

**The theme of childhood
as a source of inspiration
in the works of
Arthur Rimbaud and François Nourissier**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree Master of Arts at the University of
Stellenbosch**



by

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December 1999**

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***“Never have ideas about children and never have ideas for
them.”***

**D.H.Lawrence
Fantasia of the Unconscious
1922**

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

22/11/99

Date

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie is om die kind se kreatiwiteit uit te lig aan die hand van die 19de eeuse digter, Arthur Rimbaud en die 20ste eeuse skrywer, François Nourissier se werke as voorbeeld. Daar word gepoog om die belang van die kind se ervarings as sentrale tema vir hul teks aan te dui.

In die eerste deel van die tesis word daar na Rimbaud se poësie en geselekteerde briewe verwys, wat vermoedelik vanaf 1869 tot 1891 geskryf is. Dit is veral sy poësie in die bundels, *Une Saison en Enfer* en *Les Illuminations* wat die kind in sy verbeeldingswereld uitbeeld, wat van belang is, tesame met sy meesterlike gedig *Le Bateau Ivre* (± 1871). Temas wat verband hou met sy kinderlewe word beklemtoon.

In die tweede deel word na veertien van François Nourissier se belangrikste boeke verwys, waaronder die meeste outobiografies van aard is. Nourissier plaas die klem op sy kinderlewe as inspirasie tot die skrywer wie hy is.

In die derde deel word die twee skrywers se kinderjare vergelyk deur enkele temas uit te lig. Dit is ongewoon om 'n roman skrywer se werke te vergelyk met die van 'n digter, maar die poëtiese taal en soortgelyke temas van Nourissier maak dit moontlik om vergelykend hul werk te bestudeer. Nourissier as volwasse skrywer moet delf in sy verlede om vervulling te vind, terwyl Rimbaud die onskuld van sy kinderjare probeer verewig in poësie.

Die gevolgtrekking word gemaak dat die kind se sosialisering in sy familie en sy omgewing, diep gewortel is en sal bly in sy kreatiewe denke. Negatiewe ervarings kan suksesvol deur die skrywer in sy werke terapeutiese waarde verkry, of dit kan die skrywer se ervarings aan die samelewing bekend stel as 'n blote bevrydingsproses. Die waarde van die outeur se skryfkuns word dikwels bevraagteken, maar wanneer die leser hom met die teks kan identifiseer, kan dit hom help om sy kreatiewe stiltes te ontgin, en dit tot 'n positiewe skeppingsdrang te omskep. Die kind met 'n beperkte sosialisering hoef nie 'n lydende party van sy omgewing te bly nie, maar hy kan dit vryelik gebruik vir die ontluiking van sy verborge talente.

SUMMARY

The object of this study is to determine the importance of the child's creativity through the works of 19th century poet, Arthur Rimbaud and the 20th century author, François Nourissier. An attempt is made to present the child's experiences as a central theme in the text.

In part one of this thesis, reference is made to Rimbaud's poetry and selected letters, believed to have been written between 1869 and 1891. The collections *Une Saison en Enfer* and *Les Illuminations*, portraying the child in his creative world, are of importance, along with his masterpiece *Le Bateau Ivre* (±1871). Themes that refer to his childhood are emphasized.

In part two, fourteen of François Nourissier's most important novels are discussed, with specific reference to his autobiographical works. Nourissier believes that his childhood is responsible for the author he has become.

In part three the childhood of both authors is compared, illustrating some of the most important themes. It is not common to compare an author's prose with a poet's poetry, but because of Nourissier's poetic language and similar themes, it is made possible. Nourissier needs to delve in his past to find fulfilment in his writing as an adult, while Rimbaud struggles to eternalise the innocence of his childhood in his poetry.

The conclusion drawn from this study, is that the child's socialisation in his family and his surroundings will remain deeply rooted in his creative thinking. The author can use negative experiences with success in his works as a therapy or simply as a liberating process by sharing his ideas with society. The value of the author and his writing are often questioned, but when the reader can identify with the text, it can help him to work with his own creative silences, and to channel these into a positive creative process. The child that was exposed to a limited socialisation does not need to remain a victim of his surroundings, but can freely use his innate creativity as a gifted artist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I WISH TO EXPRESS PARTICULAR THANKS TO:

- **my promoter, professor J. de Vynck, and co-examiner, professor F. Jacques, for their patient encouragement, for the guidance of keeping unusual ideas lucid and ordered and for the knowledge shared, tending to my creative fires**
- **my friends and family who endorsed and exalted my ideas with their unconditional support**
- **François Nourissier for helping me track down his novels as well as his letters of support**
- **Mary Cameron for her gracious assistance**

***To my family who encouraged my creative being and who let
me live in my world.***

***To the masters that inspired me with their wisdom and
knowledge.***

Corpus Text

1. Fowlie, W. 1975. **Rimbaud Complete Works, Selected Letters**. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
2. Nourissier, F. 1963. **Un Petit Bourgeois**. Paris: Grasset.
3. Nourissier, F. 1965. **Une Histoire Française**. Paris: Grasset.
4. Nourissier, F. 1968. **Le Maître de Maison**. Paris: Le livre de Poche: Grasset.
5. Nourissier, F. 1975. **Lettre à Mon Chien**. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
6. Nourissier, F. 1978. **Le Musée de l'Homme**. Paris: Grasset.
7. Nourissier, F. 1981. **L'Empire des Nuages**. Paris: Grasset.
8. Nourissier, F. 1985. **La Fête des Pères**. Paris: Grasset.
9. Nourissier, F. 1987. **En Avant Calme et Droit**. Paris: Grasset.
10. Nourissier, F. 1990. **Autos Graphie**. Paris: Le livre de Poche: Albin Michel.
11. Nourissier, F. 1990. **Bratislava**. Paris: Grasset.
12. Nourissier, F. 1992. **Le Gardien des Ruines**. Paris: Livre de Poche: Grasset.
13. Nourissier, F. 1996. **Roman Volé**. Paris: Grasset.
14. Nourissier, F. 1997. **Le Bar de L'Escadrille**. Paris: Grasset.

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Introduction

Our childhood is a force that inspires, but it also leaves its scars on our adulthood. Creative writing is often a symptom of the author's state of mind, showing therapeutic value through the expression of the author's emotions and experiences. Paradoxically fear can be overcome and survival enhanced when one accepts the uncertainties one faces in life. Rimbaud struggled with his role as an author. The majority of the poets in Paris, who were not interested in his talent, rejected him. Nourissier again struggled to express the memories that were almost forgotten with the duration of time.

If we simplify all the type of careers in society back to ancient times, we find five categories, namely the king, the advisors (such as doctors, religious leaders), the agriculturalist, the soldiers and the slaves. The poet does not fit into these categories: Rimbaud explains: "En Grèce, ai-je dit, vers et lyres rythment l'Action...Des fonctionnaires, des écrivains: auteur, créateur, poète, cet homme n'a jamais existé!" (Fowlie. *Œuvres*.1975: 306). The ultimate decision he made to abandon his poetry, was perhaps also the realisation that it was a stage in a life process which helped him change and renew his present. He could express his past through his poetry, but he could not create a new life. His poetry would ultimately only be temporary as nothing ages so quickly as yesterday's vision.

Nourissier's writing is certainly a therapeutic process. He himself admits that he is a product of his unhappy childhood. In *L'Empire des Nuages* he even refers to the writer as a worker, "...pensez à vous, à votre travail...L'art gris, en littérature, c'est Babel. Le <<traduide>>, l'ordinateur-à-écrire, l'infra-langage de la TV - mais tout cela à la puissance cent, mille!...Jamais on ne s'est mieux battu pour la survie des langues minoritaires, menacés, etc. C'est par le texte, par les mots que partout on résiste aux oppressions. Écrivain, vous êtes au vingtième siècle un privilégié. Vous en rendez-vous compte? Et cela doit-il vous aveugler sur mes angoisses?" (Nourissier.1981: 218).

Nourissier is considered a classic novelist. In his books, his biography is often expressed through the narrator. He uses his writing like the balancing of a scale and as his therapy; the moments of perfect happiness are whenever inspiration strikes, otherwise he battles with his confessions in solitude. He struggles with the invention

of a story not yet known to him. His life is his writing and his writing is the life that keeps him happy. He sees his inspiration as a magical happening, which precedes his writing. The energy filters through in the writing in often-poetical phrases. With every word corrected, or with every phrase touched up, he conquers his solitude. His personal, metaphorical language is an instrument for the expression of his truths. His true problem is to find the way of expressing beauty, in prose: "Je n'ai jamais pensé à écrire des textes dont la seule fin soit d'être cette fleur que constitue le poème"(Nyssen.1969: 32).

A major difference between the two authors is the fact that Nourissier published his novels while Rimbaud never intended to write for a specific public that he knew would in any case not understand or appreciate his poetry. For Nourissier, his lucidity and his work were the solution to a meaningful life: "...la solution, c'est la façon de passer les années. Que faire d'autre?" (Nyssen.1969:45). Rimbaud draws courage from a celebration of ordinary pleasures in a magical world of poetry.

Rimbaud portrayed who he was in his poetry. Borer (1991: 31) quotes Verlaine who spoke of Rimbaud with admiration, "...généreux, toute sa vie, charitable même ... sa vie ne contredit pas son œuvre, tout au contraire, l'une et l'autre s'éclairent indissociablement." The duality in Rimbaud is poet-child versus adult-child. His writing is not only an account of his childhood, but also a profound discovery: "Parole lourde d'un passé assassiné et intuable" (Bellemin-Noël.1996: 81). Images from Nourissier's haunting past remained with him also in his fear of losing his creativity. The images exist somewhere between a god and a ghost from the past.

Carl Gustav Jung's psychology evolves around a personal unconscious that every individual possesses: "It is formed from the repressed infantile impulses and wishes, subliminal perceptions, and countless forgotten experiences; it belongs to him alone" (Fordham. 1953: 22). The personal unconscious and consciousness was a powerful source of creativity with Rimbaud and Nourissier, who used their childhood memories in their literature.

Some of their works escape proper analysis, but the central themes in their writing are a portrayal of their truths. Rimbaud encouraged a recreation and rethinking of previous constraints that Levi (1992: 526) believes to be the stimulus for many 20th century writers. Rimbaud's poetry is still alive as it illuminates poetic inspiration, long after the well has dried up. Drevdahl (1996: 21-26) sees the force behind creativity

as, "...the capacity to produce ideas, compositions which are essentially new, previously unknown to the creator. It can be an imaginative activity or involve information derived from past experiences. Transplanting old relationships to new situations must be purposeful or goal directed not just fantasy. It can be an artistic, literary or scientific form of production." The experiences of their unhappy childhood were for both authors the source of their creativity.

Rimbaud, the disinherited child, sometimes seeking disintegration from his family, uses his childhood as structural element in his poems. He possesses boundless creative energies in his revolt, sometimes seeking security. The child is living his adventures not only as the author, but also as an important participant. Macklin (1996: 58) supports the fact that "...it is clear that childhood is a key thematic and structural component of Rimbaud's work across all his collections: his poetry is a language the child does not need to learn." Macklin further refers to Rimbaud's integral logic in the prose poetry, as "... fluid and pliable form capable of accommodating all that the child experiences in the inner theatre of his imagination."

Although with both authors creative writing can be seen as an escape, it is at the same time a confrontation. Nourissier confronted his childhood, more specifically his mother and his lack of education, in a wider sense of the word. Maybe he expected too much from life: "...cette vie faisant partie, pensais-je, de la préparation d'une expérience d'écrivain" (Guillon et al. 1996: 72).

Fowlie (1965:83) substantiates my views on Rimbaud's creativity: "The literary sources of a poet are far less important than the particular joys and sufferings he knew as a child. Every episode of childhood, every act and emotion, is recorded in such sensitivity as Rimbaud's, and grows into some metamorphosis of unusual size and importance. Such are the distant origins of works of art. A child is a complex and tormented being who willingly believes, especially if his parents repeat it to him often enough, that he is a monster..."

Nourissier believed that memories were seldom pure literature and that only memories of past readings could be seen as pure literature (Guillon et al. 1996: 131), yet a poet like Rimbaud has the potential to deepen man's perception of the universe. He sees the importance of his surroundings as part of his creation.

As for Nourissier, one could think that his characters are all known to him autobiographically, but in a letter to me dated 8 January 1998 (unpublished), he selected only certain books that he advised should be used for the sake of research for this thesis. *Allemande* was one of the books he did not mark on his list of most important works and considering his remark in *Mauvais Genre* it is clear that it would be erroneous to accept a generalised view on the characters in his works: "C'est un personnage de Roman qui parle, et à propos d'un autre" (Guillon et al. 1996: 24).

Nourissier confirms the importance of his childhood as to the author he became in his letter to me dated 8 January 1998 (unpublished): "L'idée de votre thèse, de partir de l'enfance pour étudier mon travail, est bonne et juste. Sans l'enfance – triste et pauvre – il n'y aurait pas eu de Nourissier écrivain." The author's confirmation was of great value to justify going beyond the *no-man's-land*. He deserves far more recognition for his handling of his lonely years, for the energy engendered and the lucidity shown in his works. Although somewhat dramatic about his past, many facts in his autobiographies lead to sadness: "Tant que je n'ai pas été installé dans ce qui est ma vie d'aujourd'hui (c'est à-dire jusqu'en 1962), une espèce d'odeur triste, une odeur de cave ou de renfermé remontait du passé" (Guillon et al. 1996: 30).

In a letter to me dated 8 January 1998 (unpublished), Nourissier writes on my intention to compare him to Rimbaud: "La comparaison avec Rimbaud est un peu écrasante! Elle est assez juste néanmoins, elle aussi, parce qu'il venait de la même France que moi: nord-est, Ardennes, toute petite bourgeoisie ... Sous ce pli, une liste complète de mes livres. J'ai marqué en rouge les titres qui me paraissent les plus importants." One could not have asked for a better motivation than the accord of the author himself. This inspired the furthering of ideas on the title, chosen for this thesis.

Fowlie (1943:22) admires literature as it serves as a record of civilisation, of man's thoughts and actions: What remains of the true temper of our age is found in the creation of its artists. Man's destiny is also seen from a spiritual point of view through poetry as a natural heritage. Rimbaud the poet, but also the novelist Nourissier showed a sensibility in their work with which the reader can identify.

For the sake of this thesis, the complete works and selected letters compiled by Wallace Fowlie (1975) are used as primary source of reference to Rimbaud's texts. Nourissier's autobiographical work is limited to fourteen books; as for the others, it is

merely the décor or the setting that is known to Nourissier. The most important works, used for this thesis are: *Le Musée de l'Homme* (1978), *Un Petit Bourgeois* (1963), *Lettre à mon Chien* (1975), *Mauvais Genre* (1996) and *Bratislava* (1990).

Rimbaud's childhood is defined as "...certainty, as a treasure, as something pure and exempt from doubt and falsehood. He recognises the noblest efforts of man, and names them: love, ambition, poetry, science, religion – but he designates them as vain, as masks concealing a void" (Fowlie.Œuvres.1975: 6). His illusions are destroyed through adulthood, for only as a child would his creativity continue to exist. He is a child that possesses an adult language, but who would have preferred to remain a child.

Through the re-evaluation of his past, Nourissier shows an admirable honesty towards his own character. He deals with the artist's place in society, as literature would be dead if separated from life. The author's works reflect his survival, and his surroundings. Both authors struggled through the antithesis in their characters to find their own happiness.

Chapter 1

The theme of childhood as a source of inspiration in the work of Arthur Rimbaud

Parents

One of Madame Rimbaud's family problems was the behaviour of her brothers who had a tendency to travel or to disappear. She kept these problems secret, but despite her attempts to avoid a repetition of these problems with her offspring, ironically her own son behaved the same way. Furthermore, she chased her youngest brother away from their farm at Roche as she was ashamed of him. Starkie (1982: 43) believes that this should give us more insight into the severity of Madame Rimbaud's character. She wanted to prevent her children from following the same destructive path that her brothers had led. Strict education and good morality were indispensable to her in the upbringing of her children.

Rimbaud's father was away most of the time as he was far too adventurous for Charleville and seemed indifferent towards his offspring. Some of Rimbaud's poems are a cry for affection, as children, have, "... le cœur si sensible!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 12). They are comforted through their dreaming of the wonders of Nature: "La Nature s'éveille et de rayons s'enivre, La terre; demi-nue, heureuse de revivre"(Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 12).

Starkie (1982: 44) is convinced that Madame Rimbaud loved her children, but she never felt it necessary to show her love. She did not tolerate opposition and when her husband expressed opposing opinions, it ended in quarrels: "Elle était avare alors qu'il était généreux, bigote et lui libre-penseur; conservatrice et lui libéral; par ailleurs, elle était totalement dépourvue du sens de l'humour. On dit qu'elle le traitait avec la même sévérité que ses enfants, et qu'elle tentait de combattre sa légèreté, de redresser ses fautes" (Starkie. 1982: 45). Rimbaud tried to calm his parents' quarrels without success, and when his father finally left, Rimbaud and his brothers and sisters were left with an overprotective mother. When the grandfather died, the children were even more emotionally abandoned. Starkie (1982: 46) explains the complications of these events: "Cette solitude précoce, ce manque d'affection influèrent fortement sur la personnalité d'Arthur, qui se sentit très tôt différent des

autres.” However, it must have been difficult for Madame Rimbaud, alone with her four children still, whom she considered her life-task.

Understandably, although the female figure is a central theme in many poems such as *Soleil et Chair*, *Barbare*, and *Dévotion*, Rimbaud's respect for the female is only expressed in the admiration he shows for Venus. Verstraëte (1980: 29) confirms that the female figure is indeed very negatively expressed in the works of Arthur Rimbaud.

A thorough understanding of Rimbaud's family is necessary in order to find its links with his poetry. Rimbaud's life started in chaos. Levi (1992: 524) states that Rimbaud knew rejection on an emotional and physical level and he revolted against his superiors in an attempt to find an identity. He let his hair grow long, the Parnassian style, expressing resentment towards God and his mother. He even stole books or bought them on credit, knowing that he could not pay for them. His revolt against his mother and her tenacious grip on him manifested itself in a revolt against certain aspects of the Christian religion too. Verstraëte (1980: 27) believes that Rimbaud must have felt that instinct, together with man's nobility and pride was destroyed through Christianity. He could not accept Christ as a noble man, thoughts he expresses in *Soleil et Chair* showing what he believes to be the cause for man's unhappiness: “Oh! La route est amère Depuis que l'autre Dieu nous attelle à sa croix” (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 28).

While *Enfance* is a lyrical meditation on the end of his childhood along with his new discoveries and solitude, “...il met en scène la figure mythique de l'enfant, poète de sept ans, admirateur de l'aube, ou du pauvre” whenever he discusses himself (Dubois. 1975:121). In *Les Poètes de Sept Ans* the poet's solitude is evoked, but the poem in itself gives autobiographical proof of the awakening of his poetic imagination. With the opening line, “Et la Mère...” we know that his mother is the controlling force. The poem shows a proud mother, blinded by her own obsession to control. She is unaware of her child's true needs, so although he is outwardly obedient, it is just temporary: “...intelligent; pourtant des fics noirs, quelques traits Semblaient prouver en lui d'âcres hypocrisies!” His main childhood enemy is his mother who literally chased him away from her. He avoided her whenever he could: “À se renfermer dans la fraîcheur des latrines: Il pensait là, tranquille” (Fowlie.Œuvres.1975: 76).

Fowlie (1965: 7) believes that "children often invent misdemeanors to commit in order to legitimize the title that adults have given them of punishable children." It is certain that whether or not Rimbaud was trying to be the opposite of his mother's dream, he used poetry to escape: "À sept ans, il faisait des romans sur la vie Du grand désert, où luit la Liberté ravie, Forêts, soleils, rives, savanes! (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 7).

Fowlie (1965: 7) finds a parallel with Rimbaud in the mythical story of Achilles. Achilles was raised by women and even forced to wear a girl's dress. Fowlie (1965: 7) believes the Greek boy's femininity to be the same as the feigned fury of Rimbaud. Rimbaud remained what seemed a docile and a studious child until 1869, but soon he went into extreme revolt. His mother had closed her son off for too long; rebellion would be the only outcome.

Very few people frequented the Rimbards, especially after Captain Rimbaud had left. The family soon had to move to a more affordable area in town. Rimbaud was intrigued by these new, seemingly more adventurous surroundings. He envied the lives the poor children led: "Pitié ! Ces enfants seuls étaient ses familiers Qui, chétifs, fronts nus, œil déteignant sur la joue, Cachant de maigres doigts jaunes et noirs de boue ... Et si, l'ayant surpris à des pitiés immondes, Sa mère s'effrayait..." (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 76). Soon Rimbaud's mother felt she was not educating her children properly anymore and therefore she decided to move again to get away from the ill-mannered neighbours' appalling language.

Rimbaud was talented in languages and creative writing, but his mother felt that Latin and Greek was of relative importance for an educational background. Time upon time, he had to face opposition from his mother. Madame Rimbaud, always rigorous would, according to Starkie (1982: 49), send her children to bed without dinner if they could not memorise the Latin verses given to them as homework. She believed this was essential for their development and general education. Rimbaud did not enjoy all aspects of school and in an essay he questions for instance the need of Greek, Geography and History: "On a, il est vrai, besoin de savoir que Paris est en France; mais on ne demande pas à quel degré de latitude... Passons au grec. Cette sale langue n'est parlée par personne au monde!" (Starkie.1982: 50) Rimbaud's mother thus played an influential role in his emotional and educational development, which cannot be ignored. Knowing Madame Rimbaud, we can comprehend her son's attempts to run away from home.

Levi (1992: 525) supports these views: Rimbaud was sulky and aggressive and so obsessed with his poetic vision that he would sometimes live with tramps during his fugues. Interestingly enough he always returned home when he was in total despair. He clearly needed to belong somewhere and home gave him security, which is why he continued writing to his family when he stayed in Africa. Rimbaud preferred not to disappear entirely out of his mother's life the way his father did.

Arthur Rimbaud's mother was an annoyance to her children because of her possessive behaviour. Starkie (1982: 38) believes that the bourgeois atmosphere she tried to create contributed to Rimbaud's negative experience of family life. Rimbaud recalls military bands playing at the Station Square in Charleville in his poem *À la Musique*. It was on one such an occasion that his mother had met her husband. Madame Rimbaud was a determined woman and according to Starkie (1982: 42) it was most probably she who chose her husband, as she was neither young nor pretty when she met Captain Rimbaud.

Jouffroy (1991: 85) reckons that in *Vierge Folle*, Rimbaud uses 'Orphée' as the mask for himself as a child: "Réveillé, désenchanté et dessaoulé, il l'a soudain compris: ses souffles ne lui venaient pas de la Grèce antique, mais de beaucoup plus près de lui, de la partie la plus obscure (je veux dire la moins interrogée) de sa vie d'enfant des rêves qu'il a dû entretenir, devant une armoire ou un buffet aux portes noires, autour de son père disparu."

It is a good example of Rimbaud's peculiar logic. He faces the reality of his childhood, but at the same time, he is trying to escape. One can only appreciate Rimbaud's profound inspiration when one understands his childhood milieu, and his life. Jouffroy (1991: 90) believes that the parents' influence on Rimbaud's life runs much deeper than one thinks. Arthur clearly remembered the last dispute between his parents: "Ils jetaient l'un après l'autre le même bassin d'argent par terre." Jouffroy (1991: 90) is supported by Pierre Petitfils who explains: "Dans un cahier de brouillon, Rimbaud enfant a noté ces quelques lignes, seule mention explicite qu'il ait faite de son père, pour une espèce de devoir écolier dont voici la version littérale:

*Mes parents étaient peu riches
mais très honnêtes; ils (sic) n'avaient
pour tout bien qu'une petite*

*maison...
 mon père était officier dans
 les armées du roi. C'était un
 homme grand, maigre,
 chevelure noire, barbe, yeux, peau
 de même couleur...
 d'un caractère vif, bouillant, souvent en colère et ne voulant
 rien souffrir qui lui déplut
 ma mère était bien différente femme, douce, calme,
 s'effrayant de peu de chose, et
 cependant tenant la maison dans
 un ordre parfait."*

(Rimbaud in Jouffroy.1991: 90-91)

Jouffroy (1991: 91) cites some supplementary information from the version of another critic, Suzanne Briet. The supplementary part is cited:

*"Quoi qu'il n'eût guère, quand je suis né, que 48 ou 50 ans, on lui en auraient certainement bien donné 60 ou... 58. Ma mère... Elle était si calme, que mon père l'amusait comme une jeune demoiselle. J'étais le plus aimé (...)
 Je me rappelle qu'un jour mon père m'avait promis 20 sous si je lui faisais bien une division; je commençai; mais je ne pus finir. Ah! combien de fois ne m'a-t-il promis de... sous, des jouets, des friandises, même une fois cinq francs, si je pouvais lui... lire quelque chose... malgré cela mon père me mit en classe dès que j'eus dix ans"*
 (Rimbaud in Jouffroy: 1991: 91).

Rimbaud, although he must have missed his father who was away most of the time, performed well at school. One can only guess how more rewarding the schoolwork would have been if the talented young boy would have been supported by the father: *"On sait que le Capitaine Rimbaud a écrit beaucoup, cela aurait dû être l'inspiration pour le jeune Rimbaud d'écrire aussi bien. Il avait également laissé dans la maison de Charleville <<une grammaire arabe>> revue et corrigée entièrement, une grande quantité de documents français-arabes se rapportant aux guerres (d'Algérie), des anecdotes, des contes etc. – et, en manuscrit et très soigné, une traduction du coran (texte arabe en regard) égarée aujourd'hui"* (Jouffroy.1991: 92).

The Rimbaud children felt abandoned, and it is certainly a sense of anguish that Rimbaud expressed in poems like *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*. These events in his past left some miserable impressions, yet Rimbaud overcomes them in his dreams: "Dans quelque songe étrange où l'on voyait joujoux, Bonbons habillés d'or, étincelants bijoux" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 10). In this poem, Rimbaud feels abandoned without the presence of his parents and he explains the joy he could have felt if they could only have been there: "Aux portes des parents tout doucement toucher... et la gaieté permie" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 10). The house has changed so much, because, "...l'armoire était sans clefs!... La chambre des parents est bien vide, aujourd'hui... Il n'est point de parents, de foyer, de clefs prises... point de douces surprises!... Silencieusement tombe une larme amère... Quand donc reviendra notre mère?" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 12).

The significance of the words, such as "silencieusement" and "amère" is evident when we think of Rimbaud's omnipresent silence that holds the bitter tears and sadness captive. The emptiness in the room in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins* is also symbolic of Rimbaud's personal emptiness. The father is absent, and the mother is the source of revolt as in another poem, *Les Poètes de Sept ans*.

Rimbaud's father left in 1860, which means that Rimbaud who was then six years old never really knew him. Captain Rimbaud finally died in 1878. He had never attempted to contact his family again and thus played no positive role in educating his children (Starkie: 1982: 46). Bonnefoy (1961: 8-10) says that Rimbaud never shared memories of his father with anyone else. Rimbaud however inherited his father's adventurous side. Borer (1991: 17) explains that Captain Rimbaud left the house hours before Arthur's birth and thereafter he only returned periodically over a period of two years. Rimbaud as a child must have experienced this as rejection. He had no paternal figure to which he could relate to and he therefore searched for a worthy replacement in his life. According to Borer (1991: 22), Rimbaud chose Izambard as a father figure and he even wrote to his professor in rhetoric, saying: "Je vous aimerai comme un père." Georges Izambard fulfilled this role, by sharing poetry and by lending his books to Arthur. He was also expected at times to compensate for Madame Rimbaud's shortcomings.

Rimbaud's mother, although repeatedly described as cold and calm, remained his last correspondent and he always made sure that she need not spend money for his sake. On the other hand, we find several resemblances between Rimbaud and his

father in his later life. Rimbaud's awareness of his father's voyages to Africa, must have been an inspiration to him. Levi (1992: 524-526) reckons that Rimbaud inherited his father's talent for writing as well as the curiosity to see more of the world. Captain Rimbaud's reports and manuscripts were concise and factual as is Rimbaud's poetry and the letters from Rimbaud when his adventurous life led him to Africa. Richer (1972:225) confirms that Rimbaud's "désert sentimental" in which he spent his childhood years led him to the solitude of Harrar.

Rimbaud's factual, laconic letters written to his mother are interesting reports of the situation in Africa at the time. Jouffroy (1991: 193-4) also gives proof of Rimbaud's later activities in Africa: "Délibérément décidé de ne plus écrire? Jamais formulé ces termes. Savouré, qui le voyait fréquemment en 1888, a dit qu'on le voyait toujours écrire nuit et jour... Alfred Bardey a même déclaré en 1897, que Rimbaud préparait en cachette sa rentrée dans le monde des lettres, qu'il écrivait sans cesse." Rimbaud's vision continued while he was living in Africa. Whether or not he continued writing will remain a mystery.

Starkie (1982: 41) believes that Captain Rimbaud was a father of whom Rimbaud could have been proud as he was an intelligent man. In Algeria he accomplished more than his fellow workers, because of his language and administrative abilities. He wrote reports on the political situation and he was in charge of law, order, and taxes. Captain Rimbaud proved to be a responsible person and a good soldier too. His relations with the indigenous people, proved to be very advanced for his time. He received several medals and he left behind some interesting sketches, as well as a French translation of the Koran.

Rimbaud also interpreted the Koran and the Moslems considered him rather crazy. Jouffroy (1991: 96) underlines the importance of the absence of a father: "Ses déplacements continuels, sa distance à l'égard de la famille, sa connaissance de la langue arabe et son attrait ambigu pour le Coran dessinent de si nombreuses lignes convergentes avec l'expérience de son père, que l'on ne voit pas comment il aurait pu."

In *Les Étrennes des Orphelins* the mother is the central character, her absence is bitterly felt: "les petits sommeillent tristement" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 12). Dream and fantasy transform misery into comfort, thanks to "l'ange des berceaux": "Un rêve si joyeux... Ils se croient endormis dans un paradis rose..." (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975:

12). Jouffroy (1991: 105) sees *Les Poètes de Sept ans* and *Les Étrennes des Orphelins* as the starting point for Rimbaud's "antimaternelle" war. He misses a loving mother and the father is not a part of his reference world anymore. His father's absence created a dream in adulthood that would inspire Rimbaud's choice of destinations. It is from Algeria that his father had returned to France. He left the post at Sebdou and as Jouffroy (1992: 208-209) adds: "Suez, porte du même continent de chaleur où il a choisi de fondre ses traces avec celles de son père mais plus loin qu'elles, pour s'y diluer sous le même soleil." He would search for his father in the same way an adopted child would want to trace his roots.

Rimbaud's youth was further influenced by the men he had met like Delahaye, also a friend during his school years and then Bretagne, a bachelor aged 35. Bretagne was sensitive to poetry but also a rebel against authority, as Fowlie (1965: 12) explains: "He was jovial, a confirmation of attitudes Rimbaud had developed." At school (± 1870), Rimbaud was however still submissive and well behaved outwardly.

Fowlie (1965: 10) also believes that Rimbaud was searching for his father subconsciously, associating him with Izambard. The 22 year-old teacher inspired Rimbaud, which had led to the development of an intimate friendship mainly on a spiritual level, as a welcome escape from the dull, placid atmosphere in Charleville. Rimbaud had an intense need for love and he found gratitude, respect and affection in Izambard, who sincerely cared for his young friend. Bonnefoy (1970: 14-15) refers to his yearning love: "Tous les Déserts de l'amour, notamment, témoignent de cette attente. Ces pages qui sont parmi les plus nobles et les plus touchantes de Rimbaud la disent et la redisent avec l'angoisse du mauvais rêve, et la triste pensée qu'elle sera toujours vaine."

Rimbaud found not only a lack of love, but also a lack of understanding with his mother. When she questioned the significance of *Une Saison en Enfer*, a perplexing and troubling text, Rimbaud answered: "J'ai voulu dire ce que ça dit, <<littéralement et dans tous les sens >>... Prenons << moi pressé de trouver le lieu et la formule >> littéralement et dans tous les sens" (Borer. 1991: 33).

During his time in Africa he had dreamt of becoming a father himself and of having a true family. In a letter to his family (4 August, 1888) he writes of the boredom he experiences: "Je n'ai jamais connu personne qui s'ennuyât autant que moi. Et puis, n'est-ce pas misérable, cette existence sans famille, sans occupation intellectuelle ...

Pourrais-je venir me marier chez vous, au printemps prochain? ... Croyez-vous que je puisse trouver quelqu'un qui consente à me suivre en voyage?" (Fowlie. Œuvres: 1975: 354). His dream of a family is ambiguous if we think of his homosexuality and perversion as a young man.

Macklin (1996: 49) describes *Les Poètes de Sept Ans* as a key Rimbaudian text as it affords "the poet's perception of family life and child-parent relationships." It contains some striking features such as the dominance of the mother, the absence of a father figure and the life of a child. It also shows the dynamics of the child's revolt against social systems. The maternal victory over Rimbaud is only temporary, and very superficial as Macklin (1996: 49) explains: "She does not detect the resentment and defiance of a boy who has a secret after life, diametrically opposed to the ordered and conventional regime foisted upon him by maternal decree."

Childhood and Young Adulthood in General

Youth understands everything; it is an almost superhuman force. It also serves to explain Rimbaud's involvement with the older and very feminine poet Verlaine, who offered him the tenderness of love. Rimbaud's creative force as a child made him and his poetry superior, but it also created an imbalance. Rimbaud tried to avoid the merciless realism of man's destiny – the loss of youthful inspiration. Levi (1992: 526) is convinced that Rimbaud's personal history of hope and disillusion had a greater effect on literature than his "aesthetic theories."

Rimbaud in *À La Musique* remembers the talks of... "Tous les bourgeois poussifs... Portent, ... leurs bêtises jalouses" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975:46). Rimbaud knew the preoccupation the people in his town had with other people. Their curiosity was one of their main past-times. Rimbaud's many attempts to free himself from his surroundings could thus be understood.

A school principal, M. Desdouets said of Rimbaud's genius that, "...ce sera le génie du Mal ou celui du Bien" (Borer. 1991: 19). He was an exemplary student at school, and received several prizes. He promised himself: 'Tu vates eris!' (Tu seras Poète) in his Latin verses. His only motivation was his personalised vision, for his spirit could not be imprisoned.

There is an evolution from *Enfance* to *Jeunesse*. Little (1983: 52) sees *Enfance* as dreamlike and exciting, an acceptance of the unexplained allusions and a penetration of the child's vision, while *Jeunesse* is more abstract. *Jeunesse* leads to revolt and fear of adulthood. *Enfance* is really dawn before daybreak (*Jeunesse*). *Enfance* takes Rimbaud through fairy stories, magic, the Ardennes and the imagined love of a mother. *Jeunesse* concerns his anguish and his period of waiting.

He silently meditates on his life: "Les calculs de côté, l'inévitable descente du ciel et la visite des souvenirs et la séance des rythmes occupent la demeure, la tête et le monde de l'esprit" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 218). In *L'Impossible* (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 200) the reality of his past is discussed: "Ah! Cette vie de mon enfance, la grande route par tous les temps, sobre surnaturellement, plus désintéressé que le meilleur des mendiants, fier de n'avoir ni pays, ni amis, quelle sottise c'était – Et je m'en aperçois seulement!" When Rimbaud is depressed, he imagines a world of sapphire, pits of azure and wells of fire. He hopes that perhaps through his creative dreams the moons, comets, seas and fables will meet in *Enfance*.

Childhood is a defence of innocence against all forms of violence, a time of distress, as in *Mémoire*. Innocent children suffer because of "la foi conjugale, ô l'Épouse!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 122). This suggests infidelity - a loss greatly felt by the child. The atmosphere in *Les Effarés* is that of suffering, poverty and isolation. It offers some telling insight into the imaginative world of the child, with the winter setting supporting the children's need for warmth as in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*.

There is an ambiguity in Rimbaud for he is the dazzling poet, but at the same time a debilitated child. He can dance and then suddenly be bitter and unpredictable. He cannot alter his predicament as is expressed in *Mémoire*: "...ô canot immobile! oh! bras trop courts!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 124). "Madame" with her maternal tyranny fixes the boat, and steps on the white flowers. She does not fit in Nature. The contradictions in his writing corroborate the energy of childhood experiences. The child can live and identify with several lives at once.

Richer (1972:201) is convinced that the solitude of Rimbaud's childhood and his young adulthood "...n'est sans doute pas étrangère au recours à l'homosexualité" and that Rimbaud's admiration for Verlaine soon became a more physical, homosexual relationship. He was involved with Verlaine at the age of sixteen and already losing direction in a perverted world. Rimbaud worked in the Parnassian bar

"Club Zutique" and by now, he was as arrogant and devastatingly explosive as ever. Levi (1992: 525) sees Rimbaud's poetry at the time as more concerned with form. Rimbaud and Verlaine engaged in voyages together, to England and around Paris. Upon his return to the family farm at Roche Rimbaud wrote *Une Saison en Enfer*, which Levi (1992: 525) believes to be inspired by Rimbaud's involvement with Verlaine. Rimbaud hated the quarrelsome time spent with Verlaine in such poverty, as he had already experienced enough tension with his mother as a child.

Verlaine's positive influence on his poetry is evident in poems like *Voyelles*, yet Levi (1992: 527) sees the parallels existing between music, painting and poetry in Rimbaud's poetic innovation as far beyond Verlaine's poetry. Rimbaud's admiration for Antiquity is further understandable seen in the light of his ideas on sexual liberty. His sexuality is a revolt against conventional morality. Verstraëte (1980: 26) states that Rimbaud and Nietzsche shared the same viewpoints against Christian sexuality where sins of the flesh are so often mentioned.

Rimbaud was constantly looking for love, whether he was capable of loving remains yet to be discovered, although Borer (1991: 15) says that Rimbaud ought to have loved his sister, who defended his memory to the end: "Arthur n'aimait que sa sœur." His quest for love is very important as in *Sensation* where he talks about the intensity love could hold: "Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien: Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme... heureux comme avec une femme" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 16).

Rimbaud gives his quest for love a magical potential. In *Soleil et Chair*, he reminds us: "Le monde a soif d'amour," but he reaches his own absolute intimacy only in writing. In *Délires* Rimbaud continues his secretive belief that he could change life. He is not alone this time, for Verlaine is his bride, but their relationship is characterised by a certain madness. Jouffroy (1991: 78) believes *Délires* to be, "... le mythe de l'incursion d'Orphée en Enfer." It is also relevant since this is a part of his writing that Rimbaud wanted to expose through publication himself. It consists of two parts, *Vierge Folle* and *Alchimie du Verbe*. The secret of *Une Saison en Enfer: l'Époux Infernal* is definitely linked with Rimbaud's past and his life with Verlaine: "À la tentative de sauvetage d'Eurydice par Orphée." Rimbaud, the paganist is not only expressing his viewpoints on his sexuality, but he also poses a danger to society as he claims to have "un secret pour changer la vie." It is this magic, his personal quest for the "Unknown" and his own life, which makes his poetry so much more profound.

Although Rimbaud sees himself as "Orphée," as the heartache of Verlaine in *Vierge Folle*, he is also "le démon." Verlaine was very compassionate towards Rimbaud, but he is seen through the eyes of Rimbaud as a *Vierge Folle*. Rimbaud explains that: "La vraie vie est absente. Nous ne sommes pas au monde... ce n'est pas un homme... l'amour est à réinventer on le sait" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 186-188).

Rimbaud is proclaiming his personal vision of the world and his quest, as he knows that the world judges him as a demon, the way Verlaine did. His true escape is to a new world where he could reinvent it all, trying to find love. *Vierge Folle* sometimes speaks as Rimbaud himself: "Jamais je ne travaillerai," which shows the extent of his revolt against society. "Vierge Folle" possesses tenderness too in the way that Rimbaud shows pity for the poor, "...il pleurait en considérant ceux qui nous entouraient, bétail de la misère...Il avait pitié d'une mère méchante pour les petits enfants" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 188).

Rimbaud feigned as if he knew a bit of everything, one is not really sure how much he really was the true "Savant." His world is closed to the rest of us, as was Verlaine closed off from Rimbaud's world: "J'étais sûr de ne jamais entrer dans son monde" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 188). Rimbaud wants to escape from reality, but he is too logical, thus he shuts adults out of this world. He approaches his subject with fine logic, even his sadness and his love for Verlaine is never expressed in a maudlin way. In *Vierge Folle*, Rimbaud might prove to be a potential danger to society with his visions to change life (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 188) but, "il a peut-être des secrets pour changer la vie? Non, il ne fait qu'en chercher..."

