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Ezra Pound's *Rimbaud* (1957): Translation and the art of the sketch

Rimbaud (1957) de Ezra Pound: La traducción y el arte del bosquejo

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Abstract: This article is the first detailed study of the 1957 book of translations *Rimbaud* (1957) by U.S. American poet and translator Ezra Pound. As the original book form in which Pound's translations of Arthur Rimbaud were published by the independent Italian editor Vanni Scheiwiller, *Rimbaud* sheds new light on Pound's poetics of translation, his poetic dialogue with Rimbaud, and, most importantly, the ways in which the material form of a text shapes interpretative possibilities. The various drawings and sketches reproduced on the cover and throughout the small book disclose surprising affinities between the act of translating and the act of sketching, affinities that are borne out in Pound's renderings.
Keywords: Ezra Pound; Arthur Rimbaud; Vanni Scheiwiller; translation; sketch.
Resumen: Este artículo es el primer estudio detallado del libro de traducciones *Rimbaud* (1957) del poeta y traductor estadounidense Ezra Pound. Como la primera edición en forma de libro de las traducciones de Pound realizadas a partir de poemas de Arthur Rimbaud –publicada por el editor italiano independiente Vanni Scheiwiller– *Rimbaud* arroja nueva luz sobre la poética de traducción de Pound, su diálogo poético con Rimbaud y, más importante, cómo la forma material de un texto amolda las posibilidades interpretativas. Los abundantes dibujos y bosquejos reproducidos en el pequeño libro –realizados por artistas del porte de Amadeo Modigliani y Pablo Picasso, entre otros– revelan afinidades sorprendentes entre el arte de traducir y el arte de bosquejar, afinidades que se ven reflejadas en las traducciones de Pound.
Palabras clave: Ezra Pound; Arthur Rimbaud; Vanni Scheiwiller; traducción; bosquejo.

1. INTRODUCTION

In April 1957 the young Italian publisher Vanni Scheiwiller brought out five hundred copies of a slender volume titled, simply, *Rimbaud*. Its seventeen pages contain four poems by Arthur Rimbaud, one poem by Laurent Tailhade, facing-page translations into English by Ezra Pound, drawings by Henri Matisse, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Amedeo Modigliani, and Pablo Picasso, and an etching by Louis Marcoussis. *Rimbaud* forms part of an extensive catalogue of Pound titles published by Scheiwiller that was growing rapidly in the mid-1950's. 1955 saw the publication of a new instalment of cantos, *Section: Rock-Drill*, as Pound turned away from his American publisher James Laughlin and his British publisher Faber&Faber, as well as a volume of Italian translations of the Confucian classics, *Confucio: Studio integrale & L'asse que non vacilla*. In 1957 alone, Scheiwiller printed six Pound titles: *Rimbaud*, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, *Nishikigi*, *Brancusi*, *Papillon: Quattuor Epigrammata*, and *Diptych Rome-London: Homage to Sextus Propertius & Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. Including two volumes published by Vanni's father in the 1930's, the catalogue of Pound-Scheiwiller publications runs to some forty titles, ranging from reprints of Pound's pre-*Cantos* poetry to translations of his work into Italian by his daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz.[1]

The aim of the present essay is to develop the first detailed study of Pound's translations of Rimbaud as they appear in the 1957 volume, the first edition in book form of the translations.[2] As I argue in the pages that follow, a close study of the handsomely printed volume sheds new light on three interrelated issues of scholarly interest: Pound's poetics of translation, his engagement and sustained poetic dialogue with Rimbaud's life and work, and, most importantly, how the material form in which texts are produced and circulate shapes the possibilities for interpreting them. While scholarship on Pound's poetics of translation is rich, varied, and continually growing, his translations of Rimbaud have garnered little

[1] For more on Scheiwiller's career as an independent publisher and his collaborations with Pound, see Bacigalupo, 1995, 1999, and 2000; Ferri and Tortorelli, 1988; Scheiwiller and Franci, 1996.

[2] As the Publisher's Note of *Rimbaud* states, the translations were first printed (without the French originals) in October 1956 in the first number of the Australian literary magazine *Edge*, edited by Noel Stock, a notable Pound scholar.

attention.[3] Those studies that do exist ignore the original book form in which the translations were published, reading them as printed in the 1963 enlarged edition of *Ezra Pound: Translations* (New Directions). The tendency to ignore *Rimbaud* is in part a consequence of the difficulty of consulting a book printed in a single edition in a run of 500 copies. The more accessible *Translations* is a hefty volume of over four hundred pages that collects Pound's translations of a wide range of authors from disparate times, places, and literary traditions. Because the volume collects so many translations, only Pound's renderings of Guido Cavalcanti are facing-page translations that allow the reader to consult the original. The present article developed out of a rather modest intuition: the experience of reading Pound's translations of Rimbaud in *Translations* and in *Rimbaud* is not the «same» reading experience: from physical format and print run to graphic design and the inclusion or exclusion of the source text, *Translations* and *Rimbaud* are fundamentally different books. As such, consulting *Rimbaud* may lead to fresh insights on Pound's dialogue via translation with the French poet. After consulting a copy of the book held at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City, I was convinced that the original book form in which these translations were published opened up new possibilities not only for understanding Pound's poetics of translation or his engagement with Rimbaud but also for the study of literary translation: the graphic design of the volume, the drawings and etchings reproduced on the cover and throughout the book (by artists of the stature of Modigliani and Picasso, among others), as well as the introductory note combined to produce a reading experience altogether different from the one I had known in reading *Translations*. Moreover, the experience included a fortuitous encounter in the archive: the copy held at the Morgan contains marginal notes and three typescript pages of a review of the book (dated 13 July 1957) by U.S. American poet Cid Corman, thus providing

