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TITLE PAGE

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MADNESS AND MODERNITY IN RIMBAUD'S *UNE SAISON EN ENFER*

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to examine in detail the structure and internal development of *Une Saison en enfer*, Arthur Rimbaud's diary composed in prose poetry. The paper argues that the collection articulates the experience of madness as an integral part of the author's sojourn in a psychological Hades. At the same time it sees a journey towards a personal definition and sense of modernity as the means by which the victim ultimately extracts himself from his hell. Drawing on some of the key work on *Une Saison en enfer* by important Rimbaudians, the article seeks to illuminate and explain the central artistic tension in the collection between assertiveness and hesitation, certainty and doubt. Placing Rimbaud in the context of other writers who have explored alternative visions of Hell, the paper examines Rimbaud's engagement with and rejection of traditional Western systems of belief and his fascination with oriental philosophies. The statement "Il faut être absolument moderne" thus represents a culmination, a point of arrival, an emergence from hell.

KEYWORDS

hell
modernity
madness
diary
certainty
doubt

MADNESS AND MODERNITY IN RIMBAUD'S *UNE SAISON EN ENFER*

At the start of 'Délires II' in *Une Saison en enfer* Rimbaud refers to "l'histoire d'une de mes folies".(1) While this clearly acts as a summary of the artistic period revisited and derided in that fifth section of the "carnet de damné", it is an expression which could be applied more widely to the collection as a whole. Running through *Une Saison en enfer* is a preoccupation with the state of madness which is seen as an integral part of the experience of the damned soul in its period in this emotional and psychological Hades. Yet this recurring evocation of insanity is conducted in close association with a stunning clarity and conviction which leads to a host of trenchant and apparently unchallengeable assertions from the first person narrator. That the "je" is therefore a focus for conflicting impulses, for a battle between certainty and confusion is a determining artistic principle which becomes quickly apparent to the reader. It is possible to go further and suggest that in *Une Saison en enfer* we find a multiplicity of competing voices and that this phenomenon is intimately related to the presentation of insanity in this tormented diary. There is a movement between calmness and agitation, clarity of thought and purpose and a contradictory voice which rejects all definitive thoughts and beliefs. The reader moves through a disturbing range of emphatic statements, disconcerting hesitations and outright negations and refutations. It is as if *Une Saison en enfer* is Rimbaud's book of philosophy but a credo that only seems to find assurance and direction in its very final section 'Adieu'. In the preceding eight sections we find a tortured soul at odds with itself and working its way through a range of ideas, belief systems, religious doctrines, scientific trends and philosophical positions as it tries to move closer to a formulation of its own identity and stance. Paradox is the touchstone of this collection, reflected in its very title which posits a temporary stay in what has always been taken to be a permanent state.

The opening section of the work stands as a retrospective on a previous period of artistic and intellectual activity, a period from which the writer is now taking his distance. This is a defining feature of Rimbaud's poetry for no poet is more apt to adopt a position only to disown it, to espouse a style or thought process only to move rapidly forward to a new outlook and form of expression. (2) Often spoken of as the "impatient" genius, Rimbaud can be seen as a restless author in that he never seems to settle in one posture for very long. It would appear that this restlessness is key to an understanding of *Une Saison en enfer*. So it is that statements like "je me suis armé contre la justice", "Je me suis enfui" and "Je me suis allongé dans la boue" (3) in this opening section appear to establish a strong central identity for the first person narrator – rebellious, solitary, recalcitrant. Yet this impulse towards revolt, individualism and exhibitionism does not fully satisfy him and neither does his immersion in "le crime" and "la folie". Indeed he talks of ending it all in dissatisfaction before being lured back to earlier ways only to find that they are still illusory in their promise of salvation through charity. The suicidal impulse emerges regularly in the course of the collection and is intimately related to Rimbaud's engagement with insanity. With the intervention of the voice of the devil the narrator finds himself deflated and reduced to pleading with Satan for a more indulgent attitude in return for "ces quelques hideux feuillets de mon carnet de damné". (4) It is interesting that the section ends with a reference to the absence of "facultés descriptives ou

instructives” (5), this suggesting a lack of confidence on the part of the author in any knowledge or wisdom he may have or in any philosophical position he may adopt. *Une Saison en enfer* is all about uncertainty, contradiction and paradox as the stumbling narrative voice moves erratically towards some kind of coherence and resolution. Rimbaud’s *livre païen* or *livre nègre* presents “all the antitheses, antinomies and dualisms which are inherent in the condition of Western man.” (Hackett 1981) (6)

