poésie (249-250)...

Both letters also look back to ancient literature. Rimbaud ends the letter of April 17 with the following reflections:

--Du reste, je ne vous apprends peut-être rien de nouveau.
En ce cas, tendons le front aux lances des averses, l'âme à la sapience antique (247).

In the "Voyant" letter, he also looks back at the golden age of poetry:

Toute poésie antique aboutit à la poésie grecque...En Grèce...vers et lyres rythment l'Action. Après, musique et rimes sont jeux, délassements (250)...

But he also raises new questions in the second letter about the place of antiquity in modern literature. As he had done in the earlier letter, Rimbaud tries to evaluate the presence of modern literature within its two thousand year old context:

Du reste, libre aux nouveaux d'exécrer les ancêtres: on est chez soi et l'on a le temps (250).

Later, as if in opposition to his initial ideas, Rimbaud says:

L'étude de ce passé charme les curieux: plusieurs s'égouissent à renouveler ces antiquités:--c'est pour eux. L'intelligence universelle a toujours jeté ses idées naturellement; les hommes ramassaient une partie de ces fruits de cerveau...(250-1)

But these statements are not contradictory. Rimbaud is concerned with the future of art, as well as with its past. Both letters (of April 17 and of May 15) indicate the poet's eagerness to take up the most recent ideas, and to examine them in both their historical and aesthetic contexts.

Rimbaud's condemnation of Musset provides an extended example of criticism in these two contexts. Musset is a poet out of step with his time, and his reliance on antiquated imagery and themes in an age of visionary accomplishments serves to arouse Rimbaud's

most venomous indignation:

Musset est quatorze fois exécration pour nous, générations douloureuses et prises de visions, -- que sa paresse d'ange a insultées! O! les contes et les proverbes fadasses! ô les nuits! ô Rolla⁴⁶... Tout garçon épiciier est en mesure de débobiner une apostrophe Rollaque... tout collégien qui a le moyen, fait le Rolla, écrit un Rolla!... Musset n'a rien su faire: il y avait des visions derrière la gaze des rideaux: il a fermé les yeux (253).

It is important to remember while reading this that both Rimbaud and Demeny were striving to be poets at an age when most young men indeed were writing poems, whether or not they intended to be poets. Thus, much of the invective comes from a fraternal feeling of anger against dilettantism shared by the correspondents. There is also, in this long paragraph of tirade, a common thread of criticism against purely "French" poetry. Rimbaud objects to the nationalistic spirit, much in the same way as Taine has praised it:

Tout est français, c'est-à-dire haïssable au suprême degré;... Encore une oeuvre de cet odieux génie qui a inspiré Rabelais, Voltaire, Jean La Fontaine!... En voilà, de la peinture à l'émail, de la poésie solide! On savourera longtemps la poésie française, mais en France.... Français, paradis, traîné de l'estaminet au pupitre de collège, le beau mort est mort, et désormais, ne nous donnons même plus la peine de le réveiller par nos abominations (253)!

Again, the spirit of the rebellious collegians, united in their disdain against the educational and poetic establishment in which they have both labored, emerges. Most commentators of these lines have

either overlooked these facts or replaced them with far more complex interpretations. The use of the first person plural in the final line of the paragraph in itself suggests the kind of collaboration I am suggesting here. To neglect this in favor of more belabored interpretations seems to swing wide of the mark. Schaeffer offers this type of critique, invoking Sainte-Beuve, Gautier and others in attempting to integrate this paragraph into a comprehensible "ars poetica":

Faute de courage moral, d'énergie poétique, Musset refuse d'aller au-delà, au plus profond du réel. Alors que le voyant s'éveille dans le grand songe, le poète, parasite et craintif, ferme les yeux, s'arrête sur le seuil, au lieu de percevoir l'inconnu (184).

In the penultimate paragraph, Rimbaud deals with "the second generation of Romantics", who fare slightly better than Lamartine, Hugo and Musset. Although Gautier, Leconte de Lisle and Banville are all described as "très voyants," they have still not gone far enough in their poetic adventure to fulfill their promise:

Mais inspecter l'invisible et entendre l'inouï étant autre chose que reprendre l'esprit des choses mortes (253).

If we compare this to the idealized poet that Rimbaud described in his first letter to Banville (May 24, 1870), we can notice how much his early definitions have changed:

--puisque le poète est un Parnassien,--
 épris de la beauté idéale; c'est que j'aime
 en vous, bien naïvement, un descendant de
 Ronsard, un frère de nos maîtres de 1830, un
 vrai romantique, un vrai poète (236).

His second letter to Banville (dated August 15, 1871, and thus several months after the "lettre du Voyant"), reveals a different side of his attitude towards the older Parnassian. Although he still maintains his admiration ("J'aimerai toujours les vers de Banville [258]."), perhaps with an eye towards publication or at least criticism of his own work ("Ai-je progressé [258]?"), Rimbaud indicates this new direction by enclosing the satiric "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos des fleurs." In this lengthy and complex poem (signed "Alcide Bava"), Rimbaud demonstrates how far his original ideas have developed, and chides Banville and others for their conventional imagery:

II

O Poètes, quand vous auriez
 Les Roses, les Roses soufflées,
 Rouges sur tiges de lauriers,
 Et de mille octaves enflées!

Quand BANVILLE en ferait neiger,
 Sanguinolentes, tournoyantes,
 Pochant l'oeil fou de l'étranger
 Aux lectures mal bienveillantes!

De vos forêts et de vos prés,
 O très paisibles photographes!
 La Flore est diverse à peu près
 Comme des bouchons de carafes!

(56)

In her commentary, Bernard reminds us that Banville himself parodied other poets in his work, and

that Rimbaud thus continues the tradition. But he goes farther:

N'oublions pas cependant que Banville lui-même avait montré la voie au jeune poète dans ses Odes funambulesques qui sont, comme le titre l'indique, des parodies, et que Rimbaud ne fait qu'aller plus loin: s'il se moquait de Banville, c'est donc de façon moins ouverte qu'on ne pourrait croire...Rimbaud emprunte du reste aux Odes funambulesques (dont Delahaye nous apprend qu'il chérissait la lecture) de nombreuses expressions, qui ont été relevées par Gengoux⁴⁷. Mais il faut surtout souligner...que sous la forme "funambulesque" de ce poème se cache une idée très sérieuse: Rimbaud demande au poète, comme il l'a dit dans sa lettre à Demeny, "du nouveau --idées et formes." Il ne s'agit plus de chanter les lys et les roses, ou d'évoquer un exotisme de commande en vers réguliers ("des contractions d'un hexamètre!"): le poète doit aller vers l'inconnu, il doit trouver dans son siècle moderne de nouvelles inspiration, et du mystère (414).

Robert Greer Cohn gives us an even closer reading of these lines, pointing out Rimbaud's antipathy to both Banville and the type of imagery he represents:

Rimbaud imagines a whirlwind storm of roses, as in some poem of Banville (or Boticelli's Birth of Venus), hitting some poor reader in the eyes and puffing them up...The "readings" hence are not "friendly." The main idea is that even if...Banville storms the landscape with roses, we in France still have only ridiculous flowers (141)...

Carol de Dobay-Rifelj, in Word and Figure, sees this poem in the context of the "lettre du Voyant," as a poetic extension of his epistolary manifesto:

Its language shows the full range of Rimbaud's innovations in the poetic lexi-

con. He illustrates the possibilities open to poetic discourse, both for himself and for others. But because it is a kind of *ars poetica*, its self-referential character permits a certain recuperation of this new diction...

In this text, Rimbaud introduces references uncommon in poetry, to contemporary life and to banal, everyday elements in particular. There are allusions to well-known figures of the time --Banville, Renan, Hachette, Grandville (who had published a collection of drawings called Les Fleurs animées), Figuier, author of scientific works, M. de Kerdrel, a famous royalist. Many of the objects mentioned are recent discoveries: rubber, telegraph poles, spoons made by the Alféride process. Not only do they reveal his interest in technology, but they represent the introduction of unusual subjects into poetry. Rimbaud seems to be calling for a modern poetry for modern times. The same effect is elicited by the scientific terminology so frequently used in this poem (*rayon de sodium, dioptriques, glucose*), the many references to plants and animals, and the medical lexicon...There are references to textile manufacturing (*cotonnier, filer, noeuds*), mining (*filons, gemmeuses*), pharmacology, and leather manufacturing...The lyrical status of typically poetic terms is often devalued by their association with vulgar or pejorative terms, creating the kind of oxymoronic diction we have seen in Baudelaire (157-159).

Rimbaud's reading of Baudelaire is equally ambivalent. He both admires the poet and chides him for not going far enough in his invention and originality:

Mais inspecter l'invisible et entendre
l'inouï étant autre chose que reprendre
l'esprit des choses mortes, Baudelaire est le
premier voyant, roi des poètes, un vrai Dieu.
Encore a-t-il vécu dans un milieu trop artiste;
et la forme si vantée en lui est mesquine:
les inventions d'inconnu réclament des formes nouvelles (253-254).

Rimbaud's reading of Baudelaire has not been adequately examined, as André Guyaux has pointed out in his article, "Baudelaire a-t-il influencé Rimbaud?"⁴⁸. Nevertheless, we can assume from this reference that Rimbaud was well-acquainted with Baudelaire's work. His admiration for the author of Les Fleurs du mal is not total, however. He reproaches him for not going far enough in his innovation as well as in his search for the unknown. This may seem ironic to us, especially if we recall the final line of "Le Voyage":

Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!
(Baudelaire 127)

Perhaps Rimbaud is comparing this insufficiency of Baudelaire's invention to his own quest. As he states in "Alchimie du Verbe" (Une Saison en enfer; Délires II):

J'inventai la couleur des voyelles (106)!

and later in the same work, in the section entitled "Adieu":

J'ai essayé d'inventer de nouvelles
fleurs, de nouveaux astres, de nouvelles
chairs, de nouvelles langues (116).

Rimbaud also reproaches Baudelaire for his dandyism, a pose which might have gone against his feeling for the poet's responsibility to society. In her analysis of "A la Musique," Kristin Ross points out this inconsistency:

...the dandy, on the other hand, displays or parades himself as an aesthetic object (78).

Rimbaud also admonishes Baudelaire for his "shabby" poetic form, a phrase which might sound strange to us. However, when we contrast the regularity and near-classicism of the latter's verse with the more innovative creations of Rimbaud (as exemplified by the three poems which he includes in this letter), this phrase does seem to concur with Rimbaud's aesthetic throughout the "Lettre du voyant".

In the final paragraph of the "Lettre du voyant" comes evidence not only of Rimbaud's extensive reading in the poetry of his own time, but also of the poet's sound judgment of his contemporaries. Rimbaud groups these poets into classifications of his own devising; the naming and connotation of these groups at first indicates Rimbaud's scorn, but eventually grows to show his admiration and appreciation of these poets and their work. Almost every one of them appears in the Parnasse contemporain of 1869. Bays comments:

It seems possible that Rimbaud had the review on hand and glanced at its table of contents as he wrote the letter. The authors mentioned have been listed and classified in a manner significant for what it reveals about the literary judgment of the poet(258).

The first group, "les innocents", includes Armand Renaud and Léon Grandet. Both of them, according to Rimbaud, have written their "Rolla" (yet they are not listed under a further subdivision, "Les Musset").⁴⁹ In an earlier paragraph, Rimbaud has vented his spleen against authors of this ilk to Demy. Armand Renaud (1836-1894) contributed to all three

issues of Le Parnasse contemporain. Renaud held the post of Chief Inspector of Fine Arts in the Prefecture of the Seine and Custodian of Historical Works of Paris. His most famous work was the collection of Parnassian verse entitled Les Nuits persanes (1870), which Rimbaud mentions in a later letter to Izambard:

Tenez-vous aux Nuits persanes? un titre qui peut affrioler, même parmi des bouquins d'occasion (256).

[Letter to Izambard, July 12, 1871]

Bays further comments on Renaud in analyzing his preface to this work:

...Renaud precedes Coppée in the "genre populaire," whose artistic theory he attempts to justify in the Preface...He felt constrained...to write about the material misery of people even at the risk of incurring the anger of "les artistes épris d'art pur(260)."

The other "innocent" indicted by Rimbaud is Léon Grandet, whose pseudonym was Léon Barracand (perhaps a reference to his political activism). He wrote both novels and poems, and his "Rolla" was most likely the lengthy poem entitled "Donaniel" (1866), where the hero was the son of Don Juan.

The second group Rimbaud terms "les gaulois et les Musset." The reference to the Gauls as a primitive, unevolved race can be seen in the letter, in which Rimbaud condemns such writers as Rabelais and La Fontaine for their purely "French" appeal. He sees this influence even in his own being, as he describes himself in "Mauvais Sang" (Une Saison en enfer):

J'ai de mes ancêtres gaulois l'oeil bleu blanc, la cervelle étroite, et la maladresse

dans la lutte. Je trouve mon habillement aussi barbare que le leur. Mais je ne beurre pas ma chevelure.

Les Gaulois étaient les écorcheurs de bêtes, les brûleurs d'herbes les plus ineptes de leur temps.

D'eux, j'ai: l'idolâtrie et l'amour du sacrilège;--oh! tous les vices, colère, luxure,--magnifique, la luxure;--surtout mensonge et paresse (94)

This self-abasement continues throughout "Mauvais Sang," in which the concept of the inferior original race is reiterated:

Il m'est bien évident que j'ai toujours été race inférieure. Je ne puis comprendre la révolte. Ma race ne se souleva jamais que pour piller: tels les loups à la bête qu'ils n'ont pas tuée (94).

No doubt, this concept was fostered by Rimbaud's reading in both history and fiction. Bouillane de Lacoste, for example, cites several examples of the primitive custom of buttering the hair in Chateaubriand's work⁵⁰. We know too that Rimbaud was reading such works as Costal l'Indien⁵¹. Thus the barbarism he condemns here is not limited to the Gallic race per se, but to any primitive characteristic which lingers into the present day. In the context of this letter, therefore, and the poets he condemns under its rubric, "Gallicism" represents those tribal characteristics which persist in and identify these writers. As for his condemnation of Musset and his followers, we have only to examine the lengthy middle section of the "lettre du Voyant" to understand this pejorative appel-

lation. Under these two headings he groups Georges Lafenestre (1837-1919), Charles Coran (1814-1901), Claudius Popelin (1825-1892), Josephin Souлары (1815-1891), and Louis Salles. Lafenestre had published only one volume of verse at the time of the "lettre du Voyant," Les Espérances (1863). Like Renaud, he held an official post, that of Conservator of the Louvre, and he was also a professor at the Ecole du Louvre. Charles Coran had published two volumes of verse, Onyx (1840) and Rimes galantes (1847). Claudius Popelin had acquired some notice as a painter in enamel, and had written a book on the subject (L'Art de l'émail, 1868). Souлары, the leader of a group of Lyonnais poets, had published a collection of poems entitled Sonnets humoristiques in 1858. According to Sainte-Beuve, his work resembled Gautier's ("Un Gautier plus rare, mais qui a des idées"⁵²). Salles had contributed three poems to the Parnasse contemporain of 1869 and had published three volumes of poetry, one of which (Les Amours de Pierre et de Léa, 1869) had earned him the dubious title of "The Parnassian Petrarch"⁵³.

The next group of poets ridiculed by Rimbaud are called "the Schoolboys" ("les écoliers"). Although all were older than Rimbaud, they were relatively young to have achieved renown, and all had published in Le Parnasse contemporain by the time of the "lettre du Voyant". Here, perhaps, Rimbaud's own thwarted ambitions were most obviously combined with his derision.

Gabriel Marc (1840-1900), a cousin of Banville's, had published a collection of his work, Soleils d'octobre, in 1869, and dedicated it to Banville. Like Renaud and Lafenestre, he also held a governmental post. Jean Aicard (1848-1921) was the youngest of the three, and had published his first volume of poetry, Les Jeunes croyances (1867), at the age of nineteen. He is pictured with Rimbaud and Verlaine in Fantin-Latour's group painting Le Coin de la Table.⁵⁴ André Theuriot (1833-1907), published his first volume of poetry, Le Chemin des bois, in 1867, in the style of Lamartine. He later wrote rustic novels in the style of Georges Sand, and, like others on this list, held a government post.