[3] In *Surprised in Translation* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), Mary Ann Caws dedicates a short chapter (*Pound at Liberty*) to Pound's translations of Rimbaud and two medieval Provençal poems. Her comments are based solely on the text of *Ezra Pound: Translations*. Juan Arabia, in *Poesía* (2016), provides a brief introduction to Pound's comments on Rimbaud and prints Rimbaud's sonnet *Vénus Anadyomène*, Pound's translation into English (as printed in *New and Selected Poems and Translations* (New Directions, 2010)), and Arabia's translation into Spanish. Marjorie Perloff (1981, pp. 157-158) is the only critic I have encountered who alludes to *Rimbaud*; she briefly discusses the original 1957 book edition of Pound's translations of Rimbaud, quoting the introductory note of the volume. As I indicate below, her analysis in the rest of the chapter, dedicated to the Rimbaud-Pound connection, does not treat the translations.

a rare account by an early reader of *Rimbaud*.[4] In attending to the particularities of *Rimbaud*, I take my methodological cue from studies of bibliography, book history, and the material forms of modernist texts by Jerome McGann (1991; 1993), Roger Chartier (1995), D.F. McKenzie (1999), Michael Davidson (1997), and George Bornstein (2001), as well as more recent studies by Amaranth Borsuk (2018) and Lise Jaillant's edited volume, *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* (2019).[5] This rich and varied body of scholarly work regards the literary text «not as an abstract linguistic form, but as a mediated material artifact», as Peter D. McDonald (2003) asserts.

To borrow a distinction made by Jerome McGann (1991), the linguistic codes of the translations appearing in *Rimbaud* and in *Translations* are nearly identical, while their bibliographic codes—including such features as cover design, page layout, and the physical size and distribution of the book—differ greatly. The distinct bibliographic codes of *Rimbaud* and *Translations* instantiate diverse writing strategies, gauge and engage the reader's inventiveness in different ways, and generally shape the process of meaning-making in the act of reading. In my own reading of *Rimbaud*, I argue that the material form of the book—including the drawings, portrait sketches, and etching reproduced on the cover and interspersed throughout the book—discloses surprising affinities between the act of translating and the act of sketching that are borne out in Pound's translations of his French predecessor. The volume casts Pound as a casual translator who, by reducing and condensing his source texts to their supposedly essential, distinctive qualities, «renders» Rimbaud, just as a draftsman or draftswoman might render a subject by reducing and condensing him or her to the essential, distinctive lines of their figure. The delicate dynamic of loss and gain, it turns out, are familiar to both the translator and the sketcher.

2. POUND'S POETIC DIALOGUE WITH RIMBAUD

Before detailing the ways in which Pound's poetics of translation in *Rimbaud* can be understood as a poetics of the sketch, I would like to

[4] I would like to express my gratitude to the staff at the Morgan Library and Museum, as well as to my friend and colleague, Rafael Lemos, who helped me consult the copy in question.

[5] I am grateful to Gustavo Guerrero (2025) for indicating a number of these sources in a recent plenary lecture at the University of Salamanca.

provide a brief overview of Pound's engagement with the French poet's life and work. Pound is, of course, not alone among avant-garde writers and artists in taking an interest in Rimbaud; for the French surrealists and for Federico García Lorca (to give only two notable examples), Rimbaud was an important source of inspiration for poets seeking in various ways to dismantle prevailing conventions of poetic practice and purpose. And yet avant-garde appreciations of Rimbaud's legacy are as diverse as the many portraits of the poet made by artists such as Félix Vallotton, Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, Hans Arp, Henri Fantin-Latour, and Fernand Léger, among others. Indeed, a certain creative drive to portray Rimbaud—the attempt to articulate in words or lines the legend of the French poet who revolutionized his art while still in his teens and abandoned it forever in his twenties—is a persistent feature of the reception of his work.[6] Take, for example, the famous 1872 drawing of Rimbaud by his fellow poet and lover, Paul Verlaine: ever since the image was reproduced as the frontispiece in the first edition of Rimbaud's *Poésies Complètes* in 1895, it has helped shape the Rimbaudian image for generations of readers. After years in which the original drawing's whereabouts remained unknown, it recently surfaced in the estate of a French opera manager and sold at auction in Paris for the astounding sum of 585,000 euros.[7] In assessing the varied reception of Rimbaud during the ferment of the historical avant-gardes, one should bear in mind not only such a proliferation of Rimbaudian iconography but also the belated publication of letters now considered fixtures of the Rimbaud "canon": the two so-called *voyant* letters of May 1871—in which he draws his own

[6] A precious example of such Rimbaldian multiplicity is the 1962 volume *Arthur Rimbaud vu par des peintes contemporains*, which contains drawings, etchings, and lithographs by Hans Arp, Georges Braque, Jean Cocteau, Max Ernst, Valentine Hugo, Alberto Giacometti, Juan Miró, Pablo Picasso, and Jacques Villon. A more recent example of the artistic fascination with images of Rimbaud is the 1992 anthology of translations by Brazilian poet Augusto de Campos, *Rimbaud Livre* (Perspectiva). A veritable treasure trove of Rimbaudian iconography, Campos transforms the many portraits of Rimbaud into a central element of the graphic design of his volume. In collaboration with visual artist and poet Arnaldo Antunes, Campos overlays a sketch of Rimbaud by Félix Vallotton with the woodblock print "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" by the Japanese artist Hokusai. The volume also contains a reproduction of a lithograph by Valentine Hugo, "Portrait of Rimbaud."

[7] For more on Verlaine's famous drawing and its recent appearance, see "Oh, to Own the Lost Portrait of Arthur Rimbaud!" in the 5 December edition of the *The New York Times* (Meltzer, 2024).

verbal portrait of the poet as one who works to become a « *voyant* », seeks to reach the unknown through a « dérèglement de *tous les sens* » («deregulation of all the senses»), and who is shot through with otherness (« Je est un autre » («I is another»; Rimbaud, 2004, p. 138)[8]—were not published until 1912 and 1928, respectively.[9] As potentially significant as the affinities may be between, say, the Rimbaudian conception of the poet as *voyant* or the «I» of the poet as «another» and Pound's *personae* or poetic masks, they were likely not the consequence of Pound's reading the *voyant* letters.

