Rimbaud

Oxenhandler, Neal

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Introduction

2. Suzanne Briet, Madame Rimbaud/essai de biographie, 72.
3. Jean-Pierre Richard is an exception here, since he finds no depth in Rimbaud, only a dazzling surface: “Rimbaud rejects all manifestations of depth, and it is this which marks his real divorce from Baudelaire. His visions display themselves on a shallow screen; film-strips supremely thin and yet unbreakable for there is nothing behind them, neither volume nor abyss nor being nor nothingness nor god nor the infinite . . .” Poésie et profondeur, 240. But Richard is speaking of the iconic image-work here, not the subjective depth of poetic consciousness.
4. The recent book by Todd Dufresne, Against Freud: Critics Talk Back, gives some idea of the contradictions, confusions, and errors attributed to Freudianism by a mixed bag of critics. Because of the interview format, this book is a collection of opinions rather than closely argued positions.
6. On the uncanny see David Ellison, Ethics and Aesthetics in European Modernist Literature: From the Sublime to the Uncanny. Ellison gives a striking analysis of Freud's unconscious motivation in writing “Das Unheimliche” (“The Uncanny”): “If, to use Freud's own vocabulary, one might say that the conscious purpose of his essay ‘Das Unheimliche’ was to remove the uncanny from the domain of the aesthetic and reterritorialize it within the field of psychoanalytic theory, its unconscious motivation would seem to be the instantiation of the repetition compulsion in a literary model” (67).
7. The concept of “the splitting of the ego” in respect to perceived reality
originates with Janet, Breuer, and Freud; here, I have taken my theoretical reference from Melanie Klein’s reworking of the original thesis.


9. This was the priest who signed the death certificate. He was sixty years old in 1891. There was another, much younger priest at the hospital, but the comments reported by Isabelle are those of an older man.

10. André Guyaux, *Poétique du Fragment, essai; Illuminations, Texte établi et commenté par A.G.*

## Chapter 1

9. Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*.
10. This might be compared to Lacan’s view that the psyche is structured like a text or Derrida’s inverse position, that the text has features of the psyche, e.g., it is a weave of memory “traces.”
12. The concept of *dwelling* is taken from a prose poem by Hölderlin (“In Lieblicher Blaue . . . / In Lovely Blueness”), who writes, “Full of acquirements, but poetically man dwells on this earth.” Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), 600–1. Heidegger unpacks this seemingly simple phrase, first separating poetic existence from the busyness of modern life, and then giving it the attribute of an essential humanity that comes to us in the appeal of language. So it is that man/woman dwells and has his/her being in “the house of language.”
17. Formulae such as “Oedipus complex” or “primal scene” are part concept and part image, which allows them to be used simultaneously as figures and analytical terms.
19. In his essay on Rimbaud, Collot illustrates the figural nature of psychocritical language, as for instance in the following: “Dans le jeu des figures qui trament
son écriture, c’est le je qui est mis en jeu, et son histoire qui prend figure. In the play of figures which frames his writing, it is the I that is put in play, and its story that is figured” (160).

Chapter 2

1. “La Bouche d’ombre” is a weighty metaphysical poem by Victor Hugo.
2. Enid Starkie believed that Rimbaud had read books on alchemy and magic in the Charleville library. He certainly studied Michelet’s La Sorcière and Quinet’s Le Génie des Religions. Starkie finds evidence for familiarity with alchemy in his sonnet “Voyelles.” (There are many sources for this poem, but the most obvious is Baudelaire’s “Correspondances.”) Starkie comments on other more esoteric writers but there is no clear evidence that Rimbaud read them. Enid Starkie, Arthur Rimbaud, 159–78.
4. Lawler, Rimbaud’s Theatre of the Self, 130.
5. Citations are from the book of essays by Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, selected and translated by Albert Hofstadter.