The tension between affirmativeness and tentativeness established in this introductory statement sets the tone for what follows. ‘Mauvais sang’ represents a sustained endeavour on the part of the poet to understand himself through an exploration of his unconventional lineage. The second section in the whole, ‘Mauvais sang’ is vital to the overall structure of the work. Its opening lines evoke ancestry in almost exclusively pejorative terms – “maladresse”, “barbare”, “ineptes”, “tous les vices” and so on. One would be tempted to say that Rimbaud is depicting himself as the prisoner of a contaminated family line were it not for the fact that so many apparent negatives are often for him positive qualities. Vices can be redefined as virtues – the Vierge folle talks of the Epoux infernal doing this in ‘Délires I’ (7) – so that one is left poised ambiguously between an acceptance and a rejection of this past. He may well revel in being of “mauvais sang” but one senses that this iconoclast who can state trenchantly “J’ai horreur de tous les métiers” (8) is not at all sure of who he really is. A striking feature of this second section and of *Une Saison* as a whole is its historical orientation as the poet attempts to evaluate periods in history, developments in human thought, industrial and scientific revolutions and other comparable movements. One agrees in this sense that « *Une Saison en enfer* qui est la relation d’un combat spirituel, est aussi l’histoire de l’homme occidental moderne qui, se libérant de Dieu, essaie, en surmontant la peur, la nostalgie et l’angoisse, de se créer une nouvelle foi centrée dans l’homme même. » (Davies 1975) (9) He casts himself as a ubiquitous spirit capable of unending metamorphoses (“manant”, “lépreux”, “reître”) but never settling into one role for any length of time. He recognizes his isolation, his lack of a familial niche and his ability to emerge recreated every time but this brings him no closer to an understanding of himself. This lack of a fixed identity must surely run counter to the apparent assurance of statements such as “c’est oracle, ce que je dis”, “Je suis de race inférieure de toute éternité” and “je suis maudit, j’ai horreur de la patrie”. (10) All of this turmoil is conveyed in a frenetic and agitated style, liberally sprinkled with exclamatory moments and full of unanswered questions. Wrestling with concepts of science and religion, Rimbaud imagines departures, returns, renewals and reincarnations in a desperate attempt to establish coherence and certainty. Alas, the outcome in ‘Mauvais sang’ is a vertiginous play of fragments, of splinters of “certainty” immediately offset by expressions of doubt:

A qui me louer? Quelle bête faut-il adorer ? Quelle
sainte image attaque-t-on ? Quels cœurs briserai-je ? Quel
mensonge dois-je tenir ? – Dans quel sang marcher ? (11)

This sequence illustrates excellently how the apparently assured narrative voice is undercut by competing voices with unanswerable questions, doubts, issues of

allegiance, an iconoclastic impulse and an inability to define truth. It is also striking how intimations of violence run through this sequence (“attaque”, “briseraï”, “sang”) and it is certainly the case that *Une Saison en enfer* as a collection is characterized by constant suggestions of both physical and psychological violence. “Le rythme de la *Saison en enfer* est celui d’un trépignement immobile, d’une frénésie ressassante et toujours en lutte contre elle-même. » (Richard, 1955) (12)

The Latin expression “*De profundis Domine*” (13) which appears in the middle of ‘Mauvais sang’ is very revelatory in a number of ways. It suggests a speaking in tongues redolent of Babel and again indicative of insanity; it shows how the narrator is torn between pleas to Satan and prayers to God; it underlines his sense of being in the pit of Hell whence he cries for succour; and it illustrates how tones, registers and idioms can change at any moment in this diary of the damned. These mutations are defined by spaces in the manuscript which show that a lengthy section like ‘Mauvais sang’ is a tapestry of subsections so that after the agitation of “*de profundis*” we have a more measured sequence where the poet documents his affection for “le forçat intraitable” and revealingly places him above the saint in a characteristically Rimbaudian inversion of normal hierarchies. The words “tu ne sais ni où tu vas ni pourquoi tu vas” (14) seem to epitomize the directionless nature of the collection as a whole and this is allied to an underscoring of the narrator’s isolation as a prophet not understood by the “foule exaspérée” who attend his execution. In the midst of this nightmarish image of being burned like Joan of Arc, he can still trot out more of the assertions that are such a feature of *Une Saison* – “Je n’ai jamais été de ce peuple-ci; je n’ai jamais été chrétien”; je suis de la race qui chantait dans le supplice”. (15) The crisis of self-knowledge (“me connais-je?”) is then projected through the remarkable sequence where he talks of the “nègre” which presents him as the only true negro and leads to thoughts of himself as a negro in Africa who will be subjected to the missionary zeal of the disembarking white colonists. The “fausse conversion” follows where, in a manner utterly typical of the collection as a whole, Rimbaud seems to accept a belief system only to reject it outright. This paragraph near the end of ‘Mauvais sang’ seem to parody the clarity, calmness and happiness of the Christian convert who appears to be delivered from all pain and confusion:

La raison m’est née. Le monde est bon. Je bénirai la vie.
J’aimerai mes frères. Ce ne sont plus des promesses d’enfance.
Ni l’espoir d’échapper à la vieillesse et à la mort. Dieu fait ma
force, et je loue Dieu. (16)