Prior to the publication of *Rimbaud* in 1957, Pound had addressed the French poet's life and work in three texts: two short pieces of literary criticism published in periodicals in 1913 and 1918, and a 1928 letter to the French academic René Taupin. In all three texts, Pound's remarks are brief and pithy; they often read as quick verbal sketches in which Pound is attempting to render in only a few distinctive and decisive strokes the French poet's impact on modern poetry. The titles of the two pieces of literary criticism suggest their sketch-like quality: *The Approach to Paris*, a series of short articles on French poetry published throughout 1913 in the London weekly magazine *The New Age*, casts Pound as a traveler approaching the metropolis of Paris (a synecdoche for modern French poetry) from afar, quickly capturing the salient features and contours of the city without entering into the details of its many streets and neighborhoods. It is in the seventh installment of the series, published on 16 October, that Pound treats the work of Rimbaud, as well as that of French poets Paul Fort, André Spire, and Henri-Martin Barzun, among others. The metaphor of a geographical approach and quick sketch of Paris implicit in the title of the piece is characteristic of Pound's shorthand style of literary criticism, in which broad strokes and decisive judgments prevail over detail and nuance. Indeed, in 1913 Pound was in the habit of making quite literal «approaches» to and sketches of the kind of poetry he aspired to write: the previous summer he had undertaken a walking tour of southern France, visiting the Provençal towns and castles of the medieval troubadours who figure so largely in Pound's poetry, criticism, and

[8] Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are my own.

[9] As Jean-Luc Steinmetz notes in his 2004 updated edition of Rimbaud's poems, the letter of 15 May 1871 to Paul Demeny was first published in *La Nouvelle Revue française* in October 1912, while his letter of 13 May 1871 to Georges Izambard was not published until October 1928 in *La Revue européene* (pp. 245-247).

translations.[10] The image of the itinerant Pound approaching the towns and castles of the troubadour landscape or the bustling metropolis of Paris bears an undeniable resemblance to the itinerant Rimbaud, who repeatedly fled the stifling provincial atmosphere of his native Charleville for the more invigorating air of Paris and Belgian cabarets: *Au Cabaret-Vert* (*At the Green Cabaret*), a poem Pound translates in *Rimbaud*, sketches a scene of ease and contentment in a cabaret in the Belgian town of Charleroi, after an eight-day journey on foot. Verlaine's 1872 drawing seizes on such itinerancy in Rimbaud's life and poetry; with his hands thrust in his coat-pockets, sporting a flat-brim hat and smoking a pipe, the Rimbaud of Verlaine's drawing seems a visual rendering of the poem « Ma Bohème (Fantaisie) », which opens with the line « Je m'en allais, les poings dans mes poches crevées » (Rimbaud, 2004, p. 103; «And so I went, hands thrust in torn pockets» (Sorrell, 2001, p. 63)) and concludes with the lines «Comme des lyres, je tirais les élastiques / De mes souliers blessés, un pied près de mon cœur » (p. 103; «I harped on the laces of my wounded boots, / one foot by my heart» (Sorrell, 2001, p. 65)).

In his enthusiastic praise of *Au Cabaret-Vert* in the second piece of literary criticism touching on Rimbaud—*A Study in French Poets*, first printed in *The Little Review* in 1918 and collected in the 1920 volume *Instigations*—Pound casts the French poet as a quick-working, sure-handed painter who applies in his poems «a thick, suave color, firm, even» (Pound, 1991b, p. 28). The pictorial metaphor of Pound's appraisal of the poem accords with the title of the piece: it is a study *in* French poets, not *of* French poets, a nuance of phrasing that emphasizes the sense of «study» as a preliminary drawing, sketch, or color study. Pursuing the pictorial metaphor yet further, Pound compares Rimbaud's mode of presentation in poems such as *Au Cabaret-Vert* to that of Cézanne's in painting: «The actual writing of poetry has advanced little, or not at all since Rimbaud. Cézanne was the first to paint, as Rimbaud had written, —in for example, *Les Assis*» (p. 28). Recurring to the language of painting again in the concluding section of the piece, Pound characterizes Rimbaud as a natural poetic genius with a sure hand: «I wonder in what other poet will we find such firmness of coloring and such certitude» (p. 31). What does Pound

[10] Richard Sieburth's 1992 edition of Pound's notebooks from his walking tour—*A Walking Tour in Southern France: Ezra Pound among the Troubadours* (New Directions)—provides an accessible and insightful glimpse into Pound's itinerant literary criticism. As Sieburth relates in the introduction to the volume, Pound discovered the notebooks from his walking tour in 1958—only a year after the publication of *Rimbaud*.

mean when he says that «Cézanne was the first to paint, as Rimbaud had written»? Part of the answer surely lies in their respective attitudes toward prevailing belle-époque conventions of artistic/poetic theme and language. Jean-Luc Steinmetz, in the preface of his 2004 edition of Rimbaud's poetry, also discerns affinities between Rimbaud's poetry and Cézanne's painting, affirming that in poems such as *Vénus anadyomène* Rimbaud ironically disfigures the conventional image of the feminine figure: Rimbaud's Venus is shown in the last line of the poem to have a rectal ulcer. Cézanne, for his part, in a painting such as *Les Grandes Baigneuses* (1899-1906), or Picasso in *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), similarly dismantles the traditional image of the feminine figure through a highly self-conscious visual language that foregrounds the very process of apprehension and representation (Steinmetz, 2004, p. 15).

But the basis of Pound's comparison between Rimbaud's poetry and Cézanne's lies primarily in a distinction he was attempting to work out in the 1910's between presentation and representation: as he states in *A Study in French Poets*, «by the violence of his feeling, Rimbaud presents» (1991b, p. 28). In the mere three pages of his 1913 manifesto for Imagism, *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste*, Pound uses the same verb no less than six times to distinguish poetic presentation from description: «When Shakespeare talks of the "Dawn in russet mantle clad" he presents something which the painter does not present. There is in this line of his nothing that one can call description; he presents» (1991c, p. 121). The distinction Pound is getting at here is in part founded on the economy of poetic language he sought to cultivate in his Imagist phase: a plainspoken poetry of unadorned language and direct juxtaposition of images rooted in concrete sensory detail, drawing on a certain interpretation of the poetic traditions of China and Japan. Also important to the distinction between presentation and description is what Pound would come to call *phanopoeia*, or a «casting of images on the visual imagination» (1968, p. 25). In the later *How to Read* (1928), Pound praises Rimbaud's «directness of presentation» (p. 41), grouping the French poet with Catullus and the Chinese Tang dynasty poets Li Po and Wang Wei precisely for their excellence in *phanopoeia* (p. 28; p. 41). To present or cast an image on the visual imagination is, for Pound, to harness the power of language to generate metaphor, recourse to which the traditional, representational painter presumably does not have. In short, Pound's comparison between Rimbaud and Cézanne is based on the idea that Rimbaud's poetic language

and Cézanne's visual language both have the power to generate what might be called non-mimetic images.[11]