Vierge Folle expresses the essence of Rimbaud's unhappy childhood. He is still but a child: "Je nous voyais comme deux bons enfants, libres de se promener dans le Paradis de tristesse"(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 190). Rimbaud remembers his childhood in its sadness, he had come to realise that this dream he was living with Verlaine, could not continue, nor a life of wandering: "Parce qu'il faudra que je m'en aille, très loin un jour. Puis il faut que j'en aide d'autres: c'est mon devoir" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 190). Rimbaud is once again facing the reality of a short-lived creative capacity.

Although Rimbaud's poetry is closely linked to his childhood, it never loses its mystery. In *Vierge Folle* the question is asked: "S'il m'expliquait ses tristesses, les

comprendrais-je plus que ses railleries?" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975:190). Rimbaud's curiosity in sexuality as well as the comfort he searched for in these relations could thus also serve as inspiration. Little (1983: 67) quotes Marc Ascio and Jean-Pierre Chambon who said: "L'érotisme adolescent n'est pas une des principales sources de son inspiration, mais, de loin, la principale." Although this can be debated, it simply confirms that Rimbaud's writing was influenced by his awakening sexuality too. He is so often referred to as an ambiguous character, that one could not reduce his inspiration to just one aspect of his youth. Rimbaud's abnormal sexual development due to the absence of his father is described in *Les Remembrances du Vieillard Idiot* and *Dévotion* is interpreted as "sublimated homosexuality" (Little. 1983: 69). This would be the best way to present his sexual preferences – and make it acceptable to a reader of literature.

Cahné(1992: 348) makes a rather weak attempt in understanding Rimbaud's sexuality: "Le ciel de Rimbaud guide des amants qui échappent à leur instinct de mort grâce à une sexualité répétitive... comme une drogue qui efface, un temps, l'appel vers le Néant." Rimbaud's quest for the unknown and for love was far greater than his need for homosexual love.

Little (1983: 72) points out that Rimbaud deals with childhood inspiration and adult problems in his poetry: "They reflect our one access to everything, the present that accompanies us from cradle to grave." In the same way Rimbaud's poems are instantaneous and multiple images of the eternal present. Rimbaud could not escape his childhood, but his metaphors are a way of periodically escaping. Little(1983: 73) shares the view that the biographical, historical approach is important as, "... words cannot be totally divorced from referentiality, otherwise communication would break down entirely."

Child of War

In 1870 the Germans took possession of Charleville. The turmoil experienced during the war is expressed in poems like *Le Mal*,

*Qu'écarlates ou verts, près du Roi qui les raille,
Croulent les bataillons en masse dans le feu; ...
-Pauvres morts! Dans l'été, dans l'herbe, dans ta joie,
Nature ! ô toi qui fis ces hommes saintement! ..."*

Nature is the only comfort amidst the violence of the war as in *Le Dormeur du Val*. Other examples of war are *Morts de Quatre-vingt-douze* and *Rages de Césars*. Noble men fall under the great equaliser, "O Soldats que la Mort a semés, noble Amante, Pour les régénérer, dans tous les vieux sillons;" (Fowlie. *Œuvres*.1975: 52). In *Guerre* we also find some impressions of the war: "Je songe à une guerre, de droit ou de force, de logique bien imprévue."

Rimbaud left for Paris in 1871. His invitation from Verlaine was a sign of acceptance for the young poet, but by November 1871, Ernest Delahaye found a bitterly disillusioned Rimbaud in Paris. This aggravated his personal war.

The poems, *Guerre*, *Démocratie* and *H* deal with violence. Fate, physical frustrations and personal drama also influenced Rimbaud's life. His friendship with Izambard for instance was ended on 19 July when the French–Prussian war started. Izambard left for the army, while Rimbaud again experienced grief and great loss having to spend the summer without his companion. During the war, Rimbaud particularly hated the bourgeois habits and the pompous military parades (Fowlie. *Œuvres*.1965: 2-13).

Levi (1992: 524) points out another aspect of Rimbaud's friendship with Izambard. Apparently, Rimbaud abused Izambard's good will and friendship, early signs of his manipulative capacity. Rimbaud tried to join the revolutionary movement as France was struggling to get to power, but he developed a distaste for revolutionaries and returned to Charleville. At the time, a young poet, Paul Demeny served as inspiration to Rimbaud (Levi.1991: 524). He went through a spiritual crisis and became violently expressive against the female sex, because of his mother's continued domineering ways. Rimbaud had already started his personal war at the outbreak of war and in 1876, he briefly joined the Dutch Colonial army. This was yet another short-lived adventure.

Delahaye was surprised (1871) by Rimbaud's stupefying lucidity on his analysis of the German victory: "La défaite nous libère de préjugés stupides, La défaite nous transforme et nous sauve...[Dans tout cela comme dans sa prédiction d'une Allemagne où l'administration de fer et de folie (...) va encaserner la société allemande, la pensée allemande]... Et tout cela pour être écrasés, à la fin par une coalition!" (Jouffroy.1991: 202).

He lived his social revolution in all earnest, as witnessed by his friend, Delahaye. Jouffroy (1991:27) refers to a conversation that took place between the two friends: "Rimbaud cueillit au bord du chemin une fleurette et il disait << Où achèteras-tu un objet de luxe, ou d'art, d'une structure plus savante?.. la nature nous offrirait toujours, en variété infinie, des millions de bijoux. Souffriras-tu beaucoup de voir s'évanouir ces chers mobiles de l'activité moderne?" Already the young Rimbaud had understood the destruction of war and his vision was activated to its full potential.

Silence and Solitude

Solitude would be Rimbaud's eternal companion as he was always alone, searching for an expression of an idea. Some ideas could be seen as a figuration of the paternal profile while others project that which would please his mother. Following his desires and dreams, he learned new languages, studied science and discovered new methods and techniques for his writing. Poetry seen in the light of his many interests was just another phase, or as Borer (1991: 113) sees it, "...la Poésie fut un moment." His poetry was part of his adventure or quest to explore his own capacity and solitude. Rimbaud is a master of silence. His poems focus the attention with the repetition of words and phrases on an incoherent harmony. Through this process Rimbaud decides: "Je suis maître du silence" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 218). He is not sure what is to become of him: "Je serais bien l'enfant abandonné sur la jetée partie à la haute mer, le petit valet suivant l'allée dont le front touche le ciel" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 218). He is no longer of a usual constitution; his flesh is now a part of Nature.

Rimbaud's absence and presence in his poems are felt due to his mastery of silence and isolation. He also often uses the sea to express this theme in his works. It is a silent movement from one extreme to another, but is important as it creates a feeling of liberty, as in *L'Éternité*: "C'est la mer allée Avec le soleil" (Bernard. 1960: 483; Fowlie. 1965: 216).

Rimbaud was literally imprisoned by his mother, as she closed him off from the universe. Fowlie (1965: 9) explains: " She isolated him in feelings of rebellion and hate." Rimbaud escaped this world in *Les Illuminations*, a poetic universe, which he coloured in with his creative imagination.

Rimbaud is often unable to make progress and he then feels alone as in *Métropolitain* where the roads are, "...bordées de grilles et de murs" and the inns are all closed. In *Enfance II* the child's infinite sadness and weeping are participants in "une éternité de chaudes larmes" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 216; Little. 1983: 37). He projects his internal drama in the isolation and desolation of his poems. There is an encrypted truth in the majority of his poems, rooted in his childhood, but there is also a strangeness to his solitude, as in *Parade* with its circus folk "... quelques jeunes ... pourvus de voix effrayantes et de quelques ressources dangereuses" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 224). Sometimes flowers can talk to him in his solitude, the flower being a repeated theme in *Aube* and *Un Cœur sous une Soutane*. Movement through its ability to act is in direct opposition with stillness, which gives greater depth to his silence and solitude.

His silence is productive. Rimbaud's artistic responsibility is to change life. Fowlie (1965: 93) calls it, "... the sacred disorder of the mind" because sometimes reality is inexpressible. Lawler (1988: 11) describes Rimbaud's isolation: "He dwells no longer in the alienation of *Enfance* but, summoning body and soul to break with the isolated sensibility, measures the dimensions of praxis in writing." There is a truth the tongue cannot express, but which a symbol can embody. Rimbaud was one of the very first modern poets who inhabited his solitude. The transcendent memory of metaphorical writing appears in a state of isolation.

There are speculations about Rimbaud's silence as a poet and the complete silence that followed when he left for Africa. It is difficult to justify that Rimbaud discontinued writing. The poet's silence is a necessary part of his creation which makes it almost impossible to stop writing completely: "Je me flattai d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre ... Je réservais la traduction ... J'écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l'inexprimable" (Fowlie.Œuvres. 1975: 192). The supreme silence will remain with him: "Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges: - O l'Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 120).

lommie (in *Munier*.1976: 73) calls Rimbaud the forever-changing and impossible-to-reach: "Quelque chose de très différent de l'anneau, de l'éternel retour." Mathilde Verlaine describes Rimbaud as a heartless person, but the solitude in his poems on childhood and his life in general, was a way of detaching himself from the world.

Freedom

Rimbaud's freedom manifests itself in his many escapes from home and his country. In *Ma Bohème* he dreams of love and freedom. Nothing matters when he is happy and when his imagination runs free: "De mes souliers blessés, un pied près de mon cœur!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 62). As long as he can wander about, he feels happy. *Phrases* shows his hunger for liberty, that allows the restricted Rimbaud to do whatever he likes: "J'ai tendu des cordes de clocher à clocher; des guirlandes de fenêtre à fenêtre; des chaînes d'or d'étoile à étoile, et je danse" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 230).

Rimbaud escapes continuously, since his childhood in Charleville, from Paris to Belgium, England and other parts of Europe. Borer (1984: 12) sees Rimbaud as the eternal voyager, "...qui ne se retourne même pas pour regarder la trace que ses pas d'enfant ont laissés sur le monde." For Rimbaud, his freedom was more important, he needed to reach yet another part of the world as we find in his "poésie du départ." He craved permanent liberty, solitude, dreams and adventures. Liberty was his life, "l'œuvre-vie est la plus belle des constantes rimbaldiennes" (Borer. 1984: 114). Rimbaud never knew where he would go next and when, he sought the absolute desire of freedom, "...la liberté est une question de haute métaphysique, dont les analyses (fuir la mère, chercher le père etc.), ne peuvent témoigner: leur butée ontologique" (Borer. 1984: 115). Rimbaud's will to be free was followed through even with his travels in Africa.

Three of his most liberating struggles were his escape from his mother, Charleville and Verlaine. *Le Bateau Ivre* is the artist's creative journey to discover things not seen before and presenting that to plain sight through writing to anyone who wants to share in Rimbaud's ideas. This journey is also the search for recognition and acceptance.

Freedom, violence and the symbol of the boat can be identified with a child. Weinberg (1957:96) supports the idea of a child's mind at work in the poem *Le Bateau Ivre*. Parents for instance, use the word "tapage", when it concerns the wrongdoing of their children. Rimbaud's indifference is certain in the phrase: "J'étais insoucieux de tous les équipages," because as a child he lives in his own world and he chooses to ignore those who only seem to rule his journey. He proves to be useful to society carrying their goods, but the fact that he might only serve to the

needs of others, makes it necessary for the boat ("porteur de blés") to find its own way, where he alone decides his journey and destiny.

Le Bateau Ivre is one of the primary, biographical sources for the discovery of Rimbaud's childhood. The poem portrays his visions and his quest for liberty, but many détails still escape the reader. Up until the time he had written the poem, he had never seen the sea before, but his childhood play along the river Meuse inspired the boat at sea, on a voyage to an unknown destination. The synthesis of all the senses forms an original integration of elements and images, taking the author on a hallucinatory voyage (Fowlie. 1965: 28-29). The child is overwhelmed with excitement and does not listen to reason; it is in this delirium that he escapes his sadness (Brunel. 1983: 106).

There is a risk involved in this freedom, his destination is 'Unknown', indicated with the image of a cork floating around, "...j'ai dansé sur les flots." His past becomes vague. This liberty is powerful: "...la tempête a béni mes éveils maritimes" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 114). The validity of his art ends in a tragedy, as there is no certainty to his future. The forbidden fruit of his childhood tasted sweet, but the reality of the situation is that things are not always what they seem when you are young: "Plus douce qu'aux enfants la chair des pommes sures" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 114).

Everything is possible in his world; the insistence on the "je" states it clearly. His superiority and thus his visions are beyond reality. He is familiar with a fantasy world, "ce que l'homme a cru voir!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 116). Fowlie (1965: 32) finds Rimbaud's freedom dangerous as, "in excess it easily incarcerates a human spirit." The boat gets lost and it is "jeté par l'ouragan dans d'éther sans oiseau." There is no returning to the continent for he is shipwrecked and a prisoner of his liberty.

Rimbaud writes with a suicidal nostalgia, which could easily surpass life in his world of poetry. It is a world allowing things to happen to the extreme, a fairy-tale world of a child. Rimbaud tries to liberate himself on every level of his life, be it from his mother, or be it the use of his own, original language. He concentrates on the role of his parents and his childhood, but it is important to remember that Rimbaud himself is also responsible for the choices he made.

Jouffroy (1991: 59) gives details on Rimbaud's freedom, as well as his visions, "...pour voir, créer sa vue au-delà des visions, il doit traverser le plus noir, le plus sale, le plus épais rideau des souffrances comme dans son poème *Éternité*: "Là pas d'espérance, Nul orietur, Science avec patience, Le Supplice est sûr" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 140).

With his poem *L'Éternité*, he also shows us a pure and magical happiness. Jouffroy (1991:138) believes that, "...nul n'a pu élucider, parce qu'il échappe au contrôle, se confond avec l'expérience mentale la moins saisissable pour les haschischins, et la plus transparente pour les autres." His quest for happiness and freedom brings him to an eternity.

*Elle est retrouvée
Quoi? – L'Éternité
C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil*

(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 138)

It is the final liberty far away from human sufferings: "Là tu te dégages Et voles selon." (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 140). Rimbaud no longer wanted to feel like an orphan and thus he distanced himself and searched for a pure and lasting love. Jouffroy (1991: 107) concludes that Rimbaud chose the final desertion, "...à tous les bateaux ivres, à toutes les fugues, à tous les voyages, au désir de déracinement intégral du poète." Rimbaud's poetry is cyclic; like a fire that would burn for all eternity. Borer (in Jouffroy 1991: iv) says that, "...c'est pourquoi Rimbaud est toujours là, absent présent, cherché sans savoir pourquoi... Rimbaud atteint immédiatement au sommet profond de toute poésie." He liberated himself by writing in all sincerity about his likes and dislikes. He questions life with an immense mental capacity at a very young age and this visionary capacity liberates him. He avoids naivety, for he does not need any political party or movement to obtain this liberty. He liberated himself through revolt against his mother, his religion and the provincial spirit (Jouffroy. 1991: 36).

Rimbaud searches for this liberty in poems like *Bateau Ivre* and *Soleil et Chair*. He believes that man loses his freedom when he loses his original innocence. He must also have the insight into life, as Verstraëte (1980: 13) points out in the *Correspondances* of Baudelaire: "Le poète est celui qui sait lire le monde." Rimbaud's entire evolution towards liberty, becomes a creation in *Les Illuminations*.

Verstraëte (1980: 15) sees the evolution as man's return to Nature, as in *Vagabonds*, as well as the Antiquity of the golden age in *Soleil et Chair* followed by a renewal in *Génie*.

For Rimbaud his liberty does not remain relative, he takes a bound for complete freedom. Jouffroy (1991:197) interestingly points out that although Rimbaud liberates himself concentrating on his quests of the unknown, "...C'est pourtant vers le passé qu'il se retourne en écrivant régulièrement à sa mère." He could not liberate himself from her entirely. It is possibly the strange compromise between the memories of his childhood and his imagination. It was not so much as her son that he loved her, but possibly more as Rimbaud that he could not forget her.

In *Bateau Ivre* Rimbaud generalises by using "Des fleuves" as an artistic voyage of relevance to the artist or creator. The boat is the instrument. The drunken boat has no haulers or crew to direct it he has only his imagination left. He is like a child that plays deaf to any advice, impatient to reach the end of what will ultimately be his own will. Fowlie (1965: 31) believes that Rimbaud strove for the "disorderly, the blatant and self-affirmation." The "Peaux-Rouges" serves as evidence of his childhood images, they both represent liberation and disorganisation. The boat is distancing itself from society, as it wants to escape from establishment.

Rimbaud is also seeking liberation away from the servitude that is expected from a child. The easiest way to do this would be to become deaf to orders from elders and to distance himself, "...dispersant gouvernail et grappin." Rimbaud uses lovely imagery to point out his disorder and relative unimportance in an adult world." Weinberg (1957:99) sees this as Rimbaud's realisation of how small he is compared to the "vast adventure of manhood" which lies ahead. Society expects him to enter the adult world, but the choice of adult activities would lead to destruction, as indicated by the title *Bateau Ivre*. Adulthood can lead to a loss of innocence. This is the most probable explanation why Rimbaud neglected poetry in his later life. This is a valuable insight into the vision of Rimbaud. His visions were genial in many ways and he must have known it, as Weinberg (1957: 104) quotes from *Bateau Ivre*: "Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir!" Rimbaud admits to superiority and a higher knowledge, but he never becomes truly happy for long. His joys are always shadowed by doubts and disillusionment, as shown in *Bateau Ivre*: "J'ai vu le soleil bas, taché d'horreurs mystiques."

There is an overwhelming sense of confusion and drunkenness due to the intermingling of the sea and the sky and all the senses. This is strengthened by the great contrast in the initial joy of liberty now becoming uncertainty, violence, "corruption and decay" in the words of Weinberg (1957: 109). Disgust and horror is the tragic fate of the boat-poet. Weinberg (1957: 110) interestingly notices that Rimbaud's direct references made to childhood are usually "pleasant and nostalgic" and the poet easily recalls them removed from childhood in *Bateau Ivre*.

Rimbaud accepts that he has become a victim when he talks of "Bateau perdu." Weinberg (1957:114) sees this statement as a returning of the poet to himself. He is without a direction and feels isolated, because his unknown position now becomes a restriction. He has no goal for he has become a useless failure, "la carcasse ivre d'eau." The poet becomes even smaller compared to the "gigantic and mythological vastness of the sea" (Weinberg.1957: 116).

Finally, the boat-poet reveals to the reader that which he could not find, namely "Vigueur." Weinberg (1957: 118) explains: "ô future Vigueur?" as the losses and diminutions that strengthened the decay and corruption experienced by *Le Bateau Ivre*. All hope is shattered and ends in failure for the poet. The poet becomes an exile, because he fails to reach his full potential. Vigour cannot be reached in, "...ces nuits sans fond que tu dors et t'exiles,..." The disappointment is such that he needs to express it as: "...mais, vrai, j'ai trop pleuré!.."

Death is a consideration to end all the suffering, by sinking this boat. This reminds us of Shakespeare's famous soliloquy in *Hamlet*, as a source of inspiration for Rimbaud: "To be or not to be..." In the words of Hamlet we find the same agony and the same perplexing options. The sea is a powerful theme: "To be or not to be that is the question. Whether 't is nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them? To die to sleep..." (Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1). The poet-boat is in need of a solution.

To ignore one's desire and return to one's original state could be an option, but then one would be vulnerable: "Un enfant accroupi" is the child poet who now wishes to return to a state of childhood. We know that Rimbaud's childhood was a very unhappy time, yet he prefers that state "plein de tristesses" to what he sees in adulthood. He desires to be small, fragile but full of vigour. He finds no pleasure in

the boat that he has become, as he seeks utility. There should be a need for the artist and his works, the creator can and should change, because one cannot expect to change man. Rimbaud must have written this poem from personal observations and dilemmas experienced in a state of liberty. This however does not mean that *Le Bateau Ivre* has no meaning to mankind in general. Every artist experiences some of the problems that the boat faces.

Weinberg (1957: 123) believes that the insistence on a drunken boat and liberty experienced make the poem more relevant for a particular man. The emotions felt and created in *Bateau Ivre* seem superior to the events in the poem. The young Rimbaud experiences disorder jumping between joy and despair, and between childhood and adulthood. He is in control of his writing; with the use of symbolism in *Bateau Ivre*, he limits our access to his genius, but at the same time, it is accessible on an emotional level. The limits seem endless to the interpretation of a boat-poet-creation.

Another equally important source remains, namely the search for the 'Unknown' as is found in *Les Illuminations*. There are many worlds and many methods of discovering these worlds. Verstraëte(1980: 41) quotes M. Besset who said, "...le chemin mystérieux va vers l'intérieur. En nous ou nulle part, est l'éternité avec ses mondes, le passé et l'avenir." Rimbaud's liberty is in essence writing and travelling which reminds of William Blake's statement as quoted by Ross (1997: 187) on the concept of *Outsider Art*: "I must create a World, or be enslav'd by another Man's. I will not Reason and Compare: my business is to Create."

Vision

The name Rimbaud originates from the word *ribaud*. According to Petitfils (1982: 18): "les ribauds, au Moyen Age, étaient des mercenaires qui ne faisaient la guerre, que pour piller – et Arthur le savait qui a écrit dans *Une Saison en Enfer*. «Ma race ne se souleva jamais que pour piller»."

Rimbaud's vision is born from his childhood. Rimbaud, a boy, as any a child can see things that men cannot see. Fowlie (1975: 114) recognises bravado as well as a weakness in Rimbaud as child. His visions took him far beyond the boundaries of childhood; Rimbaud for example saw the effect of the power of the sea on his *Bateau*

Ivre. He has to know the monsters that are hidden in this sea and the bitterness of love. A great symbol of fear hides in his unconscious, and the life of a child with a simple paper boat captures his youth. Rimbaud is familiar with his vision, a vision that displays to the eye another way of seeing the ordinary.

Rimbaud's vision is typical of the extroverted intuitive type. Fordham (1853: 43) explains Jung's theory on the intuitive type as a person who thinks all things are possible: "He dislikes intensely anything that is familiar, safe or well-established ... he often looks like a ruthless adventurer ... but in fact he has his own morality based on loyalty to his intuitive view."

Rimbaud's state of mind is an active participant in creating his vision. Fowlie (1975: 78) sees the "voyou" and the "voyant" as one being in Rimbaud: "His anxiousness not to mature in order to salvage his vision which is that of a child." *Bateau Ivre* is the archetype of his future and his fears. He is spectator and player, allowing the reader to identify with situations. Little (1983: 40) believes that Rimbaud leads his reader into the marvellous world of his vision. This is his silent world where he hides the secrets and the mystery of his poetry. *Bateau Ivre* exposes Rimbaud to the dangers of his future visions. This boat is beyond any boat he had seen before (Brunel, 1983: 108).

"Future" is a keyword in *Bateau Ivre*. Rimbaud's vision is more than the present. The child heading for adulthood is already aware of all the complications, frenzied in a drunken state of misery. Fowlie (1975: 78-79) explains Rimbaud's situation as a boy who "...was not protected and supported by individuals or by a group or even a tradition. He was an isolated individual who knew solitude. His sullenness is typical of a young child trying to be independent." *Bateau Ivre* is of symbolic value in the understanding of his youthful anticipations and his joys. His extraordinary visions become regrets when he questions the validity of his art and the continuation of his youthful creative energy and inspiration.

His vision determined his actions, be they positive or contrary to the average person in society. Borer (1991: 19) sees this determination to live this vision in Rimbaud's letters to Verlaine. He desperately needed to share his poetry, his vision and to be understood. He was hoping that Verlaine would give him the support he needed. "La Reine, la Sorcière qui allume sa braise... ne voudra jamais nous raconter ce qu'elle sait, et que nous ignorons..." is possibly a symbol portraying the mother in *Après le*

Déluge (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 212). The emptiness in the phrases indicates the mother's cold ruthless acts. She is always hiding something. One can also sense the absence of a kind father and the sad distance between him and his mother.

The world of adults is a fearsome existence for the young poet. Little (1983:53) thinks Nature was Rimbaud's only comfort. In *Enfance III*, Rimbaud finds that adult explanations are not always relevant or even necessary to a child: "Il y a une horloge qui ne sonne pas" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 216). A child's logic is much more interesting, dreamlike and exciting all together. Little (1983: 52) believes *Enfance* to be the key to the unexplained allusions and acceptance thereof. Rimbaud is in revolt against the status quo, faced with appearances versus reality.

Rimbaud in *Illuminations*, filled with visions and images, uses certain Impressionistic techniques. There is a powerful giving of information, but it is limited. It is only with an overall view of the information that you can find Rimbaud's vision. Rimbaud is an individual who lives a dual personality: "Je est un autre" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 304). His poetic eye can see an invisible world as Verstraëte (1980: 13) explains: "He is familiar with "l'harmonie grecque" and in *Vagabonds* again we find, "...l'état primitif de fils du Soleil." There are contradictory forces and Rimbaud finds it difficult to choose. Rimbaud as a child discoverer is willing to take many risks to make his life a worthwhile experience, especially where it concerns his poetry.

Levi (1992: 527) believes that Rimbaud's literary vision made him see himself, as did the Renaissance and 18th century writers. The poet possessed a "superior vision or supernaturally inspired knowledge." The romantics and early Parnassians took up this idea. In a letter to Izambard (13 May, 1871) Rimbaud explains his vision: "Maintenant, je m'encrapule le plus possible. Pourquoi? Je veux être poète, et je travaille à me rendre voyant: vous ne comprendrez pas du tout." It is his life task to to escape all forms of degradation and to become new.

Through his search for the unknown as in *Bateau Ivre*, this voyage entails the disorientation of all the senses. In another letter, to Paul Demeny (15 May 1871), Rimbaud continues his ideas on the poet as a visionary: "Je est un autre. Tant pis pour le bois qui se trouve violon, et nargue aux inconscients, qui ergotent sur ce qu'ils ignorent tout à fait!" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 304). Rimbaud as a poet believes it to be his privilege to see things differently. He reminds us of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* when he talks of the disorientation of, "...toutes les formes d'amour, de souffrance et

de folie". *Hamlet*, when described by Polonius sounds very similar: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (Shakespeare.II: ii: 202). As an outcast of society, he seeks the essence of his quest for a purity that would outlive all his fears.

Rimbaud wanted to escape from this world in search of an ideal. His longing for God turned into hatred and so he longed for happiness and the absolute instead. Rimbaud's shared vision leads to his friendship with Charles Bretagne. Starkie (1982: 120-122) explains that Bretagne's bizarre life, his interest in the occult together with his maturity, attracted the young Rimbaud. He not only enjoyed his company, but also encouraged the young Rimbaud to express himself in order to experience liberty. Bretagne would patiently listen to Rimbaud, reading his poems, giving his opinion and at the same time showing his understanding. He was one of Rimbaud's very first, true admirers.

To specify Rimbaud's internal dramas, one can think of the death of his father, his difficult mother as well as his above average intelligence that created a distance between Rimbaud and the world. Little (1983: 39) quotes Jacques Plessen for a greater understanding of Rimbaud: "Un être essentiellement frontalier, dont la "dromomanie" peut se décrire comme le mouvement d'un homme qui a perdu son centre." It is true that the interpretation of Rimbaud's works can be very ambiguous, however that is part of the mystery of his vision, that which makes Rimbaud such a unique child genius. His life is encrypted in his writings.

As stated before, *Bateau Ivre* is a symbol of Rimbaud's voyage into the future; and the vision of the artist, separated from his artistic dream, is made visible through this voyage. Rimbaud is still enjoying his childhood dreams, he is still renewing reality, but the underprivileged in society, a misunderstood exile, will have to make some choices. He would have to sacrifice innocence for reality. Rimbaud's vision is a universal language, which Levi (1992: 527) sees as a synthesising of scents, sounds and colours. He lives a creative process in which he discovers new ways of expressing himself. Rimbaud fears that adulthood or society could make him lose this vision. Levi (1992: 528) explains that as in *Matinée d'ivresse*, "...promesse surhumaine faite à notre corps et à notre âme," is something that cannot always be fulfilled.

Le Dormeur du Val is a typical example of his magnificent vision. A young soldier, "...Les pieds dans les glaïeuls" is fast asleep in an eternal sleep of Death (Fowlie.

Œuvres.1975: 56). The picture is impressionistic, the colours described in fine nuances. The destiny of man can be so brutal, and earth can destroy without selection of his victim. Nature is personified as the mother figure: "Nature berce-le chaudement: il a froid" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 56). Nature is the central theme in Rimbaud's metaphysical thinking. The colours change with the sun, "...dans son lit où la lumière pleut" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 56). His artistic vision is profound in which he judges society, as a child of war faced with the brutality of Man.

Starkie (1982: 123) claims that Rimbaud's vision must have been influenced by, "...l'Orient comme lieu central de toute sagesse." For Rimbaud, "Le monde a perdu son âme en se déplaçant vers l'Occident." It is also true that "L'Orient était une des sources d'inspiration des Parnassiens." Starkie (1982: 124) continues that there were sufficient works to read, with authors like Pierre Louys, Honoré Wronski and Deliphas Lévi. They could easily have influenced Rimbaud as the occult thinking, marxism and psychoanalysis with well-known authors such as Freud were predominant in the century. Even Baudelaire, with his interest in the occult could have influenced Rimbaud (Starkie.1982: 125). She does however differentiate between the two poets: "Baudelaire restait essentiellement chrétien et articulait ses théories occultes par un catholicisme profond et inné. Au contraire, Rimbaud souhaitait le retour aux temps qui précéderent le christianisme et sa distinction manichéenne du Bien et du Mal."

Starkie (1982: 125) believes Rimbaud to be arrogant. He has a desire to find his own way to Eternity. Rimbaud tried almost everything from drugs to magic in his role as "voyant." Starkie (1982: 125) thinks, "...il s'inspira de plus en plus du symbolisme, de la magie et de l'alchimie." Other authors would have influenced Rimbaud's originality, but in the end, he recreated his own, brilliant poetry, which made him a visionary. Starkie (1982: 126) explains this as follows: "Paradoxalement, le génie est la faculté de voler habilement...Les grands écrivains sont des prédateurs, ils volent dans les ruches des abeilles travailleuses."

In *Les Illuminations*, we find the themes of water and fire, a vision of purification. The fire of inspiration strengthens the soul: *Les Illuminations* refer to a flame of creation. His "vision mystique" invites us to travel with him through his evasions, his loves, his views of women, his childhood and the role of Nature. Rimbaud's mystical vision separates him from the rest of the world. In *Départ* Rimbaud leaves this world, for he

had seen enough, he is absorbed by his vision: "Assez vu... Assez eu... Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs!" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 246). The world of his childhood is unbearable, therefore, he must separate himself from ordinary human beings. He escapes "un beau matin chez un peuple fort doux" in *Royauté* (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 246). Fowlie (1965: 206) describes this state of being as Rimbaud's prodigious solitude. Rimbaud is philosopher and child, but he sometimes can become confused as in *Matin* when he says: "Je ne sais plus parler!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 206).

In *Départ*, Rimbaud, determined to change his life, is impatient. He wants to get away from his ordinary vision: "Assez connu" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 246). The title, *Départ* is parallel with Rimbaud's wish to leave his home and to travel the world. *Royauté* again is an image showing the transformation of his life through his departure from a previous situation. In this poem, a man and a woman are elevated into becoming royalty.

Rimbaud's mystic vision is a changing vision. Fowlie (1965:207) mentions that Rimbaud can even change his personality. In *Une Saison en Enfer*, he is subhuman and bestial, in *Nuit de l'Enfer*, a simpleton and then in *Les Illuminations* he even appears to be an angel, distinctly different from Mankind. In *À une Raison*, reason is the powerful instrument used in his transformation. Children sing: "Change nos lots, crible les fléaux à commencer par le temps" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 246). The children believe in the change of their fortune in "le nouvel amour": "Élève n'importe où la substance de nos fortunes et de nos vœux, on t'en prie. Arrivée de toujours, qui t'en iras partout" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 246). Rimbaud understood that it is indeed Reason that has the potential power to become eternal.

Fowlie (1965: 211) describes *Mystique* as a "...pure moment of vision which the poem transcribes successfully and in greater fullness and coherence than in others." It is typical of a child's mystical experience for there are angels, the stars and the sky. The Last Judgement with the separation of good and evil is also described in the poem: "À gauche le terreau de l'arrête est piétiné par tous les homicides et toutes les batailles, et tous les bruits désastreux filent leur courbe" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 248). It is a typical Biblical version of the end of the world, but the sweetness of the heavens is the element of peace in the poem, a place Rimbaud longed for. Fowlie (1965: 211) explains that: "The picture is uniquely Rimbaud's, despite the

reminiscences it bears of primitive pictures of the Last Judgement or of Jacob and the Angel or of the Annunciation or of children's pictures." The continual shifting of the focus in the poem is self-explanatory; it is the key to an astonishingly beautiful vision. We find all the mystical elements and all the traditional subjects combined, but as Fowlie (1965: 212) puts it, "...the entire picture provides a vision of an enchanted world where salvation and damnation are delineated." Rimbaud could not accept the damnation, presented to him through his biblical upbringing. It is the sea, "La mer de la veillée...ah! puits des magies; seule vue d'aurore, cette fois"(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 248) that shows Rimbaud the way to escape from this world.

Veillées, another poem where Peace forms a strong element, is divided into three parts. The first part is closely linked with people, whilst the second and third parts are related to inanimate objects such as rooms and cities. The setting or the décor, as one would find in a play, is the setting for the world: "Rêve intense et rapide de groupes sentimentaux avec des êtres de tous les caractères parmi toutes les apparences" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 248). Fowlie (1965: 213) believes the third part of *Veillées* to be focused on "...the limits of the world and of the combined room" as found in part two." These very limits are made absolute by the moment in which they are seen and painted" (Fowlie.1965: 213). It is possible that at a certain moment, one vision can be transformed into yet another one for it is through the ordinary that we can become familiar with the marvellous. Rimbaud's magical poetry forces open the gates for discoveries: "*Veillées*, and so many other illuminations combine the daily and the marvellous in such perfectly realised proportions that one finds oneself reading a miracle without knowing that it is such..." (Fowlie. 1965: 213).

Rimbaud's few childhood joys are shadowed by doubts and disillusionment, as found in *Bateau Ivre*: "J'ai vu le soleil bas, taché d'horreurs mystiques"(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 116). There is moreover confusion and drunkenness due to the intermingling of the sea, the sky and the senses. Rimbaud feels disgust and horror towards society, as this will remain the tragic fate of the boat-poet.

When one studies *Les Illuminations*, Surrealism very often comes to mind. Fowlie (1965: 74-75) however thinks that Rimbaud "le voyant" is too violent and active compared to the Surrealists: "They are passive and continuously questioning the unconscious." Rimbaud provoked the unconscious in a different way from the surrealist thought. Fowlie (1965:75) compares Breton's *Manifeste du Surréalisme*

with Rimbaud's *Lettre du Voyant* and he concludes that Rimbaud consciously arrives at derangement while the Surrealist waits for the unconscious to manifest itself. Fowlie (1965: 75) believes Rimbaud's poetic secret "is the seizure of his own reality."

Rimbaud provoked a literary crisis, which reminds us of the Surrealists' desire for spiritual adventure and the questioning of ordinary values in life. In *Les Illuminations*, Rimbaud introduces the reader to his new world based on his poetry and his visions. He is not only liberating himself, but even the reader is put at the centre of the disorder. Rimbaud seems to find liberty in each new adventure, as with *Bateau Ivre*. Rimbaud, "le voyant" creates and discovers the connection between "le moi" and one's intelligence in his *Lettre du Voyant*. Littré, E. (*Dictionnaire de la Langue Française*.1876.Hachette: Paris) explains this idea: "Objectiver le subjective, examiner comme un objet d'étude notre propre moi et chacune de ses impressions ou de ses opérations." Rimbaud takes his personal experiences as a child and expresses his spiritual state of mind in a lucid way. Ideas and images are put into words, as would Monet or Degas do on canvas to capture an image at a specific moment in time. Fowlie (1965: 97) believes that Rimbaud's "voyance" is his vision of a deeply hidden self. In a letter to Izambard on 13 May 1871 he says: " Je veux être poète, et je travaille à me rendre voyant" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 302). André Breton, together with the Surrealists, reaches the unconscious, as would Rimbaud, through dreams. Man is believed to be free in a state of dreams as can be found in the poetry of Rimbaud. He wished to be free, ever since the time he was locked up in his room as a child (Fowlie.1965: 108).

Baudelaire explains the idea of losing the superficial self. Fowlie (1965: 108) quotes from *Journaux Intimes*: "De la concentration et de la vaporisation du moi, tout est là." By the end of this process, we have Silence. Rimbaud silences himself, for he did not have the words to express his total truth and essence (Fowlie. 1965: 108). The silence in his works will remain.

Rimbaud's poetry must, "...faire sentir, palper, écouter ses inventions" in his *Lettre du Voyant*. His quest is: "Trouver une langue" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 308). Fowlie (1965: 191) puts it as follows: "It is the seemingly masterful and actually pitiful means - but the only one - of establishing between the flesh and the spine of man a continuity." Rimbaud's creative process is the linking of the subjective past with the objective future. Words are the manifestation of our thoughts, as Rimbaud also puts it

in *Lettre du Voyant* (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 308): "Du reste, toute parole étant idée...La Poésie ne rythmera plus l'action; elle sera en avant."

Rimbaud never intended to explain his inspiration or to give a possible interpretation of his works, it is a language that should communicate directly with its reader: "Cette langue sera de l'âme pour l'âme, résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs, de la pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 308). *Lettre du Voyant* does however shed some light on his creation of poetry. The poet has a responsibility to his art: "Le poète définirait la quantité d'inconnu, l'annotation de sa marche au Progrès!" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 308). Rimbaud is a creator of art and therefore he strives to give meaning and function to the artist in society. He wants to belong somewhere, be it the poet's society, or be it the world of his own visions.

When we consider Rimbaud's vision, it should be again with reference to Baudelaire, whom he greatly admired. He mentions this in *Lettre du Voyant*: "Reprendre l'esprit des choses mortes, Baudelaire est le premier voyant, roi des poètes, un vrai Dieu"(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 310). Baudelaire believed the poet to be a decipherer of the universe, which inspired the young Rimbaud. Fowlie (1965: 232) quotes Baudelaire's view on the poet: "Manier savamment une langue, c'est, pratiquer une espèce de sorcellerie évocatoire." Mallarmé, also at the peak of Symbolism, was preoccupied with the magical concepts of the artist's work.

Rimbaud's poetry has been a source of inspiration to over 500 books written on him as a philosopher and a poet. Fowlie (1965: 241) sees some of Nietzsche's doctrine in Rimbaud, because his art was also a response to suffering and a celebration of life. Rimbaud's poetry is an artistic creation, but it is also a manifestation of his needs. He did not want to change the world, as much as he wanted to change that which he found intolerable: "Nous ne sommes pas au monde" (*Délires*. Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 188). He did not like his world and he knew that his visions could not last. Yet, he found joy in his poetic creations; as Lapeyre (1981: 472) says: "His thirst for the infinite, the absolute and the duration could never be quenched."

Rimbaud uses colour in a joyful way in his poetry. In *Voyelles* we see an explosion of colours, sounds and an interplaying of all the senses. The colours are mixed, obtaining all the shades the poet envisaged; "U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers virides..." (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 120). There is a dynamic play between the colours

blue and black, also contrasting colours such as blue and yellow. His aesthetic sensitivity is according to Corsetti (1993: 58) "d'un homme ouvert au bonheur de l'art."

Fowlie (1965: 81) describes Rimbaud's vision as an awakening of another visionless solitude, yet another 'Unknown'. His vision abounds of magical creatures such as angels, fairies, gods and talking flowers.

His visions of the future saw a Rimbaud on foot in the desert, following in the footsteps of his father as in *Mauvais Sang* (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975:178): "Allons! La marche, le désert, l'ennui et la colère" and in *Enfance* (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975:218): "Ce ne peut être que la fin du monde, en avançant." These barren territories already existed in his childhood. Borer (1991:93) sees Rimbaud as the exile, driven out of Paradise to continue a life of wandering, "...l'errance à travers les solitudes infinies." This could be interpreted as a self-inflicted punishment or the continuation of his quest.

Rimbaud enters a hallucinatory state with poems like *Matinée d'ivresse*, *Veillées*, *Dévotion*, *Mystique*, *Fleurs* and *Matinée d'ivresse*: "Ce poison va rester dans toutes nos veines même quand la fanfare tournant, nous serons rendu à l'ancienne inharmonie" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 232). In *Veillées* he is in a dream-like state: "Et le rêve fraîcheur" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 248). He welcomes the impressions he gathers from his dream, as if delving from a magical well. In *Dévotion*, a prayer-like incantation, we are again led into a state of hallucinatory dreams, his litany, "...à tout culte en telle place de culte mémoriale... et précédant des bravoures plus violentes que ce chaos polaire...même dans des voyages métaphysiques" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 252). His metaphysical voyages are part of his quest for the 'Unknown', contrasting with his quest for love and liberty. Sometimes he experiences a false sensory impression, a hallucination due to a lack of external reference to support his description of events. A dream is often seen as a hallucinatory experience, as people who are subjected to rejection or isolation are especially prone to hallucinations (John Wiley & Sons.1994: 101).