Chapter 3

1. David Ellison writes about Freud’s invention of the uncanny as a theorization that is unconsciously literary; this observation supports the point made in chapter 1, about the figurative nature of many psychoanalytic formulae. See Ellison’s Ethics and Aesthetics in European Modernist Literature: From the Sublime to the Uncanny, 67.
8. The Freudian equation of phallus = eyes is based on the relation of both to sexual desire. In “Le Bateau ivre” the menacing eyes may represent the father’s phallus, both threat and object of intense infantile curiosity. Taken more literally, the prison scows actually existed at the time Rimbaud wrote his poem. They held the communards who had rebelled against the government.

Chapter 4

4. Lawler makes a connection between Mémoire and the draft of Une Saison en enfer. Rimbaud’s plan (never realized) was to see this exploration of memory as a near-death experience. He writes in the draft of Saison: “I found myself ripe for death and my weakness led me to the very boundaries of the world and of life” (Lawler, 57).
6. A splendid example of “vocalise” is Rachmaninoff’s Opus 34.
7. Leo Bersani, A Future for Astyanax, 242–43.
8. It can in fact be read as a version of the “negative Oedipus complex” in which the father’s departure leaves a dominant mother.
9. For both Freud and Klein, the ego has unconscious as well as conscious dimensions.
10. Collot finds a more positive vestige of the primal scene in “l’ébat des anges / the play of angels” in line five.
12. Blue eyes, he tells us in “Les Poètes de sept ans,” are eyes that lie. His own blue eyes had been called “shifty” by Verlaine’s wife after her first meeting with Rimbaud. The association of yellow with marriage suggests the taint of cuckoldry.

**Chapter 5**

1. The second mystery, which is discussed in the appendix, concerns Rimbaud’s deathbed confession. The only evidence for this is a letter from his sister, Isabelle, a less than trustworthy witness.
4. The triolet is a fixed form, made up of eight lines. The first line repeats after the third, the first two after the sixth.
5. This extensively revised poem has had three titles: “Tortured Heart,” “Clown’s Heart,” and “Stolen Heart.” I use Verlaine’s copy, the one chosen by Suzanne Bernard in her edition.
6. “Ils font des fresques / they make frescoes” is sometimes read by translators to mean obscene graffiti; but to anyone who has experienced barracks life, the pantomime of sexual acts is more plausible. No soldier would incur the sergeant’s wrath by defacing the barracks walls.


**Chapter 6**

1. Fourier published *L’Harmonie universelle* in 1804.

2. Jules Michelet, author of *L’Amour / Love* (1858) had two great loves. The first reconciled him to his mother; the second reconciled him to the Orient. In both respects Michelet was important for Rimbaud.

3. There were many indiscriminate killings, though orders were given to kill only activist Communards (especially foreigners), deserters from the army, and men bearing arms.


**Chapter 7**


4. This is Klein’s response to the unanswerable question about human evil. Marx thought it was man’s alienation from his work; Freud blamed the trauma of birth. Rimbaud finds it in a child’s boredom.

5. Leo Bersani comments on both the painterly and theatrical framing of the *Illuminations*: “The fabulous atmosphere of Rimbaud’s visions is, for example, heightened by Rimbaud’s emphasis on their theatrical nature; they are often presented as acts or episodes in some extravagant ‘play’ of the imagination. . . . The *Illuminations* should be seen entirely, and at once; our eyes should immediately grasp the entire picture.” “Rimbaud’s Simplicity,” in *A Future for Astyanax*, 252, 253.

6. The “colored plates” may be colored lithographs or the “planches de couleur” from which the lithos are printed. Or possibly the reference is to “enluminures” (as in “illuminated manuscripts”).

**Chapter 8**

1. This group of poets and artists, including Verlaine and Rimbaud, is pictured in the famous painting by Fantin-Latour, “Coin de la Table / Corner of the
Table.” Rimbaud attacked a certain Carjat, who threw him out of the meeting for punctuating a poetry recitation with the word “merde.” His weapon was a sword-cane, and he wounded Carjat in the wrist and the groin.

