



A Season in Hell/The Drunken Boat

Arthur Rimbaud , Louise Varèse (Translator)

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Although he stopped writing at the age of 19, Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91) possessed the most revolutionary talent of the century. His poetry & prose have increasingly influenced major writers. To his masterpiece *A Season in Hell* is here added Rimbaud's longest & possibly greatest single poem *The Drunken Boat*, with the original French *en face Illuminations*, Rimbaud's major works are available as bilingual New Directions Paperbacks. The reputation of *A Season in Hell*, which is a poetic record of a man's examination of his own depths, has steadily increased over the years. Upon the 1st publication of Varese's translation by New Directions, the *Saturday Review* wrote: "One may at last suggest that the translation of *A Season in Hell* has reached a conclusive point..." Concerning the 25-stanza *The Drunken Boat*, Dr Enid Starkie of Oxford University has written: "(It's) an anthology of separate lines of astonishing evocative magic which linger in the mind like isolated jewels." Rimbaud's life was so extraordinary that it has taken on the quality of a myth. A biographical chronology is included.

A Season in Hell/The Drunken Boat Details

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Tosh says

What young boy exists who doesn't want to be Rimbaud. The Grand daddy or rock n' roll - and modern literature. A combination of Peter Pan and a thug, Rimbaud wrote beautifully as well as being sharp as a broken blade.

"A Season In Hell" indeed. May I wonder in that neighborhood for a long time.

Nathan Lorraine says

What can i say about Arthur Rimbaud as a writer? He was eighteen when he wrote this epic poem. He almost never wrote again afterwards. A Season in Hell is an epic poem married with a fanstastic short poem called The Drunken Boat. The mass of this review will be of A Season in Hell. As a begining writer I set it in my mind to write poems more than verse. I went to the book store one day and went straight to the poetry section. I saw all kinds of great authors that i read in school. But as i glanced at the picture on the cover of this book i felt a connection. i took it home and read it from cover to cover without putting it down.

A Season in Hell has taught me write without holding back mine or other people's feelings. The fact that A Season in Hell is a collection of poems its easy to say that weren't all written at once. Poems allow you to feel the moment. Examine it till your sick to your stomach. That's what Rimbaud has done in A Season in Hell. He did it so well it put him off writing forever.

The opening line is one of my favorites. It suggest that Rimbaud has run away from a life that once he found to be glorius then one day it wasn't so he fled. At 18 i felt all these things but at 18 i was scratching the surface of what i could do as a writer. Rimbaud wrote a classic that i think will be in the hands of misunderstood youths for many years to come.

Matt says

Satisfies and encourages every demand that it makes on its readers. There is plenty in this text for pretty much anybody who wants to dig it out.

What seems like teenage bravado (and, let's be honest, is often read out of teenage bravado) transcends the stereotypical limitations of the obstreperously drunk, young, rebellious, gifted, wild and unruly seer at the wheel.

Cheryl says

Ben says

Two of my favorite works by Arthur Rimbaud. I have read the complete works several times and always enjoy reading new translations of Rimbaud. This one has a marvelous introduction (which really illustrates where Rimbaud was at during the period of his life when he wrote "Une Saison en Enfer" -- particularly concerning his tumultuous relationship with Paul Verlaine) and it has some strengths in terms of language choices and clarity. The opening lines of "A Season in Hell" dance memorably across my mind and are, to me, some of the finest opening lines in any work. Although I enjoy the translations by Wallace Fowlie and Wyatt Mason better than Louise Varese's, her translation is still very beautiful: "Once, if I remember well, my life was a feast where all hearts opened and all wines flowed." I prefer "if my memory serves me well" over "if I remember well." My other complaint is that "l'ennui" was translated here as "boredom" (which it often is), though I feel ennui is something more intense than boredom, something more encompassing and debilitating, but this may be owed to my readings of Baudelaire.