In *Alchimie du Verbe*, Rimbaud's vision is a "hallucination simple;" his acceptance is evident: "Je finis par trouver sacré le désordre de mon esprit" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 194). The key word in *Lettre du Voyant* is "action": "Les inventions d'inconnu

réclament des formes nouvelles” (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 310), could indicate that the poet is responsible for progress. Verstraëte (1980: 43) explains that there is no longer nostalgia of the “Vie Harmonieuse” that preoccupied the poet. Rimbaud is trying to explain that through action his poetry has not been altered by Reason. He does not wish to reduce the irrational to the rational, for he is both.

Through poetical sensibility and his “voyance”, Rimbaud will risk anything and he uses everything to enforce his vision as in *Mauvais Sang* (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 180): “...les rages, les débauches, la folie, dont je sais tous les élans et les désastres.”... and in *Alchimie du Verbe* (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975:194): “ Puis j’expliquai mes sophismes magiques avec l’hallucination des mots! Je finis par trouver sacré le désordre de mon esprit. J’étais oisif, en proie à une lourde fièvre.”

For *Le Bateau Ivre*, the world of colour and the images create a surrealistic picture in which Rimbaud is daring and bold, “...dans les joncs tout un Léviathan.” The discovery of his universe is intoxicating, but the boat eventually collides with the mainland. His psychological voyage shows an artist in despair, because his vision can only exist in youthfulness, ... “ces poissons d’or, ces poissons chantants ... Million d’oiseaux d’or, ô future Vigueur? ” Eventually, reality will strike, when he is alone at night: “L’âcre amour m’a gonflé...de torpeurs enivrantes. O que j’aïlle à la mer!” (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 118). Even his obsessive want of freedom has its limits. Even a boat without direction will eventually hit the land. How he wishes he could share this with children: “J’ aurais voulu montrer aux enfants ces dorades...” (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 116-118). The drunken boat was a deception and a violent destruction of creativity. The object of movement was transformed into a “bateau frêle” of his childhood. He becomes suicidal when he faces the fear of losing his originality. Rimbaud’s exultation, his want to conquer the world led to self-defeat and failure. Even love in the poem is bitter and intoxicating. This is a prophetic vision if we think of his later involvement with Verlaine.

Rimbaud successfully communicates his profound silence through his vision. His greatest poem, *Le Bateau Ivre* recaptures his childhood through his creative spirit, reduced to a simple paper boat of his childhood. He bids his vision farewell in *Adieu*: “J’ai essayé d’inventer de nouvelles fleurs, de nouveaux astres, de nouvelles chairs, de nouvelles langues. J’ai cru acquérir des pouvoirs surnaturels. Eh bien! Je dois enterrer mon imagination et mes souvenirs! Une belle gloire d’artiste et de conteur emporté!” (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 206). Rimbaud transforms and deforms at will in

his imaginary world, so that the vision is continually changing and incomprehensible for the universe in which we live. His world is unpredictable as in *Ville*: "Mort sans pleurs, notre active fille et servante, un Amour désespéré et un joli Crime piaulant dans la boue de la rue" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 238). *Métropolitain* also manifests his mystical vision where the poet is a miracle worker: "Lève la tête:...ces masques enlumines sous la lanterne fouettée par la nuit froide; l'ondine niaise à la robe bruyante, au bas de la rivière; les crânes lumineux dans les plants de pois, - et les autres fantasmagories..." (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 242). His vision is a meeting place of the human soul and eternity. All ages of the world manifest in one poetic vision: "Les Dieux écoutent l'Homme et le Monde infini!" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 34). Rimbaud's restricted childhood was a creative source in his visionary world; he had learned to express his vision in a new poetical form.

Quest

Rimbaud's quest for love is one of his greatest challenges. He wrote *La Chasse Spirituelle* in about 1872 but the text has been lost (Starkie. 1982: 229). The title is however explanatory of Rimbaud's spiritual quest, which one finds in his poem *Mémoire*. The poem is original in form and as Starkie (1982: 230) explains, it is technically advanced, evoking his childhood memories. The visual impact of the poem is such, that it suggests an impressionistic painting. Rimbaud also tries to recapture his innocence in this quest for purity, but each time something prevents him from achieving this: "Jouet de cet œil d'eau morne, je n'y puis prendre, ô canot immobile! Oh! Bras trop courts!" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 124).

This quest for purity is symbolised by his reference to angels as well as water. Fowlie (1965: 20) believes that, "...every major poem by Rimbaud is the microcosm of his complete story..." It is the poem of his flight where the boy is a solitary white angel symbolising the spirit fleeing before all the black angels of the earth and the river. It is in essence his childhood that inspired these memories. Verstraëte (1980: 103-104) believes that his fantasies were one of his escape mechanisms to take control of his life and to handle his frustrations. It is through the recreation of Rimbaud's life that we are challenged with these emotions and images in his poetry. It is sometimes confusing, but Rimbaud is as ongoing and adaptable, as is Nature. This quest is as much a quest as it is a creation.

Rimbaud goes through a spiritual awakening in which the child-poet tries to capture every moment in a word or a phrase. He is searching unity, purity and new meanings for words. The motivation behind the quest would be sadness, a sadness that Ernest Delahaye spoke of, as quoted by Alain Borer (1991: 1) "Mais les turquoises de l'iris plus souvent tournaient à des teintes fixes d'acier, par l'ennui ou la tristesse." The child faces adulthood and its complications, but he is not prepared for the changes he would have to conquer. This quest could also be seen as a life quest, a quest that Isabelle Rimbaud tried to understand, as quoted by Borer (1991: 25): "La vraie vie... Il m'enseigne le vrai bonheur de la vie."

Rimbaud's quest is often externalised in his adventurous life. Levi (1992: 526) mentions some of Rimbaud's undertakings to illustrate the point: he taught French, visited several countries, crossed the Alps on foot, taught himself to play the piano (hired by his mother), studied languages, joined the Dutch Foreign legion, joined a Scottish boat as sailor and had a homosexual affair with Verlaine and never stopped writing in between. He seemed to have abandoned literature during his travels in Africa, but his quest continued. Rimbaud's life is opposites in profusion, yet it is through these contrasts that he would find the essence of his life. Through love, he could understand indifference and through disorder, he would understand order.

The young Rimbaud acts recklessly and with indifference as a child. Fowlie (1965: 24-25) also mentions Rimbaud's indifference, as for example living off Delahaye's generosity. He wrote *Le Bateau Ivre* before he went to visit Verlaine in Paris. Verlaine gave him hope through his invitations to Paris; this showed acceptance and his quest started out successfully. Yet as Fowlie (1965: 27-28) points out, Rimbaud's visit to Paris would not be what he had expected. When Delahaye met up with him in November 1871, he found a bitterly disillusioned Rimbaud.

One could distinguish many aspects of his quest through analysis of his poems. In *Le Bateau Ivre* Rimbaud expresses his search for love and eternity. The boat is the narrator, showing symbolically the feelings of the poet in a world where he could be free. The adventures of the boat are also the life and destiny of the young Rimbaud. From the very start, the boat had lost direction, the word "ivre" in the title indicates the uncertainty. Fowlie (1965: 29) believes that Rimbaud's memories of his childhood influenced him in *Bateau Ivre*. Arthur and his brother very often played along the shore, imitating a storm on the river. They would climb into a little boat to entertain themselves. The boat in the poem is according to Fowlie (1965: 29),

"...sailing through a psychological landscape of Rimbaud's youth." He makes use of all his senses, as well as previous literature in his extraordinary imagination. The sea is strangely as turbulent and as unpredictable as was Rimbaud's experiences of love in his life. The young Rimbaud was alone in his quest for liberty. Jouffroy (1991: 36) finds this liberty to be of importance: "Une volonté de dépassement, impatience... contre les erreurs étranges et tristes de sa propre éducation."

Rimbaud is searching with revolt, his only protection against his fears. His poetry is a sharing of some secrets and emotions, which portray bitterness, disillusionment and impatience. Baudelaire said (in Fowlie. 1965: 114) that, "...the great works of the creative spirit represent a recapture of childhood." The recapturing of childhood allows Rimbaud to enter a child's world, filled with anger, but also with marvels and fantasy. Fowlie (1965: 30-31) supports the view that *Bateau Ivre* is a valuable autobiographical display of Rimbaud's intellectual and spiritual life.

Rimbaud was forever walking, forever travelling but sadly, he never seemed to have found fulfilment in his life. We find this movement and restlessness in much of his works, as in *Ouvriers* and *Mystique*: "La ville... nous suivait" (*Ouvriers*) and there is "...la rumeur tournante et bondissante des conques des mers et des nuits humaines" (*Mystique*).

Whether Rimbaud was capable of love is doubted, but he did believe that love was a powerful, magical source as in *Sensation*: "Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien: Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme...heureux comme avec une femme" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 16).

In *Aube*, Rimbaud searched for harmony and love. He searches in Nature, expressing his love in his embracement of Dawn in the summer. Verstraëte (1980: 122) also believes that Rimbaud longed for love, but at first, it involved liberation from his mother. In *Aube*, he reaches out, he touches and he does not want to wake up at midday, as that would mean facing reality. There is comfort for him in this Eden-like Nature. He feels accepted here: "Je ris au wasserfall blond qui s'échevela à travers les sapins; à la cime argentée je reconnus la déesse... En haut de la route, près d'un bois de lauriers, je l'ai entourée avec ses voiles amassées, et j'ai senti un peu son immense corps. L'Aube et l'enfant tombèrent au bas du bois" (Fowlie. Œuvres 1975: 214). In his world, he is accepted and he can search freely.

In *Après le Déluge*, Rimbaud's search leads him to believe that humanity is in need of another flood to do away with hurt and pain and to refresh the earth with water and give life a new meaning. In order to reach the ultimate innocence, Rimbaud is searching for purification. Therefore, in many of his poems, the sea is a powerful source of inspiration and a key symbol representing a reborn innocence.

Rimbaud's quest is a very personal one, therefore Jouffroy (1991: 217) refers to Rimbaud's poetry as something that became, "...dans le champ qu'il a ouvert à ses héritiers, une sorte de *"no man's land"*: celui de toutes les utopies qui restent en suspens." His quest for happiness becomes an artificial happiness like the "paradis baudelairiens" (Jouffroy.1991: 137). Rimbaud's habits of smoking hashish around 1871 was another attempt to enter the hallucinatory world of his dreams which is why he knew about the hallucinatory effects of certain substances and how to live in a visionary world.

A presence chases Rimbaud in silence. We find it in his unspoken words, his thoughts and in his poetry. Rimbaud mentally rejoined his father in Harar for instance, but as Jouffroy (1991: 218) explains: "Son père n'était personne." Jouffroy (1991:218) also believes in a presence in Rimbaud's works, "...présence permanente d'un inconnu enfouie en lui, il lui a obéi obscurément sans pouvoir l'entendre...le père fut son dernier et infranchissable parapet intérieur. L'image du père "rapporteur" ne pouvait l'inciter à prolonger là-bas son "œuvre littéraire," mais elle l'a aidé à formaliser un projet de livre à partir de ses incursions, dans les lieux où il est allé trafiquer dans l'inconnu. Au-delà du père, mais aussi grâce à lui." Rimbaud's quest undoubtedly searched for a father. His life, as well as his poetry gives proof of his action as he took many risks in order to follow his dream.

Jouffroy (1991:173) mentions Verlaine who had said of Rimbaud at The Senate in London (1895): "Sa curiosité s'étendait à tout - à tout ce qui est vraiment curieux et digne d'intérêt. Les mathématiques, par exemple, tout en l'effrayant...L'architecture, même les travaux d'ingénieur en dehors de l'art, certaines industries, l'amusaient à connaître. La fin de sa vie devait se ressentir de ces goûts d'enfance vers une générale philomathie (qui aime les sciences)."

Rimbaud is often disappointed, often discouraged and in despair, as for instance when he returned from Paris for the first time. Starkie (1982: 232) explains that: "...il ne revenait pas en conquérant, mais chassé comme un prophète. Personne n'avait compris son message, on l'avait persécuté, mais c'était le sort des magiciens." His discouragement surfaces in *Larme* along with *La Rivière de Cassis*.

He doubts the goodness in the world as well as the magic of his poetry in *Âge D'or*:

Ces mille questions

Qui se ramifient

N'amènent, au fond,

Qu'ivresse et folie;

(...)

Le monde est vicieux;

Si cela t'étonne!

Vis et laisse au feu

L'obscur infortune.

(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975:140)

Nature rejoices the summer in *Aube* and the quest for happiness is continued in *Jeunesse*. He is forever searching as Borer (1991: 64) states: "Ne nous étonnons pas davantage qu'il aille voir ailleurs: c'est même seulement parce qu'il ne cesse pas de chercher que nous pouvons le comprendre et lire son œuvre: en perpétuel dépassement." He continued his quest for something new and more original even in Ethiopia, the country he called inaccessible to whites. He needed change to discover something, perhaps to discover the eternal child in himself, "...c'est même le Harar qui est exploration de l'inconnu" (Borer.1991: 65). Rimbaud is always ready to depart and even in his early childhood he announces his travels in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*: "Et j'irai loin. Bien loin ..." He continues his travels and disappears without hesitation. Rimbaud also dwells into the 'Unknown' through poetry and one is never sure where or when he reappears. His inclination to leave is a theme in *Les Déserts de l'amour*, *Une Saison en Enfer*, *Fêtes de la Faim*, *Ma Bohême*, *Sensation*, *Rêvé pour l'Hiver* and *Le Bateau Ivre*. His quest is never restricted to poetry alone.

Rimbaud's work and life transcends literature. Borer (1991: 125) talks of Rimbaud's 'Œuvre-vie': "Si l'on mettait en lumière chaque fragment de l'œuvre, on reviendrait toujours, fondamentalement, à cette quête métaphysique (dans une âme)..." His

autobiography is found in his poems, but his poems cannot be reduced to an autobiography for he goes beyond himself and often hides in sarcasm.

Rimbaud's quest is also a spiritual quest. His spiritual quest is probably the most difficult and complex part of his sadness to understand. Rimbaud expresses regrets in *Chanson de la plus haute Tour* when he talks of his spoiled youth:

*Oisive jeunesse
À tout asservie,
Par délicatesse
J'ai perdu ma vie.*

(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 136)

Rimbaud often refers to Antiquity. His hell however, differs somewhat from the hell of the ancient civilisations. Brunel (1997: 95) calls it, "...lieu de séjour pour les bienheureux comme pour les répouvés, et surtout pour de pâles images de ceux qui furent des hommes et des femmes..."

Une Saison en Enfer refers to Greek-Latin literature as well as to the Bible. Rimbaud in his text, follows the same change and evolution, as Brunel (1997: 65) puts it: "Rimbaud n'échappe pas plus à la religion catholique de son enfance qu'aux visions antiques du Tartare." He moves towards, "...La science, la nouvelle noblesse! Le progrès ... C'est la vision des nombres. Nous allons à l'Esprit ... Je comprends, et ne sachant m'expliquer sans paroles paiennes, je voudrais me taire" (*Mauvais Sang*, Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 176). It is not the blood of Christ but the pagan blood that flows in his veins. The Gospel restrains him, and he needs liberation, so he no longer engages in the wars of the world. Rimbaud fears the Christian Hell, which is believed to be eternal. He needs divine perfection, but he suffers at first according to Brunel (1997: 95), "l'âme tombe, et elle est engloutie dans les profondeurs. De profundis domine."

Brunel (1983: 112) quotes Rimbaud's opinion of *Bateau Ivre*, "...on n'a rien écrit encore de semblable, je le sais bien. Je ne sais pas me tenir, je suis gauche, timide, je ne sais pas parler. Oh! pour la pensée, je ne crains personne, ..."

On his quest, Rimbaud is well aware of his strengths and his weaknesses. His quest is heading for the future, but it is in a frenzied, drunken state that he approaches an adult world. Rimbaud's quest for hope is interwoven with this quest for the unknown. This hope can only exist in eternity however. Jouffroy (1991: 139) sees this quest also as a physical quest. Verlaine spoke of Rimbaud, saying: "Ses jambes – sans rivales. Le marcheur marche mieux et plus vite que personne, infatigablement... inextinguiblement." Rimbaud once travelled six hundred kilometres in eleven days in the Choa to Harar.

The only mother that can offer him pure love, is "Vénus, la Divine mère." He is aware of love's power in *Angoisse*: "Amour, force! – plus haut que toutes joies et gloires!" Rimbaud developed prematurely. His precociousness made him realise that the universal forces of love and sexuality were not the same as was divine love. His religious background showed love as a sin or as procreator: He had to learn to distinguish between good and evil and he thus feared love at first. According to Levi (1992: 524) Rimbaud once ran away with a girl, but he was rejected by her. This had a negative effect on his sexual development and led to further rebellion.

Rimbaud, who was unfamiliar with love, tries to reinvent it in *Délires*. Fowlie (1965: 105) believes that Rimbaud was one of the very few poets who consecrated his work by a silence, which did more than any manifesto or explanation to reveal it. He freed himself from clichés and contradictions, obsessed by veneration for secrets in words. He understood the power of the mind. Fowlie (1965: 46) calls Rimbaud the "Prophet-poet" as he abandons his family, his religion and his country on his quest. It is a self-exploration and a mystical experience to exercise his delirious ambition to create. He moved from known solitude to foreign solitude.

In his final correspondence with his mother, one wonders if he was not perhaps trying to be his father's superior. Perhaps he needed to prove it to his mother. In *Mauvais Sang* he accepted that he belonged to the inferior race in his mother's eyes, as he did not belong to God's chosen people: "Mais toujours seul; sans famille; même; quelle langue parlais-je? Je ne me vois jamais dans les conseils du Christ, ni dans les conseils des Seigneurs, - représentants du Christ." (Fowlie. *Œuvres*, 1975: 176).

As the world advances, he replaces the religion from his childhood with a different vision: "C'est très certain, c'est oracle, ce que je dis. Je comprends, et ne sachant

m'expliquer sans paroles païennes, je voudrais me taire" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 176). He crosses continents: "...le réel fictif de son enfance, celui des histoires racontées ou devinées de son père en Algérie, le Fatherland: c'est cela, sa première forme de saisie de l'inconnu: un rêve d'enfant projeté dans le futur..." (Jouffroy. 1991: 195). Le Hardouin (1962: 23) believes that Rimbaud's work attempts not only to find a lost childhood, but to find a childhood he never had.

In Delahaye's *Rimbaud*, certain words are used repeatedly, which is significant to an understanding of Rimbaud's quest. Delahaye explains: "Je demande pardon au lecteur, mais l'avertis qu'une fréquente répétition des mots **parti, retourné, revenu**, ne peut être évitée dans l'histoire de Rimbaud" (Delahaye. 1947: 51). He is forever searching and he made progress in his means towards modern poetry as an end. In the same way, his fascination with Antiquity was a part of his quest for the modernity. At that time, the artists of Antiquity were progressive and so was Rimbaud for his generation. His poetry is transhistorical as it crosses the boundaries of the past and the future.

Rimbaud's quest reminds us of Perceval's quest for identity. Through many tests and initiations, he gets to know his essence, love and religion being two difficult aspects of his quest. An interpretation of Rimbaud's poems needs interpretation from an esoteric and Christian point of view also. Perceval rejects "la chevalerie" of the court to search for his identity and his spirit elsewhere. Rimbaud's quest also took him on an adventure that would only be ended by death. Cuccurullo (1974: 45) comments on Perceval's encounters in a way that reminds us of Rimbaud: "Il a perdu son paradis et son innocence. Sa vie va devenir une quête éternelle."

Anti-bourgeois

Part of his revolt is against the bourgeois society. His homosexuality was also a way of defying the bourgeois morale at the time. Yet in the final days before his death, he still felt the need to have a family though he set specific norms for a female partner: "Il ne s'exposerait pas au dédain d'une fille de bourgeois; il irait chercher dans un orphelinat une fille d'antécédents et d'éducation irréprochables, ou bien il épouserait une femme catholique, de race noble abyssine" (Borer. 1991: 147).

In *Le Forgeron* also, Rimbaud shows his aversion to the bourgeois life: "Non. Ces saletés-là datent de nos papas! Oh! Le Peuple n'est plus une putain. Trois pas Et tous, nous avons mis ta Bastille en poussière" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 18). The blacksmith wishes away his fears and dislikes: "Bien que le roi ventru suât, le Forgeron, Terrible lui jeta le bonnet rouge au front!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 24).

Rimbaud's roots are in the West, but he tries to rid himself of their symbols, such as warfare and Christianity. He seeks eternal wisdom, for he is not the Westerner who harmonises Christ with the bourgeoisie. His complete liberation is away from all the bonds of the world (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1965: 111).

Revolt

Rimbaud's revolt is audacious and somewhat ambiguous to understand. In *Les Étrennes des Orphelins* and *Les Effarés*, the abandoned child seeks attention, but then Rimbaud had a way of isolating himself from his family. The revolt is also stated in *Les Poètes de Sept Ans* and *Comédie de la soif*. He seeks liberty and adventure in *Le Bateau Ivre*, but in *Mémoire* and *Enfance* he lacks the intimacy of a family. His tortured heart revolts against the factors of his childhood, which isolate him.

Rimbaud, an unconventional wanderer with filthy habits had to overthrow everything in an unprecedented banality to arrive at his unknown horizons. Yet later in Africa he had finished a part of his revolt and as Jouffroy (1991: 132) explains: "Il aime la propreté et ses coups de balais dans son agence de Harar."

His poetic revolt against fixed ideas and grammatical rules had to lead him to the invention of a book that would effectively replace all others before it, as it would have to show a new way of living and writing. He was always on his way on a voyage, maybe that is why he admired the legs of statues (Jouffroy.1991: 140). In *Antique* the idea of movement and subtle revolt is clearly stated: "Gracieux fils de Pan ... Promène-toi, la nuit, en mouvant doucement cette cuisse, cette jambe de gauche" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 224-226). In his travels he also functions independently as explorer and refuses all stagnation to a specific work: "J'ai horreur de tous les métiers ... La main à plume vaut la main à charrue. – Quel siècle à mains!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 174 – *Mauvais Sang*).

Rimbaud's initial revolt was violent and destructive. It is composed of hate, despair and bitterness. He refuses to be what he is not. This specific struggle is clearly shown in *Une Saison en Enfer*. Although magical, his child's world in *Les Illuminations* reveals chaos after chaos, and in *Parade* and *Conte* order as well as disorder: "Un prince était vexé de ne s'être employé jamais qu'à la perfection des générosités vulgaires... Toutes les femmes qui l'avaient connu furent assassinées" (Fowlie. *Œuvres*.1975: 222). Rimbaud felt relieved in his illumination without his mother.

Fowlie (1965: 137) describes *Aube* as a parable of childhood. Only the pattern of quest and discovery remains. The great moments of childhood are memorable, but they are often subtly obscured by negativity such as revolt. Rimbaud gains power through immorality, intoxication and poetry as sources of his revolt.

His poetry is also a form of revolt as he crosses the frontiers of the real, entering the other worldliness and a revelation of ideas, yet Fowlie (1965: 77) points out the underlying silence: "Its origins lie in the ineffable part of his own being and therefore are much closer to the silence of the universe than to its noises and verbalisations." Unfortunately, his poetry as a form of revolt often proves to be incommunicable, and therefore remains but revolt for many readers. The reality is that despite all his revolt, Rimbaud cannot live completely independently. He must get used to the world and accept there is no true escape.

Rimbaud's revolt from maternal tyranny takes him to the silence of their garden. Charleville became a symbol of authority with the presence of his mother. In *Fêtes de la Patience* he writes: "J'ai tant fait patience. Qu'à jamais j'oublie; Craintes et souffrances aux cieux sont parties" (Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 138). In *Mémoire*, his first poem of revolt, he started his frantic search: "Hélas, Lui, comme mille anges blancs qui se séparent sur la route, s'éloigne par delà la montagne!" (Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 124). Without freedom of action, he felt his poetry was inexplicable as in *L'Éclair*: "Je reconnais là ma sale éducation d'enfance ... Non! non! À présent je me révolte contre la mort! ... - Chère pauvre âme, l'éternité serait-elle pas perdue pour nous!" (Fowlie. *Œuvres*.1975: 204). There is nothing extraordinary about Rimbaud's revolt as any boy put in the same circumstances would most probably have revolted against the maternal domination and other suffocating rules as laid down by a bourgeois society.

Child of Nature

In his poem, *Bateau Ivre* Rimbaud creates the sea from his experiences along the Meuse River. Around Charleville there are hills and forests, forming the source of his nature-inspired poems, like in *Illuminations*. Starkie (1982: 39) stresses the importance of these surroundings, for this was his only escape: "Là, sur l'herbe grasse des berges de la rivière, sur laquelle une rosée légère semble perler jour et nuit, Rimbaud, quand il pouvait tromper la vigilance de sa mère, remplissait son esprit des images qui allaient devenir la substance de ses poèmes futures." Up to the age of sixteen, Rimbaud would live here, without a father.

In Nature, the acts of love are the acts of creation. The Earth wants to continue life as the source of procreation. Mother earth is fertile, she spreads her love, reaching out to Rimbaud's lonely spirit. Rimbaud distinguishes between the pure love for a God and the erotic love for pleasure. Love is a source of confusion to Rimbaud, the issues of creation, genetics and science are so interwoven that life and love becomes one source of inspiration. The sun is therefore an important source in creation, as it gives life. Rimbaud would often refer to the sun in his poetry, as in *Soleil et Chair*.

Procreation ensures the continuation of life, this eternity that Rimbaud longs for. Fowlie (1965: 210) refers to reason as another important theme in *Soleil et Chair*. "Nôtre pâle raison nous cache l'infini!" Rimbaud, urgently seeking eternity, faces reason and reality. Through Mother Nature, Rimbaud seeks liberation in that which is mystical and magical. He feels the universe in its "multiple correspondences" (Fowlie. 1965: 227) in *Soleil et Chair*.

Rimbaud reveals the unity existing in nature and in the world: "Le Soleil, le foyer de tendresse et de vie, verse l'amour brûlant à la terre ravie" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 26). The pagan quest is a powerful driving force, which allows him to feel the energy nature possesses and the warmth with which she enfolds him. If we compare Verlaine with Rimbaud, Verlaine was much weaker and cowardly. Rimbaud was superior because he needed no one, not even Verlaine. Rimbaud lived as if chased by someone, as if he had the solution to find the 'Unknown' in Nature.

In *Soleil et Chair*, Rimbaud turns towards "l'antique jeunesse." He wants to remain young in his creative acts. In his revolt against the system, and authorities like his

mother, Rimbaud sees paganism as a way of expressing himself: "L'Antique Jeunesse" is eternal. The ancient Greek gods lived in all their perfection and beauty, completely free to express their love. Rimbaud wants to belong to Nature who regenerates the cycle of life, in order to be eternally youthful in spirit and thus also in his writing.

Nature would also be the facilitator for a homosexual relationship with Verlaine. Rimbaud's quest for love is a love in Nature: "L'eau du fleuve, le sang rose des arbres verts dans les veines de Pan mettaient un univers! Où le sol palpait, vert sous ses pieds de chèvre; Où, baisant mollement le claire syrinx, sa lèvre modulait sous le ciel le grand hymne d'amour" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 26). Youthful love and innocence will establish Man's harmony with Nature. He fears losing his original spontaneity, as it is maintained through "...le pur ruissellement de la vie infinie" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 26).

The atmosphere in *Le Bateau Ivre* is mystical, as if air becomes part of a transparent ocean in which all things exist, where man in this environment is an inextricable part of nature. Rimbaud presents nature as an integral part of this creative adventure, perhaps he saw this as a way of expressing all living creatures' interrelated dependence and equally unfathomable destiny. Being so young, he could relate to uncertainty. He is curious of what remains to be known. Rimbaud is not only a child-poet, but also a paganism orientated child with the conscience of intelligence as a great physical empowerment.

In our search of science, Nature loses its mystery. Rimbaud prefers love from the gods as it is considered to be pure. Man's love through the manipulation of Nature is not seen as a pure love. Venus is the ultimate pagan, creating force. The gods are thus a powerful source of inspiration in Rimbaud's writing. Their cosmic musicality corresponds with the divine language, which Rimbaud tries to capture. Nature can comfort as in *Dormeur du val*: "La terre berçant l'homme"(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 26). Nature plays the role of a mother, a father and a lover to Rimbaud. He distances himself from the church and finds comfort in the cyclical ideas of paganism, as there is no definite beginning or end.

In his thesis, Marlaud (1984:9) distinguishes between the rationalising and paganistic views. Rimbaud fits the philosophy of the myth and vision as he is susceptible to

change of perspective, thus his stability in life is relative to his perspectives. Marlaud (1984: 10) points out that rationalism is where "...le logos devient la loi morale qui conditionne le comportement par le biais de tables de valeurs universelles imposées d'en haut..." Rimbaud in his revolt, believes in a diversity of values and morals. He trusts instincts and personality types for the discovery of truths, and he justifies polytheism in his poetry as in *Soleil et Chair*. He is open to the world and sees a great responsibility that rests with him: to become increasingly "L'idéal, la pensée invincible éternelle" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 28). The new wisdom causes Man to become deaf and blind to the world: "Oui, l'Homme est triste et laid" and "S'il n'avait pas laissé l'immortelle Astarté" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 28).

Levi (1992: 526) sees *Soleil et Chair* as an, "...attack on Christianity for its middle-class values and its suppression of the sensual side of man." Levi (1992: 528) further explains that Rimbaud's greatest fears were that society's values and especially Christianity would enslave the poet. We find the same ideas expressed in *Les premières communions*. Nature gives the only true freedom and is perfect in essence.

Rimbaud insists on the purity and the originality of "La beauté première" as a source of necessity in his writing. He is indeed referring to himself when he says: "L'homme veut tout sonder – et savoir!" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 30). This knowledge is the very essence of his inspiration. He is intuitive about the problems he experiences with his creative process. They are typical of any artist: "Nous ne pouvons savoir. Nous sommes accablés...Notre pâle raison nous cache l'infini!..... Le Doute nous punit!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 30). We ignore the simple things in life, neglecting our observations and their uniqueness, as seen the way a child would, in order to rationalise.

Verstraëte (1980: 23) points out one of many antitheses in Rimbaud's writing. Rimbaud's freedom, together with thoughts of freedom, becomes imprisoned by reason in *Une Saison en Enfer*. His poetic originality can only be preserved through the eyes of a child. This explains the use of the sun as a symbol. Rimbaud wanted to be close to the sun, as a son of the sun, as he explains in *Soleil et Chair*. "Le soleil le foyer de tendresse et de vie..." (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 26).

Greek Antiquity remains the source of inspiration in poems like *L'Impossible* and *Aube*. Verstraëte (1980: 25) explains this attraction as a powerful source. Rimbaud embraces these pagan ideas, because Venus and universal love through divine forces can lift up all creation in its simplicity, and it seems pure and strong. Rimbaud wants to be a part of the cosmos as we find in *L'Éternité*, *Âge d'or* and *Alchimie du Verbe*. In *L'Éternité*, Rimbaud also finds liberty:

*Des humains suffrages,
Des communs élans
Là tu te dégages
Et voles selon."*

(Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 140)

In *Âge d'or* he communicates with Nature,

*Quelqu'une des voix
Toujours angélique
-Il s'agit de moi,-
Vertement s'explique:...
Reconnais ce tour
Si gai, si facile:
Ce n'est qu'onde, flore,
Et c'est ta famille!"*

(Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 140)

In *Alchimie du Verbe*, Rimbaud is creating his language, which is something beyond this world: "Puis j'expliquai mes sophismes magiques avec l'hallucination des mots!... Je disais adieu au monde dans d'espèces de romances:"... (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 194). His poetry is often cyclic by the use of repetitions as in *Éternité* and *Chanson de la plus haute Tour* and it reminds of an incantation. The desire for a complete renewal is expressed in *Chanson de la plus haute tour*:

*Qu'il vienne, qu'il vienne,
Le temps dont on s'éprenne...*

*Telle la prairie
À l'oubli livrée*

*Grandie, et fleurie
D'encens et d'ivraies,
Au bourdon farouche
Des sales mouches.*

*Qu'il vienne, qu'il vienne,
Le temps dont on s'éprenne.*

(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 196)

Rimbaud is fascinated by Nature. He wants to know Nature intimately and embraces her. His inspiration as a child leads him to creative expression for he remains but a child of Nature. as he explains in *Lettre du Voyant*: "Donc le poète est vraiment voleur de feu" (Letter 15 May 1871. Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 308).

Ophélie is a moving celebration of Nature. Nature shares her secrets of a poetic revelation to Rimbaud, even in death: "Voici plus de mille ans que la triste Ophélie Passe, fantôme blanc, sur le long fleuve noir. Voici plus de mille ans que sa douce folie Murmure sa romance ... Oui, tu mourus, enfant, par un fleuve emporté!" She was attracted by eternal Death: "Que ton cœur écoutait le chant de la Nature Dans les plaintes de l'arbre et les soupirs des nuits;" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 34).

Furthermore in *Les Corbeaux*, as in *Le Dormeur du val*, there is a suggestion of war and devastation, with the cold winds blowing over the fields where the dead are 'sleeping'. He uses the word, "sleeping" as a euphemism of the word, "die": "Par milliers, sur les champs de France, Où dorment des morts d'avant-hier" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 122).

The word sleep has a tranquillity that implies repose, contrasting significantly with war, violence and death: "Un soldat jeune...dort"(Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 56). The "sleeping" dead is in harmony with Nature. Perhaps this was his way of comforting himself in the arms of Nature. There is also a multiplicity of nature scenes in poems like *Fête d'Hiver* and *Fairy*. Nature is subservient to the child's views and ideas. Mother Nature can revive any creature and there is intrinsic love in the Universe's infinite smile as in *Soleil et Chair*.

Myth and Religion

The myth of Rimbaud can be understood as: "...prométhéen du voleur de feu, chrétien du péché originel, luciférien de l'orgueil en révolte, faustien de la déparadisation; par l'initiation aux pouvoirs surnaturels qui mènent à la limite de la folie, à cette lisière qu'ont franchie, parfois de façon analogue, Hölderlin, Blake, Nietzsche ou Artaud" (Borer.1991: 32).

If we look at Jung's views on myths, we could understand Rimbaud's creativity. He never loses touch with his creative forces. "Myths are a direct expression of the collective unconscious, they are found in similar forms among all peoples..." (Fordham.1953: 27). Rimbaud does not lose the ability to transform the myth into dreams, at different stages of his young life. He creates through myth making.

Certain poems deal with a fairy world, while others are related to his religious upbringing. His poem, *Fleurs* suggests a fairy world of light and colour. Bernard (1960: 510) calls it an altered reality: "la réalité est tellement transposée par Rimbaud qu'elle apparaît sous le jour splendide d'une résistable illumination."

Many of his poems are related to the Bible. In *Après le Déluge* the flood destroys, but it recreates new possibilities. Verstraëte (1980: 93) refers to the Bible for an understanding of the poem: "Les sources de l'abîme et les écluses du ciel furent fermées." (Genèse 8:2). The poem is spiritual with words like prayer, God, mass and the rainbow, but it also combines with fairy-tale images like Blue-Beard and the moon. The beautiful picture created after the "Flood" is however, not so perfect: "Un lièvre ... dit sa prière à l'arc en ciel à travers la toile de l'araignée." The innocence of the child is also shown in the poem as if purified by the "Flood": "Les enfants ... regardèrent les merveilleuses images, Les premières communions..." (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 212-214). The beliefs of his mother and the forced readings of the Bible would indeed have influenced Rimbaud's creativity. However, it inspires him to search for supernatural powers, beyond Nature and belonging to a higher realm.

Fowlie (1965: 127) believes that Rimbaud also dabbled in occultism because of his fascination with extraordinary powers. He adjures the dangerous elements, the monsters, witches and storms at sea, along with all his other fears, but fantasy comforts him in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins* with a fairy that passes by – "La bise

sous le seuil a fini par se taire ...On dirait qu'une fée a passé dans cela!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 14). Little, in this context quotes Pierre-Georges Castex (1983:76): "Je considère que *Les Illuminations* demeurent le texte non pas certes le plus obscur, mais le plus difficile à commenter dans toute l'histoire de notre poésie."

In *Soleil et Chair* Rimbaud gives his pagan views: "O Vénus, ô Déesse! Je regrette les temps de l'antique jeunesse,...où la sève du monde... Dans les veines de Pan mettaient un univers!" Rimbaud refuses to believe in the sins of the Catholic religion: "l'Homme est Dieu!... L'Homme a relevé sa tête libre et fière!" (Fowlie. œuvres.1975: 26, 28). He, however searches for love, "Mais l'Amour, voilà la grand Foi!" Rimbaud would have shocked his mother and church with these statements: "Oh! la route est amère Depuis que l'autre Dieu nous attelle à sa croix." (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 28).

The guilt one carries as Christian weighs too heavily for Rimbaud. His love remains loyal to Antiquity and to paganism: "Chair, Marbre, Fleur, Vénus, c'est en toi que je crois!" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 26). Rimbaud attended a religiously orientated 'Collège de Charleville' where the classes were divided into those wanting to become priests and those classified as ordinary pupils. Added to his education, he had a highly moral mother who was very religious, but also militaristic. This explains Rimbaud's revolt against religiousness, even if it was only to shock his mother (Levi. 1992: 524).

Rimbaud discovered the sun and the sea as primary symbols in his writing. They are symbols of the earliest creation in which Rimbaud believes as Delort (1978: 20) states: "La danse éternelle des flots et Vénus Aphrodite foule, d'un pied léger, la vague qui l'a vu naître pour la plus grande joie du poète qui chante, en un fervant credo: Je crois en toi! Je crois en toi! Divine mère. Aphrodite marine!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 28).

The ancient Greeks also personify the joy of life by making use of the rays of the sun. Rimbaud expresses this force and beauty in *Alchimie du Verbe*: "Enfin, ô bonheur, ô raison, j'écartais du ciel l'azur, qui est du noir, et je vécus, étincelle d'or de la lumière nature. De joie, je prenais une expression bouffonne et égarée au possible"(Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 198). Rimbaud prefers the sun to any other source of life. Christianity doomed him to an inferior race. Whatever he needs to express will be with a corporeal as well as a spiritual alchemy of the word. Rimbaud's paganism and his polytheism are not at all uncivilised attitudes towards life. There is a multiplicity of forces, which Rimbaud links to fateful events.

His anti-religious views were chiefly in reaction to his devout mother and his hell was possibly the silence of his father. 'Soleil', 'lumière' and 'aube' are frequently used: "Ils traduisent une hantise qui a préoccupé le poète de l'enfance à la mort..." (Eigeldinger. 1964: 12-13). The sun is a creating god and father of the universe who is capable to love in all harmony. It is a male force in poems like *Dormeur du val*, *Les Premières Communions* and *Soleil et Chair* that purifies, revives and restores the image of Life through the enlightening of the obscure. Eigeldinger (1964:21) quotes Jung on his idea of the Father-sun: "Le père visible du monde, c'est le soleil, le feu céleste; aussi père, dieu, soleil, feu sont-ils des synonymes mythologiques... dans la force solaire, c'est la grande force génératrice de la nature..."

Bellemin-Noël (1996:98) believes "... chaque créateur, en lutte avec ses ombres, dédie sans le savoir à la divinité qui préside à nos enfers après avoir bercé et malmené nos enfances." Rimbaud's profound suffering through *Une Saison en Enfer* leads to greater sensitivity. Through the fire associated with Hell, he is purified. Rimbaud's quest for innocence lights up with intellectual gifts in his poetry. In *Soleil et Chair* the primitive music of Pan is the hymn of love and Nature responds. The goddess "Cybèle" controls the forces of the Earth. Rimbaud regrets this state of the primitive, as he believes man had lost his innocence through science. Man became deaf and blind to the forces of Nature. The love that existed between Nature, Man and the Universe has been destroyed by modern truths. This equilibrium was disturbed through Rimbaud's mother and her Catholicism, so he rejects it in his poetry. The significance of archetypes like the sun, the moon, the earth and the mountain is different for each individual poem. Robert (1977: 83) sees the sun, "... comme la mère universelle et le poème nous dit pourquoi: le soleil porte la terre, il en est le centre de gravitation."