This is clearly a moment of deceptive calm since Rimbaud’s anti-Christian stance could never permit him to adopt religious orthodoxy except for the briefest instant or as a form of parody. It is also the case that the insanity which is evoked in the collection is evinced not just in phases of delirium and agitation but in these contrasting periods of apparent serenity and lucidity which will inevitably break down quite quickly. And so the concluding phases of ‘Mauvais sang’ see a return to rebellion as evidenced by the sardonic comment “Je ne me crois pas embarqué pour une noce avec Jésus-Christ pour beau-père.” (17) That such a sarcastic remark should follow so quickly upon the apparent serenity of religious acceptance is indicative of how *Une Saison en enfer* is composed of

such contrasting tones and such divergent lines of thought. It is made up of all sorts of assertions and refutations, positive statements and almost immediate negation of those statements. Such conflict, sustained as it is, might well lead to a form of madness and it can be no coincidence that the closing lines of ‘Mauvais sang’ seem to capture the descent into this mental hell as, in a storm of punctuation and fragmentation, Rimbaud yearns for calm yet finds only disturbance and is reduced to seeing life as a “farce éternelle”. He experiences the bodily torments of burning lungs and searing temples, these being the physical counterpart to that mental disintegration which leads to ideas of death and suicide:

Feu! feu sur moi! Là! ou je me rends. – Lâches ! – Je
me tue ! Je me jette aux pieds des chevaux ! (18)

The contrast between this delirium and the contrived serenity of the previous acceptance of Christian belief is a measure of how the narrator in *Une Saison* is torn between scenarios, identities and voices. Once again here we have a vision of suicide, the self-destructive impulse being a leitmotif in the work of Rimbaud and often seen in the *Poésies*, the *Derniers Vers*, *Une Saison en enfer* and the *Illuminations*. In *Une Saison en enfer*, “to plunge into the whirling drift of Rimbaud’s peripeties is to know the giddy experience of truth.” (Cohn, 1999) (19)

It was Claudel, of course, who saw *Une Saison en enfer* as a kind of culmination in French poetry. (20) Yet Rimbaud also takes his place in a long line of writers who have evoked their own version of Hell – Dante, Sartre and Beckett are only three of those who come to mind. (21) Many critics see the third section, ‘Nuit de l’enfer’, as the final stage in the poet’s descent into hell. Certainly the opening paragraph with its reference to the effects of a poisoned potion would seem to confirm that the poet now occupies his personal hell conceived of in terms of fire, burning and thirst but obviously a venue for psychological rather than physical torment. He mockingly recalls his chimera of conversion, salvation and happiness through religious belief but the mordant tone of “les nobles ambitions!” puts paid to such notions. Now the debate turns to the duration of this hell – is it *inferno* or *purgatorio*? Yet one notes how the deceptively assertive “je” still produces those assertions seen throughout this collection such as the parody of Cartesian thought – “je me crois en enfer, donc j’y suis”. (22) So much of this work involves unrelenting efforts to escape from outmoded credos and philosophies and the statement “je suis esclave de mon baptême” (23) underscores the need to shake off the debilitating faith handed down by the family. All the time he is haunted by the voice of Satan whispering in his head. How to distinguish between error and truth is the central question here but such is the level of crisis in ‘Nuit de l’enfer’ that conviction rapidly turns to pleas for mercy with God, Satan and the Holy Virgin all being invoked. There is a degree of unimaginable wretchedness at this point compounded by the ongoing desire for companionship from a position of impregnable isolation – “jamais personne ne pense à autrui.” (24) Appropriately, this delirium leads to references to hallucinatory experience but interspersed with this mental disturbance one still encounters assertions of superiority and confidence – “Je suis mille fois le plus riche.” (25) We have more than enough evidence now to question the consistency, integrity and continuity of the “je”. One thinks

of another comment in a subtle study of the collection that “the evolving subject in *Une Saison en enfer* endorses poesis over mimesis.” (Paliyenko, 1997) (26) Surely, rather than a single entity, we find in the narrator in *Une Saison* a multiplicity of identities scattered through numerous fragments, moods and inclinations to create an impression of insanity rather than wholeness and stability? In fact, the collection seems to articulate a range of competing voices in the mind of the speaker and one senses that this is an exercise in the use of language to reflect intense mental disturbance. The splintered self craves unity, lucidity, serenity. Yet in this very process, a magical poeticization of language occurs – the beautiful aesthetic by-product of the tortured mind.

There is a very real sense here of a soul trying to make sense of its predicament and one of the salient features is the endeavour to transcend traditional dualities and binary oppositions – heaven/hell, God/Satan, up-above /down-below. A redefinition and personalization of Hell is being undertaken in ‘Nuit de l’enfer’ (“l’enfer est certainement *en bas* – et le ciel *en haut*”) (27). One feels a certain delirium at work here, as if the speaker is undergoing a nightmare or going through the hallucinations induced by a fever. Thus a phrase like “Extase, cauchemar, sommeil dans un nid de flammes” (28) both evokes the traditional notion of eternal hellfire and links it to supreme pleasure and to the possibility of hell as a state of rest. Rimbaud is thus muddling and inverting the conventional opposition between good and evil and this forms part of his ongoing campaign to release himself from the debilitating shackles of this old thinking. The reference to the biblical tale of Christ walking on the waters again suggests that Rimbaud is struggling to leave behind the teachings of Christianity and to find a new spiritual niche which will be more congenial for him. So it is that in *Une Saison en enfer* we are left poised between the old and the new, traditional doctrine and a new spirituality and thus it is far from surprising that we should find the collection to be brimful of assertions that are then qualified by counterstatements or negations. It is through this process that the author will finally reach a clearer, more settled affirmation of his new direction in the final subsection of the collection. The reference to Jesus seems to inspire the poet to set himself up as a new, alternative messiah and this leads in ‘Nuit de l’enfer’ to a flurry of assertions in the first person:

Je vais dévoiler tous les mystères...

