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Israel-Pelletier, Aimée. *Rimbaud's Impressionist Poetics: Vision and Visuality*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013. Pp. xii + 201. ISBN: 978-0-7083-2535-3

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In her new book, Aimée Israel-Pelletier reads Rimbaud's poetic development in relation to visual culture, aligning "the way vision and visuality play out in [his] work [. . .] with the aesthetic practice of the Impressionists" (1). She approaches his poetry from the side of art and thus, as fleshed out in introductory comments, draws her theoretical framework for his visual realism from art history and criticism. Placed in the context of the early 1870s, the aesthetic rapprochement between Rimbaud and the Impressionists focuses on the "attempt to make the work of art responsive to modern life" (2). From this vantage, Israel-Pelletier attempts to demonstrate that, "Rimbaud's work, like that of the Impressionists, reflects a changing social reality, new cultural conditions and a new kind of observer" (3).

In the space of five chapters following Rimbaud's trajectory, Israel-Pelletier stages the emergence of his literary impressionism via an attachment to the real. Beginning with the *Poésies*, in chapter one, she argues, "the extent that the visual is privileged over the discursive aspects of language [. . .] is consistent with realism's privileging of sight" (12). She thus provides close readings of Rimbaud's early "realist" texts, "Le Forgeron" and "L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple," which represent the political reality along with ambient sensations. In Rimbaud's *Poésies*, Israel-Pelletier foregrounds values akin to Impressionism: "strikingness, liveliness, flatness and the depiction of everyday life" (40). Along the axis of Rimbaud's experimentation with rendering material and physical reality, the poems grouped under the *Derniers vers*, Israel-Pelletier contends, represent a shift from "the visualization of affect [. . .] to a rhetoric of the acoustical" (42). *Une saison en enfer* in turn marks Rimbaud's break with the discursive function of poetic language. Chapter two, treating the transition from Realism to Impressionism in order to prepare close readings of selected poems from the *Illuminations*, delimits the movements across the visual-cultural field.

Presented first in chapter three are the topoi of Impressionism, as elaborated by Michael Fried, from the *ébauche* to "a new look to present the new reality" or strikingness, "the appearance of flatness, in the metaphorical sense," and "the representation of movement" (81). Reading, then, with Impressionism in mind, Israel-Pelletier shows how Rimbaud creates such visual effects in the *Illuminations*. Whereas poems such as the four-part "Jeunesse" and "Scènes" illustrate the effect of incompleteness or *ébauche*, strikingness characterizes the cityscapes such as "Villes II," "Villes I," and "Les Ponts." To demonstrate flatness, Israel-Pelletier chooses "Les Ouvriers" and "Conte," and the visual rendering of movement, "Ornières" and "Marine."

In Chapter four she concentrates on the stylistic use of three visual phenomena in poems from the *Illuminations*: the afterimage, binocular vision, and *passage* (129). The second part of "Phrases," like "Aube," "Départ," "Mystique," and "Métropolitain," evokes the sense of a vivid image that lingers (133-38). The act of seeing, a process "characterized by movement and indeterminacy of point of view," comes to the fore in "Fleurs" and "Nocturne vulgaire" (142-47). In Rimbaud's Impressionist practice, Israel-Pelletier elaborates the effect of *passage*, meaning "spatial ambiguity at a point on the canvas where background and foreground are indistinguishable" (148). Against formalist approaches to Rimbaud's work, which deny "its affective charge," Israel-Pelletier observes that, "affect and expressiveness are very

much at play in his most experimental work, the *Illuminations*” (149). An examination of “Génie,” a poem exploiting indeterminacy, stresses “the idea that visuality is nearly always the recording of a feeling, a mood and an attitude” (150).

The fifth chapter concludes the study by considering, perhaps all too briefly, why Rimbaud stopped writing poetry. Aimée Israel-Pelletier nevertheless succeeds in capturing the synergy between the visual and the verbal in Rimbaud. Thus, it is unfortunate that secondary sources crowd the body of her analysis. Some readers may find the distance between the art criticism and Rimbaud’s texts difficult to bridge, but others will surely want to consider further the turning toward art to create a new language for his experimental poetry.