Rimbaud's deception "*les pauvres Jésus*" showed that his prayers led to nothing in *Les Effarés*. His poem *Les Pauvres à l'église* is a further revolt against the church for it is God that makes them suffer: "Les Pauvres au bon Dieu, le patron et le sire, Tendent leurs oremus risibles et têtus ...Après les six jours noirs où Dieu les fait souffrir!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 78). He addresses Jesus, dreaming far beyond the misery of man. The rainbow in *Après le Déluge* as a sign of God's grace (Genesis IX) is what Rimbaud calls his damnation in *Alchimie du Verbe*. Rimbaud prefers to embrace and possess Nature in his youthful, pantheistic impulse as in *Aube*. In the words of Brunel (1972: 533), Rimbaud's poetry is the language of his soul.

Rimbaud's youthful enthusiasm in the *Illuminations* is described by De Lacoste (1945: 228): "Tout ceci témoigne évidemment d'un état d'euphorie, voire d'allégresse, que nous ne nous expliquons pas entièrement..."

Rimbaud looks upon Christianity as a destroyer of energy. His visions were apocalyptic and superior (Fowlie. *Œuvres*.1965: 240). He had premonitions of failure, as in *Vies*: "Je suis un inventeur bien autrement méritant que tous ceux qui m'ont précédé, qui ai trouvé quelque chose comme la clef de l'amour. A présent, gentilhomme d'une compagne aigre au ciel sobre ..." (Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 228). It is not new to Man to want to transcend and surpass his existence. Rimbaud shows this nostalgia for the world beyond this world.

Creative writing in General

Instead of moulding his ideas in structured form and rhythmical rules, he creates a direct poetry with free running phrases. His inspiration flows naturally, as does the fluidity of days. He is impatient, "un sensationniste assez impatient, il voulait tout de suite une couleur dont il pût jouir ..." (Borer, 1991: 38). He captures the idea and the moment, as would the Impressionist capture light at a specific time of day. He wants to invent a renaissance of love, society, science and poetry in general. His obsession drove him to modernisation: "Le nouveau n'est jamais assez nouveau, il reste à inventer. Le reste à trouver" (Borer, 1991: 53). His *Illuminations* are the invention of a new poetic world. In *L'Alchimie du Verbe* he introduces the magic of colour and sound, he claimed to keep "the translation" of the poem.

His great admiration for Baudelaire must have influenced Rimbaud. Baudelaire's mother also misunderstood her child. Baudelaire's definition of genius in *Le Peintre de la vie Moderne* (*Œuvres Complètes II* in "Critique d'Art" Gallimard. Paris), reminds one of Rimbaud's "enfance retrouvée à volonté." Macklin (1996:45) supports the view that Rimbaud's poetry and his childhood are "synonymous and indivisible." There is a multiplicity of evocations from Rimbaud's childhood as a motif and structural element in his poems. All his frustrations, isolation and family problems are expressed in the boundless creative energies of a child.

Rimbaud never explained his poetry. His response to his mother after her enquiry about the meaning of *Une Saison en Enfer* was: "Ça dit ce que ça dit, littéralement et dans tous les sens" (Jouffroy. 1991: 22). The lack of understanding that others might have experienced was sufficient for Rimbaud. He had no urge to explain his profound mental activities.

The major themes in *Illuminations* are: women, childhood and travelling. This is proof of his insistence on his youth. De Lacoste (1945: 242) calls *Les Illuminations*: "Une réalisation, dans le domaine littéraire, de cet appétit insatiable de conquête et de liberté." Rimbaud's whole literary career, however, can be viewed as a constant re-orientation. He contemptuously outgrew his own originality. Macklin (1978: 25) sees "force" and "faiblesse" as one of the fundamental principles behind Rimbaud's approach. It is a productive channelling of his imaginative resources as he plays the weak, suffering child and the revolting dominant partner in *Vierge Folle* for example.

There is an ambivalence in Rimbaud's creative drive and a continual flux and reflux of emotions. Rimbaud's oscillations are an energy: "Depicting himself as a god and a demon, a pagan and a Christian, a kind of pre-Nietzschean Übermensch and a slave, a poet-prophet-seer (the *voyant*) and a peasant, a suppliant imploring God's mercy and a rebel cursing God..." (Peschel.1977: 15). It is in his contraries that he progresses.

Disorder and despair dominates much of his writing as Kittang (1975: 333) explains: "Le dynamisme spatial de l'écriture jusqu'aux limites du silence, aux éclats mortels d'une Mer frénétique, aux tourbillons catastrophiques des masques et des significations ... le texte ludique de Rimbaud constitue, ... une manifestation froidement solitaire ... L'opéra fabuleux ... se joue devant une salle terriblement vide."

Rimbaud is the lost prodigal son, the angelic-looking boy and the artist all at once. He is universal, using Orpheus, Freud and Hans Christian Andersen in his poetry. Victor Hugo called him "Shakespeare enfant" because of his outstanding assimilation of ideas. His words in poetry retain their relationship with the idea with which they were created, and the language responds to Rimbaud's desires, yet the words are not joined in familiar ways. Richer (1972:225) believes "il est aussi vrai, sans doute, de dire que la poésie l'a quitté que de parler de son adieu à la poésie." He will always be the mysterious child-poet.

Chapter 2

The theme of childhood as a source of inspiration in the works of François Nourissier

Parents

Nourissier uses the images of his childhood as metaphor for his writing. He is as cautious in the selection of the right word, as is a child when learning to walk. In a letter to me dated 8 January 1998 (unpublished), he admits the effect his parents had on his childhood and later on his inspiration: " Enfance: la mort de mon père, en 1935, au cinéma. Enfance la solitude de ma mère, puis ses remariages aberrants. Tout est venu de là."

Nourissier was only eight years old when his father died. Nourissier always feared death, especially on certain birthdays as he kept thinking of his father. This was also the very source of inspiration behind his autobiography *Un Petit Bourgeois*. Nourissier's fears as a child manifested themselves again in adulthood when he became a father. It was difficult for him acting as father as he never had the opportunity to experience a real father-son relationship: "Je me suis alors dit que mes fils risquaient d'en savoir bien peu sur moi, et d'autant moins que le silence est de rigueur dans la famille" (Guillon et al.1996: 26).

In an article Nourissier tells of his discoveries in his father's personal library. This serves as the only witness to his father's existence and his political beliefs "...il était plutôt Croix-de-Feu ou Action Française, terriblement <<ancien combattant>> et pas radical-socialiste pour deux sous"(Nourissier.1979: 21). He searches exhaustively to get to the fundamental elements of both his and his father's lives. He even compares their physical appearances on photos.

Nourissier started reading some of his father's books from the age of fourteen. He was left with some articles that belonged to his father, 300 books amongst others Bernanos, Georges de La Fouchardière, Anatole France and Marcel Prévost, and also certain memories of the war: "Ce sont les bombes et le feu là, qui ont organisé le silence des choses" (Nourissier.1963: 24). This would help him to continue his

puzzle of the imaginary father. Nourissier fears that he might dislike the completed image of his father, "...vers 1937, il eût adhéré au PSF ... et les valeurs de la "Revolution nationale" ou au contraire... Je n'en sais rien... serais-je opposé à son attitude..." (Nourissier: 1996: 28). The political situation and the war were indirectly responsible for Nourissier's father's death and therefore one can understand his negative views on life in general. Nourissier's father's early death played a very important role in his life and it inspired much of his writing: "Au vrai, la mort de mon père a tellement occupé ma mémoire qu'elle m'a fait ce que je suis" (Guillon et al.1996: 27). This shows what an impact the death of a parent can have on a child's life.

A voyage Nourissier undertook with his father is still clear in his mind: "De la gare de L'Est, si gaie, même en hiver, dans sa lumière de serre, les hommes de mon passé, les hommes selon mon cœur partaient pour la guerre. Petit Lorrain en exil à Paris, mon enfance a baigné dans leurs songes héroïques" (Nourissier. 1985: 43). He also recalls his bitterness after his father's death: "Mon père-enfant, mon père-cadavre, à jamais fixé dans l'âge et l'attitude de sa mort et à qui je pardonne mal d'avoir si tôt déserté, lui, le combattant, et de m'avoir laissé seul mener et perdre la longue guerre de ma vie" (Nourissier.1985: 44). Nourissier was involved in a war of his own, trying to overcome his grief. Later he would refuse to go to war. He does not want to be a ghost to his wife and children. Being a father himself, he thought in *La Fête des Pères* that having a child of his own would help him overcome the loss he felt "... j'avais tant rôdé, après sa mort, autour de l'ombre de mon père, tenté si ardemment de deviner l'empreinte en creux qu'il ne pouvait avoir manqué de laisser en moi" (Nourissier. 1985: 45).

Nourissier believes that his father was, according to the notes that he had left behind, "...passionné, vers 1932, pour la Grande Peur des bienpensants... L'atavisme, les photos de familles, un vieux parfum d'enfance me disent que le vrai personnage eût été celui-là, si édifiant, si classique que peut-être il m'eût rebroussé?" (Nourissier. 1990: 127- *Bratislava*).

After the father's death, they lived on the little he had left behind: "Nous grignotons chichement des restes" (Nourissier. 1978: 189-*Le Musée de l'Homme*). Nourissier's mother invested her fears and embarrassment in him... "Je sais, moi, par atavisme, qu'ils ne changent jamais" (Nourissier.1978: 197).

Although he did not know his father for a very long time, he treasures the moments they shared. His father is in this sense a positive part in his creative writing. He uses lovely imagery in describing the moulding of his character, of his personality as a writer, the product of all his experiences, memories and thoughts, "...à la façon dont mes ancêtres potiers tournaient et "montaient" un vase, par les inflexions de leurs deux mains... mon père m'a souvent mené dans des poteries... Je ne le savais pas, mais il était sans doute anxieux de m'apprendre d'où nous venions" (Guillon et al.1996: 23).

The death of his father is a major source of creation, as Nourissier felt the need to escape: "Il est même probable que, sans le traumatisme que sa mort représente, je n'aurais pas éprouvé cette boiterie à laquelle l'intention littéraire était une réponse, une thérapeutique"(Guillon et al.1996: 29). His mother also added to his frustrations, and one can therefore combine the present and imaginary mother–father as a source of inspiration in his works, "...ma mère... laissa s'instaurer dans ma formation une anarchie, une sorte de précarité passionnée, qui du point de vue d'une éducation idéale, étaient des négligences, des erreurs, mais qui favorisent la dérive littéraire..."(Guillon et al.1996: 29). Nourissier thus admits to the autobiographic nature of his inspiration and makes the search for evidence in his works worthwhile. It gives us the understanding of his views. It assists others experiencing the same circumstances and thus serves as a purposeful form of literature. People enjoy reading facts and if it they are presented in the way Nourissier does, one is eager to find the facts hidden in his metaphorical use of the language. It gives substance and meaning to his books as literary sources and not only as novels. Thanks to his misery, Nourissier became the writer he is.

Nourissier fears death. This is rooted in the burial of his father. The impact of these events inspired him to write *Un Petit Bourgeois*. Death prohibits one from expressing those final wishes as his family sadly reminded him: "Ton père(*Nourissier's father*) aurait aimé que tu entres à la Polytechnique. Elle m'emplit aujourd'hui de nostalgie. Quels autres désirs mon père n'aurait-il pas exprimés si l'occasion, le temps, lui en avaient été laissés"(Nourissier.1963: 28). He understands the wishes his father could have envisaged for him. The father would have wanted to see his son achieve that which he never could, but these shadows of the past would haunt him, still.

In *Un Petit Bourgeois*, Nourissier writes of his misinterpretation of love as a child. His aim was to be open, and to explain what he expected, being a father himself. His

expectations were high but he realises that the complications and peculiarity surrounding the love of a father for his sons are many: "Je le confesse, j' espère être aimé de vous" (Nourissier.1963: 26). At no stage does he attempt to expose too much, his emotions are well defined. By means of a comparison he tries to define himself, to justify this book in his children's eyes, "...et de la garder présente à l'esprit, pour deviner l'oppression que font peser sur moi la mort de mon père, l'incertitude où je demeure à son endroit, et les deviner assez forte pour justifier à elles seules ce livre" (Nourissier.1963: 26). Nourissier returns, insists and discloses the death of his father repeatedly. The loss created not only fears, but also pain.

The death of his father also led to complications. His widowed mother refused to work, did not know how to work, and yet tried to keep up appearances. Then there was the war and as everything started tumbling into ruins, his older sister left her studies to start working. Nourissier lived through this with great difficulty, as his mother never explained what was happening to them. He experienced this as a disgrace, "...ma mère n'a pas eu l'intelligence de nous l'expliquer, de nous faire vivre harmonieusement ce changement, comme aujourd'hui où cela ne poserait pas de problème:... À l'époque, dans ce milieu complètement renfermé, vraiment irrespirable, c'était vécu comme un drame qu'on faisait, en serrant les dents, en opposant un front de béton à l'adversité" (Brochier.1997: 4).

In *Un Petit Bourgeois* he vaguely remembers a time he had spent with his father at a lake in the Vosges. It is not much that he remembers, but enough to inspire him to continue his quest for a father. He wants to defeat the isolation, "...comme on cherche un mot oublié obstinément, tout au long d'une soirée et de ne rien découvrir que le vide. Ce vide irrite..." (Nourissier.1963: 25). In an article the author explains his interest in cemeteries. It is his last link to his father and the last meeting-place where he can communicate with him. Cemeteries allow dreams and memories to live on: "Dans mon département de la Meuse je suis un terrible explorateur de cimetières... J'y prends même des photos quand, d'aventure, je retrouve ici ou là le nom des miens, parfois seul, inquiétant et étonnamment étranger..." (Nourissier.1979: 22). He gives life to the blurred shadow of his father. Certain images reincarnate the fatherly figure "...l'héroïsme du fantassin, la solitude du facteur rural, les aubes embrumées, et ce geste du pouce pour couper le pain à la miche quand on casse la croûte au bord de la route"(Nourissier.1979: 24).

Nourissier regards his fear as pre-existing to his father's death. It had left him with a sense of uncertainty when he reached the age of his father just before his death. His father's heart problem was known before his death as he was gassed during the war of 1914. The scene of death in the cinema and the two hours of isolation that followed thereafter were so overwhelmingly violent to the young Nourissier that he could never escape them. Nourissier spells it out that, "...toute une partie de mon travail en a été la conséquence. Quand l'aîné de mes fils s'est approché de l'âge que j'avais à la mort de mon père je me suis dit: à cet âge-là, si on perd son père on ne sait rien de lui, et je me suis mis à écrire *Un Petit Bourgeois*, pour me raconter à mes enfants, au cas où... Il y a eu ainsi des seuils successifs... Et après cela, une sorte de libération. J'étais devenu l'aîné de mon père" (Brochier.1997: 3).

Nourissier tries to find his father in all the ways he possibly can. He searches for the strong father figure with whom he can associate himself, at the same time he strongly opposes his upbringing: "Élevèrent": quel drôle de mot pour désigner cet aplatissement, cet affadissement que fut mon éducation acharnée à me faire ressemblant" (Nourissier.1978: 42-43 – *Le Musée de l'Homme*). Further memories of his father in *Le Musée de l'Homme* include his father always dressed up in military uniform. The description of his father is precise, yet something of this character is lacking, as he does not have all the information available.

He relives the pain and unhappiness continuously, as he puts it in *Le Musée de l'Homme*, "...j'étais tout occupé de mon passé des années d'enfance et d'adolescence..." (Nourissier.1978: 136-139). He analyses his past with controlled lucidity, however from time to time, something bursts: "On dirait d'une lave souterraine surgie par quelque fissure de notre pensée" (Nourissier.1978: 136-139). He cannot keep everything under control. Adaptation does not mean a total control.

His novel, *La Fête des Pères*, questions Nourissier's role as a father. Perhaps he is trying to mould his children the way one creates a book. In an article on Nourissier, Pelletier emphasizes the author's way of incorporating humour, discernment, cruelty and tenderness in a confessional analysis of the characters (Pelletier.1997: 2).

A quotation from Abbé Prévost (*Manon Lescaut*) appears on the first page of *La Fête des pères*: "Un cœur de père est un chef d'œuvre de la nature." This phrase shows the depth of Nourissier's love that he had for his father. The text shares certain aspects of Nourissier's life, but touches mainly on the theme of the father. Lucas's

parents are divorced (*La Fête des Pères*) and soon the child bears the scars of the separation. The father-son relationship becomes superficial. Lucas for example, has the silence of a cat about him that fascinates his father. The father feels powerless in their many silences and absences and he is anxious and frustrated in his relationship with his son. Lucas was a graceful child: "Les enfants très beaux sont faciles à aimer, comme le sont pour d'autres raisons les petits malheureux qu'une disgrâce majeure laisse sans défense et livre aux compensations de notre tendresse... les enfants moyens sont défavorisés"(Nourissier.1985: 17). These are very cruel observations, although based on real experiences.

A train in the distance reminds Lucas's father in *La Fête des Pères* of his own childhood: "J'avais passé plusieurs années de mon enfance dans cette désolation, du temps que mon père, entre deux quintes de la toux attrappée sous les gaz de 1915, travaillé par la nostalgie de sa province et épuisé par Paris, nous avait installés par ici, ma mère et moi, dans un de ces pavillons, dans le plus triste de ces pavillons que je voyais défilier dans le gris du matin. Triste à en mourir. Il y était d'ailleurs mort peu d'années plus tard"(Nourissier.1985: 48). Nourissier also retains his love for the old countryside, as he finds his childhood in the associations with the scents, the names and even the colours. The colour grey is repeated in many of Nourissier's works and it gives a forlorn, bleak background to his novels. Nourissier recalls the period of mourning after his father's death. His mother and sister spent twenty-four months in mourning. The lights in the house seemed as dull and depressing as those years, as described in *Le Musée de l'Homme*.

The opposing characters, Lucas versus his father could be interpreted as a theory that Nourissier had constructed to solace himself. Nourissier missed his father so much, yet he only knew him while he was still a child. Perhaps if he had known him longer he would have discovered their differences. It is probable that Nourissier could have had as many complications with his father or the other way around, as he had with his mother. Perhaps Nourissier would have felt like Lucas in *La Fête des Pères* who utters a suppressed cry for love.

The father figure in *Le Gardien des Ruines* wears a moustache, a typical picture that Nourissier recalls of his father. Nourissier's father was born in Angleville, it is therefore interesting that Fargeau, the main character, passes through Angleville during his travels, a village he no longer frequented: "Il se fait un silence en lui, comme si la vitesse, la tension avaient déchaîné un orage qui s'apaiserait, et dans

ce silence, dans la soudaine lenteur de ses gestes, il entend battre son sang" (Nourissier.1992: 232). It seems more like Nourissier's experience of the village than Fargeau's experience.

In Nourissier's autobiography *Un Petit Bourgeois*, he becomes the father of two sons. He sees his own fragility in them: "Des regards qui basculent si vite du vive à la crainte... Mon sourire à deux sous. Le silence. Le petit âge des enfants tolère un certain temps l'embarras des hommes" (Nourissier.1963: 174). The tone of voice, the facial expressions or silence can condemn a parent forever. He encourages his sons, also giving us some more insight into his character. The mere testimony is an objective attempt to advise his sons. He wishes that his sons should go beyond the norms of society, and that they would not simply accept life as stipulated by society: "J'ai eu envie de rester ou de devenir atypique, comme *Un Petit Bourgeois* était un livre atypique. Je n'ai d'ailleurs pas l'impression, aujourd'hui d'avoir réussi ma vie, sinon sur ce seul point: je suis devenu, je le voulais écrivain, un homme des livres" (Guillon et al .1996: 100). The narrator flees from his responsibilities as a father. He fears the man he is expected to become, and he also fears the mystery surrounding maternity that excludes him in many ways.

As a father of three children, Nourissier faces his childhood again in *Le Musée de l'Homme*. This remembrance lights up "mes anciennes fièvres" (Nourissier.1978: 163). He is aware of his responsibility, to not only being their father, but also the father he did not have. He fears that the negative traits from his youth might rub off on them, but consoles himself that their childhood was happier than his own had been (Nourissier.1978: 182).

There are several depressing similarities in *Une Histoire Française* between the life of the author and the life of the character Patrice Picolet, also born in 1927. The mother is equally appalling, and their childhood is very distressing, following the death of the father in 1935. Nourissier, as Patrice, dislikes the church: "Mais il n'est pas temps encore de débusquer le cynisme chez un petit garçon à qui l'abbé Omnès donne de si bonnes notes quand il récite le décalogue en commençant par la fin (sa spécialité) devant l'une des jeunes filles exsangues qui aident à l'enseignement du catéchisme pour alléger un peu la tâche si lourde de nos prêtres" (Nourissier.1965:20). Patrice shows no tenderness when he talks of his mother, which creates quite a contrast to the bourgeois behaviour, "...il leur faut attendre la cinquantaine pour troquer leur prénom contre le mamie, ou mémé, ou nanie, ou

bonne-maman qui, utilisé par toute la famille, les délivrera de l'exil où les a confinées une vie de bon ton... Entre nous la douceur de tout – des mots, des silences - est venue trop tard. Nous avons bâclé nos guerres et nos paix à contretemps" (Nourissier. 1965:46-47).

In vain, Nourissier tries to find more resemblances between himself and his father in their appearances, but his memory of his father is too vague. In *Un Petit Bourgeois*, there is not only a silence around his father, but also a silence surrounding his mother, "...je n'ai jamais osé rompre le silence de ses amis disparus, oubliés ou morts, le silence des objets et du décor, ... mon propre silence obstiné, surprenant (et dont pourtant, je ne pris conscience qu'à trente ans passés), enfin le vide de ma mémoire... on oublie tout d'un homme enterré quand on avait huit ans" (Nourissier.1963: 23).

In a letter to me dated 9 June 1998 (unpublished), Nourissier admits to the emptiness he felt after the death of his father: "Oui: la mort de mon père quand j'avais 8 ans et lui, 43. Vide, manque d'homme. C'est essentiel. Ma mère en m'aimant trop et mal a joué involontairement un rôle." Nourissier uses his friends as a periodical replacement for his father, but he actually preferred older people and felt very frustrated at school with his fellow students' conversations (Guillon et al. 1996: 136). Other father substitutes were Aragon, Chardonne, Morand, Genevoix, Paulhan and Arland. Each time one of them died, he felt alone again. In general, he was more at ease with older people, but his greatest admiration ever, was for literature. In *Mauvais Genre*, he explains: "J'étais allé à eux par goût littéraire et, sur ce plan-là, toutes mes amitiés étaient justifiées"(Guillon et al.1996: 136-137). He also became very attached to his father-in-law as a substitute figure: "Je m' étais beaucoup attaché à lui - toujours les pères"(Guillon et al.1996: 144).

Nourissier's mother did not inspire him to live. This left him with even less respect for her, "<<la sauvagerie>> dans laquelle ma mère me laissait alors vivre, sans chercher sérieusement à m'inculper une morale – elle avait perdu à mes yeux, de ce point de vue, sa crédibilité" (Guillon et al.1996: 34). She is completely disregarded in his works. Ironically Nourissier is still influenced by her, even in his adulthood. He would not have written *Le Musée de l'Homme* had he not been sure that she would not read it. His secrets remain with him, in the same way she had kept her life a secret (Nourissier.1978: 119-120). Nourissier often dreamt of a different mother. He described the role of the maternal figure in his life in a letter to me dated 9 June 1998

(unpublished): "J'ai toujours aimé les filles très jeunes, et je crois n'avoir jamais été troublé par une "image maternelle"- vraiment pas."

Again in Nourissier's letter to me dated, 9 June 1998 (unpublished), he expresses a strong antagonism towards his mother: "Veuve en 1935, ma mère, affolée, de solitude, a cherché un nouveau compagnon. Hélas, elle choisissait mal. Son remariage (1939) et son divorce (1940) ont été de vilains épisodes, mal pardonnés." Nourissier was the unhappy child due to this inability of his mother to communicate with him. One cannot insist enough on the importance of the parents in Nourissier's creative inspiration. In a France 3 production (4 December 1996). Jérôme Garcin affirms that a portrait on Nourissier cannot be anything but an autoportrait. Nourissier is alone with himself, his past, his conscience and his dreams, be they broken or fulfilled dreams. Garcin sees the cinema where his father died as, "...le lieu fondateur de l'Homme. Nourissier et la métaphore la plus juste d'une œuvre dans laquelle il se met en scène; pour quoi un lieu fondateur? Parce que c'est dans un cinéma du Raincy que Nourissier, alors âgé de huit ans, a vu mourir son père... Toute son existence a été marquée par ce drame dont les effets se prolongent dans ses livres et ses comportements."

Yet, Nourissier does mention one positive aspect of his mother: she certainly did not lack courage, as she was always willing to help an escaped prisoner during the war. His admiration for her is however limited and little spoken of or written about. This naturally also influenced him and the way he saw himself: "gentil garçon... un peu, fayot... de loin aux chahuts... Je me sais prodigieusement ennuyé à école. Pas mauvais élève, mais cossard." (Guillon et al.1996: 25).

He once overheard his mother discussing him with a friend of hers: "...oh, il n'est pas méchant, il est taquin..."(Guillon et al.1996: 25). He remembered this and used it repeatedly as an excuse for bad behaviour: "J'ai vu ma mère tiquer car ce n'étaient pas des mots d'enfant, mais d'adulte et d'adulte bête" (Guillon et al.1996: 25). He disliked this part of his life, which was so dominated by women.

Hector's mother in *En Avant Calme et Droit* is again the parallel of Nourissier's mother: "Plus sa mère le dégoûtait, plus Hector devenait lui-même... Chaque fois qu'elle l'avait horrifié... Hector s'était lavé à quelque chimère: La Révolution, les chevaux..."(Nourissier. 1987: 158). Hector's mother is recurring throughout *En Avant Calme et Droit*. The female domination is easily observed with the female characters

in Nourissier's novels as he was overexposed to females during his entire childhood. In almost all of his works, the mother figure weighs heavily with her suffocating presence. She seems like the cause of a social downfall that scarred Nourissier terribly. Although *La Fête des Pères* is not directly based on the life of Nourissier, there are certain feelings that are very personal as expressed in the novel. Nourissier's comment on the book is that, "...quelque chose vient directement de moi, c'est ce sentiment, que les blessures que s'infligent réciproquement enfants et parents font plus mal que toutes les autres, bien plus que les questions d'ambition, d'argent, de carrière" (Brochier.1997: 8).

Nourissier dreamt of becoming an artist. This is the source of inspiration for certain of his books or the background for certain characters. Nourissier (as a child) wanted to become a painter, until he realised that he had no talent and then turned to writing as his vocation. As an adult he often writes of his childhood, or other childhoods that seem very similar to his own (Brochier.1997: 2-3). Patrice dreams of the life of an artist, but his mother is too absorbed in her misery to respond to her child's needs: "Mais il n'interroge pas sa mère. Patrice n'interroge jamais sa mère, qui est ombrageuse et blessée au point de ne pouvoir dire quel jour on est à qui le lui demanderait. Elle répondrait probablement par habitude, <<pousse tes légumes avec ton pain et tais-toi>>"(Nourissier.1965: 20).

Nourissier is lucid in his writings. His ambiguous feelings for his mother hint at nostalgia, but he admits that they were both responsible. It bothers him that they were incapable of communicating and he clings to the possibility of a solution in their silence. This quest continues even in *Le Musée de l'Homme* when Nourissier had already reached the age of 51. He is determined and patient, accepting the fateful events of his childhood. He finds a scapegoat, enumerates events in his past that could serve as an explanation for his unhappiness, like the fact that his mother was desperately looking for an anchor in her own life (Nourissier.1978: 104).

After the death of his mother, he returns to her apartment with fear. In *Bratislava* it is clear that he would have wanted to avoid the memories of his childhood, seeing the apartment where she stayed before her death; "...l'irrésistible processus d'enferment, de clochardisation... un espace restreint, délimité..." (Nourissier.1990: 115). His mother was prepared for Death's battle approaching: "Ma mère, que volontiers j'imaginai passive, végétative, donc peu ouverte à l'angoisse, occupée de soins et de préoccupation dérisoires"(Nourissier.1990: 116). She had kept photos of his father

in the secret, until her death. When Nourissier discovers these photos, he realises that his father was only a shadow in their house. He realises that at least his children have a father and a mother (Nourissier. 1978: 115).

In *Le Musée de l'Homme*, Nourissier is an adult reflecting back on his past. He experiences emptiness after the death of his father. His mother was never close to him. He felt as if he had lost his rights as a child. Whenever he quarrelled with his mother as a child, he would walk in the streets, almost rehearsing the words.

His mother in her old age was very ill and he taught her to walk again. In *Le Musée de l'Homme*, Nourissier is now in a parent role, caring for his weak mother (Nourissier.1978: 98-99). It bothers him that he never felt tenderness between them: "Notre histoire de non-amour... elle m'a aimé comme ont fait certaines femmes, d'une tendresse ombrageuse et niaise..." (Nourissier.1978: 100-101). He sees himself as, "...le meilleur des mauvais fils."

His childhood inspired him to invent a life of superior quality. He dreamt of escaping the poor suburbs of Paris, which had become their home during the war. Neither his mother nor his sister worked at the time and socially he could not understand where he fitted in (Guillon et al.1996: 70-71). There was no balance in his life after the death of his father: "Nous étions depuis la mort de mon père de tout petits rentiers, sans contacts avec le monde réel, les affaires, le travail, l'argent" (Guillon et al.1996: 39). He lost contact with the world as no role models existed. Ambition was not a part of his life. He seldom met anyone except for family or certain friends whose way of living resembled theirs. He wonders, "...si la présence de mon père eût ou non provoqué des dérapages..." (Guillon et al.1996: 39).

Nourissier can be cynical at times, but he is in reality a realist: "Une enfance triste ou gâchée, ou sordide, est un véritable filon littéraire, alors qu'il faut passer une enfance heureuse au feu doux de la nostalgie pour en tirer quelque chose" (Guillon et al.1996: 29). This realisation is not cynical but, "...une constatation d'écrivain"(Guillon et al.1996:29).

An omnipresent Nourissier continues his quest for love in *Le Bar de l'Escadrille*. The character Fornerod is an affectionate man. His mother, a fragile being in her old age becomes totally dependent on others for her survival. The narrator reflects on parents in general: "Les parents sont incroyables. Ils changent à toute vitesse de

personnage, de sentiments. On les quitte indifférents, on les retrouve désespérés; on s'apprête à les consoler, ils ont pris leur parti du drame"(Nourissier.1997: 82). Another situation similar to Nourissier's in *Le Bar de l'Escadrille* are the endless reminders of death and mourning: "Ma mère couleurs de demi-deuil,...avec ses duretés presque paysannes...étranglée de solitude..."(Nourissier.1997:10)

Parents often avoid divorcing, because of the responsibility they feel towards their children. This fact is the essence of Nourissier's creative inspiration as he refuses to compromise his happiness. The narrator in *Un Petit Bourgeois* questions his happiness: "On veut absolument que le bonheur de l'enfance soit à ce prix: pouvoir compter jusqu'à deux – et l'on se sentirait criminel à refuser le principe de cette arithmétique"(Nourissier.1963: 191).

These reflections seemed important to him, especially for someone who grew up without a father. He accepted that his search for inspiration elsewhere would only lead him to nowhere: "Aucune vie ne peut se détourner de ses origines" (Nourissier.1963: 48). The birth of his sons for instance was a source of fear as death is so closely connected to life: "La paternité, si je puis dire, m'a <<ceuilli à froid>>" (Guillon et al.1996: 98). He fears for his children as he understands their grief in *Un Petit Bourgeois*: "...c'était l'oppression de la solitude dans la poitrine d'un enfant. A moins que ce ne fût ma propre solitude à dix pas d'Alain qui m'avait oublié... l'homme qui lui deviendrait étranger, de l'empire de qu'il croirait avoir à <<se libérer>>" (Nourissier.1963: 194). He realises that his sons often just needed the presence of a man, though he would have preferred them to be less dependent on him. There is no comfort for him in his own responsible role as father. He made it well understood that writers needed liberty.

In an almost bitter attempt, Nourissier remarries, each time far away from his mother. He fears that she might ruin his more happy moments in life. This proves how little he trusted her, even in adulthood. Due to his view of women he handled the women in his life as one would handle possessions: "J'étais ainsi fait que la possession de l'une me redonnait le goût de l'autre" (Nourissier.1978: 86 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*). As he was an unhappy child, women had to compensate for his problems and they were therefore carefully selected: "Elles étaient toujours joyeuses, rieuses et elles avaient découvert le pouvoir sur moi de leur gaieté." It seems more like a quest for a childhood friend and a playmate rather than a wife (Nourissier.1978: 88-89).

Nourissier's friends' families replaced his own and created a greater awareness of his situation, "...ils étaient raisonnablement patriotes et anti-allemands" (Guillon et al. 1996: 40). Fear and patriotism made them look the other way, "...cette terreur qui faisait peser sur nous la présence allemande" (Guillon et al. 1996: 41). Their experience of Paris as an empty city was, "...le premier souvenir concret de l'Occupation" (Guillon et al. 1996: 33).

At least these families of his friends helped him with his cultural development and outlook on life, "...des familles où l'on allait au concert, où l'on pouvait parler de livres, où l'on riait, où regnait un autre climat que chez moi" (Guillon et al. 1996: 44). Sadly, his gratitude lies with strangers. He was exposed to simple things like playing bridge and learned from his friends' parents: "Tout cela sans rien m'en montrer" (Guillon et al. 1996: 44). There was an absence of family socialisation, of happiness and a home.

Childhood in General

It is not only Nourissier's past memories that are important but also his association with his person as an adult. The adult Nourissier expresses the errors of his sullen childhood days in *Un Petit Bourgeois*: "Mariages imprudents, divorces, enfants confiés au hasard: tout ce dont j'avais souffert, tout ce que j'avais à reprocher aux miens, je m'en rendis à mon tour coupable" (Nourissier.1963: 72). Nourissier, although undaunted by the setbacks of his childhood, still wonders about his father's death: "A soixante-sept ans, j'essaie toujours de comprendre. De prendre la vraie mesure des choses. À la fois, celles que j'ai fuies et celles que j'ai conquises" (Guillon et al. 1996: 21). The impact of death permeates his memory: "La mort de mon père ... elle m'a fait ce que je suis" (Guillon et al. 1996: 27). He is manifestly linked with death ever since 17 November 1935. One of his first visits to the cinema, and the very first, alone with his father, ended in a tragedy with the death of his father only an hour into the projection. He will remain a product of his past; the humiliations and the fears combined were cause for obsessions in his adulthood.

In *Le Musée de l'Homme*, in a chapter entitled "Un Autoportrait," Nourissier returns to his youth, haunted by the "fantôme" of his childhood: his family, the roles he played as his father's son, his mother's son and as a pupil. Reliving the past gives meaning to his present life. In this context he comments on the words of Saint-Exupéry as

quoted in *Mauvais Genre*: "On est de son enfance comme on est d'un pays." The child's ability to associate with his surroundings is an integral part of his development, yet Nourissier's situation was evidently very different from Saint-Exupéry's childhood: "S'il avait passé sa petite enfance dans ma famille, en Seine-et-Oise, je ne sais pas s'il aurait dit la même chose" (Guillon et al.1996: 17). Nourissier is realistic, admitting that one cannot escape one's childhood: "On s'arrange mieux d'elle en l'analysant, en la racontant" (Guillon et al.1996: 17). Nourissier tried up to 1962 to retain the silence of his past, but he later felt the need to express his childhood, as in *Un Petit Bourgeois*.

As his childhood was a time of worries, fear and isolation, he would have preferred to forget it. Nourissier for instance reiterates the theme of the death of his father in *Mauvais Genre*: "La mort du père l'avait trop marquée, et tout ce qui s'ensuivit: une éducation marquée par l'absence de l'homme et l'influence féminine sur-abondante, la mainmise catholique au catéchisme, l'impression accentuée par les jérémiades de ma mère; puis les drames et vaudevilles subséquents au veuvage de ma mère... sa peur de la solitude tout cela a flanqué de bons coups à l'insouciance et à l'innocence" (Guillon et al.1996: 31).

Through the enumeration of his past problems, it is clear that they remain a source of inspiration throughout the works of Nourissier. His childhood and especially his parents were the major sources of his creative writings, especially in *Un Petit Bourgeois*. Nothing is forgotten by chance: "Je tombe dans les images de la mort de mon père, devenues somptueuses elles, et précises, à force d'avoir été caressées..." (Nourissier.1963: 48). The blocking out is only temporary for the origins will always rise again.

Nourissier sees the absence of his father as a cruel event that gave his childhood "...sa couleur; à mon tour je l'organisai pour mes fils"(Nourissier.1963: 72). In his own weakness, he took the risk of having children: "Si à leur tour par l'effet d'une fatalité psychologique, d'un instinct de la catastrophe enracinée en nous, mes enfants suivent mon exemple, nous risquons fort de fonder une dynastie d'instables"(Nourissier.1963: 72).

Nourissier's childhood is a recurrent theme in another autobiography, *Lettre à mon Chien*: "Il s'agissait d'échapper à une toute première qualité d'étouffement, solide, indéfectible. Mon enfance appartenait à un style de vie que l'on peut espérer fuir,

non changer... On perd une force absurde à devoir saccager son enfance avant de prendre le départ. Et même on y use d'une qualité assez rageuse et basse de volonté, dont plus tard toute une partie de la vie sera empestée. Ceux qui le nient, c'est qu'ils ne connaissent pas ce dont je parle"(Nourissier.1975: 52-53).

Nourissier divides his life into two sections in *Un Petit Bourgeois*. As far as it concerns his family, he lived ten years in nostalgia and ten years filled with remorse. Both periods, he felt were equally important, "...enfant, je reprochais à mes adultes de m'avoir privé de feu et de lieu; dans la seconde, adulte, je ne partage guère le feu ni le lieu de mes enfants" (Nourissier.1963: 72). Nourissier played the absent father in his own family too.

He wanted to travel as child and in many of his books, like *La Fête des Pères*, he is indeed travelling (Nourissier: 1985: 68-69). He needed to live his dreams, although he could only fulfil some of these dreams in adulthood. Nourissier gains knowledge of his childhood experiences: "Mais on ne plaque pas un enfant. Quand il vous blesse, on saigne" (Nourissier.1985: 112). It is the distance as divorced husband, away from his children that the author fears and expresses in *La Fête des Pères*.

Nourissier as a child was a "...précoce disciple de l'Ecclésiaste", but ever since, his pleasures have changed. As a child he believed that happiness was a reason to live as in *Bratislava*: "De mon enfance à aujourd'hui, solitaire ou amoureux, sobre ou ivre, recroquevillé de froid ou amolli par la canicule, l'esprit vagabond ou bloqué sur une idée fixe, il n'est aucune épreuve dont le sommeil ne m'ait délivré" (Nourissier.1990: 226).

The religious mother planted the seed of doubt in his religious experiences. Nourissier therefore dislikes Catholicism and his criticism on Protestants are that they try to change you in order to accept you. He applies the same criticism of his own life through the narrator in *La Fête des Pères*: "Avec Lucas la difficulté est ailleurs. Dans ma rage de le réformer, peut-être. Je n'ai jamais su l'accepter tel qu'il est" (Nourissier.1985: 295).

Nourissier's mother ignored him for who he was. Their relationship was a comfortable arrangement through which they used each other. Hector's resentment towards his mother in *En Avant Calme et Droit* occurs repeatedly in Nourissier's works: "Hector a commencé de mépriser sa mère. Non seulement il a honte de la rue d'Arcole, des

godasses, du grand-père planqué, du beau-père obèse, mais, très précisément, il en veut à sa mère”(Nourissier.1987: 24). Nourissier ironically hated men, perhaps also because he was not used to men in his childhood years. He feels more at ease in the presence of women. Nourissier's childhood was too much dominated by overprotective women. He believes that it was an unhealthy situation for a boy. The two most decisive moments in his life were understandably when his father died and then his first exploration of love.

In 1940 Nourissier's years as nomad started: “ Nous étions assez voyageurs et assez passionnés (des voyages et des passions immobiles que tolérait l'époque)... Nos jours se passaient à écrire des lettres, des journaux intimes... des confessions” (Nourissier.1963: 305). In *Un Petit Bourgeois* their experiences of freedom, of “filer” as he calls it, were felt as children in Paris as they could spend time on the streets: “La dose d'infantilisme restait forte dans cette passion de filer, je le savais, mais je comptais promulguer un grand nombre de lois afin de protéger mes séquelles d'enfance, de les cultiver, d'en extraire tout le bonheur possible” (Nourissier.1963: 306). He found happiness in his travels and in his escapes, as those were the times he felt he could breathe freely.

Nourissier loves reading magazines and newspapers, as his father most probably did too “... bref mon père, sortant du caveau de famille et bavardant gaiement avec moi dans une allée du cimetière de R., n'eût pas été tellement désorienté par la liasse de journaux par moi glissée sous son bras avant qu'il ne retournât aux espaces infinis, par moi: c'est-à-dire par un fils ressemblant” (Nourissier.1963: 325).