2. The classical name for abreaction is catharsis, that purification/purgation which has both medical and religious connotations. In Aristotle, the homeopathic notion of curing a disorder by inducing that disorder in a controlled way is applied to the symbolic evocation of pity and fear and their unbinding through the tragic action. This is the same process of tension and release clinically described as abreaction.


4. Monts-Rocheux is a play on the name of Rimbaud’s village, “Roche.”


6. “Dévotion” is the third poem with an affective title.


8. Rimbaud also uses this device of personification in “Après le déluge” where the flowers gaze wide-eyed at a brand new world.

Chapter 9

1. Another way to read this conclusion is in terms of the pleasure/punishment pairing that is basic to psychoanalysis. Searl speaks of “better than reality” fantasies vs. those that are “worse than reality.” They inevitably occur together. (N. Searl, “The Flight to Reality,” 280). In such a case the “you” would be Rimbaud himself.

2. The imperial prince, son of Louis-Napoleon, was born in 1856, the year after the International Exposition where Hortense Schneider achieved her greatest success in the role of the Duchess of Gérolstein. He died on June 1, 1879 at the age of twenty-three, killed by Zulu warriors while serving with the British Army in Africa.

3. See my analysis of “Conte” (chapter 10) for a discussion of “monstrous” fantasies.

Chapter 10

1. From the record album by Roberta Flack, Killing Me Softly (New York: Atlantic Recording Corp., 1973). The title song is: “Killing Me Softly with His Song.”


3. André Guayaux, Poétique du fragment, 205.

4. Lawler attributes the discovery of the relation between Baudelaire’s prose poem and “Conte” to Hackett in his edition of the Oeuvres poétiques of Rimbaud.

5. Fanciulle is involved in a conspiracy to depose the Prince. Having learned
of the conspiracy, the Prince must inevitably punish the conspirators with death.

6. The *chassé-croisé* is an eighteenth-century dance, where the partners pass alternately in front of and behind each other.

7. These lines from “Délire I: Vierge folle” have the ring of truth:

   Plusieurs nuits, son démon me saisissant, nous nous roulions, je luttais
   avec lui!—Les nuits, souvent ivre, il se poste dans des rues ou dans des
   maisons, pour m’épouvanter mortellement.—“On me coupera vraiment
   le cou; ce sera dégoûtant.” Oh! ces jours où il veut marcher avec l’air
   du crime!

   Several nights, his demon grabbing me, we rolled on the ground, I
   wrestled with him!—Many nights, often drunk, he hid in the streets or
   in houses, to scare me to death.—“He’ll cut my throat; how disgusting.”
   Oh! those days when he wants to lurk like a criminal!

   Eva Rosenblum, 155. Lagache borrows the term “looking-glass self” from the
   pragmatist Charles H. Cooley.


**Chapter 11**

1. Stephen A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History

2. Here I am following the analysis of Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language
   of Psycho-analysis*, 298–99.


**Chapter 12**

1. Social romanticism was precursor to the humanitarian socialism of Michelet.
   Arthur Mitzman speaks of Saint-Simonian ideals and values: “A secular relig-
   ion of humanity, in which artists would take the place of priests, would replace

2. Sigmund Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” in *Complete Psychological Works

3. Freud’s view of the relationship between super-ego and ego-ideal shifted
   between one of independence to one of part to whole.


   blum, 219.

6. Heidegger speaks of the “unshieldedness” of vision, “the innermost of the
   inner,” as opposed to the “presence of calculated objects” in modern metaphysics.
Only with this poet’s vision does “the widest orbit of beings become present in the
heart’s inner space.” Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 124–25.