Rimbaud is a poet that I enjoy revisiting often. I first read his works four years ago ("if MY memory serves me well") and have read him at least once a year since. His use of language is so masterful and original, taking the reader on a magical mind-trip that one does not quickly forget; it is very easy to get lost in the images he paints with his words ("I thought of us as two good children, free to wander in the Paradise of sadness"; "It is recovered!/What? Eternity./It is the sea/Mixed with the sun" -- these are just two examples).

On this last (re)reading of Rimbaud I really picked out the biographical elements in the work, and could really sympathize with his despairs throughout "A Season in Hell." I also enjoyed the bibliography of works in English by (translations) and about Rimbaud, and would like to read some of these in the near future.

Jacques Coulardeau says

ARTH/UR RIMBAUD – LÉO FERRÉ – UNE SAISON EN ENFER – 1873-1991-2000

Ce texte est magique, ensorcelé, maudit, magnifique, pervers, exquis de délicatesse et de naïveté, envoûtant du pêché d'innocence et du crime de simplicité d'esprit. Il est un délire sans fin mais sans commencement non plus sur l'impossibilité dans laquelle Rimbaud se trouvait de simplement se poser dans une des boîtes cubiques qui sont sensées être l'habitat de chacun de nous dans une société moderne. Et qu'aurait-il souffert s'il avait connu les boîtes cubiques de nos temps modernes avec Internet, Netflix and Google intégrés et branchés directement sur nos cerveaux par WIFI mental expérimental et connecté pour toujours et irréversible ?

On me dira Rimbaud souffrait du syndrome d'Asperger, j'imagine, il avait du mal à établir des relations « norm-â-â-â-les » avec les autres. Mais il vit et voit cette incapacité avec les concepts et les yeux de ceux qui exigent qu'il se plie à ce rite initiatique. Il ne peut saisir son malheur qu'avec les concepts de ceux qui lui ont imposé ce malheur en premier lieu, ses parents qu'ils n'évoquent que métaphoriquement, surtout sa mère dit-on, les maîtres de ses écoles plus ou moins jésuites mais toujours casuistes, les prêtres qui ont probablement tous senti sa différence et une bonne proportion d'entre eux ont dû prendre avantage de cette différence.

Et qu'il ait réussi à garder son innocence pendant quelques temps importe peu. Il la perdit sur les barricades

de la Commune de Paris et il s'ensevelit vivant dans la fange révolutionnaire et y trouva son plaisir, et y trouva Verlaine. Verlaine ne cherchait pas à compenser son syndrome d'Asperger, car lui n'était en rien autiste, simplement opportuniste et jouisseur. Il lui fallait sa brouettée de jeunes garçons pour passer la nuit aussi souvent que possible. On dirait aujourd'hui qu'il était pédophile et il les aimait autour de quatorze ans. Je ne peux ici citer les poèmes érotiques du dit Verlaine. Mais alors pourquoi donc Rimbaud fut élu pour plus d'une nuit, fut-il mis en concurrence avec l'épouse officielle de ce rat poétique qu'était Verlaine, put-il survivre presque trois ans dans ce ménage à trois qui avait tellement de petits et mignons lutins mâles que même le chat de Verlaine devait en perdre son miaulement latin.

Il réussit à survivre à cette ordalie autistique parce qu'il avait une imagination tellement plus forte que la moyenne. Il était un visionnaire Asperger, un visionnaire que le monde de Verlaine tentait de transformer en voyeur car en bon autiste mental et sensuel, sentimental et luxurieux sinon lubrique, comme la vipère qui devait l'effrayer comme une folie sybarite, aussitôt le plaisir atteint, la jouissance engrangé, il se retire, il se renferme, il se cloître et se replie comme si les papillons pouvaient redevenir des larves, renverser leur métamorphose en une apocalypse rétrograde qui défait tous les réseaux, qui tuent toutes les aventures, qui laissent la victime de son plaisir souffrir d'avoir effectivement atteint le plaisir, ce qui semble prouver qu'il n'est bon à rien car il a volé son propre plaisir à l'autre qui de toute façon n'en demande pas plus et se satisfait d'une aventure sans lendemain. Mais pour Rimbaud les lendemains de l'aventure déchantent toujours.