The group baptized "the dead and the imbeciles" seems to be a more arbitrary association of names. Only two were actually dead at the time of the "lettre du Voyant" (the Deschamps), but we may perhaps understand Rimbaud's designation in a metaphorical sense.

Joseph Autran (1813-1877) was the only poet whose name does not appear in the Parnasse contemporain of 1869. Nevertheless, he was fairly well-known at the time of the "lettre du Voyant" not only for his poetry (La Mer, 1835, and Les Poèmes de la mer, 1852) but also for his theatre, especially La Fille d'Eschyle, presented at the Odéon in 1848. He was elected to the Académie Française in 1868. Autran belonged to the group of Parnassians that were known as the "Vilains

bonshommes," which also included Verlaine, Charles Cros, Méral, Banville, Hérédia, Valade, Coppée, Germain Nouveau and others, including, eventually, Rimbaud himself. They later became known as the "Zutistes."⁵³

Auguste Barbier (1805-1882) was also elected to the Academy (in 1869); his success seems to have been based chiefly on a volume of poems entitled Iambes and published in 1827. Léon Laurent-Pichat (1823-1886) published his first volume of poetry, Les Voyageuses, in 1844, after traveling through Italy, Greece and the Orient. This was published in collaboration with another writer, Henri Chevreau. He also collaborated with Louis Ulbach in the publication of a newspaper, Progrès de l'Aube. By the time of the "lettre du Voyant," he had published three more volumes of verse, Libres paroles (1847), La Chronique rimée (1852), and Avant le jour (1870). He was elected to the National Assembly in 1871 as the representative of the department of the Seine, and belonged to the extreme leftist faction; he participated in a number of important debates. André Lemoyne (1822-1907) began his career as a lawyer and ultimately became a librarian in the Ecole des arts décoratifs. He contributed to each issue of the Parnasse contemporain, and had written two volumes of poetry by the time Rimbaud wrote the "lettre du Voyant": Les Roses d'antan and Les Charmesuses. Emile Deschamps (1791-1871) and his brother Antoni (1800-1869) were more closely affiliated with the Romantic

school of poetry than the Parnassian. Emile was one of the founders of La Muse française,⁸⁶ for which he wrote articles signed "le jeune moraliste." These were collected and published in a volume in 1826, entitled Le Jeune Moraliste. In 1828, he published Etudes françaises et étrangères, which had a preface which many compared to Hugo's preface to Cromwell. An early poem of his, "La Paix conquise" (1812) won the praise of Napoleon. He was awarded a post in the Ministry of Finance, where he remained for most of his life. His brother Antoni went to Italy, where he translated the Divine Comedy into French verse (1829). He wrote two volumes of verse: Trois satires politiques (1831), and Résignation (1839). Emmanuel des Essarts (1839-1909) was both a scholar and poet. He held the chair of French literature, first at the University of Clermont and then at Dijon. He published works on Erasmus, Milton, Marivaux, Chateaubriand, and Musset. He contributed poems to all three volumes of Le Parnasse contemporain, and his only volume of verse, Poésies parisiennes, was published by Poulet-Malassis⁸⁷ in 1862.

Under the category of "the journalists," Rimbaud lists three writers: Léon Cladel (1835-1892), Robert Luzarches (1848-1870), and Louis Xavier de Ricard (1843-1911). All three were known for their editorial work on various publications, as well as for their own writing; this designation thus seems more

appropriate than some of Rimbaud's other, more critical categorizations. Cladel was perhaps best known as a novelist who depicted the customs of Brittany.

Baudelaire wrote a preface for his first novel, Les Martyres ridicules (1862)⁵⁸. A second novel, Pierre Patient, was published serially in the review L'Europe.

A third novel, Une Maudite, cost him a month in prison.

He worked as an editor for Les Petits cahiers and ultimately held a government post in the prefecture of the Seine. Robert Luzarches was the son of publisher Victor Luzarches. He himself went on to found and edit the Gazette rimée in 1867. This was a review which published works of the Parnassians, but was short-lived.

He wrote one volume of verse, Les Excommuniés, in 1867; this was published posthumously. Ricard was co-editor with Catulle Mendès of the first Parnasse contemporain (1866). He had previously edited two other journals.

The first, Revue de progrès moral, littéraire, scientifique et artistique (1863-4) had political tendencies and favored "scientific" poetry. Its editors were prosecuted on charges of atheism. The second, L'Art (1865-6)⁵⁹, was important because of its formulation of Parnassian theories. His first volume of poetry, Chants de l'aube, was published in 1862; a second volume Ciel, rue et foyer appeared in 1866. The

latter contained a poem entitled "Aphrodite Anadyomène", which might be compared to Rimbaud's own "Venus anadyomène" (1870). His radicalism in both politics and religion caused him to be exiled during the Second Empire; he also served a term in prison.

Although Rimbaud uses the plural form for the next group ("les fantaisistes"), only one name appears: that of Catulle Mendès (1842-1909). In addition to being a Parnassian poet, Mendès was also a novelist, playwright, and man of letters. He founded the Revue fantaisiste (published from February to November of 1861) [from which, perhaps, Rimbaud devised his title for him], and was co-editor, with Ricard, of the first Parnasse contemporain (1866). He published a large number of poetic works, (including Philoméla and Pagode), novels (e.g. Les Folies amoureuses, 1877), and plays (La Reine Fiammette, 1889; Médée, 1898). Some of his works of literary criticism are still valuable as guides to nineteenth-century poetry, especially the Légende du Parnasse contemporain (1884) and Rapport sur le mouvement poétique français (1902).

Rimbaud lists no specific poets under the next two categories, "les bohèmes" and "les femmes." Although some critics have put forth candidates for these groups, the only person whose name seems appropriate here is Louisa Siefert (1845-1877), since Rimbaud not only recommends her work in his letter to Izambard of August 25, 1870, but quotes extensively

from one of her poems ("Margu  rite"). She was a well-known poet of the "Lyonnais" school, and a prote  g  e of Josephin Soulayr  . Her collection of poems, entitled Rayons perdus, was published in 1868, and went through several editions. The work was praised by Banville, Sainte-Beuve, and Leconte de Lisle. In his earlier letter to Izambard, Rimbaud says of her:

Vous aviez l'air de vouloir conna  tre
Louisa Siefert, quand je vous ai pr  t   ses
derniers vers; je viens de me procurer des
parties de son premier volume de po  sies, les
Rayons perdus, 4e   dition. J'ai l   une pi  ce
tr  s   mue et fort belle, "Margu  rite"; [here
Rimbaud inserts a large portion of the poem
itself]
---C'est aussi beau que les plaintes
d'Antigone...dans Sophocle (259).
[Letter to Izambard of August 25, 1870]

It might be useful to recall here Rimbaud's thoughts on women poets in the "lettre du Voyant":

... Quand sera bris   l'infini servage de
la femme, quand elle vivra pour elle et par
elle, l'homme,---jusqu'ici abominable,--lui
ayant donn   son renvoi, elle sera po  te, elle
sera po  te, elle aussi! La femme trouvera de
l'inconnu! Ses mondes d'id  es diff  reront-ils
des n  tres? --Elle trouvera des choses
  tranges, insondables, repoussantes,
d  licieuses; nous les prendrons, nous les
comprendrons (252).

Rimbaud's ideas seem contemporary to us in this passage, but we must also remember how feminist theories formed an important element of the "communard" aesthetic of 1871. For example, Suzanne Bernard cites lines from Vermersch's Grand Testament:

Quand le jour de l'  galit  
Pourra luire enfin pour la femme,
On n'  touffera plus son   me
En lui ravissant sa beaut  .⁶⁰

Rimbaud lists three poets in his next classification, "les talents": Léon Dierx (1838-1912), René François Armand Sully-Prudhomme (1839-1907), and François Coppée (1842-1908). Dierx was a disciple of Leconte de Lisle's, and, like him, was born on the island of Réunion. He was given a post with the Ministry of Public Education, and in 1864 published Poèmes et poésies, dedicated to Leconte de Lisle. His collection entitled Les Lèvres closes (1867) was parodied by Rimbaud in the Album Zutique⁶¹. He succeeded Mallarmé to the Académie Française in 1898.

Sully-Prudhomme had careers in both engineering and law before he began to write poetry. His first volume of poetry, Stances et poèmes, was published in 1864. His second volume, Les Epreuves (1866), is mentioned by Rimbaud in the same letter to Izambard of August 25, 1870, as that in which Louisa Siefert's poem is quoted. In 1869, he published a collection of philosophic verse entitled Les Solitudes, and translated Lucretius' De Rerum Natura. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1901.

Coppée, nicknamed "Le poète des humbles" because of his depiction of the lower classes, was also parodied by Rimbaud in the Album Zutique. Rimbaud wrote a number of pastiches ("Vieux Coppées") in which his style and subject matter are lampooned.⁶² In addition to a well-received play (Le Passant, 1869), Coppée had

published three volumes of verse by the time of the "lettre du Voyant": Le Rélicuaire (1866), Intimités (1868), and Les Poèmes modernes (1869). He is well-represented in each of the three issues of Le Parnasse Contemporain.

Rimbaud's final classification is the only one which mentions the word "Parnassian"⁶³:

---la nouvelle école, dite parnassienne, a deux voyants, Albert Mérat et Paul Verlaine, un vrai poète (254).

Mérat (1840-1909) collaborated with his friend Léon Valade in the publication of his first volume of poetry, Avril, mai, juin (1863). His second collection, Les Chimères, was published in 1866. In 1868, with Valade, he translated Heinrich Heine's Intermezzo. Two more volumes of his own verse appeared in 1869: Les Villes de marbre and L'Idole. Like many other Parnassian poets, he held posts in the government, eventually becoming Librarian of the Senate. It is interesting that Rimbaud classifies him as a "voyant", along with Verlaine. Today his works seem rather slight, and he is usually mentioned as a minor Parnassian poet.

Verlaine (1844-1896), although today more often thought of as a Symbolist or Decadent poet, began his career writing in the Parnassian style. Alphonse Lemerre, publisher of Le Parnasse contemporain, published Verlaine's Poèmes saturniens in 1866. A number of interesting studies have been devoted to this early stage of the poet's career⁶⁴.

As early as 1863, Verlaine had become friendly with a number of Parnassian poets.

1863: Les Verlaine s'installent 45, rue Lemer cier. Verlaine rencontre Banville, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Chabrier, Coppée, Hérédia, etc., chez la générale-marquise Ricard, mère du poète Louis-Xavier de Ricard, au 10, boulevard des Batignolles,

1864 (Mars): Verlaine est nommé expéditionnaire dans les bureaux de la ville de Paris (à la Mairie du IX^e arrondissement, rue Drouot, puis à l'Hôtel de Ville). Il gagne 1800 francs par an à mandater le traitement des ecclésiastiques de Paris. Il finira par devenir commis-redacteur. Il a pour collègues Léon Valade et Albert Mérat, qui feront avec lui partie du groupe de l'Hôtel de Ville et des Batignollais.

Fin de l'année: Verlaine fait la connaissance de Catulle Mendès, dont la Philoméla sera longtemps son livre de chevet avec Les Vignes folles de Glatigny. Autour de Mendès se réunissent Sully Prudhomme, Léon Dierx, Villiers, Hérédia, Glatigny (Verlaine, Oeuvres Poétiques complètes, xvii).

Rimbaud's own knowledge of Verlaine was limited to this phase of his poetry, as he indicates in a letter to Izambard (August 12, 1870):

J'ai les Fêtes Galantes de Paul Verlaine, un joli in-12 écu. C'est fort bizarre, très drôle; mais vraiment, c'est adorable. Achetez, je vous le conseille, La Bonne Chanson, un petit volume de verse du même poète: ça vient de paraître chez Lemerre; je ne l'ai pas lu: rien n'arrive ici; mais plusieurs journaux en disent beaucoup de bien (240).

Rimbaud's first letter to Verlaine, written several months after the "lettre du Voyant", in September of 1871, apparently declared his poetic affinity

with the author of La Bonne Chanson and included some of his own poetry⁶⁸.

Verlaine's own account of his receipt of these letters provides further revelations:

...à la fin des vacances 1871,...je trouvai, en rentrant à Paris, une lettre signée Arthur Rimbaud et contenant "Les Effarés," "Les Premières Communions," d'autres poèmes encore, qui me frappèrent par, comment dirais-je, sinon bourgeoisement parlant, par leur extrême originalité? A cette lettre qui, en outre de l'envoi des pièces de vers en question, fourmillait sur son auteur, qui était celui des vers, de renseignements bizarres, tels que "petite crasse," "moins gênant qu'un Zanetto," et qui se recommandait de l'amitié d'un ailleurs très bon garçon, commis aux contributions indirectes, grand buveur de bière, poète (bachique [sic]) à ses heures, musicien, dessinateur et entomologiste...les vers étaient d'une beauté effrayante, vraiment. J'en conférai avec des camarades, Léon Valade, Charles Cros, Philippe Burty...et d'accord avec ma belle-famille...il fut convenu que "le jeune prodige" descendrait pour commencer, nous le fîmes venir (Oeuvres en prose complètes, 974).

Thus, at the same time Rimbaud was categorizing and ridiculing the Parnassian poets in his "lettre du Voyant" to Demeny, Verlaine was receiving Rimbaud's work and having it read by some of these same poets.

We have seen how Rimbaud's reading forms an important component of the "lettre du Voyant." Like the letter to Demeny of April 17, 1871, Rimbaud uses the epistolary mode to discuss his own reading and exchange ideas about it with the correspondent. As a geographically isolated and spiritually impoverished adolescent,

his reading and its documentation reaches out beyond the narrow world of Charleville to another individual. Rimbaud tries to connect his own ideas about poetry and literature to other writers he has read, and thus participate in a sense of community. It is obvious that he has met much of this "community" through the standard reading curriculum of nineteenth-century public education ("D'Ennius à Théroldus..."; Racine, La Fontaine, [mentioned on 253].). It is also evident how important Izambard has been in guiding Rimbaud's reading. It is probably because of his influence that Rimbaud first read Rabelais, Hugo, Banville, Leconte de Lisle, and Baudelaire. The letter also shows how familiar Rimbaud was with contemporary poets. His attempt to categorize them for Demy is also a feat of literary criticism. Thus the poet's own reading, as revealed here and in other letters, must be seen as one of the key subtexts for the "lettre du Voyant." Rimbaud's reading is not displayed here as an arrogant show of erudition, but to establish those literary credentials necessary for the formation of his innovative poetic theory. This theory must be examined, of course, in the context of cultural and literary history.⁶⁶

In the letter to Izambard of July 12, 1871, another facet of Rimbaud's reading emerges. Here, the young poet, eager to sell both his and Izambard's

libraries to pay off his debts, shows himself to be a worldly judge of the value of this same reading. In meticulous and playful inventory, Rimbaud attempts to cajole his former mentor into allowing him to combine the two libraries to sell at a higher price. The language is peppered with colloquialisms and slang. There is evidence of Rimbaud's future mercantile interests in the phrasing of the letter as well. If, in the letter of May 15, 1871, Rimbaud showed his knowledge of the literary value of certain works, here he shows more concern with their material worth. Desperate to pay off "an enormous debt⁶⁷," the letter begins in the same quasi-playful tone with which he addressed his former teacher in the first "lettre du Voyant" (May 13, 1871). Once again, Rimbaud chides him for leading the easy life) ⁶⁸, and bemoans his own lack of freedom and his penuriousness. It is the latter state which prompts him to write to Izambard, questioning him about certain volumes in his library which Rimbaud wished to sell. Not only had Izambard allowed Rimbaud to read freely among his books, but he had also allowed him to use his apartment in Charleville. This secretive reading (Rimbaud had to make sure that his mother--referred to in this letter as "the crocodile"⁶⁹--did not know about his activity) made for a somewhat mixed personal library, as Izambard explains in his memoirs:

...en quittant Charleville à l'orée des vacances, j'y avais gardé mon logement, sous les Allées, pensant y revenir à la rentrée des classes. J'avais prié mon proprié-

taire...d'en remettre la clef à Rimbaud quand il la demanderait pour venir travailler. Il avait largement profité de la permission pendant les vacances, avant sa fugue. Tantôt il les lisait sur place, tantôt il les emportait chez lui en grand secret. Mais cela n'allait pas sans danger, car la maman continue à exercer une censure taillonne sur ses lectures qu'elle jugeait nocives, au même titre que la prose du nommé "hugot". Alors Rimbaud, avec des précautions d'apache, les réintégrait chez moi, y joignant même quelques livres à lui, achetés en cachette...à crédit, comme bien on pense (170).