Nourissier repeatedly tells of the shame he felt for his family, as in *Le Musée de l'Homme*. There was no ambition, no guidelines, nothing that enthused him. He was not at an age that he could escape “les poules d'Avocourt.” He learned to accept it: “...de chaque fureur je faisais un aliment pour ma résolution” (Nourissier: 1978: 185). At times, it was dreadful, but he reminded himself that he had no choice in their selection.

He felt irritated with his past, because many things kept him in a state of despair: “Je veux dire en désespoir de parisianisme et de Méditerranée, en désespoir de protestantisme, de bourgeoisie, de judaïsme, de richesse, d'exotisme, de tradition” (Nourissier.1978: 37). The social and political situation aggravated this period of despair. Despite his misfortune, Nourissier is realistic in *Le Musée de l'Homme* about

the positive influences of his childhood, mentioning Jacques Callot, an engraver whom he adored (Nourissier.1978: 37-38) as well as Monsieur Verger, the father of his friend Jacques, whom he described in *Un Petit Bourgeois* as the incarnation of eccentricity. Although his own mother feared the man and his wolflike dogs, Nourissier considers him as "...une des bouffées d'oxygène de mon enfance" (Nourissier.1963: 51).

Nourissier's fatherhood is an obvious reminder of his childhood, but he had discovered that he would never be able to tame the past and the present if he left out but one dimension of his life. He scrutinizes the past he had previously ignored: "Mais, à peine ai-je accepté le jeu, c'est pour découvrir des terres infertiles sur lesquelles ma hâte de fuir n'a laissé à rien le temps de prendre racine..." (Nourissier.1963: 48-49).

His education was characterised by stinginess from his mother's side, and it was restricted in many ways through his exposure to the chitchat of ladies with a very limited reading resourcefulness that left him silent. Despite all his negative remarks concerning his childhood, he admits that he loves, or as he corrects himself, he loved families. He loved them as he loved houses: "D'ailleurs il était entendu que vous habitiez des maisons" (Nourissier.1963: 70). The reason for this seduction is the fact that a house is the attraction for a family to live in it. This idea of a home-family will remain his nostalgia.

If one compares Nourissier and his much admired Aragon, we find a common ground, probably the reason why Nourissier chose Aragon to be his inspiration. They both despised their roots, "...l'enfance d'Aragon fut romanesque et déchirante – c'était là un terrain, la revanche, où nous pouvions nous comprendre" (Guillon et al. 1996: 164). Nourissier returns to his roots for inspiration. He never felt as if he possessed anything as child, therefore it is only his memory that is his own: "Il est naturel et plus intéressant d'être un homme du passé quand on n'a pas de passé. D'être pauvre et d'avoir un passé si pauvre, m'a poussé à vouloir enrichir ce passé, à chercher des valeurs dans cette pauvreté... J'ai été amené, pour me sentir exister, à vénérer le passé plus que je n'aurais dû, et à lui accorder plus d'importance qu'à l'avenir. Vous me direz j'aurais pu être révolutionnaire" (Guillon et al.1996: 197).

Nourissier's childhood complicated his own fatherhood: "L'esprit de sérieux est un défaut de jeunesse qui ne m'a duré que peu d'années. J'espère l'avoir chassé aussi

de ma littérature, mais on n'est jamais trop vigilant. (Et ne faut-il pas de ravages dans ces entretiens?)”... (Guillon et al.1996: 307). There is a resistance to age or old age for he fears death. He prefers not to write about his present, approaching old age.

Nourissier's childhood and more specifically his creative writing is of use to us as his readers. Although the author is creating to satisfy his own needs, there must be some appeal to captivate his readers. He uses his art, his writing as a therapy: “Dans l'aveu il y a une part de thérapie, voire de ruse. J'espère donc que le livre m'a un peu amélioré, ... Cette distance, entre l'ambition et la réalisation, m'obsède” (Guillon et al.1996: 101).

Guillon (1996:14) supports the title of this thesis with his views of Nourissier's childhood on his writing: “We find a man that has suffered a lot through childhood, that suffered from depression in adulthood and one cannot but link the two periods as a major source of creative thought that flows through from childhood into writing”. Nourissier's quest to understand his life, for a deeper discovery is an attempt to understand, “...mon peu d'appétit à vivre”(Guillon et al. 1996:15). He does not want to resent or ignore this past, as he feels that this type of silence, is “...un choix passablement véhément – m'a paru être une faiblesse du personnage”(Guillon et al. 1996:16). There is a necessity to continue life. He admits having rejected his past for a certain period of his life, but it served no purpose. He expressed himself without mythomania, “...en éclairant, en expliquant, en explorant tout pour dégager le terrain derrière moi”(Guillon et al.1996: 16).

Nourissier often felt ashamed as a child, but he contends to accept it: “Mon enfance s'est déroulée, par exemple, sous le signe de la réduction et de la révérence due à ses bénéficiaires. On ne prenait pas le train que muni d'une carte de demi-tarif achetée à l'année, que l'on présentait au contrôleur avec une satisfaction qui ressemblait à de l'orgueil. Je suis sûr que le regret taraudait ma mère de ne pas disposer des droits particuliers accordés aux mères de famille nombreuse” (Nourissier.1996: 47):

The shame and the pride of the characters in his novels are accentuated as for instance in *Roman Volé*. In this novel, Nourissier also elaborates on his childhood as an inspiration: “J'évoque ces lents jeudis d'autrefois, et mon enfance calfeutrée, pour continuer d'expliquer les années où tout se joue. J'explore, j'insiste, j'écarte les

apparences. Quand vous regardez le passé il paraît souvent confus, amorphe. Vous le croyez vide ou vous n'y entendez que l'écho de rengaines" (Nourissier.1996: 52). It is repeatedly the adult reflecting back on his childhood, looking for excuses, searching for answers. The mannerisms and the characteristics are familiar to him. He identifies himself in the eyes of a child. As an admirer of Aragon, he quotes a paragraph from *Le mentir-vrai* in *Une Histoire Française*:<<Pauvre gosse dans le miroir. Tu ne me ressembles plus, pourtant tu me ressembles. C'est moi qui parle. Tu n'as plus ta voix d'enfant. Tu n'es plus qu'un souvenir d'homme plus tard>>(Nourissier.1965: 9).

Hard work was not for him, he now knows that one does not change much over the years: "Je me rappelle l'enfant que j'étais, teigneux, certes, mais filochard, relâché, toujours à la cosse ou à la ruse. Change-t-on jamais? Si j'avais tant travaillé, j'aurais fait mieux. Plus et mieux, et ça se saurait" (Nourissier.1996.149).

In *Une Histoire Française*, Patrice is frustrated with his childhood: "Les jamais et les toujours de l'enfance!" Adults seem to have a vocabulary with nuances that only they can understand (Nourissier.1965: 176). He leaves for Paris with his mother, without being given the chance to bid his friends farewell. Patrice was now alone with his mother and sister with their suffocating silences, walking in the streets of Paris, and frequenting the bookstores and the artists as part of his quest to find happiness. Rimbaud, Barrès and Lautrec intrigued him. All these facts taken from *Une Histoire Française* are more than coincidental if one compares it to Nourissier's childhood.

Patrice reflects back on the hardships that went along with the happiness during his childhood: "Comme pour l'enfance des scènes investissent la mémoire de Patrice à l'affût de lui-même...les heures réelles d'une vie, la réalité de rien...Il s'installe dans tout ce mou , cet abandon d'une vie sans morale, ni bataille, et il trouve qu'il n'a pas été tellement heureux. Ne cherchez plus. Ne voyez-vous pas qui je suis?" (Nourissier.1965: 231).

Patrice helps Nourissier to rediscover the past they share. The walks that Patrice took with his father, are all familiar to Nourissier: "Tessancourt, Varenne, Vaux et les Caures, Vauquois, Avocourt, Mont Faucon: les buts des promenades de mes vacances d'enfant" (Nourissier.1965: 93). Looking at a map with all the familiar names helps him remember his father's stories and gestures, his now old childhood. Some of the places deteriorated in their isolation as ruins, reminders of the suffering

of war. The spirits of the past reappear: "Je voyais là les miens, les connus et les autres: mon père, qui savait parler comme j'entendais en ce moment parler, mes oncles morts, ma grand-mère morte, tous ceux d'Argonne dont j'avais oublié les noms"(Nourissier.1965: 99).

Nourissier sometimes feels tenderness mounting in him, but this usually frustrates him as he does not know how to handle these feelings, as in *Le Maître de Maison*: "Je suis une rivière qui ne parvient pas à faire tourner la roue de son moulin. Risque-t-il, lui, un effort? Aussitôt l'envie me vient de gentiment le narguer... Longs silences. Banalités...des mots énormes, disproportionnés, et je me retrouve devant la gravité de l'enfance aussi désarmé que devant ses puérités"(Nourissier.1968: 155-156).

Through the rediscovery of his past, "...vers la modestie de mes origines, vers ma forêt d'Argonne", he captures some of the joys of becoming a writer: "Dur d'écorce et tendre de cœur, généreux en idées et égoïste en mots il est difficile de redevenir un écrivain" (Nourissier.1978: 203-204). The life of an adult is no easier than that of a child, and the thought is comforting to Nourissier. He learned to survive as an adult, making peace with the ghosts of the past. He serves the memory of his past and exposes his readers to his valuable experiences.

Nourissier is aware of how strangers perceive and observe him. This urged him to write about it, especially when his marriage fails: "Quelque chose resurgissait de mon enfance la plus profonde: Dans la famille, et au Raincy, on tenait en suspicion « les divorcés » (Guillon et al. 1996: 99). He must have experienced the same sense of loss and disappointment then as he did as a child. Failure led him to creativity. Nourissier makes an effort to ensure that his children grow up with a sense of family: "Il faut rouler les gosses dans la neige si l'on veut les composer des souvenirs" (Nourissier.1978: 163).

Child of War

Nourissier was emotionally scarred by the war. The houses in which he stayed since the 1940's onwards left sad memories. Everything was ugly to him as he explains in *Un Petit Bourgeois*. It was a poorness, that now stuck to his existence: "Les explications m'intéressaient peu, c'était de me sentir accepté par le monde dont j'avais besoin. Je ne voulais pas devenir une de ces bêtes de solitude et d'aigreur

comme il en grisonnait autour de nous”(Nourissier.1963: 79-80). Nourissier explains that the “petits bourgeois” are like the living-dead. He tried to convince himself whenever he experienced total silence in his room in the apartment building, mostly inhabited only by widows and children, that there was something wonderful out there that would turn his life around.

Nourissier knew about the war and more specifically about the weapons that were used, as he learned much from the fathers of his friends, recalled in *Le Musée de l'Homme*: “La Guerre une vieille connaissance de la famille” (Nourissier.1978: 57). He still remembers the time spent with his father in the forest, near a mountain in Lorraine. Nourissier, like his father, had kept some militaristic tendencies: The ways of infantrymen definitely left their mark, as order is important to him. (Nourissier.1978: 74-75).

Nourissier, as has already been mentioned, often uses grey as an adjective in *Une Histoire Française*: “Plus même de belles nuances de gris pour dire l'absurdité de tout. Le gris nous est entré dans la peau, notre sang est couleur de cendre...J'avais oublié la phrase de ma mère et ses larmes de ce jour de septembre 1940 où elle évoqua l'immense mur de prison allongé sur la terre en quoi elle n'avait pas reconnu notre ville, Paris tout son sang étanché...”(Nourissier.1965: 236). As a child of war, the majority of his images are grey and filled with despair: “Les mots à quoi se réduit le monde”(Nourissier.1965: 239). Time flows between the pen and the thought, it is the flow of thoughts that liberate the author, also from his personal war.

Patrice remembers his father when he looks at ruins. These ruins tell the history of France and they bear witness to certain journeys he took with his father: “Est-ce là ce que mon père voulait m'amener à sentir, autrefois, dans les couloirs gluants des forts aux trois-quarts ruinés...Peut-être serait-il heureux de me voir reprendre aujourd'hui son chemin?”(Nourissier.1965: 87). Patrice discovers that a France that was defeated and reconstructed repeatedly, opened up the eyes of the children of war: “La France de l'automne 1940 apprenait aux petits garçons quelque chose qu'ils n'ont pas oublié...l'illusion des héritages”(Nourissier.1965: 232). A value shift is created through the war that infiltrated every aspect of society, from the radio to the streets. His childhood put a distance between him and his friends. With burning intensity he recalls the incidents that shocked them: “Ce n'est qu'à la pleine mer du lendemain matin que les premiers cadavres furent rejetés au rivage. Ils étaient gonflés d'eau, d'un noir de suie...la saleté de la guerre” (Nourissier.1965:198).

In *Le Maître de Maison*, death is touched upon: "La jeunesse aime la guerre, la jeunesse déteste la guerre; mais cette fatalité de la patience, de la boucherie, les cruautés: tout ce qui enferme les hommes dans des casernes ou des usines, avec au cœur la rage de perdre des jours de rire et d'amour, l'impression de ne rien comprendre, de ne rien tenir entre les mains, un bétail à qui n'a quand même pas interdit l'ironie, et puis on écoutait les transistors – cette fatalité c'est la même partout, et par tous ressentie"(Nourissier.1968:102). The finality of death startles the author when he realises the many ways one could die and could kill, knowing that the outcome is irreparable. The separation and the uncertainty during the war influenced the lives of people: "...la ressemblance entre les années quand s'en vont les hommes, fringués il faut voir comme! et qu'ils aiment. Comme si tout déjà n'était pas assez désolé!" (Nourissier.1968: 102).

The war is an important theme in the chapter "Le Voyage" (*La Fête des Pères*). Also in *En Avant Calme et Droit*, the German occupation is discussed in detail and the main character, Hector expresses his doubts about France and Vichy.

Fargeau in *Le Gardien de Ruines* remembers the war and those who died and are already forgotten: "Le silence a passé sur ce tintamarre que croit écouter Fargeau, une guerre, une autre, les explosions quand les Allemands ont démoli les maisons riveraines sur le Port, les maladies des haines profondes, des passions, des malédictions, et surtout l'indifférence, aveugle, sourde, légère, qui aura tout nivelé, tout effacé. Il faudrait imaginer quelque procédé capable d'escamoter" (Nourissier.1992: 49). The war is well-engraved into Nourissier's childhood memory as an unremitting theme. Life felt so long during the war, yet so many ghosts, names and places disappeared so that the start of his adult life's journey seems vague and far away. Fargeau experienced "la drôle de guerre" as a prisoner of war and he faced shame and fear. The war devoured people's lives, their innocence and their truths (Nourissier.1992: 255).

Nourissier grew up as a war child, without any sense of security. Normal socialisation is neglected and man's cruelty is a constant reality. In *Le Musée de L'Homme* he mentions the destruction of war, "... j'y avais vu la "drôle de guerre"" dans sa vérité accablante et cocasse"(Nourissier.1978: 37-38).

Nourissier was but one of the children affected by war in *Un Petit Bourgeois*: “La guerre, toute cette mort, j’étais entre temps devenu une espèce d’homme et ce qui me chavirait le cœur dans le petit matin de Dieppe c’était un souvenir d’été brûlant, d’enfance et débâcle” (Nourissier: 1963: 151). For some time after the war, Nourissier was still struggling with his own war. In a battle to find his own happiness every word mattered. It was a confusing time, because unfortunately as a child he was not educated about the war, they were kept very much in the dark.

Nourissier is disgruntled with the fact that no one led the way to educate him: “Nous ne comprenions presque rien. Si les petits bourgeois Français sont prêts à basculer vers n’importe quoi à voter pour n’importe qui, c’est qu’ils sont bêtes. Historiquement, cette idiotie pèse toujours plus lourd qu’on ne l’attendait” (Nourissier.1963: 99). His parents, his education and the war are reprehensible for his disorganised life at that time. All these factors were debilitating.

During the war, they had very little schooling, so Nourissier and his friends would spend the time walking and chatting in the streets of Paris. These were some of the real memories he kept, but he explains that, “...enfin, du sortir de l’enfance – restent un des moments de bonheur de ma vie” (Nourissier.1963: 127). Later it would be his childhood he would search for again to continue his quest for happiness.

His memories of the war are intense and clear. He remembers the radio broadcasts and the speeches of Hitler: “Cette guerre si proche nous gonflait de convoitise” (Nourissier.1963: 56-57). He is not only examining the French bourgeoisie, but the entire Second World War also intrigues him. The war recurs as a theme in *Portrait d’un Indifférent*, *Le Maître de Maison*, *Une Histoire Française*, *Le Gardien de Ruines* and *En Avant Calme et Droit*.

Fargeau in *Le Gardien des Ruines* is a doctor who survives the privations of war without revolt. Fargeau introspectively examines his neglected relationship with his son as he grows old, a fear which he cannot control. We see so much of Nourissier’s life in this book, that Fargeau could have been Nourissier himself at times (Bosquet.1992: 72-73).

The war had not only left the land in devastation, but also aggravated Nourissier’s loneliness after his father’s death. The war has specific associations for Nourissier that link him with his father: “On dit qu’il avait dû, en 1916, artiller, pilonner son

village... soldat... entré dans la machine militaire à vingt ans, petit paysan orphelin, il en sortit à près de trente, officier, devenu une espèce de bourgeois... pour lui l'essentiel, sa vraie aventure" (Nourissier.1963: 43). Nourissier admired his father, especially when he thinks of the war. He felt that his father also played a role in the history of France: "Un des innombrables Français à cheval encore, sans honte, sans duperies ni camouflage sociaux..." (Nourissier: 1963: 44). His father at least attempted to explain things to him and thus he became the only positive connection with the war that Nourissier can remember.

The war must have made a strong impression on the young Nourissier as he keeps returning to the memories of these years in *Un Petit Bourgeois*. Avocourt, where his grandparents lived, was destroyed during the war. After the war Avocourt is a dirty, sad village, as is the whole region: "Les noms de lieux sont des noms de bataille" (Nourissier.1963:43). Nourissier recalls outings with his father in the red zones: "Mes rêves tournaient autour de ces buts d'excursions. L'Ossuaire de Douaumont, la Tranchée des baïonnettes, la Côte 304... Tourisme de la guerre et de la mort. Mes premiers étés" (Nourissier.1963: 43). They inspected the old cartridges the war had left, and in this way Nourissier at least felt that he had lived a part of his father's life, since his father had been a soldier for over eight years.

In *Le Maître de Maison*, the narrator refers to his memories of the war: "J'étais un gosse quand les journaux racontaient cette guerre où des soldats maures montaient à l'assaut... et face à eux se levaient d'autres soldats qui criaient Vive la Mort! Ils ne se trompaient pas de maître, ceux-là" (Nourissier.1968: 20). Nourissier would have liked a family that could withstand the war, a family rooted so well, that it would not move: "C'est ça une famille... Franchir toute cette mitraille des guerres et des révolutions, destiné aux autres, sans frémir ni fuir." (Nourissier.1968:25). The memories of war are fundamental to his childhood. In *Un Petit Bourgeois*, Nourissier adds that the despair even influenced the paintings of the time - it filtered through everywhere.

The Occupation did contribute to happiness although there was sadness and confusion felt most of the time. One thing he does not regret of this time is friendship. His assistance to Palestinian refugees (after he finished school) that had suffered in Europe had taught him about the reality of war and the truth that is so often hidden. The war strengthened his need for love: "Une certaine qualité

d'émotion, de tendresse... qui était nécessaire à ma vie comme la chaleur et l'eau le sont aux plantes" (Nourissier.1975: 126- *Lettre à mon Chien*).

Some of Nourissier's pessimism stems from his childhood years with the arrival of the Germans. This led to fear: "Cet été 1940...ponctué de signes tragiques...la nourriture pourissant dans les assiettes... le bombardement des bateaux... au large de Saint-Nazaire... La mer qui rejetait sur la plage des cadavres de noyés brûlés de mazout..." (Guillon et al.1996: 33).

Well before the Second World War fear already reigned. Nourissier's fear of death is a reality he faces in almost every book as in *Roman Volé*. His father's death, followed by the war explains why death had made such an impact on his life. It was a lugubrious time: "La fin des années trente revit les fêtes toujours un peu tristes de l'enfance, les femmes en noir, la peur de la guerre, la hantise de fixer le passage inexorable du temps. Nommer tout cela, simplement mettre tout cela en mots! Offrir à ces ombres la dérisoire durée des mots, celle justement dont vient de me priver une chiquenade du sort..." (Nourissier.1996: 55). In several of Nourissier's novels, the war is a determining factor in the lives of his characters. Most often they are victims of the war, as in *En Avant Calme et Droit* and *Une Histoire Française*.

Patrice in *Une Histoire Française* is a pupil at the "Collège Notre Dame." His fears concerning the war are at first still intact: "Patrice vient de lire "l'Histoire de L'Armée française du général Weygand... Il sait que les soldats français sont les meilleurs du monde, certitude rassurante au printemps 1939" (Nourissier.1965: 23). Nourissier also recalls the outbursts on the radio with Hitler, as does Patrice: "Patrice écoute, se tait, sent se creuser en lui une peur et souffler un hiver qui lui annoncent que le monde est là, derrière les murs, à la porte du jardin" (Nourissier. 1965:23-24). Patrice tells of his encounters with the war, first indirectly and then directly with the start of World War II: "On parle toujours des hommes qui racontaient leur guerre. Moi j'ai été gosse parmi des hommes qui la montraient. Mon père, c'était sa passion, un rêve obstiné dont il est mort avant d'en être sorti. Retourner à son village, pour lui, c'était retourner à la guerre. À Tessancourt il était né, puis il s'était battu" (Nourissier.1965: 84).

The war turned his life around, his much loved houses would not ever be a safe refuge anymore. Patrice discovers World War II through his reading, "...le nez dans

les "Albums de la Grande Guerre" (Nourissier.1965: 24). Nourissier admits that Madame Picolet in *Une Histoire Française* could have been his mother.

Nourissier refers to ruins as in *Une Histoire Française* and *Le Gardien des Ruines*. For him a ruin is not at all romantic, it is symbolic of death. Having known war, it is easily understood that Nourissier saw these vestiges as traces of destruction. Through his past, Nourissier will remain a child of wartime.

Silence and Solitude

Nourissier's loss is great when an original manuscript is stolen - the inspiration behind *Roman Volé*. He spends a substantial amount of time alone while he is writing, thus the loss he feels is profound. The stolen manuscript is an invasion of his privacy and he reconsiders society under a new value system due to his insecurities. Silence without creation is a suffocating idea to Nourissier. His character Fornerod experiences it in *Le Bar de L'Escadrille*: "Il y a trois mois je suis parvenu à faire le silence en moi. J'ai tout bloqué. Des semaines sans écrire une ligne - c'est dur. Il me fallait laisser l'eau s'apaiser, retrouver sa limpidité, et l'essentiel remonter du fond, librement..." (Nourissier.1997: 138). These ideas compare well with *Roman Volé* where Nourissier similarly talks of literary creation.

Silence is repeated in all his books, be it the silence of the characters, silence in general or the author's silence. Jos Fornerod is an appreciated silent character in *Le Bar de l'Escadrille* : "Les silences de Jos m'ont toujours ému. Il regarde la mer avec cette parfaite absence d'espoir qu'à mon âge on a appris à connaître" (Nourissier.1997: 116).

In *Lettre à mon Chien*, the author prefers his solitude with his dog, Polka. His silence is greeted by her presence: "La sentinelle de mon silence"(Nourissier.1975:180). Polka is like a magical presence as she can comfort her master in silence. Nourissier battles to find a secure environment that could free him from his childhood isolation. In a chapter entitled "Silence" the author speaks to Polka, contented with his newly found tenderness, "...la vraie vie reprend, qui est distance, silence. Tu me l'as enseigné" (Nourissier.1975: 66).

The narrator pays dearly for his liberty in *Un Petit Bourgeois*. He feels abused by his wife who responds negatively to his silence: "Marie-Anne, qui n'avait pas ma science, prit mon silence pour tout ce qu'il n'était pas: remords, émotion, pacte renouvelé dans un instant vaguement solennel. Moi je mesurais la malhonnêteté de mon silence" (Nourissier.1963: 187). He spends hours unable to talk, unable to escape from his distress, trying to find an explanation in his pessimism or his unpreparedness.

Nourissier's solitude will not be his alone anymore, once he shares it with a family. Even as a divorced man, he is not free anymore. His space would be shared with dependants and he would bear the scars of this battle: "À l'âge où d'autre cassent les vitres je voulais, moi, casser mes enfants. Je les avais mis au monde trop tôt, avant d'avoir commencé mes nettoyages de jeunesse" (Nourissier. 1963: 195).

He distances himself from his friends too, because he believes that a secret isolation, a refusal to join the pack, will lead to more sensitivity and creativity. He voices his silence in *Bratislava*: " C'est avec la hantise de la déchéance et de la mort que je peux donner de la consistance à ces jours creux, sonores, rapides et lents, dont l'âge fait mon ordinaire...J'appelle oubli l'épreuve par laquelle doit passer le passé pour devenir matériau littéraire" (Nourissier.1990: 107-108). Time helps to sort out the memories and to simplify them. He needs the familiarity of long silences before he commences to write. The laughter and the appreciation of special moments, his conquests, beautiful places, as well as his affection for animals are but a few of the things that give him pleasure: "La plus sûre qualité de ces plaisirs est qu'ils se laissent savourer en solitude et en silence" (Nourissier.1990: 149).

Nourissier appreciates silence, a silence that is such that it transforms even a distant sound into a noise. In his relationship with his children, the narrator in *Le Maître de Maison* prefers silence rather than a trade of secrets between them. Perhaps not knowing much is a benediction, the driving force for their survival. In silence he can find the time to tend to his anxieties. As with any parent he worries about his children: "Il y a aussi cette douleur du côté du cœur qui t'inquiète. Ah! ta vieille peur de la mort! Mais je(Geneviève) ne suis pas montée jusqu'ici pour patauger dans tes inquiétudes" (Nourissier.1968: 173). He maintains his distance and his solitude. He values the evenings alone as they remind him of life's repetitions: "L'âme voyage la nuit. Si vous dormez vous ne rencontrerez pas votre âme" (Nourissier.1968: 181). He enters into a communication of his own, with the wind as his voice of silence. The

isolation offers silence without any force while he works at night: "Prenez la solitude, par exemple. J'ai très tôt commencé, presque gosse encore, à faire le vide autour de moi. Force? Que seulement la peur des compétitions? J'ai quitté plusieurs de mes vies: loyauté ou veulerie?"(Nourissier. 1968: 227). In his attempts to isolate himself, he created a distance between himself and his children. His respect for his children's freedom perhaps only estranged them more from him and his comfort.

Nourissier uses silence as an elegant escape when he prefers to say nothing. He loves his silence when inspiration strikes, as does the narrator in *Le Maître de Maison*: "Mais quelque part le silence veille. Il intervient. Quelle surprise quand soudain l'histoire, au détour d'une phrase, s'ensable dans le vide de la page et s'y perd, ainsi que font dans le désert, dit-on, certains ruisseaux" (Nourissier. 1968: 285).

In *La Fête des Pères* the father describes himself: "En moi silence et froid" (Nourissier.1985: 59). Unfortunately, these are the characteristics of his mother Nourissier hated, but every person hides his doubts in silence. The characters in *L'Empire des Nuages* struggle with the same doubts and fears as does Nourissier: "Mais je ne me sens pas la force d'aimer mon personnage, moi! Je refuse d'être bien dans ma peau!" (Nourissier.1981: 24).

The word "silence" is used well over 25 times in *L'Empire des Nuages*. The silence in situations as well as the solitude of the characters are very powerful in the novel: "...quand Ludovic se fut repu de sa solitude, de foule, de bruit, de silence: quand il eut bien frotté son imagination et sa mémoire à toutes ses œuvres ici découvertes qui les ranimaient, les sollicitaient" (Nourissier.1981: 138).

In solitude there is no aggression, but it can be harsh and perplexing. There are old and new silences and repeated or continued silences. Silence is the safe place for secrets and shame: "C'est le vide, le silence, mais vide et silence sont tissus de signes" (Nourissier.1981: 298). Silence plays a personified role in his works, "...le silence prend soin d'eux" (Nourissier. 1981: 343).

La Crève (1970) pertains to the same major themes in Nourissier's other works. The house as a haven for solitude and silence allows the author to dream. His preference to writing in the third person creates a distance between Nourissier's own thoughts and those of the narrator, yet we know that they could be one. Petit (1971:

42) is sure that Nourissier does this, as "...plus de liberté, une distance, s'établit qui laisse place au sarcasme." In his dreams, it seems as if the narrator is talking to himself: "Tu laisses ton rêve prendre le large parce que tu as peur de le regarder de trop près" (Petit.1971: 43). Petit (1971: 44) sees an ambiguity in the text: "Benoît rêve et détruit son rêve, trop conscient de l'incapacité où il est, de le réaliser."

Also in *Le Gardien des Ruines* the silence of the characters is a profound presence. Fargeau remembers his solitude away from France: "Elle lui avait été un exil et une solitude que la captivité ensuite avait poussé à ce paroxysme dont il n'est pas guéri" (Nourissier.1992: 123). Fargeau became a silent victim of the war. He had seen the solitude, the despair and the abandonment of people in the concentration camps during the war. He experienced the misery, the constant need for something, "...les enfants étaient malingres, leurs épaules étroites, et la moindre primo-infection faisait peur. Huit heures par jour, Albin Fargeau vivait à ras de terre, à ras de vie. Il avait emménagé, seul, dans un studio..." (Nourissier.1992: 204). Nourissier's characters suffer in silence, but with dignity and a superior knowledge of life. They are often haunted by their past, but their suffering and their fears remain silent.

Although Nourissier often prefers his silence, he also sees it as the introduction to Death: "Cette mort-là existe, dont nous détournons sauvagement le regard, que nous cachons sous l'asepsie des cliniques et la noblesse du vocabulaire" (Nourissier.1978: 307-*Le Musée de l'Homme*). In his silence, Nourissier is telling us the story of his fear. He had gone much deeper to release himself from some of these silences in *Le Musée de l'Homme*: "Substituer à un style de récit, maquillé et altéré, la formulation de ce qu'il est d'usage de taire, et de cela seulement" (Nourissier. 1978: 309).

Nourissier is obsessed with certain images of his past, "...le sentiment de la pauvreté à l'intérieur de la richesse, de la solitude à l'intérieur de tout" (Nyssen.1969: 36). He only feels secure those times he does not listen to the news, when he does not watch television, when he refrains from reading the newspaper and when as few people as possible enter his doorway, and consequently his life. Those are the silent and the affable days of his memory, when he can concentrate on his social environment and his ideas.

The unhappy child turns to himself in a reorganisation of his secrets in *Un Petit Bourgeois*: "Au printemps de 1939 j'étais un enfant écoeurant de docilité et de

craintes; un an plus tard j'étais enfin le modèle, réduit mais fidèle, de l'homme qu'il me restait à devenir. Les batailles perdues des petits garçons, ces batailles contre rien, ces mêlées noires qu'ils n'ont pas cherchées et qui les terrorisent, construisent mieux l'homme que les longs jardinages sous les serres: un homme tordu, couvert de bosses prématurées... Vidé, poncé, mon cœur chercha de l'emploi "(Nourissier. 1963:119).

In *Un Petit Bourgeois*, in a chapter named "La traversée du désert", the author intimately describes the isolation he felt with a stepfather and the divorce that followed soon afterwards. At school he made some friends and he enjoyed the company, but not much later his mother changed her mind: "Nous partîmes pour Paris. Je n'eus le temps de dire au revoir à personne. Paris, l'hiver 40. Voici que commence ce que j'appelle le désert. L'aridité, la course à l'amitié vont durer trois années" (Nourissier.1963: 121). Nourissier still does not despair. He tries to find happiness - a long journey through emptiness, solitude, friendship, tears and laughter: "Un soir de 1942, accoudé à la cheminée de ma chambre, le front pesant sur le miroir, je me retrouvai en train de pleurer. Avec toute ma colère, toute ma force, l'énorme machine tournant à vide, je pleurai longtemps..." (Nourissier.1963: 122). The troubles and the fears of the past had built up over a long time. He now needed to clear his memory: "C'est même aujourd' hui que je trouve utile d'en parler...Ce que je nomme le désert, c'est une vie à quoi manquait le goût du bonheur" (Nourissier.1963: 123). Nourissier has to pass this desert to find his oasis of happiness, but he needs his silence and his solitude at times.

Books remain the author's silence in the sense that society logically is more absorbed in life rather than in literature. In *Bleu comme la Nuit* (1958) Nourissier writes: "Le vrai problème de l'écrivain, c'est qu'on entende sa voix dans le terrible tintamarre des livres, dans le silence terrible de la vie" (Guillon et al. 1996: 270).

In *L'Empire des Nuages* the central themes are love, art and solitude. It is a remarkable, authentic portrayal of the world of painting. Tolson (1983: 62) sees it as his rendering of the ambivalences of love and solitude: "Throughout the novel silence and/or physical flight are his solution to the tiniest situation hinting of confrontation..." Nourissier's childhood quest for love remains an inspiration through all his silences and solitudes.

Freedom

In his article on *Portrait d'un Indifférent*, Charles-Roux (1997:10) uncovers liberty as a central theme: "Le manque d'homogénéité d'une vie telle que la sienne, ses révoltes, ses silences, ses désordres, peuvent paraître inexplicables à moins qu'au lieu d'en dénoncer les contradictions on veuille bien considérer qu'il a vécu librement face à ses chimères." Nourissier's greatest liberation is at first from himself, as he feels uncomfortable with himself and then from his mother's presence and his father's absence.

Nourissier's liberty is parallel with his solitude and his silence in *Autos Graphie*. Houses offer him the protection and the beauty needed to feel free. Power is also essential in our freedom, we need domination at certain stages of our lives to give us the opportunity to defend ourselves and to discover our boundaries: "La liberté ne s'entend guère avec l'égalité"(Nourissier. 1990:135). As a child it was already clear to him that there would always be a hierarchy in society.

Some of Nourissier's first experiences of freedom were as a child in Paris. A friend, Antoine whose father owned a Citroën often invited him along for a drive in the countryside: "Quel dommage que les deux garçons à qui, l'été 1934 ou 1935, un monsieur ironique et bon pédagogue offrait les joies conjuguées de la nouveauté mécanique et de la pérennité historique, n'aient pas trouvé davantage d'inspiration!"(Nourissier.1990: 46). These times spent with Antoine and his father were precious and liberating for the young Nourissier who lost his father: "...éternel soleil d'enfance. Je voudrais que cet été-là fût encore à vivre, et revoir mon propre père, qui s'était enfin décidé, peu avant sa mort, à <<acheter une voiture>>...Oui tout vient de là- mais pour aller où?"(Nourissier.1990:147).

Hope gives Nourissier his freedom as it enables him to conquer his pessimism and his impatience: "Ma Jerusalem littéraire est pour l'an prochain" (Nourissier. 1978: 241- *Le Musée de l'Homme*). The entire process of writing cannot be limited, as it must happen freely. Time or any other limitations cannot guarantee the creative freedom needed to write. Nourissier would have enjoyed it more as a writer if he could have been as fortunate as Gide. Money does give the writer an added freedom. Nourissier's childhood was characterised by poverty. Now he faces the challenge of escaping and liberating himself completely: "Il faut adopter la posture du

grand écrivain pour en être un" (Nourissier. 1978: 245-249). The unfortunate obstacle is that pessimism and modesty do not help to improve his creativity. His "aride enfance" is at the heart of his creation, but the happy moments are the most liberating times for the author. Liberation was unknown to him as a child.

Quest

Nourissier finds it easier to estimate happiness in the light of fears and surprise in *Le Musée de l'Homme*. In the face of death, his happiness is clear and simple. Discipline controls the brain, but underneath it all one finds buried the truth of our emotions: "On dirait d'une lave souterraine surgie par quelque fissure de notre pensée" (Nourissier. 1978: 139). His quest was essentially to find love. His quest for love took him through three marriages and gave him two sons and a daughter. His acceptance of Cécile, his third wife is explained thus: "Elle est une terrible ramasseuse de chiens perdus" (Nourissier. 1978: 133). Nourissier loves his three children: "Nous nous respectons mutuellement" (Nourissier.1978: 150). His constant wish for them is happiness. He sees the manifestation of his positive and negative traits in his children and he is pleasantly surprised when they improve on his lack of generosity as an example.

Nourissier found happiness in his ability to blind himself from a mediocre childhood and in creating a life away and out of his misery, out of his petit-bourgeois life. Love was not an element in his youth: "Je m'aperçois alors que le vrai drame de mon enfance a été de manquer aussi radicalement d'amour...Personne n'aimait personne...comment me serais-je aimé moi-même?" (Nourissier.1978: 191). The petit-bourgeois are cold and indifferent in the author's eyes: "Je me roule un peu dans la cendre et la poussière où gisent le souvenir de ces années de ma formation et ceux qui y veillèrent" (Nourissier.1978: 191).

Nourissier passionately and lucidly inspects his conscience. He rejoices, inspired by the happiness he finds in writing: "l'Homme, l'écrivain et ses personnages montrent le même visage. Les masques sont absents" (Nyssen. 1969: 36).

Nourissier chose Geneviève in *Le Maître de Maison* to be the creator of the nest. As a child Nourissier never had a room that felt like his own. The narrator also felt like a chained dog at home and thus searched for love and happiness in other places,

"...vivant sur autrui, chez autrui. J'ai toujours vécu, comme on dit,"...chez les autres" (Nourissier .1968: 277).

Hector in *En Avant Calme et Droit* searches for love, and finds a love for riding. His time spent with horses is an introduction into a world of silence, "...il préférerait son travail solitaire...ce retour quotidien sur soi..." (Nourissier.1987: 127). Hector's love for riding is a way of living: "Un cavalier, ça ne s'improvise pas...il y faut une morale"(Nourissier. 1987: 98).

Nourissier's quest for love and happiness continues in *L'Empire des Nuages*. While Nourissier wants order in his life, he also needs reassurance through happiness. Burgonde struggles with the same quest: " Il n'a jamais pu associer le bonheur à l'ordre, encore moins le plaisir au bonheur. Le bonheur, c'est ici et maintenant, cette faction au bord d'une route, cette maison de nulle part posée entre deux paysages" (Nourissier.1981: 407).

The narrator's love for Danièle, a school friend in *Un Petit Bourgeois*, is a liberation, but when he loses this love he feels betrayed: "Je pleurai un long moment, seul dans la chambre où il faisait froid. Les hommes convenables essaient de ne pleurer qu'une fois dans leur vie pour des raisons de cet ordre: moi, ce fut le matin du 8 août 1947" (Nourissier.1963: 159). Danièle symbolised a winter and spring of happiness. Aragon believes that Nourissier's *Un Petit Bourgeois* was a solution to his self-discovery. Aragon finds Nourissier's silences even more interesting. They are perceived as discretion or fear, like his fear of death: "Il se dénonce, il avance dit-il, à visage découvert" (Aragon.1964: backpage). His greatest discoveries materialise through his creative quests.

Nourissier's voyages and escapes increased towards his adulthood. A lack of love in his life is why he admires certain people: "J'aime aimer qui n'est pas aimé ou qui l'est mal" (Nourissier 1963: 290).

Nourissier's quest for happiness manifests itself through his writing: "Je suis sûr d'être dans ma vérité" (Nyssen.1969: 19). We are given access to a very original happiness, a doctrine of happiness. One must pursue this in his books, as it is a happiness that does not always surface in its usual form. His writing is very personal as in *Un Petit Bourgeois*: "Dans une perspective hédoniste, Nourissier, loin de chercher l'homme doué d'éternité, n'était déterminé par la poursuite d'une

<<extase>> personnelle”(Nyssen.1969: 20). He searches and researches himself constantly. Nyssen (1969:20) describes *Un Petit Bourgeois* as, “...narcissique mais lucide, impertinent mais diabolique, impudique mais parfaitement vrai, est libéré des contraintes.” Nourissier wrote this book during a winter of perfect happiness. The quest for happiness is but a sinecure in the creative process. He finds happiness in his work, which is his writing. His solitude is the link to this happiness. From his childhood days, Nourissier was searching for something. His quest continued into adulthood and through into his writing. Through an expression of the shortcomings in his childhood, he succeeds in his quest otherwise his life would remain without ambition and without a goal.

Bourgeois

Nothing in his childhood was truly bourgeois, “...rien n'appartenait dans mon enfance à la vraie bourgeoisie, mais plutôt à sa frange, à son écume, à sa parodie et à sa nostalgie: exactement à ce qu'on nomme la petite bourgeoisie...Des artisans et des paysans du côté paternel, de petits robins du côté maternel. Donc pas de quoi fabriquer un bourgeois...” (Nourissier.1963: 267-*Un Petit Bourgeois*). His laziness together with the “laisser-aller” with which he grew up left Nourissier on a detour to becoming bourgeois.