Alors il s'envole tel le papillon dont je viens de parler dans la noirceur de la nuit et il illumine un ciel sans étoiles des myriades de beauté colorée et fantastique qui deviennent les légions de sa souffrance. Il lance ses propres forces punitives contre lui-même et se fait le martyr de son désir d'innocence qu'il ne sait ressentir que quand il a rencontré le pêché du désir et le crime du désir satisfait. Cette situation est castratrice et il en devient femme par la perte de ce qui fait de lui un homme, sa capacité à fuir. Il devient une femme soumise, une femme que l'époux prend comme une chose qui lui est due, une femme qui ne trouve son plaisir que dans la soumission aux caprices de l'homme. Mais c'est justement la femme en lui qui peut le sauver, car la femme en lui rend à l'homme qu'il est le désir de vivre libre et le désir de se libérer de la souffrance de l'après.

Alors le voilà qu'il hante les champs de la beauté de Jason plantant les dents du dragon, mais il est incapable de combattre les guerriers qui en naissent. Alors il rejette la beauté dans la ciel divin ou dans l'enfer diabolique, les deux à la fois, comme les deux faces d'une même monnaie. Le Jésus, fils de l'homme qui est allé dans les limbes chercher les païens méritant d'être sauvés, le petit Jésus qui n'est autre que son outil de virilité, marche sur l'eau et se noie, tiré par les pieds par le Satan Luciférique et cadavérique qui ne veut qu'une chose dans ce monde : rôti ses victimes au feu éternel de la culpabilité incontournable. Et le désir en revient et en devient plus fort et il se mue en ce moucheron enivré des vapeurs de la pissotière de l'hôtel, de cette tasse où il cherche à satisfaire son envie de jouissance sans la moindre attache. Les vespasiennes ne sont peut-être pas encore inventées mais tous les hôtels ont des pissotières largement ouvertes à ces jeunes gens et jeunes filles qui sont comme des distractions de voyageurs.

Mais ainsi de désir en satisfaction et de satisfaction en culpabilité il finit par perdre le sens du jour et de la nuit, par mourir dans son âme, perdre son âme, devenir une conche vide même du bruit de la mer. Il faut partir, mon ami, mon amour, se dit-il, et partir chez les fils de Cham pour y établir le commerce succulent et juteux des femmes pour européens blancs qui ne viennent en Afrique chercher que cela, la chair noire qu'ils peuvent ensuite rejeter comme si ce n'était qu'une caresse d'un chien ou main amie trouvée dans la lubricité d'un singe. Cela ne compte pas, n'est-il point ? Et son commerce d'esclaves que l'on dit généralement femmes, en oubliant qu'il y avait probablement autant d'hommes dans la horde concupiscente aux désirs lubriques des colonisateurs. La femme pour un épisode nocturne. L'homme pour un épisode diurne.

Pourquoi cette peur de l'homme noir dans la nuit ? Personne ne sait répondre à cette question. Pourquoi la femme noire pour la nuit ? Là non plus personne ne sait répondre. Une vieille vision venue des temps les plus anciens. L'homme noir est une bête qu'on peut exploiter tout le jour durant. La femme noire est une autre bête qu'on peut exploiter toute la nuit durant quand on ne voit plus qu'elle est noire. Il faut être absolument moderne dit-il.

Et ce fut bien là son malheur. Il revint d'Ethiopie avec la maladie honteuse que l'on sait pour mourir quasiment sur le quai de Marseille. Il abusa plus que nécessaire de ces chairs noires pour satisfaire son désir de plaisir et ensuite oublier sa frustration castratrice de l'après.

Etre un tel Asperger poétique est une calamité dans le monde moderne et il n'y a pour ces personnes que le plaisir de mourir le plus vite possible pour être enfin en rapport avec soi-même, posséder comme il le dit dans son dernier souffle, enfin, « la vérité dans une âme et un corps », les deux unis dans la mort qui enfin satisfait sa soif et sa faim d'une satiété éternelle.