Thus, if we can trust Izambard's memory, Rimbaud's books and his own had become inextricably mixed up in his library. This problem was further complicated when Izambard prepared several cases of books to be shipped to his new address; apparently, many of the titles requested by Rimbaud in the letter of July 12 had been crated and were waiting to be shipped. Izambard remarks upon this with a mixture of sentimentality and irony:

C'est seulement quatre mois plus tard que mes caisses de livres...me rejoignent...J'y retrouvai, naturellement, les volumes désignés ci-dessus. Il s'ensuit que je les ai toujours, avec quelques numéros du Parnasse Contemporain qu'il y avait joints autrefois. Il se réduit à bien peu de choses, mon lot de souvenirs...Dame! Que possédait-il en propre, et qu'avait-il à donner (172)?

For the most part, Rimbaud's letter of July 12, 1871, is a plea for Izambard to give him these volumes so that he can put together collections which will gain better prices when they are resold. Izambard's 1946 published recollections point out other

ironies attached to this letter: he gave Rimbaud the "35 Francs, 50 Centimes" himself, for example (172). Despite its ultimate practical futility, the letter reveals a number of important details both about Rimbaud as reader and as correspondent.

If we first consider what the letter reveals about Rimbaud as reader we see that a number of authors discussed in earlier letters are mentioned again (Banville's Florise and les Exilés, Demeny's Les Glaneuses.) Of the three new writers who are introduced, two are Parnassian poets; Rimbaud mentions Louis Veuillot's Les Couleuvres (1869) and Armand Renaud's Nuits persanes (1870). The third writer mentioned, Armand de Pontmartin, was probably known to Rimbaud through one of his novels⁷⁰. Mention of this kind of reading (Parnassian poetry and contemporary novels) has been encountered in previous letters; we can relate it to Rimbaud's own poetic expression in such works as "Ce qu'on dit au poète...", which relies heavily on Parnassian imagery, or to the exotic and romanesque diction of "Le Bateau ivre."

On the other hand, this letter also reveals Rimbaud's willingness to see and use these books as commodities. In his mercantile discussion with Izambard, Rimbaud shows us another side of himself--a side that is further corroborated by the letters he wrote in Africa. In this letter, Rimbaud describes the "alchemy" he will perform in displaying and selling the books:

--Tenez vous aux Glaneuses? Les collégiens d'Ardennes pourraient déboursier trois francs pour bricoler dans ces azurs-là...Je ferais rutiler les titres inaperçus. Je réponds de me découvrir une audace avachissante dans ce brocantage (256).

He reveals as much disdain for his reading in this letter as he has already done in the "lettre du Voyant." There, he dismissed the great (and not-so-great) writers of the past in a few scornful paragraphs. Here, the writers have become identified with their books, and as such, Rimbaud will use his magical abilities to sell and exorcise them. The dispensability of these authors, in both letters, is evident. Once their work has been digested and mastered, it is time for the reader to move on. Rimbaud has already proclaimed this principle as a general intellectual one in the "lettre du Voyant":

L'intelligence universelle a toujours jeté ses idées naturellement; les hommes ramassaient une partie de ces fruits du cerveau: on agissait par, on en écrivait des livres...(250-251).

Later, Rimbaud shows how this process is an ongoing one, particularly in the world of poetry and poets:

Il [le poète] 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 (251).

Thus, like the writer, the reader must keep devouring the written word at an inhuman speed. Rimbaud

shows in both these letters the way in which these books have become read, absorbed and ultimately abandoned. His avidity for reading as well as his theory of the entire creative and poetic process are intertwined. The written word exists as a free commodity, and the reader may exploit it at will. The way in which these ideas are related to similar economic ones will be explored more fully in my chapter on Rimbaud and the Paris Commune of 1871.

The final letter that I wish to examine in this chapter is the one written to Delahaye in May of 1873. The facetious dateline ("Laïtou (Roche) (Canton d'Attigny") reminds us of the free-spirited word-play of a letter of the previous year to Delahaye ("Parmerde, Junphe 72"), which I have discussed in my chapter on neologism. In the 1872 letter, one of only a handful that we have from Rimbaud's stay in Paris, there is little mention of his reading. The letter is more focused on the poet's work and his impressions of the capital. He does offer some encouragement to his friend who is forced to languish in the provinces:

Peut-être que tu aurais raison de
beaucoup marcher et lire (266).

In this respect, reading, like physical exercise, is seen as a cure for the boredom and restraint of life in a small town to which Delahaye is now constrained. Rimbaud also manages to launch one

barb against a magazine which was about to publish one of his poems:

N'oublie pas de chier sur La Renaissance⁷¹, journal littéraire et artistique (266).

The letter dated "Laitou, May 1873" reveals more about Rimbaud's reading habits, likes and dislikes. The reference to the small village where his family spent the summers is obviously a pun centered on the vegetative existence he feels he is leading in this provincial outpost. This opening inscription frames the letter in an atmosphere of oppression and discontent. His disgust with his rural environment is even stronger now that he has been to Paris:

Cher ami, tu vois mon existence actuelle dans l'aquarelle ci-dessous.
O Nature! ô ma mère!
Quelle chierie! et quels monstres d'innocence [sic], ces paysans... Je ne sais comment en sortir: j'en sortirai pourtant. Je regrette cet atroce Charlestown, l'Univers, la Bibliothèque, etc... Je travaille pourtant assez régulièrement; je fais de petites histoires en prose, titre général: Livre païen ou Livre nègre...(267)

Thus, this enforced solitude made Rimbaud turn to his work ("Livre païen" and "Livre nègre" were probably early titles for Une Saison en enfer), and both reading and writing were ways for him to escape the daily tedium of Charleville. As Delahaye comments in his memoirs:

...ces travaux, ces études, cet emprisonnement avec les cahiers et les livres, c'est un peu de vraie liberté déjà, c'est un commencement de pouvoir vivre intellectuellement pour soi-même (85).

Rimbaud devotes the next paragraph to a fairly detailed description of some publishing difficulties surrounding a work of Verlaine's⁷², in which he is involved.

Verlaine doit t'avoir donné la malheureuse commission de parlementer avec le sieur Devin, imprimieux [sic] du Nôress. Je crois que ce Devin pourrait faire le livre de Verlaine à assez bon compte et presque proprement. (S'il n'emploie pas de caractères emmerdés du Nôress. Il serait capable d'en coller un cliché, une annonce!) (267)

If the letter of July 12, 1871 to Izambard revealed Rimbaud's ability to gauge the material value of books, this letter shows us that he was also becoming aware of the way in which books were put together and published. The "Nôress" (in reality Le Nord-Est) was a journal directed by Perrin, the instructor who replaced Izambard at the Collège de Charleville. The editor-in-chief was Léon Deverrière, rhetoric instructor at the Insitut Rossat, whom Rimbaud also knew. Apparently, he had sent them poems for publication, but was rejected.⁷³ The printer Devin is here portrayed as a canny country workman with whom Rimbaud has to arbitrate. His attitude here seems far from the idealized picture of the manual laborer painted in his "Communard" phase, when he composed the "lettre du Voyant" and such poems as "Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie." In the next paragraph, Rimbaud discusses his editorial relationship with Verlaine; Delahaye would act as intermediary between the two:

Verlaine doit t'avoir proposé un rendez-vol[sic]...Moi je ne puis y aller. Si

tu y vas, il te chargera probablement de quelques fraguements [sic] en prose de moi ou de lui, à me retourner (267).

It is obvious that both he and Verlaine edited each other's work.⁷⁴ Since almost all of Rimbaud's correspondence to Verlaine was burnt by Mathilde Verlaine, it is only in such brief references that we may corroborate Rimbaud's part in this editorial interaction. Nevertheless, it shows that he was not only reading the books mentioned throughout this chapter, but in the case of Verlaine, at least, was both reading and editing some of the work. We might also assume that he and Demeny had a similar literary relationship. We know with certainty that the latter copied (as did Delahaye) many of Rimbaud's poems and then sent them to others.⁷⁵ The fact that Rimbaud enclosed so many of his poems in the letters to Demeny and specifically asked for his advice in the "lettre du Voyant" further suggests that the letters served as a medium for interactive editing, as well as for discussions of reading and writing.

In the post-script to the letter to Delahaye of May, 1873, Rimbaud once again returns to the theme of reading. He asks his correspondent to send him some books:

Prochainement je t'enverrai des timbres pour m'acheter et m'envoyer le Faust de Goethe, Biblioth. populaire. Ça doit coûter un sou de transport. Dis-moi s'il n'y a pas des traduct. de Shakespeare dans les nouveaux livres de cette biblioth.

Si même tu peux m'envoyer le catalogue le plus nouveau, envoie (268).

Rimbaud's interest in these two works shows a realignment with the classical side of literature, which he had all but abandoned in the "lettre du Voyant" of 1871. The succeeding two years and especially the time spent in Paris with Verlaine had no doubt broadened if not changed Rimbaud's reading habits. We might also note that Delahaye remained a correspondent throughout Rimbaud's life, and in many of the later letters from Africa, he asks his friend for similar help in sending him books.⁷⁶

The subject of Rimbaud's reading is a vast and unexplored one; I have attempted in this chapter to make some inroads into a heretofore untouched area, by examining the letters of 1869 to 1873. There is still much work to be done in the letters written after this, especially those to Delahaye, in which the poet discusses his reading and requests specific works. Reading, like the letters, was a way for Rimbaud to make contact with the outside world during the period 1869-1873. The fact that the two intersect so frequently and with so much detail also points to the need for further research in this field.

Chapter Three: Notes

1) Jacques Borel states "Lire, bien entendu, de Charleville" Oeuvres en prose complètes, p. 1356.

2) As illustration, see Delahaye's cartoon, "L'homme aux semelles de vent," in Ruchon's Rimbaud: Documents Iconographiques (Geneva: Cailler, 1966), [page xxxiv] in which a gigantic figure of Rimbaud, with elongated legs, strides confidently across the continent of Europe.

Bernard gives the following caption to the same drawing, "Le nouveau juif errant, dessin de Delahaye" (xc); her commentary reads:

Rimbaud parcourt l'Europe à grandes enjambées, salué par les paysans, les douaniers et un "valaque." (xc)

[See Illustrations]

3) Charles-Simon Favart (1710-1792), dramatist who became director of the Opéra-Comique. He wrote light comic operas, which show the transition from the comédie de vaudevilles (based on popular airs of the day) to the comédie en ariettes (with music especially composed for the works themselves). His most famous plays are La Chercheuse d'esprit (1741), Les Amours de Bastien et Bastienne (1752, a parody of Rousseau's Le Devin du village, which later served as the libretto for Mozart's opera), and Les Trois Sultanes (1761).

4) cf "Les Assis" and note five, Chapter Two.

5) As a schoolboy, Rimbaud won a number of prizes for Latin and Greek translation at the Institut Rossat (1862). In 1869, when Rimbaud was a student at the Collège de Charleville, three of his Latin poems were published in a national review of education:

Le Moniteur de l'Enseignement secondaire publie successivement trois pièces en vers latins de Rimbaud: "Ver erat," "L'Ange et l'enfant," "Jugurtha." Cette dernière pièce vaut à son auteur le premier prix au Concours académique (Bernard vi).

These three poems are included, along with other Latin verse, in the Pléiade edition of his complete works (pp. 179-186).

6) In "Délires II" (part of Une Saison en enfer), Rimbaud writes:

...j'écartais du ciel l'azur...Je dus voyager, distraire les enchantements assemblés sur mon cerveau (111).

7) Adam notes that this collaboration by George Sand, P.-J. Stahl [a pen name for Hetzel, see note 18 below], Léon Gozlan, Charles Nodier, and others, was published by Hetzel in 1845 (1069).

8) Adam's note:

Il s'agit en effet du fameux caricaturiste dont Rimbaud avait admiré les dessins dans Le Magasin pittoresque. Né en 1803, Grandville était mort en 1847 (1069).

9) Le Dragon de la reine ou Costal l'Indien (first published in 1852), was a novel by Gabriel Ferry (1809-1852). Ferry's real name was Louis de Bellemare, and his literary specialty seems to have been the exotic adventure novel. His greatest appeal was to children and young adults. Most of his work was published posthumously. Other colorful titles of his include Le Coureur du bois (1853), Scènes de la vie mexicaine (1854), Scènes de la vie sauvage (1856), Les Squatters (1858), and Souvenirs du Mexique et de la Californie (1884) [Thièrme 720]. An article on "Enfance et Jeunesse," (subtitled "La Robinsonnade") in the Dictionnaire des littératures de la langue française (Paris: Bordas, 1987) points out the trans-continental connection between this type of writing and the American adventure novel of the nineteenth century:

C'est ce besoin de rêve procuré par l'aventure et le dépaysement qui explique la vogue au XIX^e siècle des romans d'Indiens et des romans historiques...Fenimore Cooper, avec sa série des Contes de Bas-de-cuir (dont Le Dernier des Mohicans, trad. 1826) ouvrit la voie aux romans de Gabriel Ferry, tel Le Coureur des bois (1856)...qui annoncent les westerns à venir et expliquent le succès plus tardif des ouvrages étrangers comme L'Appel de la forêt (1903) ou Croc-Blanc (1907) de Jack London (805).

10) La Robe de Nessus (1855) was a novel by Amédée Achard (1814-1875). Judging by the list of works in Thièrme's Bibliographie de la Littérature française de 1830 à 1930 (Geneva: Slatkine, 1983), his prolific output included both exotic adventure stories (with titles such as La Chasse royale (1850), L'Ombre de Ludovic (1859), Les Chaînes de fer (1867), and Souvenirs de la forêt (1879), as well as racier adult fare (such as Parisennes et provinciales (1856), Brunes et blondes (1857), Les Seductions (1860), and La traité des blondes (1863) 3-4).

11) Les Epreuves, a volume of verse published by the Parnassian Sully-Prudhomme in 1866.

12) Les Glaneuses, verse published by Demeny in 1870.

13) Adam provides this note:

L'édition de Don Quichotte illustrée par Gustave Doré avait paru en 1863. Deuxième édition en 1869 (1069).

14) Gustave Doré (1832-1883), an illustrator who first worked as a caricaturist, most notably for Le Charivari (See Grandville, above). Between 1860 and 1870, he produced many of his best works, illustrating the Bible, Dante, Rabelais, Don Quixote, Perrault's Contes, and Balzac's Contes Drolatiques.

15) Bernard gives us the following information:

Isambard avait prêté Gringoire de Banville, à son élève, pour son discours français ("Lettre de Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI") [note 1, p. 544].

16) Noulet, Emilie. Le Premier Visage de Rimbaud. Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1963. [This work contains eight of Rimbaud's earliest poems, with commentary and bibliography by Noulet]

17) The "demoiselles Gindre": two sisters, who lived in Douai; they were Isambard's aunts as well as friends of Demeny, and took care of Rimbaud after his first flight from Charleville, in September, 1870, and again after he ran away to Brussels in October of the same year.