In her 1981 study of the Rimbaudian legacy, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*, Marjorie Perloff dedicates a chapter to the Rimbaud-Pound link in which she provides her own interpretation of Pound's statement that «Cézanne was the first to paint, as Rimbaud had written». «What Pound means here, I think,» Perloff writes, «is that Rimbaud's images, like Cézanne's, are framed, not as symbols pointing beyond themselves, but as metonymic displacements that convey, in this particular case, a sense of overwhelming ugliness» (p. 162). She continues: «Rimbaud thus decomposes reality; he uses palpable visual images, but they are such as the human eye has never encountered» (p. 162). Perloff's interpretation of Pound's remark is, up to this point, entirely convincing in my view. Where I think her take on the Rimbaud-Pound link is less compelling is her claim that a poem like *Les Assis* anticipates the «anti-paysage» mode of the *Illuminations* (a notion she borrows from Jean-Pierre Richard), which she then posits as the most enduring link to Pound's poetics in *The Cantos*. The crucial Malatesta cantos of 1922-23, for Perloff, make use of a Rimbaudian art of montage that flattens historical time and creates a «documentary surface» that extends through the rest of the epic poem. Scott Hamilton's reading of the Rimbaud-Pound link is, I believe, more convincing on this score; in *Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance* (1992), Hamilton places Pound's early interest in Rimbaud within the context of Pound's regard for Laurent Tailhade's satirical poetic portrayals of French bourgeois mores. Richard Sieburth, in his 1978 study of Pound's engagement with the work of the French writer Remy de

[11] In his classic study of modern poetics, *The Structure of Modern Poetry* (1956; trans. Joachim Neugroschel, Northwestern UP, 1974), Hugo Friedrich cites a remark, reportedly made by Rimbaud in Paris in 1872, that bears considerably on the distinction between representation and presentation that so preoccupied Pound in the 1910's: «We must root out painting's old habit of copying, and we must make painting sovereign. Instead of reproducing objects, painting must compel agitation by means of lines, colors, and shapes that are drawn from the outer world but simplified and restrained: genuine magic» (Friedrich, 1974, p. 57). I have not been able to locate this statement in Rimbaud's correspondence, so I have relegated it to a footnote. If the remark is indeed authentic, the statement that the «sovereign» artist's presentation is «drawn from the outer world but *simplified and restrained*» (my emphasis) helps to articulate the relation of source text and target text, subject and sketch, that I am seeking to define in referring to Pound's poetics of translation in *Rimbaud* as the «art of the sketch». I am indebted to Marjorie Perloff (1981) for locating the quote in Friedrich's text.

Gourmont, highlights the importance of perceptual clarity and precision in the Poundian reception of Rimbaud. Sieburth argues that Pound rejected the Rimbaudian conception of the poet as *voyant* (who seeks the «derangement of all the senses») in favor of a perceptual lucidity, inspired by the Provençal troubadours and Gourmont, that would have «the intensity of the visionary but none of that phantasmagoric incoherence by which the seer becomes not the shaper but the passive victim of his vision» (p. 146).[12]

Notwithstanding the variety of interpretations of Pound's debt to Rimbaud, one thing is certain: his brief critical «renderings» of the French poet in *The Approach to Paris* and *A Study in French Poets* are deeply rooted in the poetic project of Imagism, which was taking shape in London at the time the first of these pieces was printed. The guiding principles of Imagism color the portrayal of Rimbaud that emerges in these two journalistic pieces, in which Pound emphasizes the vividness and vitality of the French poet's imagery, the brevity and concision of his poetic expression, and his ironic upending of conventional poetic theme and language. Only briefly alluding to the qualities of prose poems such as *Aube*, *Vierge Folle*, and *Villes*, Pound clearly rates the short lyric poems of Rimbaud's first phase much higher than the prose poems of *Une saison en enfer* and *Illuminations*, singling out the concision, vivid imagery, and metrical mastery on display in poems such as *Les Pauvres à l'église* and *Tête de faune*. The early journalistic pieces on Rimbaud I have been examining certainly bear out the argument that Pound rejected the Surrealist reading of Rimbaud that emphasized the *voyant* letters and the prose poems. Pound's quest for clarity in poetic expression informs the ambivalences of certain passages of *The Approach to Paris* and *A Study in French Poets*, in which he can, almost in the same breath, lament that Rimbaud «can scarcely ever let out a noun unchaperoned» (Pound, 1991a, p. 191) and hail Rimbaud as a natural poetic genius whose early verse is «perhaps more comparable to the beautiful forms made by chance in some process like the oxidation of silver crystals than to figures carved by an artist» (p. 91). For the Pound of the 1910's, then, Rimbaud's crystal-like poetic genius, his vivid imagery and verbal precision, all constitute significant discoveries in the historical development of poetic technique.

[12] For Sieburth's remarks on the Poundian reception of Rimbaud, in which he draws on passages from *The Spirit of Romance* (1910) and a 1922 book review published in the *New Age*, see Sieburth: 1978, p. 42; p. 146.

