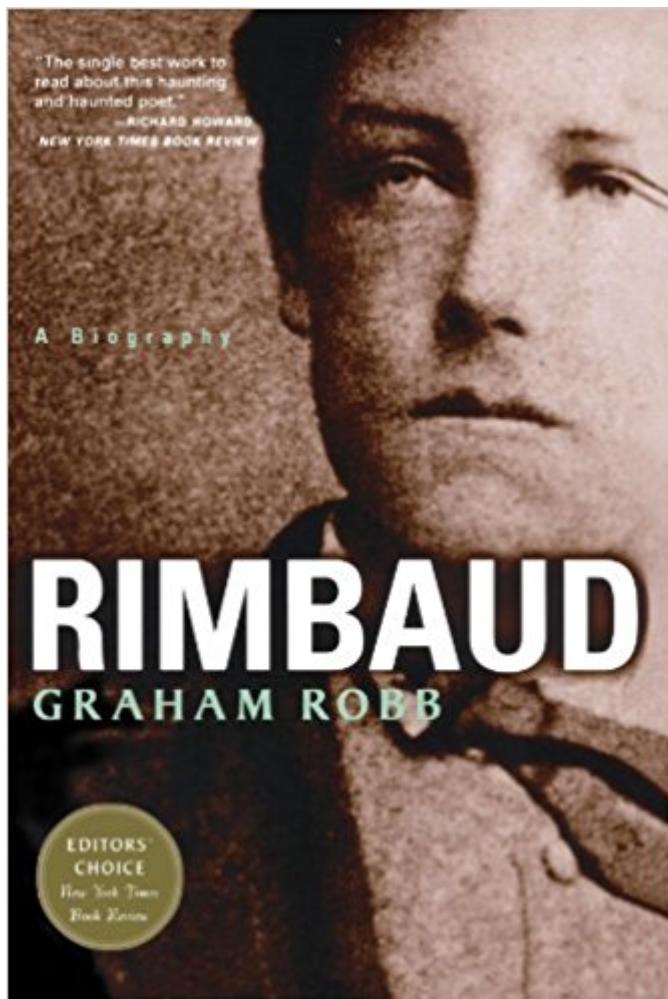


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Rimbaud: A Biography



Synopsis

"Superb...the single best work to read about this haunting and haunted poet." —Richard Howard, *New York Times Book Review* Unknown beyond the avant-garde at the time of his death, Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) has been one of the most destructive and liberating influences on twentieth-century culture. During his lifetime he was a bourgeois-baiting visionary, and the list of his known crimes is longer than the list of his published poems. But his posthumous career is even more astonishing: saint to symbolists and surrealists; poster child for anarchy and drug use; gay pioneer; a major influence on artists from Picasso to Bob Dylan. 16 pages of b/w illustrations.

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Customer Reviews

When he was not yet 17, Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91) electrified Paris's literary society with the incendiary poems that later made him the guiding saint of 20th-century rebels, from Pablo Picasso to Jim Morrison. "A Season in Hell," "The Drunken Boat," and the prose poems of *Illuminations* were epochal works that changed the nature of an art form--and yet their author abandoned poetry at age 21 and spent the rest of his short life as a colonial adventurer in Arabia and Africa. "He was writing in a void," explains British scholar Graham Robb. "In 1876, most of Rimbaud's admirers either were still in the nursery or had yet to be conceived." Hardly surprising, since the poet was a difficult and frequently unpleasant person to actually know. The Parisian poets who took him under their wing soon discovered that Rimbaud was ungrateful, crude, and as scornful of their precious verse as he was of the Catholic Church, bourgeois proprieties, and everything else his disapproving mother held