18) See note 7 above. Hetzel was also responsible for the publication of a children's magazine, Le Nouveau magasin des enfants and was a shrewd judge of popular taste, as stated in in the Dictionnaire de la littérature:

En 1843, Hetzel crée Le Nouvel Magasin pour enfants "pour amuser les enfants en exerçant leur imagination au profit de leur coeur." Cette déclaration d'intention révèle la complexité des motivations et des objectifs d'Hetzel. Libraire-éditeur, celui-ci perçut très vite ce que représentait la public nouvellement alphabétisé qu'était l'enfance, dont les besoins évoluaient selon l'âge. Il publia donc des livres d'images pour les tout-petits, les albums Stahl, tels les célèbres Mademoiselle Lili illustrés par Froehlich et écrits par lui-même sous son pseudonyme de P.J. Stahl. Influencé peut-être par le succès européen des contes modernes

d'Andersen, dont la première traduction française ne parut qu'en 1848, il demanda à des écrivains reconnus d'écrire des contes: Charles Nodier, Alfred de Musset, Alexandre Dumas, Octave Feuillet ...Hetszel integra à ses collections des oeuvres écrites pour adultes, soit intégrales, telle la trilogie champêtre de Georges Sand, soit adaptées pour la jeunesse par leurs auteurs mêmes, tel Le Petite Chose, histoire d'un enfant (1878) d'Alphonse Daudet, ou des oeuvres étrangères adaptées par lui-même comme Les Patins d'argent de M. Mapes Dodge ou Maroussia de M. Markovitch (805).

19)Biographers still disagree about the nature and time(s) of Rimbaud's flight(s) to Paris in the spring of 1871. Adam, in his chronology, for example, places the dates at February 25 (Rimbaud's first departure for Paris), March 10 (Rimbaud returns to Charleville), April 19 (Rimbaud's second departure for Paris), and May 3 (Second return to Charleville) [xli]. Cohn writes:

In 1871 came another escapade, to Paris for a month, where he almost starved. Perhaps a fourth flight occurred that year, during which Rimbaud may have endured sexual humiliation at the hands of soldiers, recorded obliquely in "Le Coeur volé"--this has never been solidly established (6).

Verlaine, in an 1884 portrait, give us the following information:

En 1870-71, il parcourait l'est de la France en feu, et racontait volontiers plus tard Villers-Cotterets et sa forêt aux galopades de uhlans sous des lunes de Raffet. Retour à Paris pendant la Commune, en quelque séjour à la caserne du Château-d'Eau, parmi de vagues Vengeurs de Flourens (Florence, gazouillaient ces éphèbes à ceinture blanche).-- Interdum la gendarmerie départementale avait eu des attentions... (Oeuvres en prose, 800)

Ruff, in his chapter on Rimbaud and the Commune, spends several pages trying to sort out the diverse accounts of Rimbaud's flights, only to arrive at the following uncertain hypothesis:

En conclusion, aucun argument n'est décisif. L'hypothèse la plus vraisemblable reste le départ pour Paris le 16 ou le 17 mai, l'arrivée pendant "la semaine sanglante" et le retour presque aussitôt (65).

Etiemble devotes an entire chapter (III);[in Volume Two: Le Mythe de Rimbaud: Structure de la

mythe]) to the question of the poet's participation (or non-participation) in the Commune. In a brief summary, he states:

La lettre du 13 mai prouve que Berrichon et Delahaye en ont menti [about Rimbaud's participation in the Commune], et que Rimbaud ne put arriver à Paris que le 22 mai, le jour où les Versaillais occupaient la caserne de Babylone...Malgré Izambard, Jean-Marie Carré, Coulon, la fable du communard continue à prospérer, approuvé par les communistes et par les surréalistes. La Jeune Révolution, Renéville, Breton se prononcent pour le Rimbaud du mythe communard (20).

A more recent biographer, Pierre Petitfils, comes to different conclusions, relying on material from the files of the Belgian secret police:

He set off on April 18, on foot of course. We presume that he reached the gates of Paris on April 23 or 25. At the post, he declared proudly that he had come from the Ardennes on foot. He was congratulated, and, as he was without money, a cap was passed around among the soldiers; the collection amounted to 21 francs and 13 sous...He was sent off to the Babylone barracks; he was then attached to a group of francs-tireurs volunteers, probably the "francs-tireurs de Paris (82)"

[Note taken from Alan Sheridan's translation, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1987]

In his 1984 notes to the "Livre de Poche" edition of Rimbaud's Poésies, Daniel Leuwers sums up the status of one of many mysteries in the poet's biography:

Un doute demeure sur la participation effective de Rimbaud à la Commune. Était-il à Paris le 23 ou le 24 mai? Rien n'est moins sûr (243).

20) Adam points out that the fourth edition of her work had just appeared (1069).

21) Delahaye 151.

22) Mathilde Verlainne, Mémoires de ma vie. (Paris: Flammarion, 1935) p.179.

23) "recopiés par Delahaye en petite ronde, parce que ça ressemble davantage à l'imprimé et que ça se lit mieux (Adam 260)."

24) Adam's note points out that although Rimbaud's poetry had been rejected by the progressive pub-

lication, he eventually worked there, answering correspondence:

Le Progrès des Ardennes avait été fondé en novembre 1870, par un vieux républicain de la génération de 1848, Jacoby, pour combattre le réactionnaire Courrier des Ardennes. Au mois de décembre, Rimbaud et Delahaye avaient espéré que Le Progrès publierait les chefs d'oeuvre qu'ils lui envoyaient. Mais selon la plaisante formule de Delahaye, Le Progrès des Ardennes "recevait tout et n'insérait rien." D'ailleurs, les locaux du journal furent incendiés dans le terrible bombardement du 31 décembre 1870.

Pourtant le vieux Jacoby réussit à remettre sur pied son journal et cette fois Rimbaud fit accepter ses services. A partir du 12 avril, il passa une partie de ses journées au bureau du Progrès des Ardennes à dépouiller la correspondance (1072).

25)Alphonse Lemerre (1838-1912) was the publisher most associated with the Parnassians. It was at his bookstore in the Passage Choiseul that the Parnassians held their gatherings. He published the three volumes of Le Parnasse contemporain (1866, 1871, and 1876).

26)Leconte de Lisle: 1818-1894; leader of the Parnassian group of poets.

27)François Coppée 1842-1908; called the "poète des humbles"; in 1866 Le Reliquaire, his first volume, Parnassian in tone, appeared

28)Catulle Mendès (1842-1909) Parnassian poet, playwright, novelist.

29)Claude-Adhémar-André Theuriot (1833-1907) Popular nineteenth century novelist, known especially for his writings about country and small-town provincial life. He had an early career as a Parnassian poet (Le Chemin des bois, 1867; Le livre de la payse, 1883).

30)Auguste Lacauassade (1817-1897) was a poet who wrote on contemporary themes. He had also translated Ossian into French in 1842 .

31)Félix Franck (1803-1893):Parnassian and communal poet

32)Emile Bergerat: Parnassian poet (1817-1889)

33)Arsène-Arnaud Claretie (called Jules) (1840-1913): journalist, chronicler whose 20 volumes of La Vie de Paris cover the years from 1881-1911.

34) Albert Glatigny (1839-1873): Parnassian poet who was also interested in the theater; he toured the provinces with acting companies

35) Auguste Vacquerie (1819-1895): poet, playwright, critic. (It was his character, Jean Baudry, whose name Rimbaud adopted for the submission of his poetry to Le Progrès des Ardennes. [see page 16, above])

36) Verwersch: the great poet of the Commune. Bernard notes:

Les grands espoirs de la Commune nous les trouvons déjà exprimés par Verwersch lorsque, dans la préface de son Grand Testament, en 1868, il dit sa foi dans la science et dans la future transformation du monde; et il manifeste son enthousiasme, au cours du poème, pour les penseurs et les poètes grâce auxquels l'humanité marchera vers le progrès (xxxvii-xxxviii).

37) Some works which deal with the graphic arts of this period, particularly in their relationship to social issues include those by James Leith (Images de la Commune. Montreal: McGill, 1978), Judith Wechsler (A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth-Century Paris. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), Robert Goldstein's Censorship of Political Caricature in Nineteenth-Century France (Kent State, 1989) and Beatrice Farwell's nine-volume work, French Popular Lithographic Imagery 1815-1870 (Chicago: 1989).

38) See Gustave Labarthe, Le Théâtre pendant les jours du siège et de la commune (juillet 1870-juin 1871). Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1910.

39) Jules Vallès (1833-1885) was a journalist and novelist, who wrote about revolutionary uprisings after 1848. He served a term in prison for subversive activities in 1853. In 1871, he was exiled for his part in the Commune. After living in England for several years, he returned to France and wrote Jacques Ving-tras, a trilogy based on his experiences. The last volume, L'Insurgé, was published posthumously, in 1886, and contains many spirited descriptions of the Commune.

40) Rimbaud, Lettre dite du voyant. edited by H. Matarasso (published with facsimile of original). Paris: Messein, 1954.

41) Rimbaud, Pages choisies. edited by Etiemble. Paris: Larousse, 1975. p. 6 [cited in Schaeffer].

42) Maxime Du Camp (1822-1894), journalist and novelist. He was a friend of Flaubert's, with whom he

traveled in the Near East. He also edited the Revue des deux mondes.

43) Antoine Fabre d'Olivet (1767-1825) is more often remembered for his collection of poetry entitled Le Troubadour (1803), which purported to be an anthology (with translations) of verse in Provençal and other "langues d'oc." A number of literary historians have called the work a hoax, although it may have included some authentic medieval poetry. His occult theories of poetic origins were incorporated into the Histoire du romantisme, which he was working on at his death.

44) Bernard informs us

Belmontet, poète aujourd'hui bien oublié qui par un caprice du sort collabora à La Muse française des frères Hugo en 1824 avant de chanter l'Empire en vers pompeux, symbolise pour Rimbaud le pseudo-classicisme qui encombre encore, en effet la poésie de Lamartine et même de Hugo. (note 20, pp 551-552).

See also Rimbaud's parody in the Album Zutique, "Hypotyposes Saturniennes, ex Belmontet" (Adam 215).

45) Félicité-Robert Lammenais (1782-1854). A famous religious writer, whose influence was especially strong on such Romantics as Hugo, de Vigny and Sainte-Beuve. His beliefs were expressed in his newspaper, L'Avenir (1830-1832), and the apologia, Paroles d'un croyant (1834). These writings were condemned in two Papal encyclicals, Mirari vos (1832) and Singulari nos (1834), which caused him to break with the church. His later career was marked by his political sympathies with the Republicans, and he was elected to the Constitutional Assembly in 1848.

46) Musset, Rolla (1833): A narrative poem in the manner of Byron, first published in the Revue des Deux Mondes.

47) Gengoux, Jacques. La Pensée poétique de Rimbaud. Paris: Nizet, 1950. (cited in Bernard, 414)

48) Guyaux: see note four, Chapter One.

49) The information about writers and works in the final paragraph of the letter has been drawn from various sources. Since much of it is common knowledge (names, dates), and many facts overlap each other, I have chosen not to identify each source as it occurs. Instead, I will indicate here the various reference works from which this information has been collected:

- Braun, Sidney David. Dictionary of French Literature. New York:Philosophical Library,1958.
- Charvet, Patrick Edward. The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. London:Benn, 1967.
- Dictionnaire de la littérature française et francophone.ed. Jacques Demougin. Paris:Larousse,1987.
- Dictionnaire des littératures de la langue française. ed. J.-P. Beaumarchais. Paris: Bordas, 1987.
- Dolbow, Sandra W. Dictionary of Modern French Literature: from the Age of Reason through Realism. Westport, Conn:Greenwood Press,1986.
- Larousse, Pierre. Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle. Geneva:Slatkine Reprints, 1982.
- Natan, Zhak. Encyclopedie de la littérature française. Paris:F. Nathan,1952.
- Oxford Companion to French Literature. ed. Harvey and Heseltine. Oxford:1956 (revised 1976).
- Thièrse, Hugo P. Bibliographie de la littérature française de 1800 à 1930. Geneva:Slatkine Reprints,1983.

In those cases where additional or original information has been provided, I indicate the source more specifically in the form of endnotes.

50)as cited in Bernard:

Bouillane de Lacoste rappelle que Chateaubriand fait allusion à deux reprises à cette coutume de "beurrer sa chevelure," dans le Voyage en Amérique et dans les Mémoires d'outre-tombe (458, note 2).

51)See the letter to Izambard of August 25, 1870

52)as cited in Bays, p. 261.

53)Bays 261.

54)See Illustration: Fantin-Latour, Le Coin de la Table.

55)Léon Valade, a Parnassian poet not mentioned in the letter of May 15, gives the following description of a meeting of the group (here called "Affreux Bonshommes") which Rimbaud himself attended several months later:

Vous avez bien perdu de ne pas assister au dîner des "Affreux Bonshommes." Là, fut exhibé, sous les auspices de Verlaine, son inventeur, et de moi, son Jean-Baptiste, sur la rive gauche, un effrayant poète de moins de dix-huit ans qui a nom Arthur Rimbaud. Grandes mains, grands pieds, figure absolument enfantine et qui pourrait convenir à un enfant de treize ans, yeux bleus profonds, caractère plus sauvage que timide, tel est le

même dont l'imagination, pleine de puissance et de corruptions inouïes, a fasciné ou terrifié nos amis. C'est un génie qui se lève. [Letter to Emile Blémont, October 5, 1871; qtd. in Ruchon, 18]

56) The Oxford Companion to French Literature says of this review:

La Muse française (1823-4), [was] a short-lived but famous literary review associated with the early days of le romantisme, founded by Alexandre Guiraud, Alexandre Soumet, Emile Deschamps, and other, younger writers, among them Victor Hugo and Alfred de Vigny. It published many of the Romantic manifestoes and made a point of fostering new talent. Nearly all the great figures of the Romantic Movement contributed to it (501).

57) Poulet-Malassis: the editor most closely associated with Baudelaire. In their introduction to the Pléiade Œuvres complètes, Le Dantec and Pichois provide a sympathetic portrait of the publisher:

Auguste Poulet-Malassis, chartiste, grand bibliophile, homme de goût et éditeur audacieux, fut l'un des plus fidèles amis de Baudelaire (xxiv).

58) Baudelaire's preface to Cladel's Les Martyres ridicules (Pléiade, pp 753-758) was first published in the Révue fantaisiste on October 15, 1861 before its publication with the novel itself (Paris: Poulet-Malassis, 1862).

59) Charvet discusses the importance (and failure) of poetic reviews such as L'Art:

Three efforts were made in the early 1860's to build a new literary school round a critical review: Catulle Mendès launched the Revue Fantaisiste in February 1861; it survived till November. Louis Xavier de Ricard founded the Revue du progrès moral, littéraire, et scientifique in March 1863]; its title at least reflects the new intellectual orientation, the desire to harness literature to social progress and science; it lasted a year. Another review, L'Art, owed its short existence (November 1865-January 1866) to the same founder (344).

Charvet contrasts this with the strength of Le Parnasse contemporain, which did manage to build an important poetic following, even though it seemed to have no central manifesto.

Though lacking the character of an aggressive literary manifesto. Le Parnasse contemporain, recueil de vers nouveaux (1866) has given its name to a generation rather than a school of poets; amongst the contributors--some forty in all--figured poets as diverse as Baudelaire and Heredia, Mallarmé and Verlaine. The watchwords were craftsmanship, plasticity, objectivity; at least they could share their admiration for a trinity of poets--Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Banville, and their dislike of much Romantic poetry, especially the sentimentalism of Lamartine and Musset (344).

Rimbaud, though not emulating their style, certainly testifies in this letter (as well as in the two he wrote to Banville), that he admired this group and Le Parnasse contemporain.

60) Bernard, 554.

61) See "Les Lèvres closes" in the Album Zutique (Adam 208).

62) See "Etat de Siège?," "Le Balai," "Les Remembrances du vieillard idiot," "Ressouvenir," and other parodies in the Album Zutique (Adam 210-218).

63) Many questions arise in connection with Rimbaud and Parnassianism. In connection with the second "lettre du Voyant", particularly, the issue of aesthetic opposition is unavoidable. Did Parnassianism indeed provide an antidote to the derivative "Rollas" Rimbaud had vilified in earlier paragraphs? In his book on The French Parnassian Poets (Carbondale: Illinois, 1972) Robert Denomé points out the social causes which underlie this fundamental opposition:

The aesthetic philosophy to which the majority of Parnassian poetry subscribed underlines the vast differences in personal outlook that distinguished them from the most prominent social Romantic poets...