Alors qu'en fait Léo Ferré ?

Il transforme ce long poème en une plainte, un cantique, une mélodie mortuaire qui se traîne dans quelque caverne mentale où résonne le glas de cette mort régressive qu'est la fuite d'Arthur Rimbaud au pays des enfants de Cham. Honte à toi Verlaine qui a utilisé ce jeune poète comme s'il était un crachoir au bar de l'hôtel où tu l'as réduit à n'être qu'un moucheron à la pissotière du dit hôtel où il disparaît dans le premier rayon de soleil. Et le monde nous prit un des plus grands poètes de notre temps qui ne vécut que si peu d'années qu'il n'eut guère le temps que de passer de larve à trépas sans jamais pouvoir déployer ses ailes. C'est dur d'être un autiste Asperger, et ils ne sont pas tous des Einstein même si tous le mériteraient. Mais la société ne saurait autoriser ces êtres mal polis et mal policés de s'immiscer dans les affaires sérieuses de la nation, ou de la religion d'ailleurs, car entre la nation et la religion il n'y a qu'un pas d'enfant de chœur. « La vie est la farce à mener par tous ! » et dès que tous sont l'objet de quoi que ce soit cela devient une farce parfois tragique, que ce soit un mariage pour tous ou une manif pour tous.

On voit ce qui attirait Léo Ferré, cet anarchiste mental et poétique dans ce texte qui ne fut enfin redécouvert que dans les deux fils d'André Breton le republièrent dans leur revue Poésie 1, n° 4, 1969, aux Editions de Saint Germain des Prés. Et le passage que Léo Ferré répète trois fois fait ainsi se joindre la sagesse sextine de Salomon, « cris, tambours, danse, danse, danse, danse » à la sagesse évangélique de la semaine sainte et septième de l'escrime, « Faim, soif, cris, danse, danse, danse, danse ! »

Dr Jacques COULARDEAU

Cody says

This will be brief.

While looking for a particular title for a friend in a box of old books today, I came across this. I hadn't read Rimbaud in, god, twenty+ years? As a painfully twee, *suis generis* teenager, I guess he was a bit of a hero: a drunken, libidinal monster who, well, got laid a whole hell of a lot more than I did (though I matched him drink for drink). It's dogeared and bears all the telltales of my youth, underlined passages included. The young ladies, shockingly, did not faint at the sight of the cardiganed hairfarmer reading a New Directions

paperback. Turns out they had every reason not to.

Now? Well, his youth shows. "The Drunken Boat" is absolutely gorgeous, and more than a few portions of *A Season in Hell* are still lovelylovelylovely:

-Sometimes, I'll see endless beaches in the skies above, filled with pale rejoicing nations. A great golden vessel, high above me, flutters vari-colored flags in the morning breeze. I invented every celebration, every victory, every drama. I tried to invent new flowers, new stars, new flesh, new tongues!

It's the absolutism of youth that I find a bit grating at points (and an awful lot of talk about parents), but that's just jealousy on my part. You can afford to be a walking, vomiting, ocean-guzzling behemoth at that age because you're going to live forever.

And then one day you wake up and your fucking coccyx hurts. Seriously, how the hell does that even happen?!?

David Haight says

Rimbaud's famed "letter of resignation" to the world of writing is a blistering journey through one man's soul as he struggles to come to terms with his art, the nature of love, morality, modernity and a whole host of other things. Ignore the fact that this was written nearly in the present tense, while Rimbaud was in the midst of his suffering (not after it had past), or that he had only been writing a few scant years or amazingly that he was barely out of his teens, was a genius and was never going to write again. Setting all of that aside when you read *A Season in Hell* you are still reading an astounding piece of literature. It is almost a hard piece to talk about. In it Rimbaud is really writing about the two things he had placed the most value on that he feels have failed him: love and art. He felt he was someone who could transgress not simply morality but reality. He was attempting through his art and his love of the poet Verlaine to reach some new level of consciousness or creative peak or what have you. And when he did not find what he was looking for everything he felt he was surpassing - morality, Christianity, good, evil, poetic norms, you name it - all came crashing down on him. He felt more tied down than ever to his earthly body (such is all the talk about his culture, his family ties, genetics, etc.) In the end he decides not to try again or at least not to try again in the same way but to just to quit, to quit love and art, which is exactly what he did. Read this piece it is intense and difficult and heartbreaking and even liberating.