His petit-bourgeois milieu weighed heavily on him despite efforts to surpass it. He would continually be judged on his past. He loves the bourgeois style of living and cannot stand those without it: “C'est-à-dire les flemmards, les lève-tard, les bagnoleurs, les héritiers qui ne triplent pas le capital et par-dessus tout l'affreuse vulgarité d'un certain argent. Le style Côte d'Azur...”(Nourissier.1963: 268). He soon became familiar with leftist ideas, but has never become a communist and also did not hate them: “J'en arrive à ce *no man's land* où je me sens à l'aise, que traversent des amitiés apparemment contradictoires...Les grands bourgeois libéraux et les marquis roses...mais je supporterais mal qu'ils voulussent m'interdire de bavarder avec Stalin”(Nourissier.1963: 269).

The Latin Quarter in Paris with its bookstores and antique stores assisted with his education as a child. His friends were always better educated, more elegant, more bourgeois. Observing them taught him many lessons of which he relates in *Bratislava*: “Les livres, les familles de mes camarades, la mini-société du lycée, celle

des clubs de sport, les explorations estivales” (Nourissier.1990: 200). He invented his own bourgeois life with his idea of a bourgeois house, with the right furniture and unknown bourgeois people in his family photos: “Homme mieux vaut un faux qu'une ruine”(Nourissier.1990: 202).

In general, Nourissier is rather indifferent towards politics. He prefers the Red Army due to their social status and style to “...les beaux bourgeois auxquels j'avais été (je le serais encore) tenté de me frotter” (Nourissier.1990: 131). Any form of violence, deception or hurt aimed at innocent people touches him. His advice to his sons in *Un Petit Bourgeois* is: “Ne vous laissez jamais contaminer par l'importance ni le pouvoir. Je ne vous le dis pas en révolté, mais en bourgeois”(Nourissier.1963: 338).

En Avant, Calme et Droit concerns the bourgeois society with their problems and their passions. It is also about fears, the fear of death and of women. Riding schools were popular at the time that the central character, Hector chooses riding as his vocation. He sees life through the perspective of a cavalryman and the changes during the war in France affects him deeply. Nourissier is an admirer of horses and the nobility as explained in this book. France is in the fever of change, *L'Action Française* is sold in the streets and the German occupation is discussed yet again. The bourgeois were, “...les plus déplaisants, toujours à la pêche aux privilèges, colportant des ragots de leurs voix haut perchées...” (Nourissier. 1987: 79). The poverty of the war is described as “une pauvreté toute grise.” Nourissier felt relatively deprived.

In *L'Empire des Nuages* Nourissier discusses the art and culture society of New York and Paris... It is a bourgeois society, “...À la fois les fêtes de la vie et ses paresse, le feu du désir, le parfum de la solitude, l'ambition, l'argent, l'alcool...” (Nourissier.1981: backpage). Nourissier who had dreamt of a bourgeois life as child finally succeeds into infiltrating into this society, with their pretences and their social talk although in *La Crève* (1970) Nourissier expresses his aversion to bourgeois behaviour as if their beautiful outfits restrain them from mixing with the rest of the world.

In *Le Bar de L'Escadrille*, Nourissier sketches many a bourgeois scene and character and he remarks: “La graine bourgeoise finit toujours par germer” (Nourissier.1997: 36). Nourissier would have preferred a comfortable life, as he never possessed much as child. His character, Patrice is often called spoiled, yet as with Nourissier, “Patrice

fut invité à rassembler ses jouets et ses livres. Ce fut fait en dix minutes. Il ne possédait presque rien..." (Nourissier. 1965: 39).

There are many contradictions concerning Nourissier's opinions of the bourgeois. His likes and dislikes of both the petit-bourgeois and the bourgeois overlap in many instances. His interest in the bourgeois accompanied his process of growing up as explained in *Le Musée de l'Homme*: "C'est vrai, j'ai longtemps été fasciné par le style et les usages de la bourgeoisie" (Nourissier.1978: 197). He became bourgeois through osmosis, and not as much through a selection of ideas. He finds a common ground with these members of society and therefore he prefers their company.

Class and age differentiation evidently interested Nourissier, even more so the communist ideas concerning these aspects. He would have reckoned them all to belong to the same age and class: "C'était la qualité et l'efficacité de leur dialectique" (Guillon et al. 1996: 81). A changing France, a changing life and an approaching adulthood influenced Nourissier's evolution towards the bourgeois lifestyle.

His marvellous communicability is not aimed specifically at a bourgeois reader, for the stupidities of even the bourgeois are portrayed in his books, as with the decadent, nostalgic Albin Fargeau (*Le Gardien des Ruines*). Nourissier's writing is about everything: " Il convient toutes mes colères, toutes mes envies, toutes mes admirations, toutes mes indulgences" (Guillon et al. 1996: 317). A bourgeois dream of his childhood becomes a reality in his adulthood.

Fears

Children's fears have a great impact on their lives. The fear of the dark and of other evil manifestations is not unusual in a child's life. Nourissier's childhood fears were true fears, such as the war and the death of his father. These fears inspired him to write. One of his greatest fears is Death and the theme is repeated in almost every one of his novels, as in *Lettre à Mon Chien*. Nourissier tries to hide in his silence, yet he realises that his fears rooted in his childhood will be exposed if he writes about them. He evaluates it to be a liberating process: "Dire la vie, c'est ouvrir aux scandales, aux humiliations, aux innocences, aux peurs fondamentales, le chemin donné de l'expression" (Nourissier.1975: 40). He carefully selects that which he

shares so as not to lose its mystery. In a letter to me dated 9 June 1998 (unpublished), the author admits: "S'il y a un silence, je ne le romprai pas ici!"

In *Le Musée de l'Homme*, even the smell of the flowers is still fresh in Nourissier's memory the day after his father's death: "Ce parfum aigre des maisons vides et des femmes seules. Oui, peur... Cécile(*his wife*) a donné existence et réalité à la mort. Elle me survivant, elle me quittant: c'est la même chose. Une même blessure et une même révolte" (Nourissier.1978: 141). His ability to share their eventual fate, makes the idea of death at least sufferable. His father's death left scars that are more difficult to forget than the hurt prior to the memory.

The loss of his father in familiar yet dramatic circumstances fixes the fear of death's imminence also in *Bratislava*: "Je n'ai que trop écrit de tout cela et n'y reviendrai pas... Impossible de ne pas signaler, une fois de plus, l'origine de cette angoisse encrustée depuis toujours au cœur de mes entreprises" (Nourissier.1990: 16-17). He is not alone in his battle against ageing, as he even studies the age of the deceased males in the newspapers. He tries his abatement of his fears in the death columns: "J'évoque aussitôt François Mauriac publiant un roman à quatre-vingt-quatre ans, Julien Green, à quatre-vingt-huit. Ces exemples extrêmes me donnent une envie de longévité que ne justifie guère ma paresse de plume" (Nourissier.1990: 17). The people that die are about his age, at the time of writing. He does not even need to evoke the image of his father to be reminded of death.

The first sentence in *Le Bar de l'Escadrille* could well be Nourissier talking: "Depuis qu'ils ont mon âge, les morts m'intéressent. Je les scrute, je les dévisage ces visages en train de finir" (Nourissier.1997: 15). Death is also an important theme in *Le Bar de L'Escadrille*, *Le Gardien des Ruines* and *En Avant Calme et Droit*.

Death is an obsessive presence throughout his life and when he is in his retiring years he urges himself to continue writing, "...occupé à administrer le moins mal possible les surprises, les bienfaits et les méfaits du vieillissement, c'est au vieillissement qu'il me faut offrir la bataille et le service des mots"(Nourissier.1990: 18). It is therefore not surprising that a chapter in *Bratislava* is called "Peurs" in which he discusses his haunting past.

Although he fears decrepitude and death, he fears a very old age just as much: "La mort, oui, abstraite et refusée, inimaginable et bientôt écartée du jeu des possibles,

dominait tout mon paysage de sa présence – absence implacable” (Nourissier.1990: 20). He preferred the company of older people as he admired them, which of course decupled the likeliness of him having to face death. In adulthood the death of certain close friends as well as of his mother exacerbated his fears: “En tout cas m’abandonner sur le rivage des vivants à une solitude dont je n’avais pas eu à temps la prescience”(Nourissier.1990: 21). His mother stirred up pity and despair in him during the final days before her death, as if he was being chased by death. Nothing can prepare you for death, but Nourissier uses his writing to make every effort to overcome his fears, giving each aspect thereof a new dimension. He never finds the so-called peace people talk about when you grow old: “Mensonge, et l’un des plus difficiles à débusquer”(Nourissier.1990: 89).

Nourissier knows how to detach himself from a society to which he does not really belong as in *Lettre à mon Chien*: “Je devins...tout à fait silencieux et fermé...je me trouvais mal dans ma peau...” (Nourissier.1975: 107). His life as a child was characterised by the will to please, this way he knew he could stay out of trouble. He struggled finding his way, as he was not used to conversing with people. The world became increasingly involved with the news and information and more closed to him, “...l’hypertrophie monstrueuse du commentaire écrit, parlé, télévisé” (Nourissier. 1975: 109). All of this seems futile to him. He prefers his own house and his silence to those of others: “ Mon silence à leurs <<échanges>>”(Nourissier.1975: 111). His fears of the world and his indifference are still those of a small boy. He seeks kindness and acceptance, but his mother only taught him fear.

Nourissier’s “dog years” are peaceful years as he acquires a sensitivity towards his writing. Polka and her master share the same fears. They both need love and search for contentment, “...un mot un peu trouble et trop sonore pour exprimer le sentiment de fatigue, d’accomplissement, d’incertitude, de hâte qui m’habite alors et fait de moi ce promeneur ahuri, muet ou prolix, ce convalescent d’une maladie que personne ne soupçonne, ce rescapé”(Nourissier.1975:75).

In *Un Petit Bourgeois*, Nourissier again asserts his fear of death: “La mort. J’avais peur...J’étais prêt à lui parler, à la mort” (Nourissier.1963: 219). The images of disease and death crowd his fear even more, “...un certain air de vieillesse, la mort de quelqu’un dans une mise en scène solennelle - les yeux toujours fermés - mais surtout la peur, et l’ennui d’avoir peur, l’espoir d’un sursis... La mort qui précède la vie

luttant contre la mort qui interrompt la vie”(Nourissier.1963:219). He tries to accept or moderate his fear by ‘welcoming’ disease and death into his life.

Nourissier's enemy remains his inability to find satisfaction within himself. He is not proud of who he has become: “Je n'aime pas ma vie. Voilà ce que crie mon livre” (Nourissier.1963: 332). He has nothing to confess about his soul: “Pas de confidences à faire. La bête, sur son âme, est muette. Possède-t-elle une âme? Elle crève de peur...tout le théâtre métaphysique est de la fête, mais Dieu absent”(Nourissier.1963: 333). He is almost never contented and if he would want to, he could easily replace every word on every page with another, as he is never satisfied with his work. His autobiography *Un Petit Bourgeois* is his quest to find happiness: “Tout mon livre est aux couleurs du bonheur et de la mort. Le bonheur et la mort sont les thèmes de ces trois cents pages et leur musique. Leur horizon. Leur leçon”(Nourissier.1963: 338-339).

Bratislava deals with the problems of age, the flight of time, the memories and the fading efforts to confront the past as man grows old: “La règle veut que l'âge installe la laideur partout, même là où la jeunesse sauvait quelque grâce...À chaque seconde ce sont des immortels qui meurent, d'où l'air étonné des cadavres quand la souffrance leur a épargné son rictus. <<Quoi, moi?...>> La mort, ça n'arrive qu'aux autres”(Nourissier.1990:15). Nourissier is sagacious about death and age in a rather amusing way in *Bratislava*. Death is presented as an “idée fixe”, introduced to the reader in a sometimes ludicrous way. Nourissier reckons that ignoring death is possibly the best way to pass every day: “La vieillesse n'est pas une révélation, elle s'installe en reptations, en effritements, en amenuisements de toute sorte”(Nourissier.1990: 15).

Le Maître de Maison reduces death to only the names on the graves that outlive the dead. Some of Nourissier's fears are everyday fears that every human being faces at some or other stage of his life. It is the life-death cycle, the break of day(another day in France), the lives of people and the silence at night that force him to think. He fears many of the challenges that he faces, as a husband and as a father. He prefers not to think of failure as an option in his role as father as he had suffered enough as a child.

He admits that his superstitions and his fears along with the mysteries of the past, often make him feel out of control. Everything is bound to time but, “...On ne

<< passe pas le chiffon >> sur le temps" (Nourissier.1968: 191). Indirectly his fears also affect those close to him. The wife in *Le Maître de Maison*, Geneviève refrains from even pronouncing the word death in front of her husband: "J'ai peur, oui, dans les répits comme pendant les alertes, quand monte et nous baigne la marée de douceur comme au temps où la grève était vide et que s'y posaient des oiseaux noirs. Or la peur n'est pas le commencement de la sagesse. Elle n'est que le premier entraînement vers une peur plus profonde. Une pente, un vertige et à peine m'y laisserai-je aller que la détresse des nuits de l'été, qui foisonnaient de présages reprendrait sur moi son empire" (Nourissier.1968: 280).

In each of his books, death appears in its ruthlessness and often, unexpectedly as in *En Avant Calme et Droit*. The characters' survival through sickness and old-age are interwoven in the life death-cycle. It is also a repeated theme in *L'Empire des Nuages*: " Il pensait: à la lente mort de la peau humaine, à son père, à Léa, aux miroirs..." (Nourissier.1981: 397). Victoire, one of the characters, contemplates death: "Morts, ils ont envahi Victoire et campent en elle. Elle regarde autour d'elle: à quoi servent tous ces vivants s'ils ne chassent pas les morts?" (Nourissier.1981: 444).

In *Le Gardien des Ruines* Fargeau observes his patients, especially those that suffer the miseries of their age. There is haste in him as if he tries to escape from this deterioration all human beings have to face. When Fargeau's wife dies, his fears and solitude snowball. His quest for attachment or a reason to live starts anew. The morale of his old France and the family traditions are in the past now: "Il ne pouvait plus rien arriver à Fargeau, que la mort. Il n'avait jamais imaginé vers quelle solitude s'avance toute vie. Il croyait le savoir mais il l'ignorait" (Nourissier.1992: 251). His obligations have disappeared, leaving only a shadow of his previous life: "Il avait soupiré d'aise, mais toutes ces ruptures additionnées, creusaient le vide, et le vide lui donnait le vertige" (Nourissier. 1992: 252).

His solitude becomes a threat when he is faced with isolation and death. Fargeau was not prepared for his old-age, "...il avait redouté un gouffre, une explosion, la tragédie - il continuait de les guetter - mais il n'avait pas imaginé cette déclivité inexorable ces bruits comiques d'os qui craquent... la comédie en trois âges..." (Nourissier. 1992: 252-4). Albin Fargeau is ironically comforted by the suicides of others, "...l'exemple noir, d'habitude, le reconfortait: Pavese, Drieu,

Hemingway, Montherlant... Seul Albin était libre de son temps, disponible, offert à ce jour qui ne lui offrait rien" (Nourissier.1992:257).

The themes of Nourissier's childhood are given a new perspective when he gets older. Silence, solitude and death change definition when one approaches a certain age. The silences are not neighbored by a presence in the house or a need for the pensioner anymore. To start a new life is yet another trepidation Nourissier and Fargeau face as they lack courage. Loneliness reminds them of the war. Fargeau chooses an old age home in "Sainte-Prudence" to chase away his solitude and to help him find a place where he could belong (Nourissier.1992: 263). Fargeau, but a ruin of his previous youthful existence, presents tours at the Lacapelle – "la visite des ruines" in his old age. He realises that he could not change society's view of age, "... Il entendit la dame dire à son mari, à mi-voix: "Tu crois que c'est le gardien? Il est intéressant, tu ne trouves pas? Donne-lui dix francs, il les mérite bien..." (Nourissier.1992: 271). Nourissier finds comfort in Fargeau's character: "Il eut la certitude d'occuper enfin sa peau, son personnage, d'être soi-même..." (Nourissier.1992: 269). We are given a harsh, but accurate picture of a stonyheart society that damns the exhausted, the fatigued and the weak.

Nourissier had seen the loneliness of his mother throughout her life. In her old age, as well as when he was still a child she was without a husband and always alone. It scares Nourissier to know that she was never happy, especially now that he is approaching his own old age. When he enters his mother's apartment after her death described in *Bratislava*, everything has turned old and delapidated: "Elle me donnait, de la solitude et des peurs de la vieillesse, une image plus convaincante que toute réflexion" (Nourissier. 1990: 209). *Bratislava* is a novel about France, about Nourissier's life and his writing. On the final page he evaluates his life: "Patience, sentinelle! La guerre est perdue, mais il faut continuer de guetter l'ennemi" (Nourissier.1990: 234). This is an ambiguous statement as his enemies are many: ageing, death, sleepless nights and literary void all account for his fears.

When Nourissier spends time with his children, they remind him of his fears. In their youth they do not realise that the time they spend together could well be the last. Nourissier is very aware of his age when he is with his children, as he explains in *Le Musée de l'Homme*. He cannot do the things they do anymore: "Ils ne sentent pas que ce sont les premiers signes de l'adieu, les premières de toutes ces minuscules lassitudes qui, accumulées, feront ma solitude" (Nourissier.1978: 298). These

moments spent in love and happiness make him anxious, as he constantly faces his own apocalypse of misery.

There is wisdom in Nourissier's dealing with his past. Although he was very hurt, time temporarily healed him forcing him to continue until he felt he could face his fears again. The destructive forces thus became tempered so that he could use them creatively and honestly. Nourissier quotes Colette in *Le Musée de l'Homme*: "Une enfance heureuse est une mauvaise préparation aux contacts humains." Her words must have comforted him (Nourissier.1978: 147). Nourissier realised that there would never be a father like the one he had lost. As a child his family never succeeded in liberating him from his pain and isolation and this makes him sceptical about life, but it also provides him with the inspiration to write.

Nourissier's characters are wilful problem solvers. They search, they research and tire the reader with their endless quests. In *Le Bar de L'Escadrille*, the quest for love and happiness continues as a way of overcoming fears: "Tu ne connais pas ton bonheur m'a toujours dit ma mère. Je suis en train de faire la connaissance du bonheur des autres, qui n'est pas mal non plus" (Nourissier.1997: 132).

Nourissier enforces the idea of the flight of time with his accurate and repeated dates for many of the chapters in *Le Gardien des Ruines*. He uses time lapses to create a rushed feeling towards an unknown end. The difficulty with this process is that life is reduced to a mere 200 or 400 pages!

He believes that the creator is lame and that his creation is his only crutch. The day the creator denies the hypothesis of the existence of God, the artist is again faced with his fears unless he finds an alternative. If God is of no comfort, or does not exist for the writer, he must find comfort elsewhere. Nourissier continues these ideas in an article: "Faire une œuvre, c'est affronter à la mort l'agencement le plus gratuit de mots, de formes, de sons"(Nourissier.1983: 15). The word "time" is the word most often used to refer to death indirectly. The creation is "Le temps retrouvé" to the advantage of both author and reader. It forces us to face the reality of time that will destroy us all eventually. All illusions fade when we are faced with death, as for Nourissier when his father died. Nourissier shows an intimacy with death: "Chacun de nous finira par consommer ses noces avec la mort;...La longue histoire d'amour et de peur, chez le créateur, ne peut pas toujours attendre le terme"

(Nourissier.1983: 15). His fears confront him in his silence, but he faces them with lucidity.

Nourissier finds peace in the silence of his white and pink study in *Roman Volé*: "Mon bureau me protégeait, me calfeutrait..."(Nourissier.1996: 125). In this silence he liberally interprets his freedom and the truth: "On a souvent recours à des réflexions de cet ordre pour atténuer les effets de l'angoisse, la peur de la maladie et de la mort par exemple" (Nourissier.1996: 125). Nourissier does not believe that dying people are granted a flashback of their lives: "La mort n'est pas si généreuse que d'offrir ses victimes une bouffée de poétique nostalgie; sans doute glisse-t-elle en eux à la dernière seconde, l'intuition foudroyante qu'ils n'ont rien fait" (Nourissier.1996: 157). Nourissier fears the moment he would have to face the end to only pass away into nothingness: "Ils passent, dans un hoquet ou un souffle, et le néant prend leur dépouille. Eux aussi, les morts, sont dans le rouge. Vrai couleur du deuil" (Nourissier.1996: 157). It is one of the few times that Nourissier refers to colour in his writing. His use of the colour grey and then red symbolises his fear of death.

Some of Nourissier's characters go through degradation and a deterioration that is both heart-rending and shockingly distressing. The character Fornerod in *Le Bar de l'Escadrille* is fired. A talented man is reduced to a cipher in his approaching sixties, a widower. Nourissier also weighs his possibilities. Life changes quickly and can easily turn into misfortune: "On n'a pas d'imagination devant la mort. Mes gestes, je les ai inventés à la fin de l'enfance. Mais alors qu'à quinze ans mon attention et mon chagrin se relâchaient, aujourd'hui je donne de la tête contre mon mal avec une obstination de dément. Les mêmes images, celles dont la blessure est immédiate, tournent sans cesse en moi, et j'enfonce la tête dans le dessus-de-lit..." (Nourissier.1997: 264). At the end of a successful career, it is only death that remains for Fornerod.

There is a visible degeneration in the physical appearance of his characters too. It sketches a lucid picture of retrogression and those facts one would rather ignore, "...les taches de vieillesse s'étaient multipliées sur le front et les mains de Jos, sa peau s'était collé aux os, ses yeux avaient pâli" (Nourissier.1997: 280). Death is repeated in a chapter entitled: "Ombres longues du soir: "...comme on prétend endormir les animaux que l'on tue. La mort n'est ni un poétique voyage ni un assoupissement serein" (Nourissier.1997: 319). Nourissier is creative, but realistic, old age equals death for him as with an old building, it all goes to ruins.

Nourissier fears the day of tomorrow as an adult in *Le Musée de l'Homme*. It is impossible to escape the fears created during his childhood: "Les poissons ne peuvent pas se désintéresser de l'eau" (Nourissier. 1978: 201-203). Fortunately, some of the fears have given birth to creative forces speaking truth, wisdom and acceptance of the fact that we die from the day that we are born. The author humours himself in an attempt to make life bearable. He writes to maintain the equilibrium and to avoid breaking out in laughter every morning he wakes up and faces himself in the mirror, "...les rides de mon museau" (Nourissier. 1978: 236).

His fear is multifaceted because of several factors that influenced him from his past such as has already been mentioned and elaborated upon. He feared the passing of Time: "...d'être resté un enfant, vient de ce que je n'ai jamais réussi à digérer, cette révélation de la mort. Elle est restée dans le même état en moi, une expérience, brute, immédiate, physique que je n'ai jamais su intégrer au courant ordinaire de la vie" (Guillon et al. 1996: 89). This leads to a self-perceived isolation. He was never taught how to deal with death: "Je fuirai devant ma propre mort" (Guillon et al. 1996: 96).

In *Un Petit Bourgeois* he conquers fear with hope through a revelation of the father he believes to be, "... de dresser à leur (children) usage un inventaire moral ... Je souscrivais à tout hasard, en faveur de mes fils, une assurance-mémoire" (Nourissier. 1963: 11-12). He thus deals with the life-death cycle. Death is a mystery: "Puisqu'une logique charnelle (à propos de laquelle il était inutile de vouloir calmer mes divagations; nous sommes ici en plein mystère) me paraissait promettre les pères à une mort rapide et les fils à une solitude ignorante et désarmée..." (Nourissier. 1963: 12-13).

In *Un Petit Bourgeois* he also advises his sons, claiming that no one escapes fear. Nourissier for instance writes as a subsequent evasion "...d'accomplir chaque jour le voyage du soir et de la nuit ... d'attendre un lendemain qui ne soit pas éternel ... J'écris pour qu'un jour votre peur se nourrisse de la mienne" (Nourissier. 1963: 21). Nourissier is at times a victim of despair and apprehends the problem of fear. He creatively solved his problem: "J'avais une telle horreur de ce qu'avait été mon enfance, qu'il me semblait que tout vaudrait mieux que ça et que le meilleur chemin vers ce « tout » serait pavé de livres" (Guillon et al. 1996: 268).

Houses

Nourissier was born in the house, which they sold soon after his father's death. Nourissier was not only traumatised by the loss of their house as a child, but they moved into an apartment shortly afterwards with a new stepfather too. His response to this: "Ce sont vraiment des coups de marteau sur la tête d'un enfant" (Brochier.1997: 4). He especially missed the familiar surroundings and thus his friends' houses replaced theirs: "Elles ont toujours supplanté la nôtre en charme et en mystère" (Nourissier.1963: 205-206). In *Le Maître de Maison*, the description of the houses he mentions is given almost life-like qualities. His love for houses propounds his love for families, for as a child he did not know the combination of the two. After his mother's divorce, he was alone again. She never "belonged" to a house the way his friends' mothers did.

Houses would continue to influence Nourissier's creative inspiration, as they were important vestiges to his idea of a family after his father's death. In his house as a child, he had known a father and a sense of security; all of which he had lost after his father had passed away. Nourissier became an architect through his writing. He could invent houses or recall and renovate houses in his dreams. They inspire the décor to his history and taught him the "savoir-maison" as in *Un Petit Bourgeois*. The years spent in Paris added to his interest in houses. He would watch people in haste returning home, to find himself delivered to the silence of the streets: "La mémoire et la lucidité vous tiennent la main et vous guident" (Nourissier.1963: 308).

On several occasions Nourissier mentioned the missing he felt for a family: "J'ai tellement peu aimé ce que ma famille me donnait dans mon enfance, je m'y suis si peu reconnu, que j'ai eu tendance à bloquer tout ce qui me venait d'elle...j'ai coupé les ponts et dès mes quatorze ans j'ai adhéré, comme à une sorte de parti contestataire, aux familles de mes camarades" (Guillon et al. 1996:19). His search for this family probably influenced his selection of friends too. He recalls one day at a friend's house when, "...la maîtresse de maison a dit <<François, il se met où il veut puisqu'il est de la famille...>> J'en ai eu les larmes aux yeux" (Nourissier 1996: 19). This acceptance touched the author deeply and explains his love for a house where he could feel at home. Nourissier's family was a negative source of inspiration. They only symbolise sad and dull truths. Some of these memories are still hidden: "Même en moi, là-dessous, le silence s'est fait" (Guillon et al. 1996: 19).

Nourissier resents nostalgia for the houses of his past, but he writes about them frequently as in *Bratislava*: "Maisons, vêtements, objets, décors, j'ai vécu mon enfance dans une laideur dont on n'a pas idée. La modestie des moyens, qui est allé s'aggravant, n'expliquait pas tout. L'explication était dans l'absence absolue de goût, de savoir, de modèles" (Nourissier.1990: 199).

Nourissier dedicates his *Le Maître de Maison* to his love for houses. The new house owner in the book and his wife, Geneviève decide to restore a house to its full glory. Geneviève soon discovers her husband's ability to hyperbolise, especially when it concerns a house: "Tu connais ton père: il décrit Versailles mais c'est encore un chantier..."(Nourissier.1968: 132). Although Nourissier's dream of being an architect will never materialise, he plays the architect in the remodelling of houses. He finds a special place for every family member to sleep and dream – there as he imagined, beyond the shadows and the walls: "Mes erreurs sont désormais du froid, du chaud, du bruit, du silence, et tout cela pénètre les sommeils, les peuples d'images" (Nourissier.1968: 185). In *Le Maître de Maison*, a house is described with the same intensity with which Nourissier describes his own houses in his life. The narrator believes that Terror or Happiness can live in a house. Also the description of his childhood is parallel with Nourissier's childhood in the novel: " Mon enfance avait passé dans la débâcle: veuvages, dépression et ventes de titres" (Nourissier.1968: 16).

Nourissier feels about houses the way one would feel about one's teeth: "J'avais les maisons sensibles: le moindre excès me les rendait douloureuses. Excès d'amour par exemple, ou d'amitié, qui me révélait trop d'elles et ensuite, quand c'en était fini, boucler mes valises, tirer sur moi la porte, je croyais souffrir mille morts...J'habitais l'amour"(Nourissier.1968: 36). The narrator in *Le Maître de Maison* is so involved with the house that he inhabits that leaving a house becomes a traumatic experience.

In *Roman Volé* the Nourissiers moved to a building close to the Square Saint-Michel in 1940. Nourissier hated going down to the basement as it was dark and he was ashamed to be seen there, "...dans l'espoir de ne pas croiser d'autres locataires qui, bien que logés à la même enseigne, eussent mal jugé les Nourissier de devoir s'enfoncer en personne dans les entrailles de la maison au lieu d'y envoyer une mercenaire"(Nourissier.1996: 84). He did not understand the influence of the war and therefore did not think that it served as an excuse for their meagre living-conditions.

In *Une Histoire Française* the house is again repeated as an important aspect of life, as it bears witness to a past with all its mystery. Patrice is forced to live in a cheap apartment with his mother: "Comme il fallait s'y attendre maman arrêta son choix sur le plus laid des logements visités: quatre pièces et demi au fond d'une cour de la rue des Écoles..." (Nourissier.1965: 145).

In *Le Maître de Maison* the narrator sees the potential in every one of his loves: "Je suis l'écrivain public des maisons. C'est moi que je confesse en nourrissant et glorifiant le souvenir des maisons, c'est aussi davantage et mieux que moi, un certain ordre du monde promis à l'anéantissement..."(Nourissier.1968: 37). His houses possess human qualities and they live with their inhabitants. The narrator even uses houses metaphorically to exhibit his views concerning the existence of God: "Je croirais à Dieu s'il était le gardien des maisons, leur âme nocturne et indestructible...je ne saurais pas mieux habiter la maison que je n'ai su toutes ces années habiter ma vie. Ma fuite continuera...La vie n'est un voyage que pour celui qui en connaît le but: je n'ai pas de ciel à visiter"(Nourissier.1968: 84). This reminds him of their arrival in Paris: "Cataclysmes dont fut secouée mon enfance - plus tard, la décadence, l'orgueil de Maman mis à mal...des rues de plus en plus modestes..."(Nourissier.1968: 86). The houses of his life capture his emotions and the mistakes he makes with his houses will affect all the other inhabitants, as well as every silence.

The house is also a theme in *L'Empire des Nuages*. It is analysed through the eyes of the author: "Je regarde autour de moi. Le Cafard, comme ils appellent la maison. En ai-je entendu, des expressions saugrenues pour désigner la pauvre maison...Tout a toujours flotté, ici, tout s'est toujours dérobé à mon ordre, à cette idée de Maison Idéale que je traînais sans m'apercevoir que sept ans avaient passé et que j'étais devenue moi-même la soumise habitante du capharnaüm" (Nourissier. 1981: 237).

Nourissier is always observing a house, as in *Un Petit Bourgeois*. The narrator describes the beating of his heart, when he looks at a garden and yet again, the house with its stairs and its passages. Nourissier dedicates a chapter in *Un Petit Bourgeois* to his love for houses. It is man's presence in a house that makes him dream: "Point de doute les maisons, je les aime. De passion..." (Nourissier.1963: 204).

A house is also affected by the décor in which it is situated. A house he remembers well, is a house in Jacob Street, Paris. Here he felt true peace and tranquility. The walls played deaf to his solitude and his silence (Nourissier.1963: 60-69). His childhood décor consists of old houses and old people, these taught him more about the passage of time. The suburb he remembers in Paris underwent as slow a metamorphosis, as did the author. As a child he was an unchanging person who would have preferred security.

In *Mauvais Genre* Nourissier explains what a house represents to him, "...elle signifiait la sécurité, la durée, la beauté, la stabilité et l'ancienneté sociales" (Guillon et al. 1996: 256). He grew up in an ugly house in a suburb that was, "...à la fois miteuse et un peu prétentieuse, et que cette maison ait été vendue lors de mes douze ans, tout cela m'a troublé"(Guillon et al. 1996: 256).

His passion for houses symbolises a greater quest. A house represents everything he ever wished for and it can even change Life: "S'il n'y avait pas eu Verdun, la guerre, la maison de ma grand-mère, quand j'étais enfant, eût été une maison sans style, ni âge, une maison de village, éternelle. Alors que la reconstruction d'après 1918 avait été triste et sans âme" (Guillon et al. 1996: 256). Nourissier's admiration for a house that changes the life and the moods of its inhabitants is described in *Le Maître de Maison*. The house's potential and appearance is described with fine precision. Since his childhood he had been very conscious of a beautiful house with style. He recalls, once when he returned home from school: "Lucien P.m'avait <<raccompagné>> jusqu'à chez moi, ce qui est la passion de l'enfance...Voyant où j'habitais (la maison regorgeait de <<jolis détails>> et d'embellissements à frémir) il me dit: <<Mais vous êtes riches!>> Et je lui répondis:<<Mais non, regarde: c'est affreux...>>(Guillon et al. 1996: 256-257).

Nourissier's idea of a beautiful house sounds like the description of a precious jewel. A house touches the memory and it embraces time. It must show its past and its period: "...ses gestes, ses objets, ses produits; c'est pourquoi si souvent le bâti qui entoure les activités ancestrales - maisons et chais des vigneronns, haras – est de si belle qualité: il exprime une fidélité, une tradition professionnelle" (Guillon et al. 1996: 257). The house must have a life of its own.

He has a liking for the houses in the areas of Ménerbes, Arpaillargues and Cause and he admires the architecture of up to 1840, but he expects near human qualities

from a house. He learned valuable lessons due to his observation of houses as each house defines its inhabitants. Nourissier sadly remarks that he would have preferred some of the houses in which his friends stayed. His observation of houses led to a fine analysis of detail and an expert eye when it comes to styles and architectural periods. This constitutes for the entire inspiration behind *Le Maître de Maison*.

The house is defined in *Le Dictionnaire des Symboles* as the centre of the world. It has the same meaning as a city, a temple, a palace or even a primitive hut. A house is often seen as a sacred place where man can experience total harmony. Then there is the house that can be seen as a mask that one wears in society. The bedrooms are closest to man, as is his soul. The house is a powerful symbol as it can be closely linked to the functioning of the human being. It communicates through appearance and our need for security (Julien.1989: 213).

A time of war is also a time of destruction. Nourissier longed for a house with a past and with its own character and therefore a newly built house has no charm and no mystery for him. A modern house does not inspire fantasy and therefore his childhood preoccupation became an obsession in adulthood. Nourissier explains that he would have to look at 350 houses at least, to find four acceptable ones he would consider buying (Guillon et al. 1996: 260).

Nourissier is convinced that a house can enslave the master or it can be the master's slave. It should offer a pleasant working environment; it should reunite a family and make friends feel at home. He does not separate himself from his house. His specific needs have to be fulfilled for he lacked a friendly home as a child. He concludes with the importance of calmness and solitude in a house: "...la solitude est un état dont je m'arrange fort bien" (Guillon et al. 1996: 266).

In *Lettre à Mon Chien* the house possesses a power that can inspire him or fill him with fear. He mentions houses of Faverolles and Lossan: "...leur souvenir demeure en moi, éclatant d'une lumière noire et féroce, lié parfois aux textes qui en naquirent...parfois...à rien, exactement à rien qu'au vide égaré où je passais les heures, les nuits" (Nourissier.1975: 67). Each house engraves its memory in his past, some have the ability to develop an atmosphere, and others were like prisons to him.

In each house, Nourissier's quest is confined to finding a place where he can create and work. If he feels terrorised by the space, his fears will only multiply in the hours

to follow, but once he conquers the space, his book and his creativity will make progress. His work is the core of his existence, his writing "...sa réflexion sur soi-même, la volonté de tout faire vers lui converger, de faire servir ma vie...C'est l'incessante, interminable entreprise de formuler la vie, l'ordinaire et le fou de la vie"(Nourissier. 1975: 88).

Nourissier even philosophies about houses in *Le Maître de Maison*: "Une part de l'activité du jeune homme s'emploie, du plus vite qu'il peut, à lever les obstacles entre notre déception et notre bonheur d'ouvrir la porte, de repousser les volets à grand bruit tandis que l'autre, volubile, tentatrice, voudrait détourner notre attention" (Nourissier 1968: 33). His analysis of an estate agent, is that of the psychologist versus his patient. Every house he visits is a reminder of his own losses or his own houses: "C'est qu'on porte vite le deuil des maisons de rencontre. On les découvre, visite, possède, de vaste métamorphoses en peu d'instant mais leur porte est cruelle" (Nourissier.1968: 35).

Le Maître de Maison is a metaphor of Nourissier's love and his life: "...habiter la vie...comment on supporte les années, les murs, comment on y fait son trou...le thème des maisons revient dans tous mes livres de façon obsessionnelle et je voudrais, une fois pour toutes, aller au fond de cela. Je voudrais dépasser le bonheur pour atteindre la joie..." (Nyssen. 1969: 30).

In *Le Musée de l'Homme* Nourissier gives an account of Paris with some nostalgia. All his senses are put to work, to recreate the house, even the smell of leather. At that stage Nourissier was already a patriot, "...comme j'aime ce pays incertain, partagé entre les forêts et la ville, la grande aisance et la modestie, le passé profond et les chichis Second Empire!" (Nourissier.1978: 53). France was his home, but he also needed a house. He would never escape his past or the shortcomings of his childhood years. He loves houses, for it is the one place where he feels safe, as long as the owner is not female and disorderly, as it anxiously reminds him of his mother.

Dogs and Horses

It would not have been possible for Nourissier to keep a pet as a child. There was such a lack of compassion already, that there would have been no place for a pet. His mother's dislike for dogs is directly mentioned in *Lettre à Mon Chien*. Nourissier

was very restricted as a child, he still recalls the soap "Le Chat" that they used with its very distinctive odour. To him this symbolised hygiene in superfluity: "Il n'avait jamais vu le moindre chien franchir notre seuil...Porteurs de puces ou monstres d'indifférence: l'indulgence envers les animaux domestiques n'était pas notre fort" (Nourissier.1975: 60) Polka in later days must replace the sadness of his childhood. She adds meaning to the dimensions of his house.

A house would never again be just a few walls, a roof and a garden as it could never be as sombre as the houses of his childhood ever again. It bothers him that he was brought up without affection, he would have preferred it differently: "Dans les livres, les films, un homme qui rentre chez lui - j'entends un vrai chez-soi, arbres et feu, un homme avec...deux ou trois chiens toujours l'accueillant" (Nourissier.1975: 60). He prefers people who love dogs, especially women: "Ce sont presque toujours les plus douées pour l'enfance et l'amitié" (Nourissier.1975: 140). Unfortunately, his mother failed him: "À tort ou à raison je majore les aventures de mon enfance et de ma jeunesse. Inerte ou destructrice en ce qui touche aux événements récents (à moins qu'elle ne retienne d'eux que des squelettes de faits, une chronologie sans animation ni personnages)... Sans doute cet embellissement au passé ancien au détriment du plus récent est-il une expérience banale. Elle se complique... de la certitude où je vis de n'engranger aujourd'hui pour aucun avenir"(Nourissier.1975: 148-149).

Knowing that his mother disliked pets, this gives us some insight into his opinion of her. Nourissier believes that people who dislike animals are unfavourable companions who cannot be trusted. According to him, bad habits are learned only from their owners. Polka is part of his liberation and new insight: "Elle a fertilisé son cœur...la liberté de ressentir les émotions et à l'audace de les montrer. Tu m'as refait un peu plus humain..."(Nourissier.1975: 127).

Dogs are a consolation to a want of love in Nourissier's life as well as in his novels. Dogs influenced his life, as did Polka, a dachshund born in 1966: "Polka est le comble de son confort sentimental"(Nourissier.1975: 47). The absence of love, a family and a pet encouraged him to write his autobiography, *Lettre à mon Chien*. His preference for dogs and horses over human beings are that they symbolise beauty, solitude, joy and liberty that contrast with the falseness and hypocrisy in society. He takes his dog as an example, "...jamais sérieux...jamais important...J'en ai ma

claque des humains empesés de gravité, des opinions...de la nécessité de paraître” (Nourissier.1975:18-19).

He hates any form of suffering inflicted on animals and in *Lettre à mon Chien*, his compassion for Polka is seemingly greater than his love for his wife: “Je ne supportais plus les gens qui ne respectaient pas en eux...le même ou le chien...l’esprit d’enfance et de jeu, sa gratuité, ces yeux qui de bas en haut implorant quelque chose d’urgent, d’inexprimable et de gai” (Nourissier.1975: 44). He will allow nothing to put his love for Polka at risk, even his choice of a wife is determined by her attitude towards animals, “...impossible d’aimer celles qui ne fêtaient pas spontanément les animaux ...dont l’enfance n’affleurerait pas à la surface d’elles” (Nourissier.1975: 44).