Je suis maître en fantasmagories.

J’ai tous les talents !

Je ferai de l’or, des remèdes. (29)

These statements of self-confidence and special ability trigger a parody of Jesus himself where the poet sets himself up as a prophet asking all, including little children, to come to him and to have faith in him. Occupying this hell, he feels outside of time (as in ‘Barbare’) and imagines “un concert d’enfers” for all his various vices as he maintains his dialogue with Satan and anticipates a return to life after his stay in Hades. Increasingly, one senses that this is a purgatory from which the sufferer will emerge cleansed and

renewed but one should not oversimplify here as the concluding lines of 'Nuit de l'enfer' are confusing, incoherent and contradictory with pleas to both God and Satan, a desire to be punished and a desire to be saved and the blatant contradiction of "je suis caché et je ne le suis pas." (30)

Sections four and five share the title 'Délires' but are markedly different in content. One feels that Rimbaud is using these sections as retrospectives on his hell, the first detailing a bizarre friendship and the second reflecting on a period of artistic activity now seen as defunct. In 'Délires I' we find Rimbaud casting himself as the Epoux infernal who is represented to us through the filter of the memory of the Vierge folle and this device has the effect of maintaining that parody of biblical wisdom which runs like a leitmotif through the entire collection. It also illustrates once more how the issue of first person (31) identity continues to be involved here as one senses that the author is striving to create the illusion of a strong unified self in the face of the reality of fragmentation and multiplication of identities. That the section should take the form of a confession highlights the guilt of the Vierge as she recalls the wild, unconventional lifestyle into which she has been seduced by her enigmatic mentor. The Vierge humiliates herself by admitting sin and pleading for forgiveness in a demonstration of the abjectly servile posture demanded by traditional religion and so reviled by Rimbaud. The Vierge has lost her goodness by becoming "esclave de l'Epoux infernal" but is now trying to return to the simple morality of her original beliefs and in so doing is clearly betraying the Epoux infernal and presenting herself as an innocent victim of his charms. It is interesting that her description of the doctrines of the Epoux involves yet again a list of strong assertive statements seemingly outlining a very assured philosophy – "la vraie vie est absente. Nous ne sommes pas au monde." (32) It has, of course, been frequently argued that the Vierge is Verlaine placed in relation to the much stronger Rimbaud but 'Délires I' works equally well if we imagine her to be Rimbaud's weaker self drawn to the security of traditional teaching and in opposition to the experimental, iconoclastic other self as seen in the Epoux. In this latter interpretation, we would thus again be coming close to that view of *Une Saison en enfer* which sees the collection as a clash between assertiveness and uncertainty, affirmation and negation, claim and qualification. "Je n'aime pas les femmes. L'amour est à réinventer" (33) are two of the most quotable lines from the observations of the Epoux infernal and they comply very strongly with that tendency towards brevity and that laconic expression of ideology seen so often elsewhere in the collection. The Vierge proceeds to give us an extended insight into how the Epoux inverts traditional values

("infamie" becomes "gloire", for example) and how he has created an image for himself which is very much that of the rebel, the outcast, the freak, the self-harmer and so on. This acutely dramatizes the opposition in *Une Saison* between the safety of well established morality and the dangerous attractions of a path that is much less travelled. Complicating matters even more is the Vierge's insight into a man who can be so violent towards himself and others and yet can have the most sensitive tenderness towards social pariahs, down and outs, drunks and other victims. This represents a fascinating mixture of cruelty and love, itself an example of the oxymoronic nature of Rimbaudian ideology. A revealing reference point here is Verlaine's own celebrated poem 'Crimen amoris' where he offers his portrait of Rimbaud as a fallen angel full of charm and venom and

articulating an alternative ideology and spiritual message. (34) “These violent, yet controlled, fluctuations are characteristic of the whole work.” (Hackett, 1981) (35)

