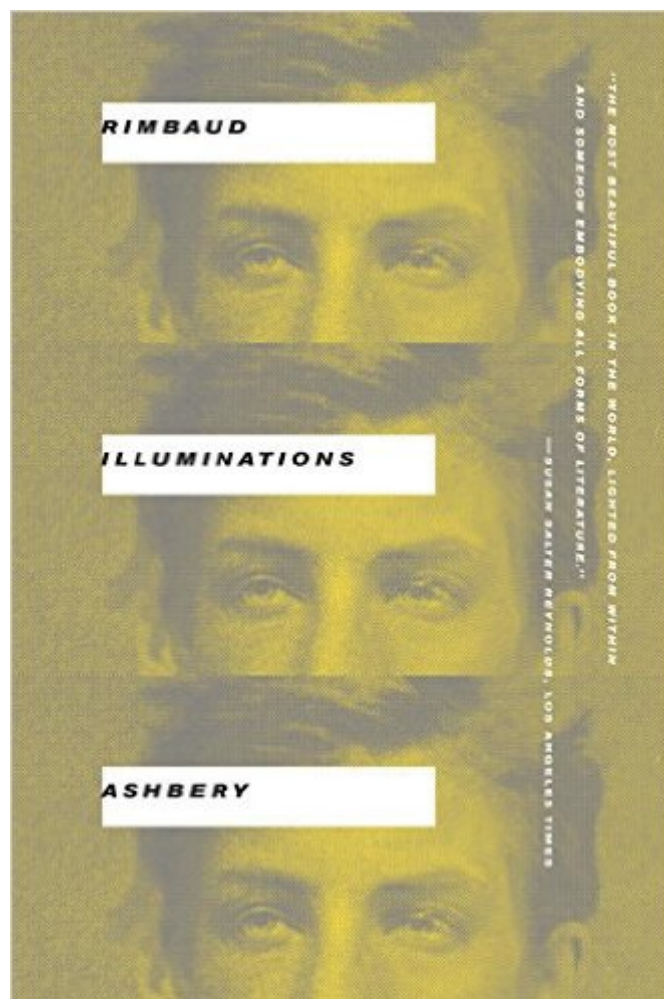


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Illuminations



Synopsis

“This may be the most beautiful book in the world, lighted from within and somehow embodying all forms of literature.” — Susan Salter Reynolds, Los Angeles Times

The modernist masterpiece that is Arthur Rimbaud’s *Illuminations* has been given new life with the publication of John Ashbery’s “dazzling” (The Economist) new translation, widely hailed as one of the literary events of the year. Presented with French text in parallel and a preface by its translator, Ashbery’s rendering powerfully evokes the glittering, kaleidoscopic beauty of the original

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I first got to know of Rimbaud’s astonishing collection of prose-poems through Benjamin Britten’s 1939 setting of nine fragments for soprano and string orchestra. It is a brilliant work whose wild energy and scintillating colors are the perfect response to the extraordinary imagery of Rimbaud’s writing. But only a fraction of the whole. So when I came upon this beautiful bilingual edition with the original French on the left-hand pages and translations by John Ashbery on the right, I was eager to buy it. I started by reading each poem in French two or three times, without consulting either the translations or a dictionary. Only then did I turn to Ashbery’s versions and read them through as a single sequence, without looking back at the French. They were very different experiences, both challenging, but for different reasons. In between, I tried translating two pieces myself: MARINE, which is one of the few written in verse, and one of the prose-poems, FLEURS. I found the former

more demanding but ultimately easier, since the structure of verse forces a search for the most evocative verbal jewel to set in its precise place. The experience gave me a greater respect for Ashbery's work -- but at the same time made it clear that any translator was attempting the virtually impossible. The collection was Rimbaud's farewell to poetry, completed in 1875 before he was even 21. It is astounding that these poems, penned when Impressionism had hardly got going, should already look forward to the verbal equivalent of Post-Impressionism and even Cubism. They are modern in a way we associate with verse of the Twentieth Century.

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