Nourissier meditates on the importance of a confidant or a psychologist and the value of his writing as a substitute. His compassion for animals is sincere. He admires Polka, but he also talks to her. Through his conversations with her, we discover his opinions on humanity. Polka is the ideal solution to therapy, as she does not pretend, she shows affection and her presence is a positive influence on the author. She makes him face reality and drives him to such an inspiration of words, that his praise of her is almost lyrical. She relieves her owner of his worries, his frustrations and his fears: “Au prix où est le pétrole, et l’Afrique qui manque d’eau, et nos enfants qui soulèvent tout le poids du monde... de quoi ai-je l’air de t’écrire, à mi-voix, comme je te parle dans nos meilleurs moments?” (Nourissier.1975:17).

Polka even leads him to a perspective on the bourgeois that he so much envied as a child: “Ils s’amusent chaque soir en rentrant chez eu: on ne pourrait pas en dire autant de tous les bourgeois de France” (Nourissier.1975: 26). The dog’s presence, silence and patience fill the space surrounding them, “... par le goût de la maison, qu’expriment si puissamment les chiens...Tu disposes à notre endroit d’une dose de tendresse que jamais nous n’épuiserons” (Nourissier.1975: 31).

Nourissier struggles to show compassion, tenderness and sensibility towards people, due to his circumstances as a child, “...mon chien est un interlocuteur parfait pour cet écrivain que je suis devenu, coincé entre le “je” et le “tu”, l’aveu et l’amitié. Moi et Polka nous sommes mes meilleurs personnages, ceux que je tiens le mieux en respect” (Nourissier.1975: 33). He admires animals’ extraordinary senses, “...à l’odeur secrète des heures... la vie dans sa nudité, sa détresse” (Nourissier.1975:

68). Anyone could write a letter to his or her dog, but in Nourissier's case, it is an intimate display of his needs, and Polka is part of the solution to his empty past.

Fornerod in *Le Bar de l'Escadrille* is comforted by the presence of a dog called Zulma, after being fired from work: "Il y eut dès lors dans la vie de Jos une présence, cet infime frémissement de l'air à quoi se reconnaît, dans un lieu clos, le souffle d'une vie. Les premiers jours de la chienne ne le quitta guère..." (Nourissier.1997: 375). Fornerod and Zulma remind us of Nourissier and Polka in *Lettre à mon Chien*. Fornerod finds peace and affection in the presence of his loyal friend, "...on eût dit des bouffées de bonheur" (Nourissier.1997:392). It is astonishing to see what an important role a dog plays in Nourissier's book. A dog gave him a sense of belonging and calms him with its mere presence. His *Lettre à mon Chien*, is not from a pet-owner's perspective, but rather an ode from a father to his child.

Nourissier's love for horses occupied much of his time. Although he suffered to cope financially, he loved this part of his life, "...au point de rater mes études..." (Guillon et al. 1996: 80). The riding community is discussed in *L'Empire des Nuages* as a recurring theme. The author's love for horses is expressed through his characters: "Le hasard me rend ce que j'ai peut-être le plus aimé sur terre: les chevaux. Oui, plus que l'armée" (Nourissier.1981: 137). When Nourissier was faced with a choice between his studies and his horse riding, he chose the latter in *Un Petit Bourgeois*: "Ils ont saboté mes études" (Nourissier.1963: 146).

Nourissier loves horses and his book, *En Avant Calme et Droit* evolves around the world of the equus, as he recalls: "Je dois aux chevaux de la reconnaissance: ils ont saboté mes études...D'un autre point de vue l'esprit cavalier représentait pour moi une régression mentale...un temps où je connaissais par cœur Bernanos, Gide et Proust, c'était l'orgeat préféré aux alcools...le catholicisme m'enlisera pour trois années dans ses marais" (Nourissier.1987: 147). Hector in *En Avant Calme et Droit*, feeling rejected as child, finds a morale and self-esteem at the riding school. Similarly Nourissier also went to a riding-school when he left school. Hector remains a child even in adulthood. The life he lived was close to his loves: "Il paraissait avoir vécu une vie à côté de la vie. Il n'exprimait sur rien les mêmes opinions que les journaux et les livres. Il était ignorant et innocent comme un enfant" (Nourissier.1987: 250). His downfall follows because of this innocence. He captured his childhood in the silent world of horses.

In *Le Maître de Maison* there is of course a dog at the house in Lossan. Nourissier could not be without one, neither could his character in the book. The dog creates its own habits in the new house and is seen as part of the house. Surprisingly enough her name is Polka, Nourissier's dog's name in *Lettre à mon Chien*. The narrator, much like Nourissier shows compassion towards Polka, especially when she is in distress: "... et ici Polka qui avait senti la percer cette douleur... avait tenté de sauter, de fuir, mais une main noire et froide l'avait plaquée au sol" (Nourissier. 1968: 115-116). Polka is important as she liberates her owner from his solitude, "...la solitude est comme une plongée sous l'eau, on doit remonter parfois à la surface aspirer une goulée d'air. Je sais de quoi je parle" (Nourissier.1968: 118). Her owner needs tenderness, something Polka shares willingly. Nourissier suffers with the expression of tenderness and sees it as an ungrateful role to play yet Polka has no need for profound discussions, she puts no-one to the test: "Voilà Polka ne vole rien à personne" (Nourissier.1968: 118).

Nourissier's house-owner in *Le Maître de Maison*, communicates with Polka – "Tu lui parles chien"(Nourissier.1968: 157). Polka is his embodiment of everything that inspires him, like innocence, play and fragility: "Un jour viendra où ces deux ou trois minutes surgiront peut-être, pour l'un de nous, d'un abîme de détresse et d'oubli parce que, ainsi ou autrement, la mort sera passée; parce que ton visage aura perdu la clarté...Oh! Cette ruine quoi! Cette horreur de tout ce qui nous guette, et la patience du temps à nous détruire..." (Nourissier.1968: 157). There is a certain behavioral pattern he knows and expects from Polka. With each welcoming she brings happiness, in jumps of joy she shows her surprise and her immense love after which she would curl up alongside her master. He treasures these moments.

Nourissier is a man of fluidity and every part of the way he is going through a different stage. Nourissier shifts the limits with his love for dogs and horses and allows them to infiltrate the human code of love. His childhood quest for love and friendship is greatly satisfied in the author's love for animals.

Cars

Cars played a meaningful role to Nourissier as a child. In *Autos Graphie* he explains that he couldn't help but notice cars, awe-struck by the beauty of their detail: "Les

voitures de mon enfance étaient tapissées, sièges et habitacle, d'un tissu chiné, beige, broché, plus soyeux que laineux très 1925..." (Nourissier, 1990: 104).

Nourissier is of the opinion that money can buy silence. In a house or a car one can be isolated in solitude: "C'est vrai dans l'immobilier et dans l'automobilier" (Nourissier, 1990:109). Houses and cars made it possible for him to take patriotic travels through his country. He got to know the countryside of France which inspired the background of his novels: "Les unes me servant à chercher pour les visiter, les autres, j'ai sillonné la France pendant vingt-cinq années à la découverte de manoirs, fermettes...castels, ruines" (Nourissier, 1990: 116). Nourissier loves travelling in a car as it improves his level of happiness tremendously. While driving through nature, he gets so absorbed in his surroundings that any passenger would soon disappear. An adventure unfolds with his travels, as he now feels liberated from the restricted child in him.

In *Un Petit Bourgeois* it is a car that links some positive memories to his childhood. Although he was unhappy with his stepfather who married his mother in 1939, he enjoyed the drives out with him at night: "...dans une énorme Chevrolet, pour aller à Mantel ou à Saint-Germain voir des films" (Nourissier, 1963: 149).

Nourissier as a youngster loved any form of speed such as in a car. He felt the wonder of having such power. With age, he realised that with writing the process is completely different though. You cannot rush the creative process as ideas can only be formulated properly through trial and error. A car gives him a sense of living as every act in a car determines the driving. Nourissier (1990:35) even finds a comparison between cars and writing in *Autos Graphie*: "Si l'on préfère une comparaison qui se réfère à l'essentiel je dirai que j'essaie de conduire comme je m'efforce d'écrire: sinon <<vite et bien>>, formule qui serait aussi hâbleuse que simplificatrice, au moins le moins mal possible."

The cars used during the Hitler occupation are some of Nourissier's sad childhood memories. He recalls: "...une voiture, et particulièrement ces monstres altiers et anguleux dans lesquels paradait Hitler..." (Nourissier, 1990: 75). Nourissier feels free and in control in a silent world away from people - in his car.

Creative writing in General

Nourissier uses his writing as a form of therapy. He aims towards a personal goal with his writing: "...un travail...la création n'est pas une façon princière et relevée de passer sa vie." Sometimes it is a difficult process as in *Lettre à mon Chien*: "Ne croyez pas qu'on entre dans un livre comme à Prisunic"(Nourissier.1975:36-37). He uses the construction of a building as a metaphor of his writing: "Il me semble aujourd'hui qu'il y a de la probité à guider le lecteur jusqu'aux bricolages de l'invention" (Nourissier.1975: 38).

He finds a certain part of his inspiration in texts, "...dont la beauté formelle et les idées qu'ils véhiculaient me touchaient"(Guillon et al.1996:59-60). He finds no interest in books with religious and moralistic views: "J'ai tenté d'en venir à bout, mon agnosticisme est resté vigilant" (Guillon et al. 1996: 62-63). His artistic creation is an interplay of intuition, a world behind the text and his own truths: "C'est parfois une bataille, parfois un jeu de miroir et d'ombres. Il y a un sous-le-livre...si près de mes mystères"(Nourissier.1975: 39). He delves into the past and he searches the ghosts of his past to make the text a meaningful expression to him. He finds new life in the discovery of himself, "...le bon mauvais père qu'il aurait été...tous les chapitres de moi sont rangés en cercle autour du regard de l'écrivain"(Nourissier.1975: 89).

He experiences many difficulties with his writing. He is in distress on a personal level and he faces the dilemma of contradictions. Nourissier is a troubled man, who complains about his childhood, who shows an obsession with houses and who fears his own mortality. Despite his discontentment and his shortcomings, he creates "...une admirable méditation sur soi"(Mohrt.1979: 118). In *Le Musée de l'Homme*, his confession is expressed with a relieved sense of pleasure. Mohrt (1979:119) admires Nourissier's courage to write "...avec le moins de mots possible ce qu'il est d'usage de faire." Nourissier enjoys elaborating on these silences in *Autos Graphie*, "...ne pas se détourner des sollicitations triviales; se tailler une plume heureuse..." (Nourissier.1990: 139).

Nourissier's mother is a significant driving force that inspires him, because in an attempt to be the opposite of his mother he is determined to express as much as he can: "La démangeaison autobiographique est née de là, en même temps que de la recherche d'identité"(Guillon et al.1996: 26). He sees himself as a pessimist,

sometimes also a cynic and these aspects influence his style with a profuse negativity. Some of his characters seem unable to take action, as they are too absorbed in their problems or too timid. They are negative characters portraying aspects of Nourissier's dubious nature.

Nourissier cannot be expected to abandon his autobiographical style of writing, "... pour un vagabondage à travers les collines: il a peur pour cela, et de manière constante, un instinct de conservation trop poussé. Ce qu'il nous offre, c'est une autre face de cette introspection pudique à quoi il nous a habitués..." (Bosquet.1975: 107)

Nourissier has his routines as writer to maintain the balance between his life as a writer and as a dreamer. He tries to control his anxiety with lucidity to ensure that he does not become totally absorbed in a dream world. Bosquet (1975:108) is persuaded that with a language that is so harmoniously constructed, "...si pleine, si ondoyante et si musicale qu'il procure un plaisir sans bornes" - his style is a way of living through the text.

In an article Nourissier returns to his roots and more specifically to his father, "...vers la Meuse paternelle et résolu de faire avec"(Nourissier.1979: 17). He reconstructs every poverty of his past into a privilege: "J'eus la chance dans mon infortune, de me trouver un ancêtre de qualité. Puisque décidément je n'étais pas de la Lorraine élégante, il me restait celle des <<Misères de la guerre>>"(Nourissier.1979: 19). There is an interrelated dependency between Nourissier and his text.

In *Roman Volé*, Nourissier does some introspection, without chasing the mystery out of his writing: "Celui-ci (*le mystère*), qui est superbe, murmuré, coléreux, le regard tourné à l'intérieur de lui-même, habité de souvenirs, faussement mi-clos, terriblement lucide" (Brison.1996: 90). He meditates on his childhood in silence, unravelling the mystery he decides to expose, which could be better explained with a quotation from *Mauvais Genre*. In this book Nourissier says of *Un Petit Bourgeois*: "C'est un livre où tout est vrai, mais tout ce qui est vrai n'est pas dans le livre... une longue expérience de l'aveu autobiographique et je sais que 'tout dire' est à peu près impossible... On rêve de la confession absolue"(Guillon et al.1996: 95).

There have been many influential writers that steered Nourissier's writing towards new insights. Some of the authors who inspired him most are Stendhal, Gide,

Morand, Chardonne, Céline, Sartre, Saint-Simon, Beaumarchais, Chateaubriand and Larbaud. He emphasises the influence of Barrès for his logic and his "culte du Moi", Montherlant's theatre, Aragon for his prose and Drieu la Rochelle for his atypical books such as *État Civil*. We know that Nourissier also read Chardonne. His character Fargeau in *Le Gardien des Ruines* shares his fascination with the silence between the characters in Chardonne's *L'Épithalame* (Nourissier.1992: 219). Aragon's *Lettre d'un père à son fils* left a great impression on the young Nourissier and it could be seen as a primary source of inspiration as is explained in *Un Petit Bourgeois*: "À défaut de vrai père je m'étais donné celui-là, adapté à mes besoins... Les années passant, je consacre de plus en plus de temps à rendre à César ce qui appartient à César. Je veux dire: à Barrès, à Giraudoux, à Bernanos, à Montherlant" (Nourissier.1963: 287). Nourissier's admiration for Balzac, Flaubert, Proust, Morand and Céline sometimes makes him feel inferior and this proliferates his fear. His abnegation to his own worth remains a problem throughout his career as an author.

He respects Breton, Perse, Jouve, Gracq, Genet, Mandiargues, Giono, Arland and Leiris: "Tous d'une façon ou de l'autre des isolés, des exilés intérieurs ou voyageurs tous le dos tourné au tumulte de l'intelligence parisienne" (Nourissier. 1963: 299). Some of his favourite poets are, Maurice Scève, Louise Labbé, Hugo and Perse (Le questionnaire Marcel Proust-Internet: 1997:8-10; Brochier.1997: 7).

Aragon was one of Nourissier's friends and was perhaps more inspiring to him as a writer and human-being rather than through his books. Aragon's life and his passion for writing were closely connected, as Nourissier recalls in a conversation with Aragon during a holiday spent with him in Provence: " Tu vois, petit, me dit-il, écrire un livre, c'est ça, même en vacances..." (Nourissier.1994: 19).

Although he does not like being associated with Morand, he admires "...son aptitude étonnante au silence, à l'ennui, au départ...l'Ennui, le silence, l'envie de s'esquiver vont rarement avec le bonheur" (Guillon et al. 1996:96).

In an article on Guy de Pourtalès (*La Pêche Miraculeuse*) Nourissier describes the source as, "...un des <<grands romans >>de formation du premier demi-siècle et pour une <<éducation sentimentale>>d'une force, d'une perfection, d'une qualité charnelle magnifiques"(Nourissier.1995: 70).

Gide's homosexuality and his disturbing silences in *Journal des faux-Monnayeurs* are not the reason why Nourissier quotes him as an inspiration: "Il a été un formidable professeur de liberté, un éveilleur...la méthode Gide: interroger, troubler, encourager...Pensez à l'adhésion au communisme, puis à la crise de conscience, ensuite, à la révision, non pas déchirante, mais sereine: quelle leçon!"(Guillon et al.1996:57)

Garcin (1996:1:internet) describes Nourissier's style as an auto-analysis, "...incessante, tumultueuse et masochiste." Nourissier does not like himself, yet he allows no one to criticise him as much as he criticises himself. His doubts and his disbelief, thinking that he is a worthless father results into confession. Van der Plaetsen (1996:143) therefore states that it is no coincidence that Nourissier values the statement of Fitzgerald so much: "bien entendu, toute vie est un processus de démolition."

Nourissier's preferred themes are houses, horses, cars, and dogs, fear of death and himself. His favourite décor in his novels, are the mountains, as they capture a thousand memories for him, "...je m'y sens euphorique et heureux; par exemple j'y travaille mieux que n'importe où ailleurs. Qu'on me donne une table à quinze cents mètres d'altitude, une heure après je suis au travail"(Nourissier.1997: 5). His text is much inspired by his nostalgia for the virtue and the innocence of a child, as well as his favourite pastime, visiting houses. He appreciates loyalty, silence, peace and liberty, words that are often repeated in his works. Nourissier's novels are carefully assembled creations, influenced by his childhood, love, marriage, paternity and solitude, inspiring bits and pieces of his life.

He is an exceptional self-critic and employs a descriptive, affluent vocabulary. He takes some time to correct his writing, although he sees the entire process as a simple one: "Quand on parle de travail de création, j'ai envie de tourner le potentiomètre et de baisser l'intensité des idées générales. S'il est question d'indicible et d'extrême prudence, il y a la poésie...Mais si l'on parle du roman, je crois qu'il faut avoir le courage de dire que cela consiste à raconter une histoire le mieux possible, tout simplement" (Chancel.1997: 17). He does not think of writing as a way of surviving or prolonging literature, it is moreover a continuation of life, the same way an ill person would be dependent on his medication (Nourissier.1983: 15-*article*). To illustrate the importance of his work, he writes in a letter to me dated 9

June 1998 (unpublished): "Un but personnel. J'écris pour marcher mieux, boiter moins, cacher ma boiterie."

Nourissier's novels hypothesise on himself. It is not a confession, neither the truth, but rather a speculation on his possibilities. His creation is a flight of phrases, a timeless process as in *Lettre à Mon Chien*: "Ce roman que je suis, que je vis, cette prise hasardeuse sur la réalité que jour après jour je tente d'assurer, et sans la crispation de laquelle écrire serait vain" (Nourissier.1975: 35).

In *Lettre à mon Chien* the creative process is described, rather than a specific décor as is the case in *Le Maître de Maison*. He wants the writing to come from within in all honesty for it must lead to greater comprehension. *Le Maître de Maison* is an example of Nourissier's ability to enrich his inspiration from all spheres of his life: "J'aime les vieilles pierres et les chiens, les violences de la nature et les douceurs de la musique. Je suis ce miracle cocasse, un homme content de lui...ma prose limpide; ma maison solide" (Nourissier.1968: 229-230). In *Le Gardien des Ruines*, *En Avant Calme et Droit* and *La Fête des Pères*, there is a collapse in the relationships of the central characters. They face death, disillusionment and sometimes they suffer.

In *L'Empire des Nuages* (1981: backpage), Nourissier made an assemblage of all his childhood themes. His characters experience the same difficulties and fears as he mentions in his autobiographical works. Nourissier's dream of becoming an artist, travelling the world, living a bourgeois existence, having the love of a father, the hostility between a son and his mother and his creative expression are but a few of the central themes in the novel: "J'ai eu besoin de voyager...enfin j'ai fait s'affronter les générations...et cette autre passion - à la fois quête et chemin de croix - qu'est l'aventure de la création." The "rue Jacob" of his childhood is frequented by his characters of *L'Empire des Nuages*." His dreams of the arts and society are realised in the novel, interwoven with the riding-school community and his beloved dogs who reappear here again. "La gare de l'Est" of his youth prepares a decor for Lucienne and Victoire. In each of Nourissier's books he continues and elaborates on these themes, which gives proof of a definite progression of his childhood themes in every novel.

Nourissier prefers his solitude as for example in *Un Petit Bourgeois*: "Les créateurs proclament volontiers leur refus de tout lien (épouse, maison, mais surtout enfants)

susceptibles disent-ils de les gêner dans leurs expériences et dans leur liberté” (Nourissier.1963: 252). He avoids an explication or a definition of marriage or fatherhood, for the author’s surroundings and the people that frequent it already complicate a writer’s life.

His characters imitate him which is why he is perplexed by the way that certain authors turn away from themselves, totally absorbed by their phrases. He admires Giono and Stendhal for their conversation-style writing. Nourissier identifies with the reader’s preference for the wounded and the fragile characters in novels, however they often have to be invented: “Le plus souvent je m’en suis tiré en amalgamant confidence et invention jusqu’à ne plus savoir où était l’aveu, où, le roman” (Nourissier.1990: 33 - *Bratislava*). Nourissier believes that his only true novel is *L’Empire des Nuages*.

He fought against himself for seven years to get away from the autobiographical style, but each time he writes about another Nourissier in another situation, “une hypothèse sur moi” (Nourissier.1990: 33). Writing is unmistakably part of the author’s memory. Hypothesis and illusion create a specific result owing to, “...la mémoire, le temps, l’oubli, l’embellissement sentimental, la broderie des mots” (Nourissier. 1990: 56). Nourissier believes in taking the best out of his past and recreating it in different words and then accepting it. Once it is written, he prefers to leave it and move on... to start a new book.

As a child he criticised poems, tragedies and abstract writing - he then already preferred novels. Nourissier enjoys the reality he deals with in his novels. Finally Nourissier succeeds in keeping quiet in *Bratislava*: “Never explain, never complain” (Nourissier. 1990: 150). His lucidity is his guiding light through his career, throughout his bitterness and his fears: “Il y a en chacun de nous un homme rompu” (Nourissier.1990: 153). He does not always comprehend his successive stages in life, but “...j’éprouve de l’amitié pour le jeune homme fantôme qui peut-être m’habite encore mais il m’est devenu impénétrable” (Nourissier.1990: 160). The foundations are not all stable, but he continues building on his past, book by book.

Nourissier dislikes the person he has become as an adult, but he accepts it. In *Bratislava* he reminds us of the fact that we presume that tomorrow will come. Nourissier still believes with each novel that his best novel would be the next one, although a finished manuscript does offer him great pleasure, no matter whether he

is satisfied with it entirely. As stated before, although he criticises his own work, he dislikes others to criticise his work (Nourissier. 1990: 165-167). Nourissier writes with his dictionary at hand, "...je pousse des ahans et des jurons...une plume devenue, parfois, pusillanime..Cela coulait de moi<<Un robinet d'eau tiède>>" (Nourissier. 1990: 224). There is little innocence left where he lies cradled in age and he realises that age outlives solitude, disease, day and night until the end.

Nyssen (1969: 20) believes Nourissier to be the most representative writer of his generation: "Celui qui incarne le mieux la vocation littéraire. Après Drieu La Rochelle...il a écrit les livres que les apprentis écrivains avaient tous rêvé d'écrire." He succeeded in his talent (the quality of his writing) and above all, he loves writing. Nourissier wonders what a writer signifies: "J'ai voulu être écrivain très tôt...Pendant un moment, j'avais bien pensé me consacrer à la peinture...Et puis je m'aperçus que je n'avais pas de talent" (Nyssen.1969: 22). His writing gives us access to his truth: "La magie des illuminations secrètes, il s'en est convaincu par ses livres, est le fait exclusif de l'écriture (Nyssen.1969: 24).

One of Nourissier's first literary experiences is still clear in his mind: "Je composais des alexandrins que j'allais montrer à M. Petit, mon professeur. Et, au fond, ce ne sont que de mauvais exemples qui m'ont donné envie d'écrire" (Nyssen.1969: 24). Nourissier finds his satisfaction in his writing, but he conquers the process rather than the final manuscript. Nyssen (1969: 25) believes that: "Chez Nourissier, l'orgueil consiste moins à justifier les erreurs commises qu'à tirer satisfaction de la part réussie - ou conquise - dans ses écrits." I do not agree with Nyssen on this point, as Nourissier admits for instance in Bratislava that he is never contented, that he could continually correct his work, always believing that his next book could be better.

Nourissier states that despite the many negative aspects involved in writing, there are also the positive ones: "Car, au-delà de tout ce qu'il y a d'amer et d'épuisant dans le travail de l'écriture, il y a aussi un lever de lumière à la faveur duquel on possède, même de façon fugace, un certain bonheur" (Nyssen.1969: 24). Nourissier feels liberated when he writes, as he believes that society allows the author more freedom than any other person. The author is given greater freedom through his expression and he retains the respect of his readers as long as he writes well. His themes are taken from his life, the very core of his existence. Nourissier's greatest success remains his ability to imbibe his life, assimilating the journeys, the diseases,

the adventures, the books and presenting the text and the story without creating a distance between the two.

Nourissier recognises his wife Cécile as an admirable person in *Le Musée de l'Homme* for she understands the life of an artist. As painter, she endures the silence Nourissier so often needs: "Je tolérerais mal une compagne qui n'aurait pas accès, d'une façon ou d'une autre à cet arrière-monde où nous résistons où cèdent les œuvres à faire" (Nourissier. 1978: 136). His surroundings along with his solitude is a part of him: "C'est toujours l'histoire des araignées: où est l'obscur et l'épais des existences limpides que nous contemplons?" (Nourissier. 1978: 211). In his study he creates a portrait of himself that will be exposed, but this creation behind closed doors is also a control over the text. The camouflage he uses to maintain his distance could well be that which others admire in him. Deceiving appearances are a part of life, an art form the writer perfects. Nourissier is an individualist and showed limited interest in the *Nouveau Roman*: "Mais aimer le Nouveau Roman, pour un jeune écrivain c'était en faire, en fabriquer, et jamais cette tentation ne m'a effleuré" (Guillon et al. 1996: 77).

Nourissier's blue suitcase is his "Musée de Papier" and it is an important filing system of his life. It contains the memories of his writing and his life and much manuscript material. The blue suitcase is also a symbol of his happiness as an author: "La valise bleue contient déjà mon cadavre ou mon fantôme. De semaine en semaine, presque sans le savoir, j'ai dessiné de moi le personnage que je suis devenu..." (Nourissier. 1978: 269- *Le Musée de l'Homme*).

Nourissier allowed himself to dream about houses, but his fantasies were never extravagant. The negative childhood memories have a negative outcome in adulthood, but Nourissier accepts through his book *Un Petit Bourgeois* that life consists of many miseries: " Ce sont les petites misères, au reste, qui lestent nos vies. Parfois à l'excès. Il peut arriver, comme on le dit pour les avions, qu'elles en aient du mal à décoller" (Nourissier. 1963: 131). The characters in his novels struggle with their problems and their miseries, as does the father in *La fête des pères* and Jos in *Le bar de l'Escadrille*.

His views on life are simple: "Les vies ressemblent aux sentiers tracés à travers la savane par les Africains, elles serpentent sans raison apparente" (Nourissier. 1963: 142). On the backpage of *l'Empire des Nuages*, Nourissier comments on his book in

general: "Depuis 30 ans je regarde des couples se donner de la joie, de l'amertume, du plaisir, et le monde changer, et mes enfants vieillir...À la fois les fêtes de la vie et ses paresseuses, le feu du désir, le parfum de la solitude, l'ambition, l'argent, l'alcool, le féroce appétit des commencements et la sagesse narquoise des épilogues...un petit morceau de la comédie universelle que je voudrais avoir su raconter" (Nourissier. 1981: backpage). The changes we go through are often hidden in our subconscious mind. We talk, often without reflecting on the words, as it is a profound source of our inner world that manifests in our behaviour and of course in the author's writing.

Teachers can give color to the lives of their pupils, they can act as go between for the parent and his child's problems. They can also inspire literary adventures. Nourissier was fortunate to have had a teacher like Levaillant: "Il nous avait appris le goût d'une espèce d'héros littéraire. Il nous apprenait maintenant à tolérer que les héros vécussent de pain..." (Nourissier.1963: 111). His lucidity and creativity inspired Nourissier even in adulthood and more than what his mother ever did.

Nourissier's own negativity also on his physical appearance reflects in his works, as in *Un Petit Bourgeois*, *Le Musée de l'Homme* and *Lettre à mon Chien*. It is an intense repetition that becomes almost overbearing at times. The self-criticism is a negative inspiration once again rooted in his unhappy childhood, "...les démêlés conjugaux de ma mère et l'empoisonnement familial qui s'ensuivit me bronzaient. Choisi comme confident, sollicité comme spectateur, explorateur involontaire d'horreurs trop poivrées pour mon âge, je mis en peu de semaines, entre moi et les êtres jusqu'alors les plus proches de mon cœur, une distance qui plus jamais, par personne, ne fut franchie" (Nourissier.1963: 118). Nourissier adapted to a self-taught indifference. His joys are often interrupted by silence and isolation.

In *Roman Volé*, Nourissier proves his dependency on literature as a therapy: "Au secours, à moi la littérature! Le style, le coulé, la musique, la témérité prise au piège de la fine rhétorique, avec parfois un gros mot, comme une tache d'encre, comme un trou pour déchirer la trame, une de ces phrases de l'ombre chères aux amants experts mais un peu las. J'avais réussi tout cela" (Nourissier. 1996: 25). His literature gives him a sense of achievement and relief with every success: "Je suis toujours à m'expliquer et à me plaindre" (Guillon et al.1996: 43). Although his writing is a mystery to him, he feels the necessity to succeed: "<<Un beau livre>> Étrange appauvrissement et enrichissement, tout ensemble, des mots les plus simples. Je

ne cherche plus la subtilité. Pour moi, désormais, un livre est <<beau>> ou non, et le jugement est sans appel" (Guillon et al.1996: 57).

Nourissier's writing in retrospect faces the changes of forgotten times in *Roman Volé*: "D'ailleurs, vrais souvenirs, qu'est-ce à dire? Comment démêler les vraies des fausses images après soixante années? Tout est évanoui, assourdi fors une lumière, des sons, même pas: cette intuition qui frémit en moi, si je m'interroge très intensément, qu'il faut en cet endroit-là creuser, insister. On doit être un peu sourcier pour capter les vestiges de la mémoire comme une eau non pas jaillissante, ah non! Mais qui, goutte à goutte, fertilisera l'étrange champ littéraire" (Nourissier. 1996: 59). Nourissier's appetite for love was a driving force. He seldom talks of love in his novels. Certain characters fall in love and marry, but love is not a theme he discusses in depth. The characters often long for affection as in *Le bar de l'Escadrille* with Fornerod and *En Avant Calme et Droit* with Hector.

Nourissier felt it wiser not to write about love while he was still young and inexperienced: " Ma complaisance, autrefois, réglait ses comptes avec de jolies personnes qui, à l'en croire, ont parasité ma jeunesse. Mon impudeur et mon mauvais goût m'étonnent aujourd' hui. Mais rien sur les rafales, les rivières profondes...." (Nourissier. 1996: 59).

Nourissier, with an elaboration on certain themes, is sharing his wisdom. In it lies the value of his literary creation: "Il arrive que soit ainsi inversée la relation entre le texte et la chose écrite, décrite. Le <<bonheur d'écriture>> surgit dans cet instant fugace où c'est la vie, croirait-on, qui se met à ressembler au texte" (Nourissier. 1996: 64). Nourissier's writing ensures his well being; he must experience the appetite to write in order to feel contented. He is lost and confused without his inspiration. He philosophies about life, yet he realised that at a certain time in life, time catches up with age. When you are older you realise that... "le temps n'est plus seulement compté: il est épuisé" (Guillon et al. 1996: 155-156). One is so sure that there is still time left, that one will have the strength to continue: "On est sûr de pouvoir grimper encore quelques marches" (Guillon et al.1996: 155). He writes as often as he can, hoping to succeed: "La plupart découvrent, à l'ultime pointe de la vie, qu'ils laissent une opération inachevée" (Guillon et al.1996: 156). Perhaps if one reflects too much on one's childhood it obscures the future and then death seems comfortably distant.

Although Nourissier states the importance of many authors in his writing, he is more specific about the kind of influence they had on him in *Le Musée de l'Homme*: "On trouvait dans mon système des coulées du miel gidien, l'application tatillonne de Montherlant et son goût des formules, sans oublier Barrès, dont j'ai aimé les coups de fouet de sa jeunesse avant de découvrir le violoncelle et les raclements d'archet de la maternité" (Nourissier. 1978: 10-20). Montherlant's *Service Inutile* functioned as a "texte paternel" for Nourissier. He saw it once on an outing with his father and later read it finding, "...en Montherlant un drôle de père!" (Guillon et al. 1996: 63). Nourissier will continue this quest with a persistent return to his childhood days as an underlying creative source.

Chapter 3

A comparison of the childhood themes: Rimbaud and Nourissier

For the sake of this comparison, only certain aspects of the two authors' pasts are worth being taken into consideration. Although there are many similarities, the differences are as many if not more. For both authors, their childhood had a very unique effect on their lives and therefore also on their writing.

A silent Nourissier distances himself from society while Rimbaud was so intrinsically different that he was rejected by society through his behaviour. Nourissier converses with the reader and when he decides to publish his works, he is opening up his literary creation for criticism. He exposes himself, along with his fears and his joys. Rimbaud wrote in isolation, but never intended to publish all his poetry, so his poetry is intimate, as it was never intended to please a public. He was in communication with his poetry, not with people. *Le Bateau Ivre* is perhaps the most explanatory poem of Rimbaud's childhood. It offers a celebration of his vision, a world isolated from adults and his unsullied innocence cry out for protection from his desolation. The struggle between miracle and catastrophe is the central theme to his childhood. Nourissier's first autobiographical attempt, *Un Petit Bourgeois* was the beginning of a new literary confessional style.

In the comparison of the two writers' works, we find that both were very autobiographical in style, yet one should not confuse autobiographic with subjectivity.

Artistic creation in General

Nourissier liberates himself in his autobiographical writing, as did Rimbaud in a more indirect way. Both control the power of the sad memories through their writing as Nourissier explains that talking is not enough: "On ne pense jamais assez au sens des mots. On parle, on parle" (Nourissier 1981: 9-*L'Empire des Nuages*). In *Lettre à mon Chien*, Nourissier is consciously aware of the writing process: Je m'écoute et me regarde... Les mots. Le vent. Un mouvement ordonne et emporte tout. Le livre apparaît enfin dans ses ensembles et ses détails" (Nourissier.1975: 69). This reminds

us of Rimbaud's *Le Bateau Ivre*. He creates feverishly and in a state of drunkenness, but when he allows himself to reflect on the writing process he realises that illusions are probable in such euphoria.

The final product is of psychological value to the reader as well as to the author. In both instances, one cannot reduce Nourissier or Rimbaud's writing to just one aspect or an abstraction of their lives. It is however possible to further the artist's work by looking at the artist behind his creation. It would serve to no purpose to try and interpret the mystery in their work with too many logical or psychological analyses, yet we are constantly given facts and creations based upon these facts, which are rooted in their childhood. In the case of Nourissier, his childhood had opened a world of literary creation and these links are repeated many times in his works. In a letter to me dated 8 January 1998 (unpublished), Nourissier states: "Sans l'enfance – triste et pauvre – il n'y aurait pas eu de Nourissier écrivain. J'avais des revanches à prendre. Revanches sur l'étouffoir, le "couvre-feu" de mon enfance; revanches sociales; revanches esthétiques (donner de la beauté et du style à la vie)." His joy is in his writing.

He is fortunate to have ample references, which is often a problem with younger writers: "J'ai parfois le sentiment que les raisins sont un peu verts et qu'après tout, les raisins mûrs, c'est plus sucré. La manicure, c'est le raisin mûr" (Guillon et al. 1996: 236). Nourissier has always a book in print. He uses this as a remedy to reach new horizons of creation, "...naviguer sur des eaux que n'avait encore sillonné aucun des miens et j'avais même trouvé la passe vers la haute mer; je ne m'étais pas encombré à l'excès de scrupules ni de prudences" (Nourissier.1979: 28). The sea is indeed used as a metaphor of his creation in the same way as Rimbaud applies it in *Le Bateau Ivre*.

The sea fascinates both Rimbaud and Nourissier. The sea seems to be the nothingness towards which they steer. Their navigation will determine their destination: "Ou le trompeur océan me tirerait-il par les pieds vers le néant qui me faisait horreur" (Nourissier.1990: 93). As the writer's success is determined by the public's approval, it puts him at risk.

It would seem that very often a writer's inspiration stems from a negative source, such as the death or loss of a beloved one or an inability to conform to society. The shock a child experiences seems much greater in such cases than that of the adult,

perhaps because a child very often does not know how to handle these powerful emotions.

Rimbaud's use of the sun as a symbol, is a recurring theme throughout his poetry as e.g. in *Vagabonds*, where he refers to "le pauvre frère": "J'avais en effet, en toute sincérité d'esprit, pris l'engagement de le rendre à son état primitif de fils du soleil"... (Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 232). The sun is here a source of life and inspiration and he respects the sun: "C'est rire aux parents, qu'au soleil" (Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 136). Nourissier loves the impressionistic sun shining over a bourgeois house, as it evokes peace. It represents everything he never had: "Tout ce dont la tourmente autour de moi de la mort, des divorces, de la pauvreté bientôt venue m'avait privé, tout ce que j'avais contemplé de loin, avec envie, derrière les grilles des jardins et les confidences de mes camarades – tout était là, idéalisé, multicolore, composé en rectangles de bonheur..." (Nourissier. 1978: 55 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*).

Nourissier read very little as a child and his mother, who only read magazines herself, was worried that her son never took interest to reading. Fortunately as Nourissier matured, he started more prolific reading. At the age of eleven he attempted to read, even though books were scarce during the Occupation: "J'essayais de vendre certain livres pour en acheter d'autres, parfois il m'est arrivé d'en voler..." (Guillon et al. 1996: 54). He regards certain books he had read as "des découvertes sauvages," helping him with his development as an author.

Much of Nourissier's reading consists of autobiographical texts, personal sketches and mémoires with preference given to personalised texts. Reading inspires him as one of his loves, yet it does not offer any solutions to life's realities, "...j'ai toujours la sensation de quitter l'illusion pour la réalité, l'éphémère pour le durable... Je ne vois pas quel livre pourrait faire oublier la difficulté de vivre, l'angoisse et la peur de la maladie. La lecture n'aide à vivre que lorsque la vie va assez bien" (Guillon et al. 1996: 212-213).

Nourissier believes that all writers start as readers: "Les livres conduisent aux livres, et j'ai le sentiment que les livres des autres m'ont conduit vers les miens" (Guillon et al. 1996: 53). For him it was moreover the quantity rather than the quality of reading that mattered for the inspiration of an idea.

Rimbaud read a lot as a child, but his interest in books really started with his friendship with Izambard. Starkie (1982: 65) points out that during Rimbaud's childhood, his only pleasure was reading. She mentions Fenimore Cooper and Gustave Aimard that helped open a fantastic world where monsters existed in the sea. A new world opened the child's imagination.

Nourissier needed his love reciprocated, but he lacked a father. He consequently preferred the company of older men whom he saw as replacements for the father figure. Aragon is such an example, "...il est clair, et c'est la banalité même, que la démarche qui m'a mené vers des écrivains beaucoup plus âgés que moi devait quelque chose au manque d'un père sur lequel j'étais resté" (Guillon et al. 1996: 185).

Rimbaud chose Izambard to be his intellectual father and his time spent at school triggered a mental development. Izambard must have been a teacher with charismatic powers, as he not only inspired the young Rimbaud, but he also opened doors to other intellectuals, such as Deverrière (philosophy teacher) and Bretagne (teacher).

Rimbaud plays with colour on the poet's palette in a significant play. Macklin (1978: 33) believes it is of great importance that the colours as in *Nocturne Vulgaire* are used as nouns, emancipated and dynamic entities, which give much needed momentum to the poem. Colour can transform the orientation of the poem. Rimbaud's coloured vision permeates the deepest levels of his creative potential. Through Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, the artist introduces us to his world of colour and technique. The reference to the colours: white, black, blue and red used most often, are significant to his coloured plates (*Illuminations*). There is perhaps more to Rimbaud's insistence on the shades of blue, used in his poetry. Madame Rimbaud once bought a large roll of blue material cheaply. Rimbaud and his brothers always wore pants made from this same blue material. It is evident that Rimbaud wanted to escape from more than just his mother. On the other hand, the little use of colour in Nourissier's novels contributes to the sadness and isolation of the author.

Architecture is also important in Nourissier's work of his appreciation of buildings. Nourissier's dreams of houses started while he was still a child. These dreams inspired him, because, as with Rimbaud, it served as an escape from reality and all that he disliked. Some houses will always remain in his dreams as he recalls: "Nous

étions allés voir le notaire...je traînais les pieds sur les trottoirs, fasciné, pendant que nous marchions...Ma mère me faisait honte de mon tempérament de voyeur...Pendant l'Occupation et la guerre, le couvrefeu, les fenêtres occultées m'ont privé de ce plaisir" (Guillon et al. 1996: 262).