Ted says

[In his confessional masterpiece, *A Season in Hell*, Arthur Rimbaud imparts the formula for the alchemical transformation of the soul, even as he simultaneously acknowledges the futility of acting upon it. No one could exact a more brutal analysis of this sublime scrap of illuminated consciousness than the poet himself. In his o

Sharon says

I was inspired to read Rimbaud after the editor of a poetry magazine referenced him in a critique of my youthful writing. The poems were a challenge and dark but I read them and found them to be better than much of what I was being taught in high school English class at the time (1967).

Rachel says

initially i wrote this off as the drunken masturbatory ramblings of a privileged white boy in france. which it is. but once i shook off my distaste for that particular trope, i kinda started liking his bad-ass shtick.

i really hated the intro although it's somewhat a necessity- some dude blathers on in a horribly biased way about rimbaud for like 15 pages. he fails to directly acknowledge hardships, queerness, blablablablabla, mostly trying to figure out how to get the whole of his body into rimbaud's ass. i definitely would have appreciated a short biography that seemed a little more reflexive and unslanted. the film *total eclipse* kinda helped correct some ideas i had about rimbaud. the movie itself is pretty mediocre, but worth it if you want to know more.

it reads kinda like a novel (a season in hell more than the drunken boat, one better than the other, respectively). rimbaud somehow matures by the end of a season in hell- all 17 years of him or whatever. the grumpiness i had from talk of wallowing in his own crapulence and fastuous self pity waned towards the end and i almost liked the guy. parts were almost kinda beautiful. almost kinda touched ya... fucking poetry. this shit is fucking french as all hell, too.

Maria says

I understand, and not knowing how to express myself without pagan words, I'd rather remain silent.

I am not going to lie to you. This is definitely not the kind of book I would randomly read. To be quite honest, I wasn't even aware of its existence until I found myself reading Patti Smith's *M Train* and watching Ed Harris' *Pollock* in the very same week. The title, *A Season in Hell*, was what caught my attention at first; then there was Patti Smith's dedication to the author and the quote Lee Krasner (Marcia Gay Harden), Pollock's wife, had on her wall.

This is definitely the kind of book that scares me; and yet I found myself buying a copy and reading it.

To whom shall I hire myself out? What beast should I adore? What holy image is attacked?
What hearts shall I break? What lies should I uphold? In what blood tread?

Rimbaud's writing *feels*... restless. At first there seems to be a sort of *chaos*, like he has happened upon a world that sees contradictions as twins in the same womb, sharing one beating heart, instead of distant

cousins. He seems to be drowning in an ocean of *everything* and *nothing*. You can almost hear his breathlessness, which seems tainted not by wonder, awe, but by adrenalin.

As someone who used to write *things*, I *think* I *recognize* the conflict. I would say that writing poetry is not something someone does lightly. Once you put something down, it truly feels like there's no turning back, no deleting. What's done is done. With Rimbaud, it's as if he's going through some sort of catharsis, like he has decided to write *everything*... and then be done with it for life. It's fascinating how he seems to have gone through all this process before even reaching the age of twenty. And his writing! It's quite extraordinary.

He made it twenty times, that lovers' promise. It was as vain as when I said to him: 'I understand you'.

I am sure I will have to revisit this book later on. First, though, I feel like I need to read more about the author and perhaps some of his other work as well.