The fact of the matter was that the Parnassian objection to the preposterous claims of social Romanticism, came, for the most part, on the heels of the failure of the 1848 Revolution and the attendant fiasco of the Second Empire. Thus, the majority of Parnassian poets tended to judge the unlimited optimism of Romantic aspiration from the optic of a recent historical event as well as from the obvious sense of disillusionment they experienced as a result of such a drastic event (22-23).

64) An early biography by Verlaine's friend, Edmond Lepelletier, [Paul Verlaine, sa vie et son oeuvre. Paris: Mercure de France, 1907] is still one of the best sources for information about the poet's Parnassian phase.

65) Adam presents us with a reconstruction of the lost letter to Verlaine based on Delahaye's copy and Mathilde Verlaine's account of it:

Rimbaud se déclare admirateur enthousiaste de Verlaine. Il lui confie son idéal, ses rages, ...il soumet ses vers au jugement de Verlaine. Il joint à sa lettre "Les Effarés," "Accroupissements," "Les Douaniers", "Le Coeur volé," "Les Assis," recopiés par Delahaye... Quelques jours plus tard, sans attendre la réponse de Verlaine, Rimbaud lui adresse une nouvelle lettre avec d'autres poèmes, "Mes petites amoureuses", "Les Premières Communions," "Paris se repeuple..." (260).

66) Christopher Robinson, in his French Literature in the Nineteenth Century (London: David & Charles, 1978), offers this succinct analysis:

Arthur Rimbaud also saw in the self the necessary focus for poetic attainment of the truth. Rimbaud's poetic credo is generally taken to be contained in two letters he wrote in 1871, at the age of seventeen. In the second and longer he says: "The first study of the man who wants to be a poet is to know himself in his entirety. He seeks out his soul, inspects it, tempts it, learns to know it." When the would-be poet has explored his inner self in this way, he is in a position to expand his vision into new imaginative fields. Whereas Baudelaire is concerned with the re-interpretation of what is, in order to penetrate to a metaphysical truth, Rimbaud sees the poet as literally creating a new reality out of his visions. The effort to train the senses to perceive the world in a different way will end in the perception of a different world (146-7).

67) We later learn that the sum was 35 francs, 25 centimes (Izambard, 171).

68) Izambard, having rejected an offer to travel through Russia as tutor to the children of a wealthy family, had now taken on a position at Cherbourg as a schoolmaster.

69) See note 1, Chapter Two. Bernard also attempts to view Madame Rimbaud in a more equitable light:

Femme "sévère et austère" suivant sa fille Isabelle, figure biblique, dit M. Coulon; suivant les autres, et suivant Arthur lui-même, la "bouche d'ombre", "la mère Rimbe"... Certes on peut éprouver de la compassion à l'égard de Vitalie Cuif, femme Rimbaud: dotée de deux frères déplorables, buveurs et débauchés; d'un mari qui, après lui avoir donné quatre enfants, se séparera d'elle définitivement; de deux fils qui lui causeront les plus graves soucis (elle dira de son aîné, Frédéric, en 1899 "Il a encore fait des progrès en mensonge, en hypocrisie, et en tromperie"), elle perdra, enfin, sa seconde fille, Vitalie, âgée de dix-sept ans. "Il y a des créatures qui sont destinées à toutes les souffrances de la vie: je suis de celles-là" écrira-t-elle à sa fille Isabelle en 1900 (xix-xx).

70) Mouquet and Renéville suggest Les Jaudis de Madame Charbonneau (1862), or Les Corbeaux du Gévaudan (1868) [pp 814-815].

71) The review did, in fact, publish a poem of Rimbaud's several months later. Its editor, Emile Blémont, has already been mentioned, in note 55, as the correspondent to whom Valade addressed a description of Rimbaud at a gathering of the "Vilains Bonshommes." Suzanne Bernard gives us additional information:

La Renaissance littéraire et artistique, journal dirigé par Emile Blémont, devait publier en septembre 1872 le poème de Rimbaud, "Les Corbeaux." Blémont faisait partie du groupe des amis de Verlaine et allait aux réunions des Vilains Bonshommes. C'est à lui que Rimbaud donnera l'autographe des "Voyelles." (note 10, 554).

72) Bernard tells us:

Il s'agit des Romances sans paroles, en grande partie écrites à Londres, et qui Verlaine cherchait alors à éditer. Ce recueil compte, écrit Verlaine dans la même époque à Lepelletier [see note 66, above] "468 vers purement littéraires", et Verlaine de son côté intrigue auprès de ses amis Lepelletier et Blémont pour le faire publier à Paris. Il enverra son "manusse" à Lepelletier le 19 mai (note 7, 555).

73) Bernard informs us:

Le Nord-Est est le journal dirigé par Perrin; il avait pour rédacteur Léon Deverrière, professeur de Rhétorique à l'Institution Rossat, que Rimbaud connaissait (note 6, 555).

Adam says of this journal:

Ce Nôress, c'est naturellement Le Nord-Est, ce journal de Charleville auquel Rimbaud avait travaillé (note 4, 1085).

Perrin, according to Bernard (553), had succeeded Izambard as professor of rhetoric at the Collège de Charleville, and then resigned to become editor of this journal in July of 1871.

74) For a number of reasons, this aspect of their writing is difficult to document. Such statements as this to Delahaye offer scant accounts of how poems were transcribed and what might have been changed. In the case of Verlaine and Rimbaud, who lived together, there is even more speculation as to what might have been written by whom. Although some recent works have attempted to deal with the subject, for the most part they avoid the issue of interactive editing. Roestenbaum's study does not deal with continental literature, and John Lehmann's Three Literary Friendships (New York: Holt, 1983), deals mostly with the scandalous nature of the poets' relationship. He does state, in an appendix, that Verlaine edited Rimbaud's work posthumously:

It was in 1895, four years after the poet's death, and only shortly before Verlaine's own death, that Isabelle at last allowed Verlaine to fulfill the dream he had entertained for so many years, of publishing Rimbaud's complete works under his own supervision. He wrote a new introduction, correcting mistakes and misapprehensions which appeared in what he had written before (175).

75) The "recueil Demy," a group of early poems given to Demy by Rimbaud and then copied by the former, was fortunately not burned, as Rimbaud requested in the letter to Demy of June 10, 1871:

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 (255).

76) See, for example, the letter to Delahaye of January 18, 1882, from Aden, in which the poet asks for an eclectic list of books in such fields as topography, trigonometry, meteorology, and industrial chemistry.

Chapter Four
Rimbaud, Revolution, and the Paris Commune
of 1871

It is important to examine the way in which Rimbaud's letters of 1871 deal with issues of revolution in general and of the Paris Commune of 1871 in particular. Critics have been reluctant to use the correspondence in this manner; if the issue of Rimbaud's participation in the Commune is raised, the poems "Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie" or "L'Orgie de Paris ou Paris se repeuple" are invoked. The letters, traditionally outside the boundaries of standard literary discourse, nevertheless reveal important insights about Rimbaud's feelings and participation in the Commune.

Stewart Edwards, writing about the Paris Commune, opens his book with an emphatic appraisal of its significance in nineteenth-century history:

The Paris Commune of 1871 was the biggest urban insurrection of the nineteenth century, an anticipation of the revolutions that were to follow (9).

This is a rather sweeping statement for an uprising that lasted only three months and was confined to the city of Paris.¹

Edwards is not alone in his view of the importance of the Commune. In his foreword to a centenary edition of Writings on the Paris Commune by Marx and Engels, Hal Draper remarks:

One hundred years ago, on March 18, 1871, a working-class-led revolution took power and established a new type of state for the first time in the history of the world--temporarily, in one city. For a hundred years, everything about the Paris Commune has been as controversial as it was during the seventy-two days of its existence, including the statement made in the first sentence (7).

One reason for contemporary historians to view the Commune as so important may lie in the fact that Marx prepared a text on The Civil War in France which he read to the General Council of the International on May 30, 1871, two days after the fall of the Commune. First published in English on June 13, translated into German by Engels and published in the Volkstaat on June 28, it was finally published in French, beginning in July of 1871 (Draper 15-16)

In it, Marx pointed to the Commune as exemplary of the type of proletarian struggle which he had heretofore only been able to describe theoretically. Despite the Commune's ultimate failure, Marx saw in it a victory for the revolutionary movement of the working classes:

Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them (Marx, qtd, in Draper 97)

Rimbaud's role in the Commune has been examined from many angles. At least three books have been written on this subject alone² and many writers

have consecrated some part of their work on Rimbaud to his association with the Commune. The divergence of critical and biographical views concerning this association is enormous³.

Perhaps the initial question to be posed is a biographical one: was Rimbaud actually a participant in the Commune? Evidence for his participation in the events of the spring of 1871 is not systematically documented. On the one hand, some of his biographers claim that Rimbaud's flight to Paris, in the early spring of 1871, coincided with the beginnings of the ferment.⁴ Delahaye and others posit a second flight to Paris, for several days in April. A few rely on anecdotal information, while others adduce the poetry (especially "Le Coeur volé") for support. Still more, claiming that Rimbaud was physically and aesthetically far from the epicenter of this movement, disavow any connection between the two.

Recent criticism, perhaps beginning in the 1950's with Etiemble's "demythification" of Rimbaud, has moved to a middle ground between these extremes. But some critics continue to propound the simplistic view that the importance of Rimbaud's Communard sympathies lies in a vague "moral adhesion" to its principles. Pierre Gascar, for example, states this case:

Il est sans grand intérêt de s'interroger, comme beaucoup d'historiens de la littérature l'ont fait, sur la participation effective d'Arthur Rimbaud au mouvement

insurrectionnel de la Commune. Ce qui nous importe, c'est qu'il y a adhéré moralement et que son oeuvre en représente une des expressions les plus pures, sinon les plus directes (2).

Here it seems that Gaspar is only half-correct in his assumptions. It is true that much of Rimbaud's writing deals with the ideas (both moral and aesthetic) inherent in the uprising. However, to dismiss any further biographical involvement as irrelevant seems to misrepresent the more pervasive element of this unrest in daily life in 1871. Marx (and others) termed it a "Civil War" because it represented a deep division in French society, regional (Paris versus the provinces; urban areas against rural ones); social (the bourgeoisie against the working classes), and political (moderates and republicans against both revolutionary and reactionary forces). In addition, most biographers agree that Rimbaud did run away to Paris at some point in the spring of 1871⁵.

Although the "official" start of the Commune is usually given as March 18, 1871 (It was on this date that Thiers was forced to flee from Paris to Versailles), the social unrest and ferment that led up to it must have certainly been in evidence during Rimbaud's fugitive visit. The Franco-Prussian War, with its disastrous defeat for the French, was being brought to a ceremonial close. Bismarck had insisted on sending occupational forces to Paris in order to insure the peace. On March 1, thousands of Prussians marched

through Paris to mark their victory, while the National Assembly, convening in Versailles, passed the Peace Treaty which formally ended the Franco-Prussian War. Violence had been sweeping the capital for several days before this. On February 24, for example, there was a demonstration at the Place de la Bastille. Several days later, (coinciding with Rimbaud's arrival in Paris), crowds seized the cannons at the Place de Wagram and transported them through the city to the eastern suburbs (Edwards 176). Thus, Rimbaud's very proximity to these events argues for a more direct interpretation of the Communard movement in both his life and work.

A number of letters written in the spring and summer of 1871 are of particular interest in attempting to gauge the ways in which the Commune affected Rimbaud. First, there is the letter written to Demeny about a month after Rimbaud's return to Charleville (April 17, 1871). In it, Rimbaud attempts to persuade Demeny to read the works of Vermersch and other Communard writers.⁶ The letter can also be read as a more focused study of the role of the Commune in Rimbaud's thought and writings. Since this letter was composed a month after his visit to Paris, and a month before the "lettre du voyant", it occupies a crucial position in Rimbaud's ideological development.

Obviously, both ""lettres du Voyant" (May 13 and 15), need to be reread in their relationship to the Commune. Rimbaud's statements on voyance, language,

and the new social and political roles of the poet are closely related to ideas of Communard thinkers and writers.

The letter to Banville of August 15, 1871, should also be reviewed in light of Rimbaud's experience with the Commune. The long and complex poem, "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos des fleurs," enclosed with the letter, may be analyzed in light of some of the more radical political, social and aesthetic ideas of 1871.

Finally, I will examine the letter to Paul Demeny of August 28, 1871. The letter recounts Rimbaud's enforced solitude in Charleville and describes his longing to return to Paris. His vision of the capital and especially of its workers needs to be studied in light of his experiences during the Commune.

* * *

In the letter to Demeny of April 17, 1871, Rimbaud describes his most recent reading (most of which deals with the Commune or the Prussian siege), and ends with the statement: "Telle était la littérature--du 25 février au 10 mars (Rimbaud 247)." As a critical statement, we can compare the latter to the opening of the "lettre du Voyant" of May 15:

J'ai résolu de vous donner une heure de
littérature nouvelle. Je commence ...par un
psaume d'actualité:
CHANT DE GUERRE PARISIEN (249-250)

In both letters, Rimbaud is involved in describing the "present" ("l'actualité") of literature.

Rimbaud's state of mind is minutely described at the opening of the letter of April 17. Although he is condemned to his provincial prison, he is not a willing prisoner. He refuses to accept the given standards of both art and behavior, and acts out of his own convictions and knowledge. Along with the Communards, who wanted to start a new social and political order, he lives only for the present and for what the future may bring:

Ne sachant rien de ce qu'il faut savoir,
résolu à ne faire rien de ce qu'il faut
faire, je suis condamné, dès toujours, pour
jamais. Vive aujourd'hui, vive demain! (246)

Like other writers and thinkers of 1871, Rimbaud saw in the present an opportunity to redefine and reestablish the order of things. In discussing the razing of the Vendôme Column (May 16, 1871), Kristin Ross points out the close relationship between the abolition of time, as symbolized by this act, and the new establishment of space. Some writers, like the Parnassian and anti-Communard, Catulle Mendès, saw in the subversive act a troubling reminder of the eternal present:

For Mendès, the destruction of the column abolishes history--makes for a time less present, an annihilated past, and an uncertain future. Alone in his room where he spends most of the Commune, wondering why he didn't have the sense to flee to Versailles along with the other "friends of order," Mendès perceives time to be at a standstill. For the Communards, the existence of the column freezes time: "a permanent insult," "a perpetual assault." Whose time is it (7)?

Ross then goes on to show how concepts of

time were replaced by those of space, and how this change, in turn, placed new emphasis on principles of everyday life. The Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, whose historical concepts are based on these principles, is cited:

Like the state for Marx, everyday life for Lefebvre is only modern everyday life: the product of the great nineteenth-century European migration to urban centers and the waning of unifying styles disseminated by church and monarch. Everyday life is born in nineteenth century Europe in the same gap or rift that separates a private, domesticated world from a public, institutional one (9).

Rimbaud feels confined and exiled from the activity he desires and has experienced in Paris. His everyday life (as described more completely in the letter to Demeny of August 28, 1871) is one of virtual imprisonment, and Charleville epitomizes the stifling provincial boredom which encases his spirit. He escapes through reading and writing. Even the local newspaper, with its amateurish liberal poses (Le Progrès des Ardennes), provides some relief from the tedium he feels. He is eager to discuss Paris with Demeny; "Causons Paris," he declares, in an attempt to refocus the letter.

However, his vision of Paris is not that of an ardent Communard participant. Rimbaud must have been aware of demonstrations at such sites as the Place de la Bastille and the Place de Wagram. On March 1, the ceremonial entry of the occupying Prussian forces took

place. Yet Rimbaud's view of the Commune in this letter is filtered through the hours that he seems to have spent in bookstores:

J'ai vu quelques nouveautés chez Lemerre...
 J'ai lu là-bas...
 A la Librairie Artistique...
 Que chaque libraire ait son Siège, son
Journal de Siège (247)

One reason for this concentration on the written word and avoidance of the actual events may lie in Rimbaud's single-minded passion for literature; another may be understood in the purpose of the letter itself--to inform Demeny of the state of literature during a given time period. Other, more psychobiographical studies may see in this a reflection of Rimbaud's timid, even alienated social persona.