7. François Claudel, “Rimbaud chez Claudel ou une visite à Brangues,” Rim-
baud Vivant 45: 117.

Chapter 13

2. “For Heidegger, the site or essential place of language is the place of a
‘gathering into Ereignis,’ the locus or manifestation . . . to the rift of the Differing,
the articulating ‘threshold’ which intimately conjoins ‘world’ (here a name for the
four-fold mirror play of presencing) and ‘things,’ while also keeping them strictly
parted. . . . This conjoining yet parting threshold is pain, because in its implacable
‘stoniness,’ it repudiates the human desire for comprehensive unification and

3. These remarks on Heidegger are inspired by Poetry, Language, Thought,
translated and commented by Albert Hofstadter.
4. This is called “narcissistic ego enrichment” by the Encyclopedia of Psycho-
analysis, ed. Ludwig Eidelberg, M.D., 327.
6. Alcohol gave the impetus to Verlaine’s madness. Delahaye writes: “Rim-
baud me disait de lui: ‘Très gentil, mais . . . s’il est ivre, inutile de discuter, parce
qu’alors il tire son couteau et on n’a plus qu’à ficher le camp . . . ’” (“Rimbaud
told me: ‘He’s very nice, but . . . if he’s drunk, it’s useless to talk because then he
pulls out his knife and all one can do is scram . . . ’”). Ernest Delahaye, Rimbaud:
L’Artiste et l’être moral, 158.
7. Rimbaud uses the English word “comforts” in the original.
8. The spelling “inquestionable” with one “n” rather than two is another
anglicism.

Chapter 14

1. Heidegger’s reply to an inquiry by R. Munier, “Aujourd’hui Rimbaud,”
Archives les Lettres Modernes N. 160: 12, 14 (emphasis in original)
2. Marjorie Perloff, The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage, 66. First
3. Introduction, The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger, ed. Charles Gui-
gnon, 17.
4. From “la lettre du voyant / the letter of the seer.”
Critical Reader, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Harrison Hall, 256.
6. Martin Heidegger, Off the Beaten Track, trans. J. Young and K. Haynes,
51–52, 63.
7. The term is from Dorothea Frede, “The Question of Being,” in The Cam-
bridge Companion to Heidegger, 46. Heidegger states in Being and Time that being
itself is presence; but he also rejects the Aristotelian theory of time as “a manifold of Nows” since time involves a “having been” and an “about to be” and thus contains past and future. Frederick A. Olafson, “The Unity of Heidegger’s Thought,” in The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger, 103.


Chapter 15

1. He had worked at the Hôtel de Ville during the Commune and fraternized with the communards, but was in no danger.

2. This violence was not something new. When drunk, Verlaine was always prone to violence. He physically abused his wife and on at least four occasions tried to maim or kill his mother.

3. The best proof of Verlaine’s influence is Rimbaud’s poetry. Of special interest is James Lawler’s study of “Dévotion,” a poem long considered impenetrable. Lawler shows how Verlaine’s name, his persona, his poems are secretly woven into this verbal tapestry. “The Poet as Lover,” Rimbaud’s Theatre of the Self, 191–99.


5. “The ‘nothing’ with which anxiety brings us face to face, unveils the nullity by which Dassein [human consciousness], in its very basis is defined; and this basis is itself as thrownness into death.” Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, 356.

6. The psychoanalytic sources culled in this book are, by and large, based on the naturalism of Freud, which views the subject as “a self-encapsulated center of action” (Guignon, 219). But Rimbaud’s own psychology appears free from such a restrictive bias.

7. François Mauriac writes of Baudelaire, “Down to his dying day, he listened to his poor soul and he confessed it. The flowers of evil are the flowers of sin, of repentance, of remorse and penitence.” “Charles Baudelaire the Catholic,” in Baudelaire, ed. Henri Peyre, 30.

8. Natural law (which ruled Rimbaud an outlaw) is synonymous with the substance ontology challenged, undermined, and subverted by Heidegger.

9. Baudelaire’s relationship with his mother was complex, but it included a period of mutual affection shortly after the death of his father. The child was six years old. Recalling this at forty he writes, “There was a phase in my childhood of passionate love for you . . . for me that was the blissful time of motherly affection . . . it was probably a bad time for you. But I was always living in you;
you were mine alone, at one and the same time my companion and someone I idolized.” From F. W. J. Hemmings, Baudelaire the Damned: A Biography, 11.