Zebardast Zebardast says

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David Lentz says

After reading his *Illuminations*, I decided that I definitely wanted to encounter more of Arthur Rimbaud. I was intrigued by his creative proposition that in order to become engaged with existence the poet must place himself at variance with life. This positioning of the poet in surging counter-subjectivity to life is somewhat Hegelian in that it induces not only a creative synthesis but suffering as its essential Muse. While *A Season in Hell* is mature Rimbaud toward the end of his life, the *Drunken Boat* is clearly his finest individual poem. One discovers a symbolic clarity in this single work that summarizes his amazing thirst for life and the human condition in a brief poem of only 25 stanzas. This really is a magnificent work reminiscent of Blake with a style and a passion that transformed his genre and left him immortal. I earnestly invite you to read this telling, visually rich and important work by a major poet of immense talent. It will broaden the palette through which you perceive the brush strokes and colors of your life's impressions.

Frankie says

I really enjoyed *Illuminations* but not so much this one, perhaps for its prose aspect. Patti Smith's foreword is fun to read, though rather excessive in style and vulgarity. Keeping Rimbaud's amazing literary story in

mind, you can understand the "farewell message" quality. His strongest themes of sacrilegious denial and mourning for his lost love for Verlaine go hand in hand. Some of his imagery is brilliant, amazingly modern for its time, and yet some is immature and unfocused. He was 19 when he wrote this and his writing career nearly finished.

Already, on page 11, he proves himself the first of modernists, when he questions the progress of modernity itself. "Oh! Science! Everything has been revised. For the body and for the soul, – the viaticum, – there are medicine and philosophy, – old wives' remedies and popular songs rearranged." And later, on page 73, "Is it not because we cultivate fog! ... And drunkenness! and tobacco! and ignorance! ... Why a modern world if such poisons are invented[?!]"

Homosexuality is an underlying theme, though understandably subdued enough to slip through 18th century publishing. He compares the societal ban on his homosexuality to the hypocrisy of holding African tribesmen to European colonist law. He cites Joan of Arc and her denial of obeying a religion that wasn't hers.

He concludes the work, particularly in "Lightning Flash", with the theme of human labor, industrialization and productivity. He applies the same philosophy as with most of his societal theories – how can progress reward the lazy? This subject seems apt to end on, as his move to a non-literary career follows.

I really enjoyed "The Drunken Boat", also included in this edition, a sort of Melville-esque travel journal in verse. As in passages of *Illuminations*, the cadence and meter are translated well.

Alexis says

Pure, raw poetry.

Natalie Davis says

Rimbaud is the French poet version of the Russian author Dostoyevsky. Existential, wants to do good, feel good, but cannot. We are human, we try, we fail.

Victoria Nicholson says

The Drunken Boat is written from the viewpoint of a sunk sad ship that's led a exciting life. This poem protests the law of the market, slavery, war, etc. It is visionary. It has gorgeous imagery such as "the northern lights rising like a kiss to the sea" and "swells that batter like terrified cattle". Rimbaud a child prodigy ran away from home as a teen and lived on the streets including a experimental commune. When the commune was forced closed by elite French soldiers, these soldiers gangbanged Rimbaud. Arthur Rimbaud then became a lover to Paul Verlaine. Finally disillusioned he quit literature and had adventures in Africa. The Drunken Boat is my favorite poem by Rimbaud. I also like

quotes by him like "Loves got to be reinvented" and "I saw the hell of women ... I shall be free to express it in one body and one soul". Rimbaud got me interested in synesthesia and the blending of the arts. I appreciate the music of Vincent Van Gogh's brushstrokes because of Arthur Rimbaud.

Louis says

3-3.5/5

I'm not too keen on the translation here by Louise Varese or perhaps it's Rimbaud's style which, despite being ground-breaking, felt awkward and jarring. There is a desperate and aggressive tone early on in "A Season in Hell", which is not surprising given Rimbaud's age. Towards the end of this poem he lowers the angst and I enjoyed it more.

"The Drunken Boat" on the other hand is brilliant.

There is plenty to admire in Rimbaud's verse and I have a copy of "Illuminations" waiting to be read, but he isn't in the same league as Baudelaire.