The reading material itself provides us with an interesting cross-section of the literature of the time. Most of the works, even those of Parnassians such as Leconte de Lisle and Coppée, show the overwhelming influence of the Franco-Prussian War, the Siege of Paris, and the Commune. Vallès and Vermersch, whose works are deemed "les fantaisies, admirables..." (247) are praised, as are a number of graphic depictions of the Commune. The new profusion of popular journals is unparalleled, as is that of pictorial representation.⁷ Rimbaud briefly discusses the theatre of the time, and then closes the letter in a style which seems to incorporate his youthful exuberance with the popular slogan-making of the day:

...tendons le front aux lances des
averses, l'âme à la sapience antique.
Et que la littérature belge nous emporte sous
son aisselle (247).

The use of slogans is clearly in evidence
throughout the two subsequent "lettres du Voyant".

[examples:
JE est un autre
...le poète est vraiment voleur du feu.
La Poésie ne rythmera plus l'action; elle
sera en avant.
Ces poètes seront! (250-252, passim)

Kristin Ross discusses the phenomenon of
sloganeering, particularly in relationship to Rimbaud's
poetic concerns and the influence of the Commune:

In the late 1860's, the very practice
of sloganeering underwent a mutation. The
word "slogan," which had always designated a
rallying cry--the word derives from the
Celtic meaning "battle cry of the dead"--
acquired, for the first time, an additional
meaning: that of the brief, striking phrase
used in advertising or commercial production.
A 1929 Russian film about the Commune [was]
entitled La Nouvelle Babylone (with subtitle,
appropriately, the Commune slogan "A l'assaut
du ciel!")....Rimbaud was particularly attuned
to the contemporary use of sloganeering in
the 1870's...In the Album Zutique he pub-
lished a sonnet entitled "Paris" composed
entirely of advertising pitches lifted from
neighborhood storefronts (151).

The second "lettre du Voyant" to Demy, of
May 15, 1871, exhibits this developing social aware-
ness. The reliance on slogans is one way in which he
acknowledges Demy's complicity in both letters. By
contrast, the first "lettre du Voyant" (of May 13),
addressed to Izambard, shows an ambiguous mixture of

disdain and rebelliousness. The poet proclaims his ideas, but seems reluctant to expand on them or explain his ideas as fully as he does to Demeny two days later. By accepting a new teaching post, Izambard has put himself squarely into the camp of the established social order. Demeny, on the other hand, has remained more faithful to the ideals of 1871 with which both poets were imbued. This must be understood as one of the chief subtexts which runs beneath both "lettres du Voyant."

Nevertheless, the first "lettre du Voyant" (May 13, 1871: to Izambard) contains many echoes of the spirit of the Commune. The socially problematic relationship of his former mentor to the establishment is line of attack for Rimbaud. In his previous letters to Izambard, Rimbaud had described a more harmonious relationship between the two. In the letter of August 25, 1870, for example, the poet creates a persona for himself based on his youthful, restless spirit and his hatred for the bourgeois, patriotic ranks of Charleville:

Ma ville natale est supérieurement idiote entre les petites villes de province...Je suis dépaysé, malade, furieux, bête, renversé; j'espérais des bains de soleil, des promenades infinies, du repos, des voyages, des aventures, des bohémienneries enfin; j'espérais surtout des journaux, des livres...Rien! Rien! (238)

The tone of defiance changes abruptly in the next letter, written from Paris on September 5, 1870,

in which he pleads with Izambard to save him from possible charges of vagrancy and imprisonment. Written less than two weeks after the previous letter, this document shows the young and frightened Rimbaud appealing to an older (even parental) figure:

J'espère en vous comme en ma mère; vous
m'avez toujours été comme un frère... Je vous
aime comme un frère, je vous aimerai comme un
père.
Je vous serre la main
Votre pauvre

ARTHUR RIMBAUD (240).

In the letter of November 2, 1870, several of these qualities are combined. Rimbaud reflects bitterly on his renewed confinement in Charleville, but he also thanks Izambard for his help in the past and tells him that his gratitude will reach heroic proportions:

La reconnaissance que je vous ai, je ne
saurais pas vous l'exprimer aujourd'hui plus
que j'avais l'autre jour. Je vous la
prouverai. Il s'agirait de faire quelque chose
pour vous que je mourrais pour le faire...
J'ai encore un tas de choses à dire...
Ce "sans-cœur" de

A. RIMBAUD (245-246)

A post-script on the war ends with renewed invective against the French bourgeoisie. Rimbaud's language is filled with neologistic invention and irony:

Abominable prurigo d'idiotisme, tel est
l'esprit de la population. On en entend de
belles, allez. C'est dissolvant! (246)

But by the time he writes the first "lettre du Voyant" to Izambard on May 13, 1871, we notice a significant change in tone. Rimbaud, having once again run away to Paris, no longer promises submission to Izambard's wishes. His opening is bold and mocking:

Cher Monsieur!

Vous revoilà professeur. On se doit à la Société, m'avez vous dit; vous faites partie des corps enseignants: vous roulez dans la bonne ornière... (248)

Rimbaud, too, has "joined" Society. He boasts to Izambard that he is learning how to maintain himself in a parallel situation:

Moi aussi, je suis le principe: je me fais cyniquement entretenir; je déterre d'anciens imbéciles de collège: tout ce que je puis inventer de bête, de sale, de mauvais, en action et en paroles, je le leur livre: on me paie en bocks et en filles. Stat mater dolorosa, dum pendet filius. --Je me dois à la Société, c'est juste;--et j'ai raison (248).

Rimbaud's experiences in Paris in the early spring of 1871 and his reading of works by the Communards have combined to reshape his own views about society. He condemns Izambard for his ready acquiescence to the established values ("votre obstination à regagner le ratelier universitaire [248]"), at the same time cynically parodying this life by his own underhanded participation in it. By proclaiming himself a member of the same "Society," he attempts to underline its corruption. The paragraph then launches into a tirade against Izambard's hopelessly antiquated verse as a reflection of his smug existence:

Mais vous finirez toujours comme un satisfait qui n'a rien fait, n'ayant rien voulu faire...votre poésie subjective sera horriblement fadasse (248).

This contemptuous attitude is in marked contrast to the letters of the previous year, in which he had treated Izambard with deference and respect. Even the tone of camaraderie has vanished here; Rimbaud now scornfully displays his alliance with the downtrodden workers of the Commune:

Je serai un travailleur: c'est l'idée qui me retient quand les colères folles me poussent vers la bataille de Paris,--ou tant de travailleurs meurent pourtant encore tandis que je vous écris! (248)

The weeks after this letter was written indeed saw the bloodiest fighting of the Commune. Stewart Edwards describes the growing state of siege in Paris during the month of May:

The army's infantry began to move on Paris at the beginning of April; its artillery began to bombard the city on 1 May. The fort of Issy, to the south-west, fell on 9 May, the fort of Vanves, to the south, on 13 May. On 21 May government troops entered Paris. That, however, was not the end. There followed a week of bitter and bloody street fighting, all the more bitter and bloody because the Parisians could no longer hope to win. *La semaine sanglante*, as it came to be called, was not so much the last campaign in a military encounter as the final outburst of a political struggle; it pitted the human substance of the Commune against the substantial presence of the French State (41).

In some ways this letter represents Rimbaud in the pose of the guerilla street fighter doing battle with the forces of official France in the person of Izambard. As such, these lines can provide us with

another framework with which to surround the presentation of poetic theory in the "lettres du Voyant." At the same time, these ideas can be connected to those more fully developed in the second letter, to Demyen:

Qu'il [the poet] crève dans son bondissement par les choses inouïes et innommables: viendront d'autres horribles travailleurs; ils commencèrent par les horizons où l'autre s'est affaissé! (251)

Thus, by the end of the second letter, the equation of the poet's work and the work of the Commune warriors has been underlined. The bloodiness ("horribles travailleurs") is necessary if they are to carry their ideals forward. Still more workers, Rimbaud proclaims with a touch of revolutionary oratory, will come to the front lines to replace them.

However, if we return to the first letter, it becomes evident that Rimbaud is not following a pure "party" line in his adherence to Commune principles. For the paragraph which includes the poet's avowal to be a worker, and in which he describes the parallel fight of the workers in Paris, ends with a complete about-face:

Travailler, maintenant, jamais, jamais:
je suis en grève (248)

How to explain this seeming contradiction? Bernard links it to the next line, in which the term "encrepulement" occurs: Rimbaud must systematically experience the depths of the human experience, and this necessitates his withdrawal from society and its demands (including work):

Cet encrapulement systématique met Rimbaud, tout d'abord, en état de grève: il se refuse à être un travailleur--et, en second lieu, en état de rupture avec la Société et ses conventions: à l'inverse de son professeur qui, dit-il sardoniquement, roule dans la bonne ornière (545).

Adam sees it in the same light as an account of the "poète maudit" whom Delahaye describes in detail:

Un récit de Delahaye éclaire...le Rimbaud de cette époque...il faisait asseoir d'anciens camarades. Puis il prenait pour plaisir à s'attribuer les métiers les plus effroyablement abjects, et aussi des moeurs dont la description, qu'il circonstançait féroceement, eût dû faire tomber tous les feux du ciel sur les vitrages du café (xxi).

Schaeffer, for his part, sees this contradiction as a necessary corollary to the inner struggle with which Rimbaud is faced:

La partie suivante ...est très importante, puisqu'elle permet de saisir la lutte intérieure que vit alors Rimbaud, tenté par la Commune, mais trop convaincu de la nécessité de se livrer à ses recherches poétiques pour céder à cette tentation (124).

Kristin Ross makes a number of interesting points about Rimbaud's seemingly opposing views of work in the letter:

In the Voyant letters written at the time of the Commune, it is clear that the elan propelling Rimbaud toward a structural identification with the worker in Paris arises at the precise moment when "work," as such, has definitively stopped. [Here she quotes the letter of May 13 to Izambard]..."I will be a worker": it is only at some future moment when the project of new social relations, a radical transformation in the structure of work, has been achieved that Rimbaud will be a worker; now he refuses to work(59).

In this chapter, entitled "The Right to Laziness," Ross discusses some alternative interpretations of the late nineteenth century attitude towards work; in particular, she examines the writing of Paul Lafargue, whose 1880 Le Droit à la paresse provided the very antithesis to the battle cry of the 1848 revolution--"le droit à travailler.(60)"

Rimbaud defiantly taunts Izambard for his membership in a society where the concept of work is undergoing a number of divisive changes. The writing of poetry, the only work that Rimbaud can now consider, requires unusual and often contradictory approaches. He must dissociate himself from the everyday world of work and even poetry, which Izambard represents. The rhetoric of the Commune is appropriate up to a point in expressing these ideas; but, as he shows in the letter to Demy, the poet must go beyond even these ideas if he is to experience and express the new and unknown in his own work.

To begin with, Rimbaud's tone, in this second letter, is less vituperative. If Izambard was the enemy in the first letter, here Demy is a colleague, if not a co-conspirator. The sense of equality among workers, so strong in the ideology of the Commune, is evident from the opening of the letter. Rimbaud still uses the formal second person plural, but the feeling is one of mutual respect and admiration. Rimbaud had opened his letter to Izambard with a direct attack on his values

and new position in society; here, he aligns himself with Demeny and continues the theme of contemporary literature that he had begun in the letter of April 17:

J'ai résolu de vous donner une heure de littérature nouvelle. Je commence de suite par une psaume d'actualité:

[CHANT DE GUERRE PARISIEN]...

--Voici de la prose sur l'avenir de la poésie (249-250).

The events and rhetoric of the Commune are just as evident here as they are in the frontal attack on Izambard and the social establishment which opens the first "lettre du Voyant." First, the crisp and almost military tone of such expressions as "J'ai résolu," "de suite," etc. aptly reflects the mood of 1871. This is not the rambling young poet who offered his verse to Banville in a letter of the previous year:

Nous sommes aux mois d'amour...et voici que je me suis mis, enfant touché par le doigt de la Muse...à dire mes bonnes croyances, mes espérances, mes sensations, toutes ces choses des poètes,--moi j'appelle cela du printemps (236).
[Letter to Banville of May 24, 1870]

A year later, in the "lettre du Voyant" to Demeny, Rimbaud no longer frames his verse with the flowery commonplaces of traditional poetry (which he criticizes throughout the letter), but instead places it at the head of his letter, surrounded by revolutionary slogans.

The poem itself ("Chant de guerre parisien") provides one of the clearest examples of Rimbaud's Communard sympathies. In its conflation of the traditional lyric images of springtime ("...les choses

printanières") with the ongoing political struggle of 1871, Rimbaud shows in poetic form what he will later enunciate in the prose of the "lettre du Voyant." The poem fuses erotic imagery with contemporary events in an unsettling manner:

O Mai! Quels délirants culs-nus!
 ...
 Thiers et Picard sont des Eros,
 Des enleveurs d'héliotropes; (40)

The theme of rape is pervasive; the tender images of springtime and young love are superseded by those of oppressive government leaders who violate their pact with the people.

The language abounds in neologism and linguistic experimentation:

Et des yoles qui n'ont jam, jam...
 ...
 Plus que jamais nous bambochons
 Quand arrivent sur nos tanières
 Voici hannetonner leurs tropes...(40)

His statements on language later in the letter confirm these revolutionary poetic utterances:

...toute parole étant idée, le temps
 d'un langage universel viendra! (252)

In the mixture of military slang, Parisian dialect, and the colloquialisms of the French working class, Rimbaud has shown in what ways this "universal language" might operate⁸. His use of the first person plural ("nous") further shows his sympathy with the people. He is both a worker and a combattant. The letter to Demeny underlines these ideas in prose statements:

L'art éternel aurait ses fonctions,
comme les poètes sont citoyens (252).

The letter, in effect, presents Demeny with three poems. It is this first one which most directly unites Rimbaud's poetic with the ideas of the Commune. The other two ("Mes petites amoureuses" and "Accroupissements") continue to illustrate and elaborate his prose manifesto, but they are constructed on more individual themes. In the "Chant de guerre...", Rimbaud attempts to show the intersection of "actualité" with his own poetic development. In the letter, he states that the poet will no longer be a passive spectator, confined to a marginal existence. The poet's function will be to gauge and describe the new thresholds that society must traverse. His voice will be prophetic, but it will also be rooted in temporal events:

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 mul-
tiplicateur de progrès! (252)

There is a sense, at least in the first of the three poems, of the poet's role in the reshaping of history. By participating in the events of the Commune and by his own representation within the poem, Rimbaud conveys the idea of the confrontation of historical time and the universal self. The language, with its calculated incoherencies, reinforces the idea of a search for progress within the framework of everyday events. The poem raises the question of individual com-

plicity in the more generalized movement of history. Those who would impede this collective progress by a sort of passivity (represented throughout Rimbaud's poetry by the action of sitting)⁹ are treated with as much derision as the unsavory figures of Thiers and Picard:

Et les Ruraux qui se prélassent
 Dans de longs accroupissements,
 Entenderont des rameaux qui cassent
 Parmi les rouges froissements (40).

The rural delegates to the National Assembly in the 1871 government presented as many obstacles to progress as did the forces of those in power. They were, in fact, united against the Communards.

Although the poem is introduced as a "contemporary psalm," its structure adheres to more traditional standards. The poem is written in eight stanzas of four lines each, in octosyllabic feet, with a consistent abab rhyme scheme. This classicism of form, in violent opposition to the subject matter, needs to be seen within the larger context of the letter. Immediately after the poem, Rimbaud begins his account of poetic history. He claims that all ancient poetry aspires to the harmonious verse of Greece. He criticizes the "rhymed prose" of succeeding generations of poets ("avachissement et gloire d'innombrables générations idiotes..." [250]).