In Pound's early literary criticism on Rimbaud, we can also clearly discern the contours of the later *Rimbaud*: in *A Study in French Poets*, he quotes from all four poems that figure in the volume of translations (*Comédie en trois baisers*, *Au Cabaret-Vert*, *Vénus Anadyomène*, and *Les Chercheuses des poux*).[13]

3. *RIMBAUD* (1957)

The motif of the sketch and portrait is immediately apparent on the cover of *Rimbaud* (Fig. 1):

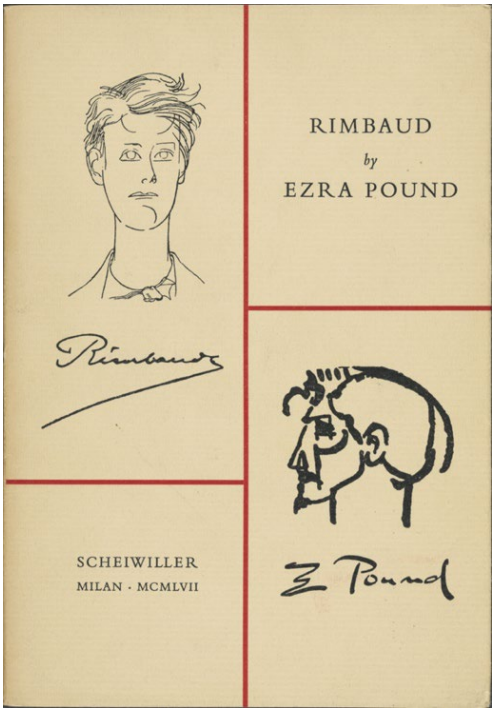

Fig. 1: Cover, *Rimbaud* (1957). Reproduced by permission of the Morgan Library and Museum.

Three red lines divide the cream-colored cover into four sections; the two largest sections, top-left and bottom-right, display portraits of

[13] As Marjorie Perloff indicates, all editions of Rimbaud's poetry after 1934 print *Comédie en trois baisers* under the title *Première soirée* (Perloff, 1981, p. 158).

Rimbaud and Pound, respectively: a 1939 etching of Rimbaud by Louis Marcoussis, with Rimbaud's signature reproduced below the portrait, and a 1912 drawing of Pound by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, which also reproduces Pound's signature below the portrait. The top-right section prints the title and author of the book («Rimbaud by Ezra Pound»), while the bottom-left section contains the publisher, city, and year in Roman numerals («Scheiwiller / Milan / MCMLVII»). The title of the volume, together with the portraits and signatures reproduced on the cover of the book, seems to place Rimbaud and Pound on equal footing: judging only by the cover, Pound is not the translator of poems by Rimbaud but the author of a book that happens to be titled *Rimbaud*. But the more precise parallel for Pound's role in the book is perhaps with Marcoussis and Gaudier-Brzeska, artists who have rendered their respective subjects with apparently casual ease in simple, black and white sketches. The impression of Pound portraying Rimbaud through the act of translation is deepened if one turns to the brief note that precedes the poems and translations. Here, Pound refers to his 1918 *A Study in French Poets* as the original impulse for the volume, claiming that he has since made translations of the poems commented on in the earlier study because «no adequate translations have yet appeared» (Pound, 1957, p. 5); the translations are made for «those who haven't had time to learn French but might like to know what the French authors were writing about» and the translator therefore «herewith *starts to provide a guide* to the meaning of the poems then given in the original only» (p. 5, emphasis in the original). In other words, Pound characterizes his translations as an initial, preliminary, perhaps even provisional effort at translating Rimbaud into English—they are the beginning of a possible «guide» for the curious reader, who has recourse to no other «adequate» translations. That there are, in Pound's judgment, no adequate translations of Rimbaud into English certainly sounds like a jibe at previous translators—but the remark is not wholly ungenerous if one bears in mind a comment Pound made in a 1928 letter to René Taupin: «Est-ce-que il existe *une* langue anglaise pour exprimer les lignes Rimbaud ? Je ne *dis pas* un traducteur capable de le faire, mais est-ce-que cette langue existe ? (comme moyen)—et depuis quand ? » (Pound, 1951, p. 294; «Does one English language exist to express the lines of Rimbaud? I'm *not saying* a translator capable of this, but if this language exists (as a medium)—and since when?»). If one reads the prefatory note in conjunction with these comments, the preliminary, provisional quality of Pound's translations is yet more apparent: not only are the translations the

mere beginning of a guide but also the beginning, presumably, of a much larger undertaking—that of making an English language capable of expressing Rimbaud's best work. Moreover, judging by Pound's remarks in the letter, there is no guarantee that such a language can even be brought into existence. His doubts about a style of English to translate Rimbaud into echo his reflections on translating the medieval Italian poet Guido Cavalcanti: «What obfuscated me was not the Italian but the crust of dead English, the sediment present in my own available vocabulary (...) I hadn't in 1910 made a language, I don't mean a language to use, but even a language to think in» (1968, pp. 193-194). Making an English language in which to render Cavalcanti was for Pound a task of some twenty-five years, involving revision after revision—or, to invoke the pictorial metaphor again, study after study, sketch after sketch. It is also worth noting here that in his letter to Taupin, Pound refers to *les lignes* of Rimbaud's poetry: a lexical choice that suggests yet another link between the art of translation and the art of the sketch. The prefatory note to *Rimbaud* begins to shape the image of Pound the translator of Rimbaud as a portraitist making repeated, provisional attempts to capture the distinctive features of his subject.

If the portrait sketches reproduced on the cover and throughout the volume suggest possible affinities between the visual form of the sketch and the verbal form of the translation, what might those affinities be? The issue of constraint immediately comes to mind: the sketching artist is constrained by the number of strokes he or she may make to render the subject—if there are too many strokes, too much detail, it ceases to be a sketch. The translator, for his or her part, is doubly constrained by the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of the target language and the formal and semantic patterns of the source text. The processes of sketching and translating are also creative processes of inevitable loss and gain: both the artist and the translator are forced to distinguish the essential characteristics of the figure and the source text, respectively, from less important, secondary characteristics. In other words, both the sketch artist and the translator are forced to choose what can be lost. Yet, as the vitality of a sketch depends in no small measure on what can be gained by reducing a subject to its essential lines and shapes, so the vitality of a translation depends largely on the advantage the translator can gain by reducing the source text and target language to essential virtues and powers of expression.