10. Here again is a Heideggerean theme, the “reassumption” of our heritage that becomes possible once we have discarded the posturing of inauthenticity. See Piotr Hoffman’s “Death, time, history: Division II of Being and Time,” in The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger, 212–213.

11. The three surviving sketches are: “A Samarie, plusieurs ont manifesté leur foi en lui/In Samaria, several showed their faith in him”; “L’air léger et charmant de la Galilée” / “The cool and charming air of Galilee”; “Bethsaida, la piscine des cinq galéries / Bethsaida, the pool with five ledges.”

12. Some time during the fall of 1872 Rimbaud wrote to his mother, informing her of Verlaine’s legal difficulties and his own involvement. Petitfils writes: “Mme Rimbaud received the news as an attack on the honor of her name. Her son involved in a legal case, and suspected of some abominable vice . . .” (162). It seems likely that Mme Rimbaud understood the nature of the relationship between the two poets but refused to admit it.

13. It was Verlaine himself who invented the anagram for his 1886 article in La Vogue. As for Les Poètes maudits (first ed. 1884), it contained one of his many tributes to Rimbaud, along with eulogies of Corbière, Mallarmé, Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, etc.

14. Heidegger distinguishes between the ordinary guilt of minor omissions and failures and the ontological guilt that arises from Dasein’s lack of power over its “thrownness,” i.e., the inevitability of death. But the “ordinary guilt” that we experience daily is colored by the awareness of that ultimate “punishment” we know awaits us all.

15. Lawler gives an account of the differing views of the Saison held by Valéry and Claudel in his Rimbaud’s Theatre of the Self, 218.

16. Again, Rimbaud uses the English word “comfort.”

17. Loewald asks this as a question: “Could sublimation be both a mourning of lost original oneness and a celebration of oneness regained?” Hans W. Loewald, M.D., Sublimation: Inquiries into Theoretical Psychoanalysis, 81.

Appendix

1. The hospital has been rebuilt since I saw it and none of the original “pavillon des malades payants / pavilion of paying patients,” where Rimbaud was interned, remains.

2. “Synovitis” is inflammation of the knee joint. It may have been caused by collision with a tree, during a wild horseback ride in Africa. “Hydarthrose” is, according to Charles Nicholl, “an obsolete synonym for arthritis” (286). Nicholl remarks that Rimbaud does not use the word “neoplasm”—meaning cancer—in this, his first letter from the hospital in Marseilles.

3. It is true that his complete name was “Jean-Nicolas-Arthur Rimbaud,” but he never used the “Jean-Nicolas.” I see this as a sign of the hallucinatory state (attributable to both morphine and pain) in which he lived during the last months of his life.
4. It is ironic that the one poem of Rimbaud’s read by many college students is “Le Dormeur du val / Sleeper in the Valley,” a pastoral poem based on the sight of a young soldier, lying dead on a battlefield of the Franco-Prussian War. He seems only to sleep, not to have irrevocably crossed the horizon of temporality.


6. Claudel describes Berrichon as follows: “He was an extraordinary fellow, big belly, bald, short, with a beard that hung down to his knees; Berrichon looked like one of those ceramic gnomes that Germans put in their gardens.” Lefrère, 1186. Paterné Berrichon (real name: Pierre Dufour) wrote to Vitalie Rimbaud asking for her daughter’s hand in marriage before he had even met Isabelle. He saw that with Isabelle he would acquire joint rights to all the writings of her brother.


9. Mircea Eliade comments on rites of initiation as practiced, for instance, in Africa. After the rigors of initiation (solitude, scarification, burns, thirst, and hunger), the catechumen meets his “tutelary spirit,” who introduces him to the spiritual realm. Mircea Eliade, Birth and Rebirth, 67.