In some ways, this debunking of his poetic ancestors has its roots in the Commune. If we view the toppling of the Vendôme Column as an example of the

systematic destruction of an oppressive cultural past, Rimbaud's criticism of Racine and others may be seen in a larger context of aesthetic radicalism. Kristin Ross discusses such "antihierarchal gestures" within the larger perspective of the Commune:

But the Commune was not just an uprising against the political practices of the Second Empire: it was also, and perhaps above all, a revolt against deep forms of social regimentation. In the realm of cultural production, for instance, divisions solidly in place under the rigid censorship of the Empire and the constraints of the bourgeois market--between genres, between aesthetic and political discourses, between artistic and artisanal work, between high art and reportage--such hierarchical divisions under the Commune were fiercely debated and, in certain instances, simply withered away (5).

Rimbaud's opening account of the decline of French poetry since its beginnings may also be seen in the cultural framework of the Commune.

The second paragraph of the letter narrates a more personal version of the same phenomenon. Once again, we are struck by Rimbaud's contradictory and playful language. On the one hand, he denies paradox; yet on the other, he uses it to gain the effect he wants:

Ni plaisanterie, ni paradoxe. La raison m'inspire plus de certitudes sur le sujet que n'aurait jamais eu de colères un Jeune-France. Du reste, libre aux nouveaux d'exécuter les ancêtres: on est chez soi et on a le temps (250).

Although Rimbaud denies both humor and paradox, we cannot divorce these qualities from his

poetic work. Nor are they absent here. The second sentence begins by parodying Pascal, and the paragraph ends on an enigmatic, reclusive note. Although these words have often been interpreted solely in the biographical sense of Rimbaud's enforced isolation at Charleville, they should also be seen within the context of the entire "lettre du Voyant" as well as that of the Commune.

Rimbaud is "at home" not just in Charleville, but as a poet; like his contemporaries ("libre aux nouveaux..."), he feels comfortable in denouncing his outmoded poetic predecessors. In terms of the letter, this is one of the poet's ongoing, necessary projects

...à balayer ces millions de squelettes
qui, depuis un temps infini, ont accumulé les
produits de leur intelligence borgnesse, en
s'en clamant les auteurs! (250)

Indeed, he must not only challenge these harmful influences from the past. The poet must now struggle with the creation, understanding and production of the new. It is with this in mind that he must undertake his most precarious task--the "encrapulement"¹⁰ that he has already begun to describe to Izambard.:

Mais il s'agit de faire l'âme
monstrueuse: à l'instar des comprachicos,
quoi! Imaginez un homme s'implantant et se
cultivant des verrues sur le visage (251).

In the first letter, this was seen as work ("Je travaille à me rendre voyant (249).") Now, it is both necessary and inevitable. In his relentless pur-

suit of sensory "deregulation", he moves to the outer fringes of society, yet retains an almost superhuman position because of the knowledge of the unknown which he has acquired:

il devient...le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit...(251)

The marginalization of the poet in relation to society and especially to bourgeois society is one of the threads that leads this passage back to the ideology of the Commune. Rimbaud asserts that the poet's self-enforced isolation is necessary if he is to discover the unknown. However, he must also recognize his place within an ongoing and continuous series of discoveries. Thus, the sense of community exists in a longitudinal sense. Each poet needs to see his place in relation to the achievements of successive generations of workers:

Qu'il crève donc son bondissement par les choses inouïes et innommables: viendront d'autres horribles travailleurs; ils commenceront par les horizons où l'autre s'est affaissé (251).

By extending these ideas to Demeny within the interactive framework of the letter, Rimbaud also shows how the community of poets and workers functions in a horizontal sense. Poets are not only "horrible workers" in an inexorable march toward progress; they also have a very real function in the world of the present. It is at this point in the letter that Rimbaud inserts his second poem, "Mes petites amoureuses." Like "Chant de guerre...", it is termed a "psalm." This shows not

only its continuity with the first poem, but underlines Rimbaud's concern with the form of his work. He indicates the way in which he would like Demeny to read it; and, once again, he employs the metaphor of a violinist whose bow is about to strike:

Ici j'intercale un second poème, hors
du texte: veuillez tendre une oreille com-
plaisante, --et tout le monde sera charmé. --
L'archet en main, je commence (251)

But, contrary to his indications to Demeny, the poem is far from charming. It shows instead some of the ways in which Rimbaud has already begun to make himself and his poetic world monstrous. In this nostalgic recollection of the poet's formation, our usual expectations of youthful fantasy and idealism are replaced by surrealistic combinations of sharp, sensual and sometimes unpleasant images of the poet's awakening. The music that is hinted at in the prose introduction comes about through the regularity of rhyme and meter, and through certain reversed images, such as those of stanza five:

J'ai déguélé ta bandoline,
Noir laideron;
Tu couperais ma mandoline
Au fil du front. (41)

The poet's simultaneous exaltation and degradation are mixed throughout the poem. He curses the source of his inspiration, yet realizes that this sordid world of confused adolescent sexuality has provided him with the material of his poetry:

Un soir, tu me sacras poète,
Blond laideron :

Descends ici, que je te fouette
En mon giron;

... Et c'est pourtant pour ces éclanches
Que j'ai rimé!
Je voudrais vous casser les hanches
D'avoir aimé! (41)

Bernard sees the poem in a more biographical sense; Rimbaud is trying to exorcise the poetic demons of his previous work in this poem. His coarseness of language and the use of the unexpected image are thus poetic reflections of the "antisentimentalist" who emerges in 1871:

Par opposition aux pièces mièvres, un peu malicieuses mais enjouées de l'année précédente (*Trois Baisers*, *A la musique*, *Rêvé pour l'hiver*, *Roman*), nous avons ici un sur-saut d'antisentimentalisme qui se traduit par une explosion de fureur et de grossièreté; les expressions mêmes, les tournures de phrases ont quelque chose de violent et de grotesque; le poète "dégueule" pour reprendre l'expression énergique de Rimbaud, il traîne dans la boue, avec rancune, toutes ses "petites amoureuses" de l'an dernier(391)

Although this conclusion seems too literal to me, it is true nevertheless that this deliberate "encrapulement" is part of the necessary poetic process described throughout the letter to Demeny. Rimbaud is dedicated to a systematic destruction of the past through poetry. The poem may thus be read as an internalization of the same larger social movements which culminated in such manifestations as the toppling of the Vendôme Column in 1871.¹¹

In the paragraphs following "Mes petites amoureuses," Rimbaud describes the poet as the

Promethean stealer of fire; his work is to find a new language which will be able to express the heretofore inexpressible. In all of this, he will participate in a universal march towards progress. Once again, Rimbaud echoes the ideas of the Commune:

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! (252)

Schaeffer, in his study of the two letters, points out the common concern of mid-nineteenth century poets with the issue of progress. Hugo, for example, states in Les Misérables:

Le progrès est le mode de l'homme. La
vie générale du genre humain s'appelle le
Progrès; le pas collectif du genre humain
s'appelle le Progrès. Le progrès marche; il
fait le grand voyage humain et terrestre vers
le céleste et le divin...Chose admirable, la
poésie d'un peuple est l'élément de son
progrès. La quantité de civilisation se mesure
à la quantité d'imagination (qtd.in Schaeffer 174).

And Bernard, analyzing the extension of these thoughts in the following paragraph ("Cet avenir sera matérialiste...") shows their relationship to Rimbaud's Communard readings and sympathies:

Rimbaud, étant passé de l'idée
d'inconnu à l'idée du progrès, se trouve
maintenant à l'aise pour lancer cette
affirmation inattendue;...et nous avons cette
fois l'impression qu'il reprend des idées
"progressistes" puisés dans ses lectures où
peut-être dans les idées avancées des "communards" (550-551).

Rimbaud's description of the future relies on a combination of sources from the present and past. In

Et le soir, aux rayons de lune, qui lui font
Aux contours du cul des bavures de lumière,
Une ombre avec détails s'accroupit, sur un fond
De neige rose ainsi qu'une rose trémière...
Fantasque, un nez poursuit Vénus au ciel
profond.

This overlapping of two discordant worlds is one of the characteristics that most infuses Rimbaud's work. The particular blend of classical pastiche and commonplace activity is one that is seen frequently in his poems. Robert Greer Cohn remarks about the last lines of this poem:

The close of the satire is mock-poetic; squatting on his pot again, the bourgeois seeks the evening star. He is like a hol-lyhock against a pink snowy background of crepuscular wall, combining floral lyricism with the excremental act in a way similar to the close of "Oraison du soir." The floral (vegetal) and the earthy (fertile or fecal) are often combined in Rimbaud in this way. The end of "Les Assis" is an example; the "campagne en rut" of "Les Premières Communions" is another (97).

The ironic side of "floral lyricism" has already been observed in the first poem enclosed in the letter, "Chant de guerre parisien":

Thiers et Picard sont des Eros,
Des enleveurs d'héliotropes;
...
Et couché dans les glaïeuls, Pavre
Fait son cillement aqueduc, ...
(40)

It will become the dominant center of images in the poem that he encloses in his second letter to Banville, "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs." But it is not only the floral imagery which unites this poem to others of the spring of 1871. Rimbaud's ironic treatment of bourgeois conventions and everyday activities reflects the growing social concern of a

country which was beginning to question the validity of such pursuits. The "lettre du Voyant" expresses this irony in both its poetry and prose.

After presenting the final poem to Demy, Rimbaud tells him to respond quickly, for he may be in Paris within the week. Once again, this phrase has caused some to assume that Rimbaud did indeed fight in the thick of the Commune. Bernard takes a more reasonable view:

Rimbaud comptait-il retourner à Paris pour prendre part aux luttes de la Commune? C'est probable, d'après cette dernière phrase; mais la "semaine sanglante" allait commencer (21-28 mai), et la victoire des Versaillais rendre désormais son départ sans objet (553).

Many writers, including the poet's friend, Delahaye, continued to perpetuate the myth of Rimbaud's participation in the events of these months. Often, their "information" relied on such documents as the "lettre du Voyant." Delahaye writes:

L'armée communaliste l'avait compté dans ses rangs...car il n'était pas homme à se contenter de théories...(qtd. in Etienne 83).

Izambard, in his Rimbaud tel que je l'ai connu (Paris: Mercure de France, 1946) is one of the few critics who tries to deny the myth that Rimbaud participated physically in any part of the Commune:

Que Rimbaud ait adhéré de loin aux idées de la Commune, ce n'est pas douteux; mais est-il vrai qu'à un moment quelconque,--entre le début et la fin de l'insurrection, entre le 18 mars et le 28 mai,--il ait fait acte de présence à Paris? (157)

He then goes on to show, that despite the evidence of Rimbaud's brother-in-law, Berrichon (by then the most widely-read of his biographers), Rimbaud did not in fact actively participate in the insurrection.

Etiemble devotes the third chapter of his second volume on Rimbaud to this issue ("Rimbaud: un Communard?"). He summarizes the conflict through the middle of the twentieth century. It is interesting to note that the publication of the first "lettre du Voyant" in 1926 occasioned a spate of critics to remark that Rimbaud could not have been in Paris during the Commune. Etiemble shows how this alone is not sufficient evidence to prove or disprove it (185). He then goes on to show how some of the more rabid critics of the era placed Rimbaud squarely in the middle of the insurrection:

"On le soupçonne de s'être fait pétroleur sous la Commune," écrira Paul Souday, le 24 octobre, 1927; "il ne haïssait pas moins le patriotisme et sa patrie même." Pour M. le Dr. Jacquemin-Parlier, il "serait dommage que notre homme n'ait pas été mêlé aux mouvements révolutionnaires de la Commune" (186).

Etiemble explains this attribution of radical militarism to these writers' own dislike of Rimbaud:

Tous ceux-là, on le sait, ou du moins on le sent, haïssent la Commune, et détestent Rimbaud. Détestant Rimbaud, il leur importe donc d'en faire un communard (186).

Etiemble then shows how those on the other side, both leftists and Rimbaldiens, also erred in their

search for the true connection between the poet and the Commune. The situation had become equally ridiculous in the English-speaking world:

1929; en Angleterre, M. Peter Quennell enrôle encore Rimbaud parmi les communards. 1932, M. Elliott M. Grant l'inscrit aux Tirailleurs de la Révolution et ne le renvoie dans ses foyers qu'une fois vaincue la Commune....En 1936, The Encyclopedia Americana de New York; en 1940, une librairie de Chicago, tiennent pour assuré que Rimbaud servit dans les rangs communards. Time, The Nation insistent sans déplaisir sur le viol prétendu qu'aurait subi l'enfant derrière les murs de Babylone ("Ithyphalliques" justifie tout!) (187).

Most modern critics have tended to side with Etienne and Bernard, maintaining a more moderate, and less opinionated view as to Rimbaud's actual participation in the Commune. Obviously, this is one of the many details of the poet's life that still needs further research and clarification. Letters, not only of Rimbaud himself, but of others in his circle, may ultimately prove valuable in providing evidence of his participation (or non-participation) in the Commune.

The final letter to be examined in the context of Rimbaud's relationship to the Commune is the one written to Banville on August 15, 1871.

This letter, signed with the pseudonym of "Alcide Bava,¹²" contains the long poem "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs." Rimbaud shows, in extended poetic form, some ideas he had theoretically laid out in the second "lettre du Voyant." Almost a year had passed since Rimbaud's previous letter to the "Cher Maître."

In the letter dated May 24, 1870, he had enclosed the poems "Sensation" [untitled], "Ophélie," and "Credo in Unam." When we compare these youthful, academic poems with the knowing sophistication and irony of "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs," it is evident that the poet has undergone a significant transformation of the intellect. When we examine the prose in the two letters, we are confronted with similar contrasts.

In his lengthy biography, Pierre Petitfils points out the similarity in tone and purpose of the second letter to Banville to Rimbaud's 1871 break from his former mentor, Izambard.

Izambard was now out of the way, but there were other mandarins that deserved to be punished. To begin with, the amiable Théodore de Banville, that demigod of Parnassus, whose elegant and facile verse had once so captivated him. What exactly was this versifier? A florist? A salon florist, for his poems were so filled with cut flowers that they resembled for all the world a bride's bouquet: so he would teach... Banville "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs" (97)¹³

But if the poem represents a revolutionary approach to the traditional poetic image, the letter which frames it is written in the most obsequious of tones. Indeed, the strong contrast between these two different styles makes the poem seem all the more radical. The poem relies on several techniques which reflect Rimbaud's brush with the Commune. First, there is the reversal of the common connotational bond of flowers as traditional poetic images:

Les Lys, ces clystères d'extases!(55)¹⁴

Like the toppling of the Vendôme Column earlier in the year, this poetic toppling of icons is a reflection of the Communard spirit.

Secondly, Rimbaud urges the poet to see and use the images of modernity in his work:

De vos forêts et de vos prés,
O très paisibles photographes! (56)

Exploration of the new and the unknown had been one of the major themes of the second "lettre du Voyant." Now, Rimbaud urges Banville and the other Parnassian poets to look more closely at what has been overlooked:

---En somme, une Fleur, Romarin
Ou Lys, vive ou morte, vaut-elle
Un excrément d'oiseau marin?
Vaut-elle un seul pleur de chandelle?

---Et j'ai dit ce que je voulais! (58)

The tired images of the nineteenth century¹⁵ must be put replaced by "the future generations of poets" whom he foresees in the second "lettre du Voyant".

Indeed, Rimbaud begins the poem with a parody of the opening to Lamartine's "Le Lac" ("Ainsi, toujours poussés vers de nouveaux rivages¹⁶):

Ainsi, toujours, vers l'azur noir...(55)

In the "lettre du Voyant", Rimbaud has commented:

Lamartine est quelquefois voyant, mais étranglé par la forme vieille (253).