Pound's approach to the dynamics of loss and gain in translation can be teased out by referring to his reflections on translation in essays and letters. His letters of 1935 to the British translator W.H.D. Rouse (who at the time was working on prose translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) are of particular interest in this regard. Pound repeatedly cites the unity of a given poem or passage as a criterion for negotiating the process of loss and gain. In his February 1935 letter to Rouse, Pound states «I don't see that one *translates* by leaving in unnecessary words; that is, words not necessary to the meaning of the *whole* passage, any whole passage» (1951, p. 357; emphasis in original). For Pound, then, the process of translation depends upon the translator's developing a clear sense of the most significant elements of a given poem or passage, which can in turn serve as a kind of sieve for filtering the source text through the target language. In a subsequent letter to Rouse on 23 May 1935, Pound laments his own difficulties in translating Homer's Greek, claiming that «When I do sink into the Greek, what I dig up is too concentrative; I don't see how to get unity of the *whole*» (p. 363; emphasis in original). Ming Xie's remarks on Pound's poetics of translation also highlight this process of discerning an underlying textual unity: «yet Pound was often able to penetrate through the literal surface of these cribs to grasp the integrity of a poem as a whole and then to transmit his insight and understanding into the artifice of a new medium» (1999, p. 210). Set in the terms of the metaphor I have been developing between translating and sketching, Pound's remarks here summon the image of a portraitist struggling to find, within the formal constraints of the sketch, the distinctive lines of his or her subject—struggling, that is, to determine what details must be preserved and what details can be sacrificed. In his translations of Rimbaud, Pound does not hesitate to suppress words, phrases, and shades of meaning in the original poems in order to reduce and condense his target texts to the unified vision of Rimbaud he articulated in his earlier journalistic pieces.

3.1. *Cabaret Vert*

Cabaret Vert, Pound's translation of Rimbaud's sonnet *Au Cabaret-Vert*, provides a case in point. The original poem is itself a kind of sketch of a casual scene in a Belgian cabaret: the poem relates the speaker's arrival at the cabaret after a long, eight-day walk, his observations of the people and surroundings in the cabaret, and the meal he orders there. The epigraph—« cinq heures du soir » («five in the afternoon»)—lends the

poem a certain immediacy and contingency that invites the reader to imagine it being dashed off within the very scene that it presents, like a painting made *en plein air*, to recall Pound's pictorial metaphor in *A Study*. (Curiously, the epigraph is reproduced in the original French in *Rimbaud*, but not in Pound's page-facing translation nor in the 1963 edition of *Translations*.) The short declarative sentences of the opening stanzas accord with the casual epigraph; I quote the entire poem at the outset, for easy reference, as printed in *Rimbaud*:[14]

> Depuis huit jours, j'avais déchiré mes bottines
> Aux cailloux des chemins. J'entrais à Charleroi.
> — *Au Cabaret-Vert :* je demandai des tartines
> De beurre et du jambon qui fût a moitié froid.
>
> Bienheureux, j'allongeai les jambes sous la table
> Verte : je contemplai les sujets très naïfs
> De la tapisserie. — Et ce fut adorable,
> Quand la fille aux tétons énormes, aux yeux vifs,
>
> — Celle-là, ce n'est pas un baiser qui l'épeure ! —
> Rieuse, m'apporta des tartines de beurre,
> Du jambon tiède, dans un plat colorié,
>
> Du jambon rose et blanc parfumé d'une gousse
> D'ail, — et m'emplit la chope immense, avec sa mousse
> Que dorait un rayon de soleil arriéré.
>
> *Octobre 70* (*Rimbaud*, 1957, p. 10)

Pound's description of the «thick suave color, firm, even» of Rimbaud's verse, his «firmness of coloring» and «certitude» are on full display here in the chromaticism of *Au Cabaret-Vert*, with its green table, colored plate, pink ham, and white beer foam gilded by the afternoon sunlight. Rimbaud's quick brushstrokes in painting the scene of the poem become plainspoken English in Pound's colloquial translation, which dispenses with the dashes and colons of the original French in favor of repeated conjunctions that seek to capture the casual vitality of speech:

[14] A prefatory note in *Rimbaud* indicates the text of Rimbaud's poems upon which the translations are based: a 1954 Gallimard edition prepared by Rolland de Renéville and Jules Mouquet.

Wearing out my shoes, 8th day
On the bad roads, I got into Charleroi.
Bread, butter, at the Green Cabaret
And the ham half cold.

Got my legs stretched out
And was looking at the simple tapestries,
Very nice when the gal with the big bubs
And lively eyes,

Not one to be scared of a kiss and more,
Brought the butter and bread with a grin
And the luke-warm ham on a colored plate,

Pink ham, white fat and a sprig
Of garlic, and a great chope of foamy beer
Gilt by the sun in that atmosphere. (p. 11)

Pound suppresses the dash and colon in the first stanza of the original, opting for a simple enumeration of nouns anchored by the prepositional phrase «at the Green Cabaret» in line three, which suppresses the main verb *je demandai* of the original. He also suppresses the subject of the verb «got» in line five and the verb and subject in the phrase «very nice when the gal with the big bubs». The result is a translation whose register is much more informal than the original French; Pound's English, like the speaker of the poem, seems to be leaning back and stretching out its legs, shunning the delicate phrasing and enjambment of Rimbaud's French in search of natural speech. Pound also loosens the tight pattern of meter and rhyme in the French original: line length and number of stresses both vary in Pound's English, with lines as short as three poetic syllables (*And lively eyes*, line eight) and five (*And the ham half cold*, line four). Rhyme comes and goes: *day* / *Cabaret* (lines one and three), *grin* / *sprig* (lines ten and twelve), and *beer* / *atmosphere* in the final two lines are the only full rhymes, with a half rhyme on *tapestries* / *eyes* in lines six and eight. These variations in meter and rhyme sacrifice the intricacy of the French original—the dexterity and ease of a phrasing that seems to pass effortlessly through apt rhyme words—in the name of a rougher manner of speech that largely preserves the imagery and chromaticism of the original.