What emerges more and more forcefully here is the Vierge’s inability to understand either the teaching or the personality of her bizarre companion. Bound by a compulsion to follow him as would a disciple follow her saviour, the Vierge realizes that the Epoux is beguiled by change, by a desire to topple reality and to create a new society. Contrasting with his strength and confidence she is “pauvre, sourde, muette, aveugle” so it is scarcely surprising that in the end she should take fright and decide to return to the fold of conventional believers to find comfort and sanctuary. Yet we should not forget the title ‘Délires’ for there is indeed in this section and the following one an attempt to capture a state of delirium in the hope of emerging into some state of lucidity, conviction, direction and clarity of purpose. For the Vierge this will be the false certainty of traditional Christian belief but for the narrator of *Une Saison*, here presenting himself as the disturbed “Epoux infernal”, this must involve a totally new credo and philosophy which transcends all previous doctrines. As she evokes the more tender dimensions of their relationship, the Vierge acknowledges both that the Epoux was always destined to leave her and that she never understood him at all. For someone who wishes to live “somnambule”, the Epoux has a “charité” and “bonté” which the Vierge in her more optimistic moments hoped would lead them to some form of *terre promise*:

Ou je me réveillerai, et les lois et les mœurs auront
changé, - grâce à son pouvoir magique. (36)

This is typical of the alternating exaltation and depression in this relationship, a pattern that reflects the wider system of peaks and troughs, certainties and doubts in the collection as a whole. Expressions such as “j’ignore son idéal” and questions like “parle-t-il à Dieu?” are indicative of how *Une Saison* is written in a language designed to capture confusion, aspiration, disappointment and mental disturbance. This “storm inside Rimbaud’s skull” (Hackett, 1981) (37) is central to this whole text, a text so vital that Rimbaud wrote “mon sort dépend de ce livre.” Having destroyed the Vierge’s value system, the Epoux will not or cannot replace it with a transparent or comprehensible ethos leaving his confederate “au plus profond de l’abîme” and bewildered by a behavioural pattern where one moment she sees horrible laughter and the next the most gentle of approaches (“Puis, il reprenait ses manières de jeune mère, de soeur aimée”.) (38) This “drôle de ménage” seems to encapsulate the central issue of failed communication in *Une Saison*, impressing upon us that this is a diary written for its author and not for a wider readership who will inevitably struggle to comprehend it.

It is fascinating that the fifth of the nine sections, and thus the one at the very heart of the diary, is so preoccupied with the matter of language and expression. This is another perspective on delirium as this “alchimie du verbe” seems to describe a period of intense artistic development which, while exciting at the time, is now seen with a disillusioned eye. The fact that ‘Délires II’ is dedicated to the poet himself “à moi” has a wider significance for the collection, especially as the evocation of the period is described as “l’histoire d’une de mes folies”. (39) It is utterly typical of Rimbaud to be able to

describe his own endeavours, pursued so recently with such enthusiasm, from the detached perspective of one who has outgrown them and moved to a new stage. Just as his previous self had rejected “la peinture et la poésie moderne”, so the author of *Une Saison* can now dismiss the predilections with which he replaced contemporary tastes. His interest in the ancient rather than the modern (“la littérature démodée”, “latin d’église”, “romans de nos aieules”) was only a temporary satisfaction and there is an ironic and cynical evocation of the dreamer and visionary who imagined global upheaval as part of “tous les enchantements”. (40) The recollection of giving colour to the vowels and shaping the consonants as part of a campaign to find a new “verbe poétique” shows how readily Rimbaud can slough skins and underlines on the same page that the language of *Une Saison* is utterly different from that used previously in the *Derniers Vers* where:

J’écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais
l’inexprimable. Je fixais des vertiges.

Thus when he quotes ‘Larme’ and ‘Bonne Pensée du matin’ immediately afterwards, one realizes that he is now juxtaposing two utterly different styles and thus showing that his philosophical development is now being paralleled with an artistic evolution. “La vieillesse poétique” was what attracted him at that point in the recent past and the taste for hallucination is very much part of his awareness now of the need to emerge from a period of willed mental disorder into something more coherent:

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’expliquais mes sophismes magiques avec
l’hallucination des mots !

Je finis par trouver sacré le désordre de mon esprit . (41)

This definition of mental disorder as an inviolable principle is very much in keeping with the ideas of the ‘Lettre du voyant’ and the concept of “l’hallucination des mots” extends the theme of visionary adventure to a complementary experimentation with language itself. It is interesting that Rimbaud then immediately talks about falling victim to a “longue fièvre” for this idea of the fever and delirium of hell from which an escape must be effected runs throughout *Une Saison*. At this previous moment, however, it was an escape from the world itself which was pursued as seen in the insertion at this point of ‘Chanson de la plus haute tour’. Yet, “everything in *Une Saison en enfer* is antithetical to something else.” (Oxenhandler, 2009) (42) A quite remarkable sequence follows, brimful of references to fire, burning, sun, aridity and dust which acts as a prelude to ‘Faim’, quoted as an illustration of a proclivity at that time for all things mineral and an

avoidance of liquids. There is a self-destructive impulse here, a revelling in fire and heat which is at the very antithesis of the mood in *Une Saison* itself where the soul stranded in hell seeks a way out and some new direction. The poem 'Le loup criait...' follows immediately, chosen for its power to illustrate how the poet was gravitating towards self-destruction:

Que je dorme! Que je bouille
Aux autels de Salomon. (43)