Banville himself did not escape Rimbaud's criticism in the letter of May 15. Like Gautier and

Leconte de Lisle he is first singled out as a "seer", but then chastised for not going far enough in his search:

Les seconds romantiques sont très voyants: Th. Gautier, Lec.de Lisle,. Th. de Banville. Mais inspecter l'invisible et entendre l'inouï étant autre chose que reprendre l'esprit des choses mortes...(253)

Finally, the poem serves as an example of how the poet may create not only a new language but new and unexpected collaborations and juxtapositions of images.¹⁷ At times, Rimbaud seems to anticipate the Surrealists in these unexpected combinations of images:

Oui, vos bavures de pipeaux
Font de précieuses glucoses!
--Tas d'oeufs frits dans de vieux chapeaux,
Lys, Açokas, Lilas et Roses!... (57)

Thus the poem serves in a number of ways to reinforce the revolutionary poetic ideas advocated in the second "lettre du Voyant".

In conclusion, we may view this series of letters as interconnected by their enunciation of Commune ideas. Rimbaud, imbued with the spirit of social and political change which pervaded France in 1871, has drawn from these principles and applied them to poetry. What seems to have confused many critics is the lack of overt confirmation of the poet's contribution to, or participation in the Commune. This seems to me a rather fruitless way of looking at the question. By examining

the letters of 1871, as well as the poems enclosed in them, we are confronted with strong evidence of Rimbaud's adhesion to the principles of the Paris Commune of 1871. We have also been able to see its significant role in shaping his theoretical ideas and his poetic production.

Chapter Four: Notes

1)The word "commune" is defined in the Petite Larousse in this way: "Autrefois, association de bourgeois d'une même localité jouissant du droit de se gouverner eux-mêmes; Division territoriale administré par un maître assisté du conseil municipal" (232).

The Oxford Companion to French Literature also points out that the proper name had been used before, to designate a radical coalition active during the Revolution:

The Commune de Paris was an improvised assembly which came into being in July 1789 after the fall of the Bastille and assumed responsibility for the government of Paris...Matters came to a head on 10 August 1792 when the extremists formed themselves into a Commune insurrectionnelle, which expelled the earlier body and forced the Assemblée législative to declare the monarchy at an end. [It] was the power behind the worst excesses of the Terror (155).

2)These include Pierre Gascar's Rimbaud et la Commune (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), Michel Décaudin's Rimbaud et la commune (Strasbourg, 1971), and Kristin Ross's The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune (Minneapolis, 1988).

3)See note 19, chapter three.

4)For example: "Il reste donc assez probable que Rimbaud a vu Paris pendant la Commune" (Ruff 64).

5)Certainly, the letter to Demeny of April 17, 1871, as well as the two "lettres du Voyant" of May 13 and 15 should be used in the search for clues to this episode.

6)see note 36, chapter three.

7)See Adrian Rifkin, "Cultural Movement and the Paris Commune", Art History 2 (1979): 201-20.

8)Jean-Pierre Richard sees this as Rimbaud's major poetic success:

...car dans un seul domain il triomphe, il parvient à trouver des "rythmes instinctifs" et c'est le domaine du langage, de la création poétique. Le prestige unique de la poésie rimbalienne tient en effet au mariage qu'elle opère, et qui ne sera jamais plus réalisé après elle, d'un jaillissement et

d'une forme, au croisement qu'elle réalise, tout comme le Génie lui-même, entre une "grâce" et une "solence," à la possession simultanée qu'elle rend possible d'une "élégance, d'une science" et d'une "vigueur." Les mots y éclatent dans une solitude, ils semblent s'y dévorer eux-mêmes tant ils sont rapidement proférés et brûlés, rendus au silence; mais il est bien vrai aussi qu'ils y sont porteurs d'un sens global, générateurs de réciprocité, qu'ils y "font l'amour." Ils vérifient en somme la définition que Rimbaud a donnée du langage futur: "de l'âme pour l'âme, résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs, de la pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant." (248)

9)see note 5, chapter two. Also note the way in which the word "accroupissements" is used in line 30 of this poem (prefiguring the title of the third poem enclosed with the letter).

10)Schaeffer says of this locution:

Je m'encrapule...est un néologisme, en rapport avec crapuler "vivre dans la crapule, peu usité" (Littré) et s'encanailler, que Molière présente comme un néologisme dans sa Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes (126).

11)The following note appears in an English version of excerpts from the Goncourt's Journals:

In the autumn of 1870, Courbet, on behalf of the Artist's Commission, and others, had urged the demolition of the Vendôme Column, describing it as a symbol of Bonapartism and militarism. On 12 April 1871 the Commune decided to demolish it, and the operation was carried out on 16 May. (note 1, p 186 in Pages from the Goncourt Journal; edited, translated, and introduced by Robert Baldick. Oxford, 1978)

12)"Bava" is probably a play on words for "baver" (cf. "Mon triste coeur bave à la poupe," in "Le Coeur volé"). "Alcide" was a descendent of Alcaeus, the son of Perseus, and father of Hercules (who took the last name of Alcide). It may also refer to the Greek poet Alcaeus, who wrote lyrics in the seventh century before Christ.

13)English translation by Alan Sheridan (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1987)

14)Even this may be a parody of Banville. Adam notes that "Banville avait parlé de clystères dans Les Odes funambulesques" (906).

15) For some writers, Banville represents the most frivolous extreme of the movement to separate poetry from the social realities of the day. Denomé points out how the reading and writing public were affected by this polarization:

The various literary drawing rooms of such varied patrons as Nina de Villars, Madame de Ricard, Catulle Mendès, and Leconte de Lisle during the 1860's were constituted primarily to assert the need for autonomy in art, and to encourage and ensure the practice of poetic expression in a society predominantly concerned with more immediately useful values. Despite its claims at objectivity and its scientific orientation, the poetry of Art for Art's Sake and Parnassianism failed to enlist the interest and enthusiasm of any significantly substantial reading public. From 1851 to 1866, the editors of such prestigious firms as Michel Lévy, Charpentier, and Hetzel refused to consider any kind of poetry for publication (18-19).

Christopher Robinson sees a continuity from frivolity to decadence in late nineteenth-century French poetry:

Individualism led directly to decadence, be it the frivolous formalism of Théodore de Banville's later poetry or the hopeless exploration of each sense experience for its own sake, as in Verlaine's Romances sans paroles. Just as anti-rationalism became anti-intellectualism, so this anti-individualism crystallised into a call for order, hierarchy, and collective responsibility (172).

Rimbaud's concern with both social and poetic issues in 1871 indicates his connection to a later, more modern generation of poets. Banville, on the other hand, should not be overlooked in the history of French poetry. His verse, especially the Odes funambulesques (1857), is related to Rimbaud's poetry in its joyful and parodistic treatment of antiquated themes. His Petit Traité de poésie française (1870) may also be seen as an important link between two extremes of mid-nineteenth century poetry:

The fact that so many critics and literary historians continue to identify Théodore de Banville as the author of the "official" exposition of Parnassian doctrine constitutes one of the most singular ironies that has sprung from the history of the movement. When Le Petit Traité de la poésie française first appeared as serialized chapters in the Echo de la Sorbonne in 1870, it

provoked the immediate displeasure of Leconte de Lisle and the more prominent practitioners of Parnassianism.

For all of its obvious concern with rhyme and rhythm and the technical intricacies of French versification, Banville's treatise conveyed a disturbingly cavalier approach to the problem of poetic expression ... The very desultoriness of his ironic remarks on form and inspiration invested his essay with precisely the kind of debonair attitude that appeared to undermine the seriousness of the problem at hand (Denommé 64).

16) Lamartine, "Le Lac" (1820), in The Penguin Book of French Verse: Volume 3/The Nineteenth Century, ed. by Anthony Hartley (London: Penguin, 1963), p.10.

The opening line also points to a number of mid-nineteenth century poems where the word "azur" has figured prominently. Mallarmé's "L'Azur" (1864) ("De l'éternel azur la sereine ironie/ Accable..." 37) provides one example. In his notes to this poem, Mondor adds additional intertextual references:

C'est dans cette même lettre du 7 avril 1864 qu'Emmanuel des Essarts informe l'exilé de Tournon [Mallarmé] qu'il a montré ses vers à Méry, à Vacquerie, à Baudelaire, "Baudelaire les a écoutés sans désapprobation, ce qui est un grand signe de faveur. S'il ne les avait pas aimés, il les aurait interrompus" (1432).

Baudelaire himself used the term "azur" in fourteen of the Fleurs du mal. Examples include "La Chevelure" ("Vous me rendez l'azur du ciel immense et rond;" [25]; and "L'Irremédiable":

Une Idée, une Forme, un Etre
Parti de l'azur et tombé
Dans un Styx bourbeux et plombé
Où nul oeil du Ciel ne pénètre; (75).

Rimbaud uses the word in nine of the poems of the early Poésies.

17) In her analysis of this poem, Carol Dobay-Rifelj says:

The text is proposing a properly poetic notion of utility rather than poetry that would be useful. The emphasis on work seen in the repeated use of the verbs *fonctionner*, *servir*, and *travailler* and in the use of the imperative mood can be understood as indicating what poetry should accomplish. To "trouver au coeur des noirs filons" is to find a new poetic vision...What is proposed, then, is not a work ethic but an esthetic of language (Word and Figure 161).

Conclusion

Some conclusions may be drawn here about the relevance of Rimbaud's letters of 1870-1873 to the poet's theoretical and practical experiences. One issue which should be considered is that of genre and the inclusion of the letter within the realm of literary discourse. The study of the letter in France has focused almost exclusively on the great correspondents of the seventeenth century, such as Bussy-Rabutin and Madame de Sévigné. Some recent critical attention has been given to the issue of letter-writing within fiction¹, but in general the letter has been overlooked as a significant form of literary discourse in itself. Rimbaud's letters, like those of many other writers, reveal the growth and development of the poet's mind as eloquently as the contemporary "bildungsroman." Unlike the nineteenth-century novel, the letter is not consistently narrative, nor must it be discursive. As Rimbaud shows throughout the letters, thoughts may be written down in a more random, conversational way than they might be within the strictures of conventional prose.²

We may further connect the issue of genre delineation which the letters raise with the poet's general concern for the traditional boundaries of poetry and prose. It is important to note that the letters serve as the texts within which statements about these boundaries are frequently made. Although the two "lettres du Voyant" of 1871 provide the most concise ars poetica, most of the other letters written between 1870 and 1873 contain valuable and frequently overlooked material about Rimbaud's theories of writing, language, literature and poetics.

Furthermore, the letters themselves are often used to "encase" poems, which Rimbaud sends to his various correspondents either to elicit criticism (Izambard), to illustrate his theoretical ideas (Delahaye, Demy), or to obtain publication (Banville).

It should also be noted that each letter is addressed to a specific "other," as opposed to the large and impersonal readership of Rimbaud's poetic work. This allows us to examine the poet's evolution from multiple perspectives. The correspondence with Izambard, for example, reveals an intense struggle between authority and self-determination.

Demeny is addressed as a fellow-poet and an equal; theoretical statements are more daringly expressed, revolutionary ideas are freely discussed. Rimbaud's two letters to Banville reveal the poet's more public side; aware of the vogue of Parnassianism, Rimbaud at first sides avidly with the movement, and throws himself at the more established poet's mercy.³ In the letter of August 15, 1871, which contains Rimbaud's ironic "Ce qu'on dit...", he pleads for recognition and publication, at the same time lambasting Banville's own poetic practices.

Rimbaud's correspondence is an important source for biographical as well as literary information. As I have tried to demonstrate in the Fourth Chapter, it is impossible to consider the question of Rimbaud's participation (or non-participation) in the Paris Commune of 1871 without thoroughly examining the letters of this period. Not only do they illuminate his ideas on the relationship of the Commune to his own work, but they also shed light on his daily life in the spring of 1871.

His letter of April, 1871 to Demeny, and the two subsequent "lettres du Voyant" of the following month (preceding the "Semaine Sanglante") show that Rimbaud (like many others), had been deeply affected by the events of the Franco-Prussian War and the subsequent unrest of the Commune to a degree which may still be underestimated. Those passages of the second "lettre du Voyant" in which worker and poet are fervently united, advancing formidably through history, may represent a transposition of revolutionary rhetoric into poetic theory. The incorporation of these ideas into a letter, as opposed to a more conventional poetic treatise, testifies to Rimbaud's concept of linguistic rebirth and invention. Unlike the formal ars poetica, the letter, a populist genre, stands in opposition to the traditional milieu for the statement of the ideals of "high" art.

I have also attempted to show how the letters serve as a record of Rimbaud's reading during these three years. This may help us understand some of his literary antecedents, preferences, influences and dislikes. The sheer volume and diversity of literature which he writes about makes us aware of his voracity as a reader, and also raises important questions about the interaction of "high" and popular culture within an individual (and within the culture of late nineteenth century France as well).

The letters of 1870-1873 also serve as an "intertext" for the actual observation of Rimbaud's increasing flexibility of form, language, and style. Just as his initial poetic impulse is transformed in the later prose works, so the letters offer Rimbaud a constant field of challenge for linguistic and literary experimentation. In my chapter on neologism, I have shown how the coining of new words as well as the use of dialect, slang, jargon, and mixed diction in the letters is paralleled by similar experimentation in Rimbaud's poetic work of this period.

The letter, being an open and uncharted form, could thus enable the writer to develop experimentation with language on a number of different levels. The transformation of everyday words into a secret code (in the letters of 1872 and 1873 to Delahaye, for example) may reflect the magical linguistic transformations predicted in Une Saison en enfer⁴.

Beyond this, we must consider the fact that the letters are addressed to specific correspondents, and imply a continuous act of literary conversation. The 1871 letters to Demeny, for example, are full of cues for response, and often demand comment on the part of the correspondent. Unfortunately, none of Demeny's replies has been preserved, but we do have letters written by Izambard, Delahaye and Verlaine. These need to be connected more intrinsically with Rimbaud's own correspondence and examined within an interactive framework.

Finally, although my thesis has dealt only with the correspondence of 1870-1873, these letters must be placed within a larger context, since Rimbaud continued to write letters until the end of his life (1891). Although he produced no poetry nor prose during these last eighteen years, the letters remain a testimonial to his life and work. For most of that time, he lived as a merchant and agent for French companies in colonial outposts in Asia and Africa. The letters of these years reflect a continuing interest in what he saw in the second "lettre du Voyant" as the ongoing search for "the unknown." These late letters demonstrate Rimbaud's continuing effort to cross the boundaries of bourgeois French life, and to arrive, prophetically, at the state which he foresees in the second "lettre du Voyant":

Toutes les formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui-même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons, pour n'en garder que des quintessences. Ineffable torture où il ... devient entre tous le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit...Il arrive à l'inconnu, et quand, affolé, il finirait par perdre l'intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues! (251)

Notes

1. See Janet Altman's Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1982.

2. See aside to Demeny in second "lettre du Voyant" ("La suite à six minutes--[252]") for an example of the way in which a narrative lapse may serve such a purpose. Or the letter to Demeny of August 28, 1871, in which Rimbaud proposes plans for his escape from Charleville at the same time describing his life as an outsider:

J'avais eu l'idée ci-dessus [of escaping to Paris and finding work as a laborer]: la seule qui me parût raisonnable: je vous la rends sous d'autres termes. J'ai bonne volonté, je fais ce que je puis, je parle aussi compréhensiblement qu'un malheureux! Pourquoi tancer l'enfant, qui, non doué de principes zoologiques, désirerait un oiseau à cinq ailes? On le ferait croire aux oiseaux à six queues, ou à trois becs! On lui prêterait un Buffon des familles; ça le déleurrerait.
[in Mouquet/Renéville 279]

3. In letter to Banville of 24 May, 1870. [236]

4. See particularly "Délires II": "Alchimie du verbe":

...je croyais à tous les enchantements. J'inventai la couleur des voyelles!...---Je réglai la forme et le mouvement de chaque consonne, et, avec des rythmes instinctifs, 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.

...Je m'habituai à l'hallucination simple: je voyais très-franchement une mosquée à la place d'une usine, une école de tambours faite par des anges, des calèches sur les routes du ciel, un salon au fond d'un lac; les monstres, les mystères; un titre de vaudeville dressait des épouvantes devant moi.

Puis j'expliquai mes sophismes magiques avec l'hallucination des mots! [in Bernard 228-230]

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