The single long sentence that stretches from the beginning of the second stanza to the end of the poem—held together by polysyndeton (repetition of the coordinating conjunction *and*)—is a good example of what Massimo Bacigalupo has called «the long and flowing line, both hieratic and colloquial, usually composing a full sentence» that Pound first mastered in the 1917 *Homage to Sextus Propertius* and developed throughout *The Cantos* (1980, p. 7). It also recalls a striking passage, from Pound's 1929 essay *Cavalcanti*, that relates syntax and drawing. Urging the hypothetical translator of Cavalcanti to attend to the «melody» or «uninterrupted flow of syllables» in the original (1968, p. 169), Pound claims that such an exercise of attention and labor can result in a «minor mastery»: «And the mastery, a minor mastery, will lie in keeping this line unbroken, as unbroken in sound as a line in one of Miro's latest drawings is on paper; and giving it perfect balance, with no breaks, no bits sticking ineptly out, and no losses to the force of individual phrases» (p. 170). The minor mastery of the translator in preserving the unbroken line of verbal sound in a translation is, for Pound, comparable to that of the skilled draftsman Miró tracing fluid, unbroken lines in a drawing. The passage from *Cavalcanti* is particularly germane to Pound's translation of *Au Cabaret-Vert* because a drawing by Modigliani is reproduced below the translation in *Rimbaud*: as Pound the translator reduces and condenses the figure of Rimbaud's poem, so Modigliani in *Nudo* (1919) reduces and condenses a feminine figure stretched out on her side (recall the speaker stretching out his legs under the cabaret table) to only a few long, curved, flowing lines.

Cid Corman's comments on Pound's rendering of *Au Cabaret Vert*, both in the margins of the copy held at the Morgan Library and Museum and in the typescript of his review, pick up on the sketch-like quality of the translation—though mostly to point up the major losses inflicted by Pound's drive to reduce and condense the figure of Rimbaud's poem. Corman refers to Pound's «syncopated shorthand style» in *Cabaret Vert*, which does not «revivify» the original (as Pound had hoped) but «only gives a sloppy edge» and «loses much of the savor that is in the subtle ease in the coloring & tone» (p. 10). Corman's point—that the colloquial register and at times choppy phrasing of Pound's translation are poor substitutes for the elegant syntax and rhyme in Rimbaud's original—is, I think, well taken. Yet the last stanza of the translation does seem to capture the «subtle ease in the coloring & tone» that Corman sees in the original: «Pink ham, white fat and a sprig / Of garlic, and a great chope of foamy

beer / Gilt by the sun in that atmosphere» (p. 11). Pound gets all of the chromaticism of the original into his translation, preserves the enjambment that runs across lines twelve and thirteen (*D'ail* / *Of garlic*), and finds convincing rhymes in *grin* / *sprig* (lines ten and twelve) and *beer* / *atmosphere* (lines thirteen and fourteen) to punctuate the final lines. The dynamic of loss and gain at play in Pound's version of *Au Cabaret-Vert* is perhaps more precisely rendered in the words of Michael Alexander, who has likened some of Pound's translations to palimpsests, in which the reader can discern a «calculatedly imperfect erasure» of the source text in the target text (1997, p. 29).

3.2. *Comedy in Three Caresses*

Comedy in Three Caresses, Pound's translation of *Comédie en trois baisers*, provides another example of the poetics of the sketch in *Rimbaud* (in Pound's source, the 1954 edition prepared by Renéville and Mouquet, the poem is printed under the aforementioned title, but Steinmetz' 2004 edition gives the title *Première Soirée*). The poem relates an intimate, erotic scene between a male and female figure punctuated by three caresses or kisses. The opening and closing stanzas of the French original are identical (excepting only an initial dash in the closing stanza), while Pound's English varies slightly:

> Elle était fort déshabillée
> Et de grands arbres indiscrets
> Aux vitres penchaient leur feuillée
> Malinement, tout près, tout près. (pp. 6-8)[15]

Pound's translation opens with the following quartet:

> She hadn't much left on, and the big trees,
> With no discretion, swished
> Their leaves over the window-pane
> Teasingly, so near, so near. (p. 7)

[15] Sorrell, 2001, translating from the 2004 Steinmetz text, translates the opening and closing stanza as follows: «She was less than scantily dressed, / And large trees blatantly / Pressed leaves against her window, / Curious, close, hard by» (p. 9).

His closing stanza is a tercet with three modifications of the opening stanza: the phrase «with no discretion» is eliminated, the prepositional phrase «at ease» is inserted, and the repetition of «so near» reduced to a single occurrence:

> She hadn't much left on, and the big trees
> Swished their leaves over the window-pane
> At ease, teasingly, and so near. (p. 9)

The recurring image of the trees «swishing» their foliage over the windows—Rimbaud's verb in one version is «jetaient» (throw or cast) and in Pound's source text «penchaient» (lean or bend over)—accords with the theme of drawing and sketching articulated throughout *Rimbaud*. A key passage in the fourth stanza of the translation, which relates the first of the poem's three «caresses», further develops the theme in the adjective «traced» and in the suffix *-ish*, which echoes the swishing of the tree leaves in stanza one and suggests, on the semantic level, the notion of approximation or rough description:

> — Je baisai ses fines chevilles.
> Elle eut un long rire très mal
> Qui s'égrenait en claires trilles,
> Une risure de cristal... (p. 6)

> I kissed her traced ankles
> And she smiled a longish smile, bad sign
> That shattered out into clear trills,
> Crystaline. (p. 7)

Pound thus imports, with little evidence in the original, the metaphor of drawing or tracing into his English version: the woman's «traced» ankles are in Rimbaud's French simply «fines». Indeed, here and elsewhere in the volume, Pound seems to be «tracing» the contours of Rimbaud's original in an attempt to capture what he deems the essential, distinctive features of the French poet's style—with all the draftsman's casual ease and disdain for unnecessary detail. Another case in point is the adjective «longish», a highly unlikely adjective for the author of *A Few Don't's by an Imagiste* to choose; but Pound as translator-portraitist of Rimbaud repeatedly employs such offhand adjectives as «shortish» (p. 13, in his rendering of *Vénus Anadyomène*) and «pinkish» (p. 17, in his translation of *Les*

Chercheuses de Poux). In *Comedy*, Pound is content not only to use such an approximative adjective as «longish» but also drastically condense the original: «Une risure de cristal» becomes in the English simply «crystaline», forming a rhyme with «sign» two lines earlier and continuing a chain of assonance that runs through three occurrences of «smile» from line eleven to line fourteen. Such patterns of assonance are a recurrent translation strategy for Pound in *Comedy*; while he very rarely seeks to reproduce the rhyme scheme of Rimbaud's French, he creates dense patterns of assonance such as the one that runs through stanzas four, five, and six (*trills*, *little*, *shift*, *permitted*, *eyelids*, *lips*, and *kissed*):