So we have moved from a desire for fire to an abhorrence of it and from the poems of the *Derniers vers* with their quaint reference points and "refrains niais" to a prose style that is utterly different in appearance and lexicon. One critic correctly describes *Une Saison en enfer* as a "seuil" (Murat, 2002)(44) beyond which Rimbaud's style and thinking change definitively. This juxtaposition on the pages of 'Délires II' of these conflicting languages vividly dramatizes for the reader the essential fluidity of the presiding intelligence which is forever straining towards new forms and some new definition of itself. The "expression bouffonne et égarée au possible" (45) is very much that of the disturbed self that *Une Saison* will eventually leave behind and the simple style of 'L'Eternité' in its song-like lyricism and brevity could not be further removed from the chunks of prose poetry that surround it. It is worth adding that 'Délires II' maintains that penchant for the assertive one-liner seen earlier. Expressions like "je devins un opéra fabuleux" and "je tiens le système" are once again redolent of a mind that is striving to summarize its knowledge and wisdom in the tersest of formulae. At this point Rimbaud joins another distinguished group – those writers such as La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, Baudelaire, Montherlant and others who are renowned for their ability to compress nuggets of wisdom into memorable one-line affirmations. (46) Yet when he talks of the "sophismes de la folie" we realize that this is a writer taking his distance from earlier positions and seeing through the naivety of previous assumptions. Once again the pattern of assertion and negation is discernible as is the notion of incipient madness contained in the words "les enchantements assemblés sur mon cerveau." (47) With sleeping for many days and melancholy dreams, he became ill and suicidal but always with "la croix consolatrice" and the rainbow of Christian teaching as a possible "salvation". One feels that the writer of *Une Saison* has graduated beyond such weakness and is finally putting behind him the errors of established religions and philosophies. No longer seduced by "le bonheur" (his quoting of 'O saisons, o châteaux' at the end of 'Délires II' illustrates his abandonment of a pursuit of "happiness"), he can now make a major step forward. The section thus closes with a trenchant break with the past and a confident assertion of an artistic quest clearly defined and accomplished in the present. After appearing to abandon hope à la *Dante*, Rimbaud has now rediscovered it. The emergence from hell has begun – "Je sais aujourd'hui saluer la beauté. » (48).

Having turned the corner, as it were, at the end of 'Délires II', we now move to the last four sections of the collection which seem to lead us from "le plus profond de l'abîme" to the finale with its formulation of a new philosophy after all the confusion and contradiction. In 'L'Impossible' we appear to find the necessary rejection of traditional belief systems as the prelude to the distillation of a personal credo. The fact that he

begins by describing his childhood as a “sottise” shows that he is still very much in the mood for the rejection of previous preferences. Yet this is a qualified rejection for he does not regret many of his iconoclastic and rebellious postures, for example his disdain for men as “parasites de la propreté et de la santé de nos femmes, aujourd’hui qu’elles sont si peu d’accord avec nous”. (49) Here he justifies himself on the gender issue and on the way men have exploited women, an issue treated in the ‘Lettre du voyant’. He even goes further to claim “j’ai eu raison dans tous mes dédains” before proceeding to assess how he had seen life as a hell for the “damnés” where charity was unattainable or not even known. Mockingly, he evokes polite relations with polite society and the “élus” and “faux élus” who inhabit it. This is very much the western society, the “marais occidentaux” which he instinctively despises and contrasts with the East which is seen now as a lost civilization. Interestingly, the author talks of having had “deux sous de raison”, a brief interlude where rational thought was possible before more delirium. This is very representative of how *Une Saison* as a whole works but he can still draw a line between his rejection of the west and his affinity with the Orient:

J’envoyais au diable les palmes des martyrs, les
rayons de l’art, l’orgueil des inventeurs, l’ardeur
des pillards ; je retournais à l’Orient et à la sagesse
première et éternelle. – Il paraît que c’est un rêve
de paresse grossière ! (50)

Yet his situation was more complicated than a discarding of hated western ways and an embracing of « la sagesse batarde du Coran » for there has to be some engagement with modernity. This must lie outside Christianity with its arrogance and self-deception and there follows a total repudiation of the nineteenth century decadence that has grown from this self-satisfaction:

N’est-ce pas parce que nous cultivons la brume! Nous
mangeons la fièvre avec nos légumes aqueux. Et l’ivrognerie !
et le tabac ! et l’ignorance ! et les dévouements ! – Tout cela
est-il assez loin de la pensée de la sagesse de l’Orient, la patrie
primitive ? Pourquoi un monde moderne, si de pareils poisons
s’inventent ! (51)

He sarcastically derides the Church voices who will try to steer him back to their Eden even though it is “la pureté des races antiques” that he desires. Equally, the sophistry of the philosophers and the tardiness of science are held up for contempt. These are all impossible systems and false persuaders in that they do not lead to the “pleine sagesse” that the author covets and the section closes with a disturbed evocation of the purity mentioned earlier and the sense of impossibility of ever attaining it. We thus have a triple refutation of religion, science and philosophy. In the closing lines of the section we find a frenzied and disturbed style as a volley of exclamations injects great emotional and subjective force into a chapter that has pretensions of logic, argument and rationality. This is a diarist still torn between reason and delirium.