dear. Rimbaud's stormy affair with Paul Verlaine estranged the older poet from his wife and, eventually, from most of his artistic friends as well. In Robb's depiction, the poet possessed from his earliest youth a restless, searching intellect that permitted no compromise with convention nor tenderness for others' weaknesses. The author doesn't soften Rimbaud's "savage cynicism" or gloss over his frequently obnoxious behavior, yet Robb arouses our admiration for "one of the great Romantic imaginations, festering in damp, provincial rooms like an intelligent disease." Like Robb's excellent biographies of Hugo and Balzac, this sharp, subtle, unsentimental portrait is both erudite and beautifully written. --Wendy Smith --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this robust biography, Robb (Balzac; Victor Hugo) contemplates the life of Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) as if the French poet/ vagabond's deeds were those of a mythic hero. Rimbaud's every impulse is viewed as the expression of a coherent, wildly innovative vision of the world; his artistic accomplishments are assumed to have redeemed his devious and destructive tendencies. Thus, when the academically gifted Rimbaud produced other students' homework for a price, the burgeoning genius was operating "a parasitic service industry feeding on the education system," which Robb posits as a "splendid achievement for a child of fifteen." When Rimbaud spread his own excrement on the table of a Parisian caf? as if it were plaster for a fresco, he was making the critical point that "flat canvas and oils could not compete with the three-dimensional kaleidoscope of reality." And when discussing the poet's use of blackmail to secure the attentions of his lover, poet Paul Verlaine, Robb dryly notes that Rimbaud "never allowed conventional morality to ruin a practical arrangement." The author seldom admits ambiguity. He is most effective in his effort to blend Rimbaud's early life as a bohemian social deviant with his subsequent 16-year career in Africa as a fledgling anthropologist and explorer. Rimbaud's childhood wanderings through the French countryside matured into caravans across the deserts. His youthful willingness to venture the unmapped lifestyle of the homosexual prepared him to encounter the exotic cultures of Abyssinia. His literary works, from "Le Bateau ivre" to "Voyelles" and "Une Saison en enfer," invariably focused on fluctuation, on moments of departure. According to Robb, these poems were crowbars that pried Rimbaud loose from family, tradition and society. (Oct.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The first thing one needs to know is that Rimbaud is famous both because of his work and his life (one of the most amazing and strange ever lived - Rimbaud makes Hemmingway a simple poser in

questions such as courage and adventurousness). Let us speak first of his poetry. > Rimbaud's Poetry
Rimbaud is considered one of the fathers of modern poetry. He was one of the first writers to use disjointed and apparently unrelated metaphors and similes, and strange and kinesthetic imagery. He was also one of the first poets to use free verse and prose poetry. However, judging Rimbaud as the father of modern poetry is almost a crime, keeping in view the sloppy and deeply obscure state of contemporary poems and poetry: it's a crime perpetrated against Rimbaud to call him the father of such abortions. Rimbaud was a prodigy: at about 12, 13 years of age he showed an extraordinary ability to write poetry, in both French and Latin. His school and his teachers were all proud of him: he won several poetry competitions and his abilities were developing at a breathtaking speed. By studying the Latin classics, Rimbaud learned to master all the classical meters, how to stress syllables in the classical way and the traditional construction of metaphors and similes. His studies of French and European literature familiarized him with the rhyme, and his knowledge of assonance and alliteration was brilliant. Thus, one can realize that Rimbaud, before innovating the traditional verse, completely dominated the classical poetry: all the poetic techniques and wisdom of poets past were known by him. But the majority of writers influenced by him (As Allen Ginsberg and the beatnik generation, and the pseudo-poet Jim Morrison) never bothered to dissect the basic and classic skeleton of the poetic art that was calcified by generations of poets thorough the centuries: they readily go for the non-fixed forms, for free experimentation (without the basis, without the vertebral spine), and thus produced only mediocre works. As for the poetry of Rimbaud, it is one of the most memorable I know: his bizarre and aggressive images, and his constant exotic/toxic perfume have hardly been equaled. It needs to be understood that the poetic production of Rimbaud in French occurred between the ages of 15 and 22 years old: namely, his work has never failed to disolor that youthful freshness, that taste and relish in the weird, in the colorful, in the metaphors and similes created to catch the reader's attention by the nose and pulling it to them. Rimbaud's work is constantly screaming at you from the pages, howling and begging for your attention: it's like a firework exhibition - a barrage of flames, sounds and luminosities. Rimbaud always keeps this delight in shocking the reader and waking (actually plucking) the dormant surprise that was rooted deep inside its rooms on the brain (you know: it is not easy to surprise experienced readers). It must be said, however, that Rimbaud is not one of the main great poets of the world. In reality, he is a poet for writers, a poet for specific readers. His work does not lend itself to all tastes. Rimbaud writes in a monotone; he has only one style (actually a blend of two styles): the weird and wonderful, the strangely aggressive caricatures and the suave lyrical beauties of the nature. Let's compare Rimbaud with Shakespeare (the greatest poet of all time): Shakespeare wrote in several