> I kissed her traced ankles
> And she smiled a longish smile, bad sign
> That shattered out into clear trills,
> Crystaline.
>
> Her little feet scampered under her shift:
> "Will you *stop* now!!"
> After the first permitted boldness,
> The smile pretending coldness?
>
> Her poor eyelids fluttered under my lips
> As I kissed her eyes
> And she threw back her weakling head:
> "That's better now," she said. (pp. 7-9)

Or the one that runs through the penultimate stanza (*rest*, *breasts*, *caress*, and *benevolence*):

> "But I have something still to..."
> I chucked the rest between her breasts
> In a caress that brought a kindly smile,
> Benevolence, all of it. (p. 9)

These intricate patterns of assonance hold the interpretive key for understanding the modifications Pound makes in the last stanza with respect to the first, even though the two are identical in the original French. Pound sacrifices the perfect symmetry of the original, reducing and condensing the final stanza of his translation so as to highlight strong

internal rhymes on *trees*, *leaves*, *ease*, and *teasingly* that seek to compensate for the *abab* rhyme scheme of the original:

> —Elle était fort déshabillée
> Et des grands arbres indiscrets
> Aux vitres penchaient leur feuillée
> Malinement, tout près, tout près. (p. 8)

> She hadn't much left on, and the big trees
> Swished their leaves over the window-pane
> At ease, teasingly, and so near. (p. 9)

As in *Cabaret Vert*, Pound's phrasing in «She hadn't much left on» is colloquial, though here he is more meticulous in establishing and developing patterns of rhyme and assonance that approximate the many aural resonances of Rimbaud's French. The phrase «at ease», inserted into the final line, seems to be transposed from line seven of the original: «Sur le plancher frissonnaient d'aise / Ses petits pieds si fins, si fins» (p. 6), which Pound translates as «And her little toes tickled the floor, / Quivering comfortably, and so small» (p. 7), doubling the alliteration of *toes* / *tickled* with *quivering* / *comfortable*.[16] The phrase «and so small», separated from the noun (*toes*) that it modifies, provides the precedent for the final line of *Comedy*, where Pound eliminates the repetition of «so near» in the first stanza and «tout près» in the original, giving simply «and so near», a phrase that could be construed as modifying any or all of the nouns that precede it: *she*, *trees*, *leaves*, and *window-pane*. With the comedy of three caresses having run its course, there is no need to emphasize through repetition the nearness of the tree limbs tracing their foliage over the windows: the limbs of the two actors are presumably near enough.

In his comments on *Comedy*, Corman argues that Pound «seems to cloud things» by consistently rendering «rire» in the original as «smile» in the translation, a change in diction that for Corman weakens the erotic charge of the woman's character in the French original (p. 3). His claim that Pound «softens the image» in stanza five by rendering Rimbaud's « La première audace permise / Le rire feignait punir! » (p. 6) as the interrogative «After the first permitted boldness, / The smile pretending coldness?» (p. 7) is convincing. But when Pound translates «Elle eut un

[16] Sorrell, 2001 gives for these lines «On the floor, her dainty little feet / Trembled with pure pleasure» (p. 9).

long rire très mal / Que s'égrenait en claires trilles / Une risure de cristal» (p. 6) in stanza four of the original as «And she smiled a longish smile, bad sign / That shattered out into clear trills, / Crystaline» (p. 7), he can hardly be said to soften the image in Rimbaud's French: though the woman smiles in the English and laughs in the French, her smile erupts into a laugh, «shatter[ing] out into clear trills, / Crystaline». The careful attention Corman pays to the verb *rire* does, however, point up a curious feature of this version of Rimbaud's *Comédie*: the noun *risure*, extremely rare in French, is almost certainly a regional word from Rimbaud's native Ardennes. (Corman perhaps suspected as much, since the word is underlined in the copy of *Rimbaud* held at the Morgan.) Ardennois words and orthographies abound in Rimbaud's poems, resting comfortably within verses of metrical polish, as in *risure* here and various instances of the orthography *maline* and *malinement* (the latter of which appears in the first stanza of *Comédie*)—which according to Steinmetz follows the pronunciation of those words common in the north of France and in Belgium (2004, p. 232). Rimbaud's occasional regionalisms perhaps form part of the basis for Pound's often colloquial renderings, though he certainly exaggerates that quality of Rimbaud's poetic voice. And yet the archaic form of the word *crystalline* that Pound employs in line sixteen—«*crystaline*» (modified in the 1963 printing of the translation to *crystalline*)—is a rare variant (as *risure* is rare in French) that accentuates the rhyme on «sign» two lines earlier. In short, Pound, in his role as the casual portraitist-translator of his French original in *Rimbaud*, is at times capable of tracing a subtly distinctive line in his renderings.

4. Conclusion

Reading Pound's translations of Rimbaud in their original book form sheds new light on Pound's poetics of translation, on his dialogue with Rimbaud's poetry, and on how the material form in which translations are produced and circulate open up new interpretative possibilities. The drawings and portraits reproduced in *Rimbaud* suggest hidden affinities between the act of sketching and the act of translating that are borne out in Pound's translations in the volume. In response to Rimbaud's originals, Pound attempts to cultivate a casual, colloquial poetic voice by often reducing the syntax and condensing the imagery of the French poems. Such strategies of translation bear resemblances to the process of sketching or studying a figure for a portrait in that the artist, like the translator, seeks

to capture the distinguishing features of his or her subject within the formal confines of the sketch—an abbreviated and provisional form. Cid Corman, in his marginal comments and typescript review, argues that the results of Pound's «renderings» of Rimbaud are mixed: the delicate balance of loss and gain inherent in the art of translation (as in the art of the sketch) often tips in the direction of the former in *Rimbaud*. There are, however, moments in which the reader of *Rimbaud* can hear the murmurings of an English worthy of Rimbaud and see at work the sure hand of an exceptional poet-translator.

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