Lawler neatly summarizes *Une Saison en enfer* as a collection where Rimbaud “interprets a Christian sensibility caught between the extremes of damnation and salvation.” (Lawler, 1992) (52) and this helps us to come to terms with section seven, ‘L’Eclair’. It contains more parody of the Bible in “Rien n’est vanité” but the title distinctly suggests that the poet is making progress in his emergence from the “abîme”. A shaft of light now illuminates the stygian depths of this personal hell of competing thought processes. Modern religion’s embracing of science and its attempts to reconcile traditional belief with scientific discovery and experimentation is just another of the *fausses pistes* to be rejected. Neither science nor religion’s promise of eternal bliss can satisfy the writer and we have a sudden and almost instantaneous rejection of the work ethic that had seemed to appeal at the start of ‘L’Eclair’. The tone is again sarcastic, cynical, detached:

Ma vie est usée. Allons! Feignons, fainéantons, ô pitié !
Et nous existerons en nous amusant, en rêvant amours monstres
et univers fantastiques, en nous plaignant et en querellant les
apparences du monde, saltimbanque, mendiant, artiste, bandit –
prêtre! (53)

One recognizes again here that tendency to change tack, to contradict himself, to backtrack that is a constant feature of the collection and one would say that ‘L’Eclair’, like ‘L’Impossible’ before it, represents a refutation of all existing paths and philosophies. In a reference to being on his hospital bed, the poet evokes the last rites, a death-bed conversion and a confession which curiously anticipates aspects of his real death. The spirit of revolt still reigns supreme (“j’attaquerais à droite, à gauche...”) and the proclivity for reassessing the past is extended at the start of ‘Matin’ into a wistful attempt to rewrite it.

The very title ‘Matin’ seems to herald a further emergence from the “nuit de l’enfer” via the “éclair” that we have just experienced. He bitterly acknowledges that he has never had “une jeunesse aimable, héroïque, fabuleuse, à écrire sur des feuilles d’or” (54) and that his present state is one of weakness in the light of “ma chute et mon sommeil”. The search for self-knowledge and the attempt at self-explanation are equally futile but at least we have come to the end of the account of the season in hell:

Pourtant, aujourd’hui, je crois avoir fini la relation
de mon enfer. C’était bien l’enfer : l’ancien, celui dont le fils
de l’homme ouvrit les portes. (55)

For the first time he here identifies the type of hell he has been in and the fact that he now feels that he has escaped from it and has completed his report on the experience suggests that the sheet is now clean for a new start and a new form of thinking. This is indeed a new dawn, a new beginning and one is very aware of the significance of the dawn and morning in the Rimbaudian imaginative process. Even in his lassitude he can appeal for a new order:

Quand irons-nous, par-delà les grèves et les monts,

saluer la naissance du travail nouveau, la sagesse nouvelle, la
fuite des tyrans et des démons, la fin de la superstition, adorer –
les premiers ! – Noel sur la terre! (56)

This is a rousing finale, evoking a collectivity and taking the much used terms « travail » and « sagesse » (57) into new definitions. This “Noel” will be unlike any Christian festival as the door is shut on the old ways and a truly modern way is envisioned. We have a glimpse of progress here as the poet stops lamenting the past and turns resolutely towards the future. The mood is close to that found in ‘Royauté’ in the *Illuminations* where aspirant royals promise an end to suffering and a new dawn. However, the caveat must be entered in both cases that there is a precarious and tenuous sense to the adventure.

So finally we come to ‘Adieu’ with its metaphor of a voyage and of a ship setting forth from “le port de la misère” to travel to the “splendides villes”. One might see last two sections of *Une Saison en enfer* as pages where Rimbaud « a essayé de tourner vers soi, vers l’acceptation de soi – de son espoir, mais aussi de ses *sottises*, de ses *vices*, de tout ce que le poème ‘Honte’ dénonça un jour si cruellement. » (Bonnefoy, 1961) (58) The seasonal progression of the collection has now taken us to the autumn but this is a journey that will take us beyond the normal conception of time (“loin des gens qui meurent sur les saisons”). Just as ‘Barbare’ (*Illuminations*) moves beyond conventional time in its opening words “Bien après les jours et les saisons, et les êtres et les pays” (59), so ‘Adieu’ frames its idea of a very modern outlook within a redefinition of time. Thus the traditional association of autumn with sadness and the loss of summer are not applicable here. The vessel is about to depart from the wretchedness, the poverty and the corruption of the old world with its outmoded beliefs – “cette goule reine de millions d’âmes et de corps morts *et qui seront jugés!*” (60) His self-projection as a down and out corrupted both physically and morally by this decadent western world is the prelude for a vision of what might be found as an alternative. Rimbaud refers to hosts of wretches sleeping rough and drunken in rags under the rain. Projecting himself as one of these pariahs is a piece of social realism:

Je me revois la peau rongée par la boue
et la peste, des vers pleins les cheveux et les
aisselles et encore de plus gros vers dans le
cœur, étendu parmi les inconnus sans âge, sans
sentiment... (61)

The next sequence of ‘Adieu’ is arguably the most famous in the collection and one of the most famous in all Rimbaud’s work. It seems like an antidote to the pain just described but its excessive optimism is seen as naïve and misplaced as the poet sees himself as a fallen artist and story-teller who once again must face “la réalité rugueuse” after such glorious flights of fancy:

Quelquefois je vois au ciel des plages sans fin
couvertes de blanches nations en joie. Un grand

vaisseau d'or, au-dessus de moi, agite ses
pavillons multicolores sous les brises du matin. J'ai
créé toutes les fêtes, tous les triomphes, tous les drames.
J'ai essayé d'inventer de nouvelles fleurs, de nouveaux
astres, de nouvelles chairs, de nouvelles langues. J'ai
cru acquérir des pouvoirs surnaturels. (62)

This glorious vision seems tempered by the realization that previous imaginative departures have led to disillusionment. So we then read the famous passage which talks about his past failure and characterizes him as a discredited “artiste” and “conteur”.

Moi! moi qui me suis dit mage ou ange, dispensé
de toute morale, je suis rendu au sol, avec un devoir à
chercher, et la réalité rugueuse à étreindre ! Paysan ! (63)

The poet is very much on his guard against further self-deception but the major effect of his stay in hell seems to be that he will not fall prey any longer to such illusions and so the attempt to create “de nouvelles fleurs, de nouveaux astres, de nouvelles chairs, de nouvelles langues” will not be repeated. Rather, as the last part of ‘Adieu’ states, he will move into « l’heure nouvelle ». One notes here the lucidity and the clarity of purpose of the speaker and one feels that all the truisms and assertions of Une Saison have been building to one last supreme one-liner that will encapsulate the message behind the entire collection:

Il faut être absolument moderne .(64)

Here he is speaking of a new type of modernity. It is not the false modernity of science and it is not the prevailing Christian ethic seen as the “horrible arbrisseau” which the poet has left behind definitively. This is a form of victory but the new era will be something other than a blissful transcendence. Rather it will represent a personal accomplishment as the poet turns his back on false friends and couples. “Il me sera possible de *posséder la vérité dans une âme et un corps*” overturns a false duality while showing that the new spirituality will actually incorporate the physical. His new truth will be experienced in both body and soul and at the end of the “carnet de damné” the pattern of shifting backwards and forwards between past and present is now relinquished. Hope is restored and the journey through madness completed. Closing the gates of hell behind him, the poet moves towards a higher realm. His face is now resolutely turned towards the future offered by the “splendides villes”.

NOTES

1. Bernard et Guyaux (1981, p. 228).

2. This is all very much part of his Protean performance throughout his poetry as he easily escapes one identity or definition to migrate into another. “Je est un autre” is given full expression in this process.

3. Bernard/Guyaux (1981 p. 211).

4. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 212).

5. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 212).

6. Hackett (1981, p. 87).

7. « Je l’écoute faisant de l’infamie une gloire, de la cruauté un charme. » Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 224).

8. Bernard/Guyaux, (1981, p. 213).

9. Davies (1975, p. 125).

10. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, pp. 214-215).

11. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 215).

12. Richard (1955, p. 210) .

13. One thinks of other writers such as Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde who have expressed their own *de profundis* to reflect despair, disbelief and angst.

14. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 16).

15. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, pp. 216-217).

16. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 218).

17. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 218).

18. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 219).

19. Cohn (1999, p. 401).

20. Murat (2002, p. 7).

21. One thinks of Dante’s rings of hell, of Sartre’s psychological Hades in Huis clos and of Beckett’s hellish afterlife of the mind in Comédie.

22. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 220).

23. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 220).
24. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 221).
25. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 221).
26. Paliyenko (1997, p. 50).
27. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 221).
28. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 221).
29. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 221).
30. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 222).
31. Macklin (1995, pp. 142-163).
32. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 224).
33. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 224).
34. In 'Crimen amoris' Verlaine depicts Rimbaud as a fallen angel, parading a mixture of virtuous and satanic qualities. The portrait painted is of a rebellious iconoclast standing up to the authority of the Christian God.
35. Hackett (1981, p. 89).
36. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 226).
37. Hackett (1981, p. 109).
38. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 227).
39. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 228).
40. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 228).
41. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 230).
42. Oxenhandler (2009, p. 129).
43. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 232).
44. Murat (2002, p. 31).

45. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 232).
46. Macklin (1996, pp. 329-342).
47. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 233).
48. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p.234).
49. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 235).
50. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 236).
51. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 236).
52. Lawler (1992, p. 4).
53. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 238).
54. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 239).
55. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 239).
56. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 239).
57. Bernard/Guyaux (1981,p. 239).
58. Bonnefoy (1961, p. 132).
59. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 292).
60. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 240).
61. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 240).
62. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 240).
63. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 240).
64. Bernard/Guyaux (1981, p. 241).

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