different styles, and exhibited a multitude of speeches, from the simple and routine - like colloquial passages of Twelfth Night: "Out o 'tune, sir: ye lie. Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale? " - to the most sublime (the great metaphorical passages such as this excerpt from Macbeth: "his virtues / Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against / The deep damnation of his taking-off ; / And pity, like a naked newborn babe, / Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed / Upon the sightless couriers of the air, / Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye, / That tears Shall drown the wind."). Rimbaud, however, always weaves poems with a mesh of strange and disjointed metaphors: it is as if he always wrote as the fool of King Lear. While Shakespeare is a great feast, with different dishes and a plethora of different flavors, Rimbaud is a extremely strong liqueur, a glass of hallucinogenic liquid pepper that not everyone has the stomach to support. Here, for example, is his biographer Graham Robb speaking about the satirical aspects of Rimbaud's poetry:"The Rimbaldian human being is a repellent piece of animated vegetation, a poxy assemblage of femurs, sinciputs, scapulas and hypogastria, a prey to cephalalgia, clottings, fluxions, rickets, nits and nasal mucus - a monster in the shape of a philosophical question-mark: if Man was made in the image of God, then what must God be like?..."With its neologisms and barbarisms, its slang words jarring with the drawing-room syntax, Rimbaud's new idiom was dramatic proof that social distinctions in the new France were as virulent as ever. It was also an expression of his hybrid roots: urban and rural, bourgeois and peasant."Of course, there is the other side of Rimbaud: the one that writes lyrical and strange songs, primeval hymns about the woods, about the sea and its "starry archipelagos

I have read and enjoyed several books by Graham Robb, but this is still my favorite. If you are a fan of Arthur Rimbaud--or even if you have never read his work at all--this biography provides a fascinating glimpse into the life and times of this genius poet and vagabond.Rimbaud's adventurous existence was every bit as engrossing as his visionary poems--and the author expertly traces his life from young French bohemian to gunrunning explorer in Africa. While this is the only Rimbaud bio I have read, I can't say I would want or need to read another. The author's style is fluid and his research thorough.To read these pages is truly to go back in time to walk the boulevards of 19th century Paris with Rimbaud and Verlaine. You may just find it illuminating.

... because we have Enid Starkie, who wrote the definitive work, even if more information about Rimbaud's career after he renounced poetry has become available since she wrote.If you haven't read Starkie, okay, then read Robb. He writes better prose, which is certainly a mark in his favor.

But don't read both unless you like a double portion of the same stuff.

I won't bother reviewing the book extensively, because the other reviews and the summary does a great job, but I would like to add a few thoughts. When I was a child I heard about *A Season In Hell*. I first heard about Rimbaud in an utterly forgettable movie, but now I must remember it because it introduced me to the greatest Poet who ever lived. I read the poem and I didn't understand much of it, but what I did understand is that it was hauntingly beautiful, and wonderfully depraved. Almost twenty years later I still don't understand all of the poem, and my opinion has not changed. Still I didn't know much about the man except that he faked his own death. I read bits of information, part of a biography that was poorly written, and I sadly gave up on this story for years. When a friend recommended this book, not for Rimbaud, he accidentally got it in a book of the month club and decided to read it, but because it was a great book. To which I wholeheartedly agree. It is more than just a book about a genius and a poet, but it is a wonderfully written book filled with dry humor and insightful commentary. Best of all for the lovers of literature and fact, this book dispels many, many myths about Arthur Rimbaud while still keeping true to the demonic young man and his disreputable behavior and youth fueled fury. I will say that sometimes the book felt more like a love letter, and the author did hold back a bit, but only rarely and only in words not in thought...Read this book because it is a great book about a great man.*WARNING* This book will make you think, and may even make your life seem small in comparison! It is a great motivator for all of us with wandering spirits, fanciful dreams, but sedentary lives.

I have always been fascinated with the life of Rimbaud but could never connect with translations of the poetry. Because of this book I am finding the guidance and the tools and the inspiration, at 78, to finally make those connections. You might say it's about time. Not a moment to lose! ABJr.

I had search a long time for a good Rimbaud biography, so when I stumbled across Graham Robb's book: *RIMBAUD*, I thought it couldn't hurt to lift the cover and take a peek. What I found was a treasure-trove! Graham Robb obviously took great care in writing this, a biography of someone who forever changed the face of poetry. I am now looking forward to reading Robb's work on Victor Hugo, for if it is written with the same skill, which Robb affords to the biography of Arthur Rimbaud, I know it will be brilliant.

Absolutely, without a doubt, 100% the best biography I have ever read (and reread for that matter).

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