Rimbaud's symbolical cities promise happiness in the same way. Rimbaud comes to appreciate the beauty of art, architecture and music in *Les Illuminations* as in these poems he steers away from direct revolt. The *Illuminations* could thus be considered as the poet's dreamworld, while his other poems are directly linked to the real world. The same transposition is found in Nourissier's novels. Certain books are an autobiographical proof of reality, while other novels have fictional characters that play out the author's life as metaphors of his world.

Parents

Nourissier and Rimbaud grew up in difficult circumstances. Both had lost their fathers at an early age and grieved deeply for their losses. The mother figure was too over-powering and too rigid and because of her domination, both Nourissier and Rimbaud tried to escape from their mother as well as their situation.

In Nourissier's *Lettre à mon Chien*, the love for his dog had become an escape in adulthood from his unhappy childhood. He explains his love for *Polka*: "Dans ma famille, on n'était pas généreux. On donnait le moins possible. Si je remonte en déluge, c'est pour faire comprendre dans quel désert s'est épanouie ma tendresse pour toi. Aimer ne m'est pas naturel. Je le dis sans forfanterie: ce n'est pas si gai" (Nourissier. 1978: 43). The key words "déluge" and "désert" immediately also bring certain associations with Rimbaud to the fore. Rimbaud's poem *Après le Déluge* is a purification and a creation of a new world. Nature is Rimbaud's comfort, for he too did not know love. There is one big difference, however. Nourissier as the adult writer is reflecting back on his unhappy childhood, while Rimbaud, the child, is writing about his sadness at the time. The child's imagination can transform the world. Rimbaud wanted to change his world, as Johnson (1974:175-177) explains: "It is probably one of the child's greatest fears to find himself not really belonging to his real family."

We find two boys, both not belonging, considering themselves orphans in their own house. Rimbaud elaborates greatly on the theme of the orphan, as in *Enfance* and *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*. In *Enfance* Rimbaud places the child in context with the world. Rimbaud identifies with the "idole" without parents in a place that is unknown to him, "son domaine, azur et verdure insolents, court sur des plages nommées par des vagues sans vaisseaux de nom féroce grec, slaves, celtique" (Fowlie. 1965: 138; Œuvres. 1975: 214). His sad vision of youth is exclusion again in *Après le Déluge* and *Aube*, "Une porte claqua" and left him outside in the rain.

Nourissier's mother never gave him the love he searched for; he was an isolated child: "...ronger mon frein dans les rues en envenimant les cicatrices d'une querelle – me ramène toujours à mon enfance. J'avais de terribles prises de bec avec ma mère. Nous nous créions en trois phrases ... palpitations, vésicules en un tournemain surgies à nos lèvres témoignent de nos rages intérieures...je tentais d'apaiser ces fièvres colériques par de longues marches ... désolé, coupable, j'achetais des violettes à ma mère ... tout cadeau destiné, en famille ou dans l'amour, à solder les conséquences sentimentales d'un emportement..." (Nourissier. 1975: 59 - *Lettre à mon Chien*). A quarrel reminds him of his mother, and the bouquet of violets became a symbol of affection, despite their differences. Nourissier prefers peace and he would even negotiate for it with flowers, a habit he would continue well into adulthood. Rimbaud preferred taking to his travels or hiding out somewhere. He was trapped in this cycle of doubt, acceptance and the search for love.

Although Rimbaud disliked his mother, she remained a source of security and he would on several occasions return to her at Roche. When he fell into trouble, he would always return to his mother. Unfortunately, Madame Rimbaud was a very domineering, possessive and an authoritative person to the extreme. She was unreachable and reminds us of the witch in his fairy dreams in *Après le Déluge*: "Madame ... dans les Alpes" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 214).

In *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*, we find Rimbaud, alone and fearful: "Il n'est donc point de mère au frais sourire, aux regards triomphants? ... Plus de mère au logis! – et le père est bien loin" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 10). In *Les Poètes de Sept Ans* Rimbaud tells of a family drama when he tried to play with the other boys in the neighbourhood. The mother's reaction is severe, "Tout le jour il suait l'obéissance ... L'âme de son enfant livrée aux répugnances" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 74-76). Madame Rimbaud was severe and even when Arthur hid in the latrine, she would call

him back. She sent children who played with Rimbaud in the garden away; thus, his only escape from his domineering mother was in his dreams and in his writing. The female figure is often repeated in his poetry as women were always the controlling forces in his life.

Nourissier describes his mother in a chapter entitled *L'Homme Secret* in *Le Musée de l'Homme*. He remembers her grey smile and their pathetic relationship that influenced the remainder of his female encounters. Nourissier's and Rimbaud's description of their mothers are the split image of the same woman. Nourissier realises that his mother might have loved him: "Elle m'aimait sûrement plus - que je ne l'ai aimée..."(Guillon et al.1996: 23). She features in his books, "comme si j'étais incapable d'expliquer mes héros sans emprunter, pour leur donner une enfance, quelques traits à ma propre mère" (Guillon et al.1996: 24).

In Rimbaud's works, the female figure is most often a negative source of inspiration. Verstraëte (1980: 98-99) explains that, "Sans loi du père, le moi est incapable de s'émanciper de la mère: il est donc constamment menacé d'absorption, de perte d'identité." Madame Rimbaud expected her children to fulfill all her ambitions after her husband had left them; the woman that ruled his life would always be "femme de devoir, rigide, austère, inaccessible" (Verstraëte.1980: 99). It is certain that his mother played a vital role throughout his life as she constantly tried to mould her beliefs onto the young Rimbaud. His quest for love and his consequent involvement with Verlaine, could be directly linked to his isolation felt as a child. Little (1982: 71) supports these ideas, as he also believes Madame Rimbaud was very authoritarian and too harsh in the handling of her children.

In *Après le Déluge*, Rimbaud writes about "*Barbe Bleue*", the nasty husband who kills his wives because of their curiosity. Rimbaud uses the character as a way of expelling his mother from his existence. The mother figure also features in poems like *Angoisse* and *Elle* where she is an ominous presence in the poems. In *Lés Étrennes des Orphelins* we see the joyous moments shared with a mother, therefore her absence in his life is felt more strongly. Rimbaud identifies with the poem, "...de deux enfants le triste et doux chuchotement" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 8). Rimbaud felt like an orphan each time his mother locked him up in his room. It seems very likely that Rimbaud used many different characters in his poetry to portray his own emotions and dreams. In *Le Bateau Ivre* we find the image of a bird that symbolises freedom and safety, for when the chicks are huddled together in the nest, they feel

secure and warm, "...comme de beaux oiseaux que balancent les branches. Dorment leur doux sommeil plein de visions blanches," in *Les Poètes de Sept Ans* (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 12). These "visions blanches" are significant as they could symbolise the innocence and the creativity that are linked to Rimbaud's poetry as child-author, also indicating restlessness and an inability to sleep when his visions keep him awake at night.

Nourissier's mother is a "fantôme" of his past who is denied the right to exist in his life. He fears that she might influence the people around him that he loves: "...les pénétrer du poison dont elle possédait la formule" (Nourissier.1978: 102-103 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*). She is a negative source, yet she is also a major source of inspiration, as "...les interminables comptes de l'enfance, qui tiennent autant de place dans mes livres que mes amours ou mes maisons" (Nourissier.1978: 102-103). As with Rimbaud, Nourissier is simply looking for love and security. He became increasingly hostile towards his mother as he believed he could have been very different: "J'aurais été un autre homme" (Nourissier. 1978: 104). He shows disapproval and disdain towards his mother, as she was responsible for the person he had become. Nourissier is especially negative towards his mother because of the things she had kept from him thus creating distrust, "... ma mère ne m'a jamais dit un seul mot de son frère tué en 1913...non plus jamais parlé de son mari – mon père – après sa disparition. J'avais donc de solides raisons – et de plus fumeuses - de vouloir m'expliquer, de vouloir m'adresser à mes enfants: à toutes fins utiles, en somme" (Guillon et al.1996: 26).

His mother seemed to have developed obsessive behavioural patterns after the death of her husband. Nourissier was ordered to pray for his father. He was forced to conform to the only security she had left, or that she knew after the death of her husband: "Je m'étonne aujourd'hui que l'on ait alors toléré, encouragé même cette manifestation quotidienne à la fois morbide et ostentatoire" (Nourissier.1963: 27 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*). He underwent the same preaching as Rimbaud did.

Although he wishes he could have had more memories of his father, there is one advantage, his father remains a neutral and positive figure in his past. He could not have known what his future relationship with his father might have been. "On aime dans le noir, on aime à l'aveuglette, c'est la règle" (Nourissier.1963: 29). These joyous memories made the discontinuation of his life with a father as hard as in the case of Rimbaud. Nourissier recalls "une nuit ... je refusai de m'endormir, ayant

découvert l'absence de mon père et de ma mère partis visiter l'Exposition coloniale" (Nourissier. 1963: 47). He needed the same security and love that Rimbaud mentions in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*. Rimbaud was not as fortunate as Nourissier as he hardly knew his father who in any case showed only rejection towards his children.

Nourissier believes that his continual relapse back to the death of his father is necessary. He accepts it as not only a part of his life, but also a source that inspires him: "Je tombe dans les images de la mort de mon père, devenues somptueuses et précises, à force d'avoir été caressées..." (Nourissier. 1963: 48 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*).

Rimbaud's father had already become a phantom to him, long before his death. Rimbaud replaced the phantom father in his own spirit with silence, a silence he retained from his childhood. Rimbaud never explained this silence, except for on a few occasions, "pendant la période où les rares poètes amis ou partisan ... réveillant soudain l'image du père..." (Jouffroy.1991: 100).

Rimbaud's father was the ultimate symbol of liberty, the eternal voyager in Africa. He was independent from his wife and his children, in the same way that Rimbaud also decided to survive away from his family and especially from women. "La Guerre de Crimée" which lasted two years, separated Rimbaud's father even more from his family. One of the first poems that Rimbaud wrote in French, gives us an idea of the situation at home: in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins* Rimbaud describes the room, "...pleine d'ombre ... De deux enfants le triste et doux chuchotement. L'âpre bise d'hiver qui se lamente au seuil Souffle dans le logis, son haleine morose On sent, dans tout cela, qu'il manque quelque chose ... Il n'est donc point de mère à ces petits enfants, De mère au frais sourire..." (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 8-10).

In *Le Musée de l'Homme*, waves of emotions leave Nourissier adrift on a stormy sea. The death of his father forces him to grow up faster. He is more aware and more fearful of death and despite his sister's presence, he was overwhelmed by a sense of isolation.

In retrospect, Nourissier becomes sceptical. He is convinced that his mother is the guilty partner to his despondency. He blames her, directly and forcefully in *Le Musée de l'Homme*. She did not fulfil her motherly duties in many ways and so he reaches a

conclusive stage in his internal debate: "Elle me laissa en friche..." (Nourissier. 1978: 106). She abandoned him and blinded herself from his existence, which added to his misery. His childhood remains but a nasty spell cast to doom his adulthood forever: "Je m'aperçus que je n'avais rien oublié de cette enfance abandonnée au néant" (Nourissier. 1978: 106).

Nourissier's mother remarried, leaving Nourissier in a state of shock. He experienced destructive emotions and became even more aware of his distrust towards society. In *Mauvais Genre*, Nourissier continues his complaints concerning his mother. She made his life difficult: "...comme elle a pesé lourd dans ma vie!" (Guillon et al. 1996: 23).

Rimbaud's mother was similar to Nourissier's mother. Instead of experiencing joy as a child, he only experienced solitude. Rimbaud is a little orphan in despair in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins* when he says, "Votre cœur l'a compris - ces enfants sont sans mère" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 10). The house is so cold, that it seems the parents passed away. *Les Poètes de Sept Ans* create the same sombre space. Rimbaud's mother had once disappeared for a while in 1859 when Rimbaud was only four years old, "...ne masque-t-elle pas la disparition, réelle, prolongée depuis longtemps, d'un père beaucoup plus gravement manquant? Quel est, d'autre part le sens caché de cette grande armoire dont les enfants se souviennent avec émerveillement, armoire qui a pu être précisément fermée à clé après la disparition définitive du père en 1860, parce qu'elle contenait, par exemple, les objets, les manuscrits que le père n'a pas cherché à récupérer" (Jouffroy.1991: 103). That could also explain why Rimbaud often locked himself up in the cupboard in order to read peacefully. Perhaps he had discovered the true contents of the cupboard. Rimbaud, like any boy of his age was curious about two things: to know more about his father and the hidden contents of the cupboard.

Rimbaud complains about his youth in several poems, such as in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*: "Les petits sont tout seuls en la maison glacée; Orphelins de quatre ans" ... (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 10).

Almost every theme in Nourissier's books can be linked to his childhood as well. Although the theme of the house is not as definite in the works of Rimbaud, Nourissier uses the house as a perpetual cry to feel that he belongs. The absent father is a further reminder of his agony. A house gives a child a sense of belonging.

Nourissier in turn gives every house a personified soul. In *Le Musée de l'Homme* Nourissier refers to different types of houses. He hates an ugly house, as it reminds him of poverty and fear. Perhaps the house at Avocourt was a manifestation of death to him: "J'y suis presque né, on y a transporté le cadavre de mon père ... et j'y fait l'expérience de cette solitude profonde ..." (Nourissier.1978: 56).

Rimbaud did not believe that a house would be the solution to his happiness. His mother was too powerful a presence in their house; he therefore preferred an escape. Starkie (1982: 51) points out that Rimbaud lived with "...la surveillance rapprochée constante." The children were forever exposed to their mother's insecurities: "Jusqu'à l'âge de quinze et de seize ans respectivement, elle les attendra chaque jour à la grille de l'école pour leur éviter de traîner en route avec des fréquentations peu recommandables."

It is certain that the two authors both liked and disliked their mothers. Nourissier remembers some detail such as his mother's hands. They bore the scars of hard work. In *Lettre à mon Chien* (1975: 59) he recalls: "Nous étions pauvres ... Aussi Maman se livrait-elle, et son obstination me blessait, à toutes les besognes subalternes - elles me paraissaient telles – avec un goût plus marqué pour tout ce qui décapait, ponçait ses mains, ses doigts, qu'après les avoir vu rougir, je vis bientôt se bosseler et se tordre d'arthrite, avec une tristesse où, je ne sais pourquoi, entraient toujours un peu trop d'humiliation et jamais assez de gratitude". She was strong-willed and difficult, yet he needed her to fulfill his need for love.

In *Le Musée de l'Homme*, Nourissier is forthright about his childhood. He had the same problems as Rimbaud, "O mon enfance! Il me semble t'avoir déjà dix fois racontée. Comme j'ai eu honte de toi pourtant! Honte de notre solitude, de nos silences, de tes éternels dimanches, de tes éternels automnes, et de n'avoir pas osé alors crier ma révolte, mon envie étouffante de vivre, la haine qui montait en moi pour ceux qui m'entouraient, m'aimaient, sûrement à leur façon, et auxquels je me jurais de ne jamais ressembler ... on n'échappe pas à sa chair ni à son inconsciente mémoire" (Nourissier. 1978: 58-59).

Nourissier struggled with his appearance as a child and he did not feel as if he belonged: "Je ne me suis jamais senti un homme du Nord" (Nourissier. 1978: 69). He undertook the same journey as Rimbaud: "On voit où je veux en venir : dans ce voyage imaginaire de moi vers moi, tout me poussait vers ... l'Est" (Nourissier. 1978:

70). There is order in his life, also in his writing. Rimbaud is in a state of revolt that does not forestall misinterpretation. He hoped to transform himself through a better knowledge of himself. He hated his childhood years in Charleville, “Ma ville natale est supérieurement idiote entre les petites villes de province” (Bonnefoy. 1961: 6).

Rimbaud proves his genius as a child-writer. His style is sarcastic, mystical with a typical silence. His unnatural childhood contributed to an original style of poetry. Rimbaud, one of four children, enjoyed solitude as he struggled to fit in with his family: “Je n’ai jamais été de ce peuple-ci – je n’ai jamais été chrétien; je ne comprends pas les lois, je n’ai pas le sens moral...” (Bonnefoy. 1961: 6-8). The almost amoral Rimbaud prefers to be a child of the sun in *Soleil et Chair*: “Le Soleil, le foyer de tendresse et de vie, Verse l’amour brûlant à la terre ravie, ...Je regrette les temps de l’antique jeunesse...” (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 26).

For Nourissier, books were the solution to his quest. In a letter to me dated, 9 June 1998 (unpublished) he explains: “Quête du père disparu oui, et qui a duré longtemps. Envie féroce, aussi, d’échapper à mon milieu. Les livres m’ont été un moyen d’évasion (lecture) et de refondation (écriture)” and as far as it concerns his childhood in general, he says: “Elle fut triste et j’en ai conservé un triste souvenir”. Nourissier also needed to escape, but unlike Rimbaud, he did not take to the world as “un vagabond”.

Rimbaud dreamt of escaping, especially on Sundays when he heard the poor children playing in Bourbon Street while he had to read the Bible. His mother kept him in the house, believing that she was protecting her children. In *Les Poètes de Sept Ans* Rimbaud dreams of this freedom:

*Il craignait les blafards dimanches de décembre,
Où, pommadé, sur un guéridon d’acajou,
Il lisait une Bible à la tranchée vert-chou;
Des rêves l’oppressaient chaque nuit dans l’alcôve
Il n’aimait pas Dieu ; mais les hommes, qu’ au soir fauve,
Noirs, en blouse, il voyait rentrer dans le faubourg .*

(Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 76-78)

Rimbaud had developed a sense of God through his mother’s teachings. She made him believe that her education was the will of God too. It is not surprising that the

young Rimbaud disliked the church and God. They were symbols of fear, isolation and oppression that created the solitude that he abhorred. Nourissier's experience of God, especially as an adult was also rooted in his mother's preaching. He is indifferent to God, because he is forever silent in his presence.

With the rigid Catholic doctrines the two authors endured from their mothers, it is surprising to see that not one of the two continued a spiritual life as stipulated by the teachings of the Bible. Nourissier sees his religious life as a type of nostalgia, in a letter to me dated 9 June 1998 (unpublished) he puts it as follows: "Jusqu'à 1952 environ, nostalgie de la Foi. Ensuite, plus rien, le vide spirituel, et aucun besoin". Rimbaud often uses parables from the Bible as an inspiration, but it does not lead to a faithful belief in anything except for a love of Nature. He needed love, but failed to see the love of God. He praises the sun in several poems, as in *Aube*: "J'ai embrassé l'aube d'été" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 218). Rimbaud was fascinated by the paganistic ideas surrounding the cycles of Nature. Although he had an unhappy childhood, he could experience the advantages of his youthful energy. In *Les Poètes de Sept Ans*, we find a very confused child. He reads the Bible he is forced to read, but he dreams of "des soirs fauves". He rather dreams of "des prairies amoureuses" than spiritual love: "Il savourait surtout les sombres choses ... aux bois sidéraux ... Vertige, écoulements, déroutes et pitié! ... et pressentant violemment la voile!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 78). He thus already announces his travels as part of his vision.

Rimbaud distances himself from all that is familiar in *Une Saison en Enfer*. "Parents vous avez fait mon malheur et vous avez fait le vôtre ... je retournais à L'Orient et à la sagesse première et éternelle. Et l'ivrognerie! et le tabac! et l'ignorance! et les dénouements! – Tout cela est-il assez loin de la pensée de la sagesse de l'Orient, la patrie primitive?" (Jouffroy. 1991: 107)

The absence of the mother is the central theme in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*: "Les petits sommeillent tristement ... Les tout petits enfants ont le cœur si sensible!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 12). Rimbaud discusses the children's emotions in such a way that it could easily be any child other than himself.

In Nourissier's novel, his mother was always kept at a distance from his friends. She existed as "une mère fantôme" and appears in much of his literature. She is a character in *Un Petit Bourgeois*, *Une Histoire Française*, and *Allemande*. Both

Nourissier and his mother could never talk about their problems to each other and therefore lived in silence: "Plus de vingt ans nous avons donc vécu, elle et moi, dans le mensonge. Mensonge par omission. Mensonge par prudence" (Nourissier: 1978: 103-*Le Musée de l'Homme*). The female figure often appearing in the poetry of Rimbaud, is most likely his mother, sketched as an aloof character: "Les tendresses, profondes, De l'enfant se jetaient sur cet étonnement. C'était bon. Elle avait le bleu regard, - qui ment!" (Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 76). Jouffroy (1991: 105) also talks of Madame Rimbaud as an untruthful person: "Ce mensonge de la mère, inopinément dénoncé par la flèche du tiret, n'est-il pas celui, central, qu'elle a décidé de faire sur le père qu'elle fait passer pour mort, alors qu'il vit, qu'il a toujours vécu ailleurs? Dès que le mensonge maternel est dénoncé, Rimbaud passe, comme par hasard, et sans transition, à ses rêves de voyages extraordinaires..."

Rimbaud's parents were responsible for his revolt and for his fears. He blames them for the mistakes they had made. Despite his emotions, he shows pity for his mother, as in a letter to Izambard (1871), "...écrivez à ma pauvre mère pour la consoler." Rimbaud continued writing to his mother until his death. Nourissier also wrote to his mother on special occasions, but it was only out of guilt. It serves as evidence of the emptiness he must have felt. He played the role of the obedient son while she abandoned him. She was so absorbed in her own misery that Nourissier felt deprived. Would he ever know love and tenderness that he had never been taught or shown? He could well be doomed to a continued life of indifference. Had his mother not realised what effect his father's death had on him? "Un père m'eût-il occupé le cœur - admiration, agacement, révolte, retrouvailles, selon le cheminement classique - toute ma morale en eût été changée ... Sans doute redoutait-on que la mort de Papa ne m'eût ébranlé?" (Nourissier.1978: 104-105). He would not hurt his mother on purpose for he knew that she loved him in her way. Their pitiable relationship only led to further rejection of his mother in her old age.

Madame Picolet in *Une Histoire Française* is a definite transposition of Madame Nourissier. Through a transformation of Nourissier's own mother into Madame Picolet, it makes it easier for the author to be honest about her. Patrice Picolet had already been accustomed to her ways: "Je connais cette combinaison j'ai souvent discerné chez ma mère de la tristesse, de la colerè, de la détresse, de la satisfaction, mais jamais de chaleur. Elle a traversé tous les sentiments dans le même froid. J'imagine que c'est « plus fort qu'elle » , elle glace ce qu'elle touche ... elle plonge

pour des jours et des jours dans une solitude aggravée de rancune, d'étonnements" (Nourissier. 1965: 47-48).

In *Enfance III* Rimbaud's final phrase is striking. It shows his experience of his childhood in general: "Il y a enfin... quand l'on a faim et soif... quelqu'un qui vous chasse." (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 216-217).

Nourissier and Rimbaud both feel the need for maternal protection. In *Enfance*, Rimbaud articulates the childhood in innovative ways. Macklin (1996: 46) emphasises the connections between Rimbaud's exploration of the world of the child and his search for a new idiom. Rimbaud's idea of a family replaces the traditional idea of a family. While Nourissier searched for a traditional family, Rimbaud needed diversion from the confinement of family, as well as love and eternal youth. Nourissier liked families with an authoritarian father, he could even be a simpleton, and a smart mother: "Je les voulais, mes familles, nombreuses, protestantes, plutôt provinciales" (Nourissier.1963: 70 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*). He did not take long to integrate himself into his friends' families, giving himself the status of an orphan. The theme of the orphan is also repeated in many of Rimbaud's poems. As with Rimbaud, Nourissier had no problem with making himself at home, wherever he felt welcome. At the time of the war, widows surrounded him and children in mourning which strengthened his will to have a family. Rimbaud seeks a solution in *Le Bateau Ivre*, but he looks at a limitless horizon as part of his adventure.

Nourissier gives details on his father's death: "Elle a été si brutale, si spectaculaire, et vécue par moi dans des conditions si dramatiques – nous étions seuls, lui et moi, au cinéma, quand il s'est écroulé dans l'obscurité qu'elle a en quelque sorte décoloré, assourdi tous les autres épisodes de mon enfance" (Guillon et al.1996: 27). As with Rimbaud, the death of the father figure means growing up much faster, it makes life a cruel, unfair experience: "Cette mort m'a affligé, ma vie durant d'un manque d'élan vers la vie, de goût pour la vie" (Guillon et al.1996: 27).

Nourissier's life as a child would be changed forever thereafter, he would have no motivation as there was no need for him to make an effort after this disappointment. One of his mental quests in life would be the hypothetical question, what his life would have been if he should have had his father. This perpetual longing to know, would remain an unanswered question for the rest of his life.

He is unable to escape the ghost, a shadow of his past, which is repeated in his vocabulary. He play-acted the role of "un garçon heureux" (Nourissier.1978: 114-117: *Le Musée de l'Homme*). This isolated himself even more into a similar coldness to Rimbaud's isolation. He was estranged from his mother and his father and he built walls around him in order to protect him. His writing is valuable therapy, especially with his mother now in her old age as he knows: "Elle ne lira ni ce chapitre ni ce livre"(Nourissier.1978: 119-120). The continual interrogation of the shadow of his mother is frustrating. He criticises her as well as his sister, and even society, as he never belonged. His mother with her silences was indifferent to his doubts, and now his book is the only truth that exists. Perhaps he is as misunderstood and as lonely as Rimbaud was. He is also alone with his problems and he becomes an "old child," using his mother the way she used him, yet he could never replace his spoiled youth (Nourissier. 1978: 114-117).

A paragraph in *Le Bar de L'Escadrille* reminds us of a similar situation in the life of the author: "Voilà vingt ans que m'occupe l'amour de maman. C'est vers mes sept ou huit ans que j'ai senti en moi cette énorme bouffée de passion me gonfler, me soulever...Gosse comme tous les gosses j'avais connu les terreurs du réveil <<Et si elle n'était plus là? Si elle était morte, partie, transformée! Si elle n'allait plus me reconnaître? >> J'étais recroquevillé dans mon lit, le drap sur la tête, et je tremblais. Je retardais le moment de l'appeler..."(Nourissier.1997: 49). This is proof of his insecurity, without a father and without a loving mother.

Nourissier and Rimbaud both had disintegrating families. Without family or a friend, Rimbaud is deprived of a rich, imaginative realm. In Rimbaud's *Comédie de la Soif*, Macklin (1996:52) describes "la soif" as an unquenchable metaphysical thirst. It symbolises his needs as a child, his life and death will not lead to the conventional end of flowers at the 'cimetière' but to a more spectacular extinction and rebirth somewhere else: "Mourir aux fleuves barbares...Aller où boivent les vaches"(Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975:130).

Rimbaud's father died away from home; thus, the emotional repercussions were not as directly felt as they were with Nourissier. Rimbaud did not even see his father on his deathbed; his father seemed very little interested in his offspring, which serves as an explanation as to why his description of his father differs so much from reality. Le Hardouin (1962: 26) explains that Captain Rimbaud had blond hair and blue eyes, while Rimbaud described his father in his ninth year as black-haired with dark eyes.

Nourissier was very interested in the physical appearance of his father and they were much closer to each other than Rimbaud and his father.

Rimbaud and Nourissier tried to find paternal replacements. Rimbaud had Verlaine, Charles Bretagne and Georges Izambard while Nourissier had Aragon and his friends' fathers.

Rimbaud gave up ordinary living: "J'ai fini par provoquer d'atroces résolutions d'une mère aussi inflexible que soixante-treize administrations à casquettes de plomb"(Letter to Paul Demeny: 28 August 1871: Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 312). His mother and the sea are possibly closely linked themes, because the sea continually rejects him, as does his mother. Nourissier experienced the same type of rejection and his love for his mother was merely respect. As an adult he still felt like a child in her presence. He lied about her through omission until 1953.

Education

Rimbaud's true quest for knowledge and a proper education can be followed through his childhood well into adulthood: "Tout en continuant d'étudier les langues du pays – il finira par parler, en plus de l'Arabe, l'Omoro, le Galla, savoir même écrire des lettres en Amhara..." (Jouffroy.1991: 243). Apparently, he was writing day and night while he stayed in Harar.

Jouffroy (1991: 256) is evidently impressed by Rimbaud's genius especially for a person that had suffered so much as a child. He motivates his views: "... il a cru à la science ... sa liberté libre, son bien, son mal et son beau ne font qu'un..." Until his death, Rimbaud remained the adventurous traveller, forever reading and writing.

As for Nourissier, he also channels anger against established institutions, much like the young Rimbaud. "Contre les enseignements, l'apprentissage, l'imprégnation qui supposaient le lieu, l'époque, la classe" (Guillon et al. 1996: 21).

Rimbaud could have been a universal believer: he was Christian, pagan, catholic, blasphemer, sane and neurotic all in one. Sometimes his mental state is deluded by appearances of the world around him. His dreamlike state expresses the subconscious, creating a super reality. Nourissier is also ambiguous about his

religion. In *Musée de l'Homme* he describes his appreciation for religion: "Le côté « protestant » a aussi été important, par sa sévérité, un rien de raideur" (Guillon et al. 1996: 44). At a stage, after the war, he became a Catholic again although not so willing: "Catholique, j'étais de formation ... Je détestais ce catholicisme dans lequel on m'avait élevé, qui consistait à envoyer les enfants à l'église sans y aller soi-même. Ma mère me répondait toujours qu'elle n'avait « pas le temps »" (Guillon et al. 1996: 84). Perhaps his mother's memory confused him, as she forced religion upon him. Nourissier's wife (1949) tormented and swayed him on a spiritual level with her fervent religious beliefs too. He consequently brought his two sons up in the catholic tradition. He kneeled down for three years without success and then turned towards complete agnostic lucidity.

Nourissier's mother never inspired him, he never dreamt of a higher education, and there was no father either, yet he says: "Peut-être est-ce d'ailleurs grâce à ce temps ... de latence, que je suis devenu écrivain..." (Guillon et al. 1996: 34). A pitfall can provoke joy, as happiness is rarely an inspiration during its stage.

Nourissier's socialisation at school is less inspiring than Rimbaud's experience: "Les lycées que je fréquentai alors, et mes classes, furent d'une neutralité étonnante" (Guillon et al. 1996: 37). The teachers' influence was much less than the German presence with the SS, the war machinery, the violence and the fear. Nourissier admits that he did not quite understand what was happening: "... l'antisémitisme n'avait aucun sens pour mes copains ni pour moi ... Nous y étions ... indifférents: c'était l'air du temps – d'un temps pourri:" (Guillon et al. 1996: 38). Fortunately Nourissier was culturally fairly well-adapted, because some of his friends' houses were the arena for talks on books and concerts: "...où l'on riait, où régnait un autre climat que chez moi"(Guillon et al. 1996: 44).

Nourissier does not blame his mother for their material poverty, but much more so for his narrow upbringing: " Notre vie était incroyablement étroite" (Guillon et al. 1996: 49). Rimbaud's mother was very ambitious for her son, so that she even asked his teacher M. Lhéritier, to give Arthur some extra lessons. Lhéritier was a kind man with a love for poetry and his assistance was beneficial to Rimbaud's love for Greek and Latin. He inspired Rimbaud to write his own verses. Rimbaud was not easily accepted at school, because his mother forbade him to participate in any activities that would spoil his clothes. He wrote poetry as compensation for the continual reprimands to which he was exposed at home. He wrote poems in Latin on his love

for Nature: “ La contemplation de la nature écrit-il, lui permet de surmonter l'ennui que lui causent l'école et les mornes leçons de ses professeurs”(Starkie.1982: 58). Rimbaud soon became an admired pupil and school became his entire zone of happiness. No matter what he did, “...rien n'adoucissait les yeux de sa mère; les succès ne semblaient pas lui faire plaisir”(Starkie.1982: 59).

Nourissier's teachers were not as influential as Rimbaud's teachers, but one teacher, Jean Levaillant, however, inspired his pupils to read Mallarmé, Valéry and Baudelaire. “Cet homme doux mais impérieux portait du feu...Il nous offrit Baudelaire, Nerval, Mallarmé, Valéry, et une forte dose de Victor Hugo...Il nous jeta à la lecture comme à une bataille” (Nourissier.1963: 110). Nourissier was once asked what he planned on becoming, and without reflection, he said that he wanted to be a writer. Levaillant did not leave it at that; he inspired Nourissier to find a recipe for life that would work for him. His vocation was a dream at first and then eventually became a reality (Guillon et al. 1996: 67). This would be the solution to his “plate, atone” childhood. Nourissier continues that, “... les gens qui choisissent un métier de création souffrent sans doute, à l'origine, d'une boiterie plus accentuée” (Guillon et al. 1996: 71).

Nourissier proved to be talented for writing while he was still at the “Collège Notre-Dame” in 1938: “Le professeur de lettres des cinquièmes, un certain monsieur Petit, reçut ma confidence. Il fût bientôt l'unique lecteur du poème écrit...La pièce, en vers réguliers, avouait une forte influence d'Edmond Rostand...Il fallut attendre 1940 et mon essai sur l'état militaire pour que la littérature reprît pied dans ma vie” (Nourissier.1963: 197). Nourissier was a mannerly pupil and he always received diplomas. He did not contemplate writing books, but: “C'est la grisaille des jours et l'envie de leur donner de la couleur qui me décidèrent à écrire. L'ennui inventa la littérature” (Nourissier.1963: 198). The patience, perseverance, discipline and naivety required for writing, intrigues the author. The most frightening part of the process is its fragility. Nourissier calls each book “l'enfant du miracle” as it is an exhausting process, therefore one must love writing: “À force d'avoir voulu courir deux proies je me retrouvais entouré d'ombres” (Nourissier. 1963: 203).

Nourissier's school years were not as influential as with the young Rimbaud: “Et toute ma vie a découlé de ce choix, avec ses gênes et ses silences. Le collège Notre-Dame, les bonnes notes en rédaction, l'Histoire de France illustrée et racontée aux enfants de M. Jacques Bainville, le collège de Valois ... les femmes qui ne se

rougissaient pas les lèvres et ne sortaient pas sans chapeau, la peur de vivre, la peur des hommes ... des Vosges vers lesquelles mon père, chaque été nous emmenait pèleriner au Vieil-Armand et au Champ du Feu" (Nourissier.1978: 61 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*). Nourissier is reflecting back on this period of his life and on the passions he had developed: "Je sais aujourd'hui que je ne trouverai jamais la maison que je cherche, jamais je ne l'habiterai, jamais je ne laisserai nulle part pousser mes racines. Je ne cesserai pourtant pas d'investir dans un lieu, l'inépuisable espérance d'apaisement qui me harcèle, entre quelques murs réputés chargés de souvenirs, dans un jardin clos" (Nourissier.1978: 62). He could not find the happiness he yearned for. A house only helped him to control his fears.

Rimbaud's brilliance was evident from the time he attended the Institution Rossat (1861-65). He enjoyed reading as a favourite pastime, something his mother was opposed to. Levi (1992: 524) sees Hugo and Desbordes-Valmore as influential people in Rimbaud's life. In 1869 he continued his revolt against his mother by reading *Le Parnasse Contemporain* and getting his *Les Étrennes des Orphelins* published in 1870. His close friend and teacher, George Izambard, motivated Rimbaud to read books like *Les Misérables* to which his mother objected (Levi. 1992: 524). He also developed an interest in left-wing republican politics and was further influenced by Banville and Leconte de Lisle. Rimbaud wrote poetry as a form of revolt. His writing allowed him an escape for all his dreams and desires. Dreams and fantasy created his happiness and his comfort as in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*: "...l'ange de berceaux ... met un rêve joyeux, Un rêve si joyeux ... Ils se croient endormis dans un paradis de rose..." (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 12). Rimbaud's admiration for his mother soon disappears when a fairy comforts him instead.

Nourissier's writing is not so much a war or a revolt as he is tracing his roots, trying to find his happiness at becoming a writer. He is honest with himself as a positive therapeutic process to liberate him completely as did Rimbaud through writing. Bernard (1960: I-II) sees the formation of Rimbaud's poetry as a creation of his personality. Rimbaud liberates himself from the Parnassien influence and creates in accordance with his genius. At the age of eight, he is writing fantasy and by the age of twelve, he writes Latin verses. He has a magical power with words, yet not even words could liberate him from his religious upbringing. The Catholic influence is found in several poems, such as in *Mauvais Sang*. If Rimbaud did not learn about the doom and damnation in the Bible, he would not have struggled so much to release himself from the chains of sin. His mother's religious sermons and baptism

made him go through *Une Saison en Enfer*. A Paganist Rimbaud prefers the love found in Nature, for he does not want to feel enslaved by a religion, as explained in *Mauvais Sang*: "Je n'en finirais pas de me revoir dans ce passé. Mais toujours seul; sans famille ... Je ne me vois jamais dans les conseils du Christ..." (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 176). Rimbaud finds liberation through conscious arguing and revolt.

Regularly, on Thursdays, Nourissier's mother took him to his friend Jacques for a day out. They stayed away an entire day as the travelling took much of the day. The children played while the mothers chatted. They invented their own fantasies: "Indiens, conducteurs tous de modèles réduits de torpédos" (Guillon et al.1996: 53). Rimbaud also lived in his fantasies as in *Roman*: "Le cœur fou Robinsonne à travers les romans, - lorsque dans la clarté d'un pale réverbère, Passe une demoiselle aux petits airs charmants" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 52) and in *Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de Fleurs* (IV) where he overthrows all logic: "Trouve des Chardons cotonneux Dont dix ânes aux yeux de braises Traivaillent à filer les noeuds! Trouve des fleurs qui soient des chaises!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 112).

Nourissier had learned to observe and to listen whenever his family was around. He blindly accepted this life, showing much courage. This life showed no promise of hope and no opportunities, yet he struggled on: "Des exemples autour de moi dans mon enfance étaient si médiocres, si bornés que m'en contenter eût été suicidaire" (Nourissier. 1978: 187 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*). Rimbaud showed the same courage, but he took it further through revolt. Nourissier was restricted on many levels of his life, because his family was poor: "Nous étions pauvres non seulement d'argent mais de cœur, d'amitiés, de traditions, de règles" (Nourissier.1978: 189). He feels deprived, even bitter, but he does not allow the lack of education to influence his adulthood too negatively.

The Nourissiers never listened to music, they did not read, and they were taught to fear anyone placed superior to them. Nourissier learned to fear the rich and all strangers. Only much later did he use these experiences as a creative energy in his works. Rimbaud used his dreams and his poetry as an early escape already as a child and through his child genius, he produces novel ideas. His fears manifest themselves as hard realities, as Johnson (1974: 175-177) explains: "It is believed that geniuses are often estranged from neighbours and alienated from their mates during childhood."

Nourissier's adulthood is an alternation of revolt and acceptance. His revolt against his mother started with his involvement in the riding-school he had joined after school. He neglected his studies and turned to the Catholic religion of his childhood again. He explains this period of his life as a self-punishment as he feared Life in general. The religious stage passed: "Un peu plus tard et à peine le chiral enterré, le catholicisme m'enlisera pour trois années dans ses marais ... peur des vagabondages du péché..." (Nourissier.1963: 147 -*Un Petit Bourgeois*). Rimbaud also struggled with the idea of sin he was taught as a child. He feared the damnation that was preached and turned to liberation through Paganism. Nourissier again was very ignorant, he never had the exposure Rimbaud had and none of his teachers fulfilled the role, as Izambard or Delahaye had done as mentors in Rimbaud's childhood education. To prove his ignorance, Nourissier explains that they never knew of the "antisémitisme," which would have exposed to him the "racisme hitlérien" (Nourissier.1963: 103).

Rimbaud's provincial timidity disappears in Paris. As with Nourissier, Rimbaud finds liberation in Paris, but he also sees a false intellectuality. After a visit to the Louvre, Rimbaud remarks that, "...ces tableaux célèbres sont des débris. Si on les compare à la littérature, la peinture a une infériorité que je trouve définitive: elle ne dure pas" (Jouffroy. 1991: 188).

Rimbaud's lyrical passion is his life, but neither his mother, nor Verlaine could appreciate it. He feels alone in his struggle against the world where he is a scapegoat for the ordinary citizen. His unconventional words for ordinary situations were misinterpreted and not understood. A diversity of needs is met In Nature. Rimbaud educated himself largely as he had very adequate role models. Even his homosexual relationships with Verlaine can be seen as an attempt to see life differently. It is through these experiences that Rimbaud is liberated. He had to capture the maximum of force and science.

Childhood

Rimbaud and Nourissier faced reality in their early childhood. Fear of death and the reality of their isolation led to a magnificent world of metaphors and personifications. Delas (1986: 68) in his analysis of Rimbaud's poetry, makes a valuable statement which could be applied to both Nourissier and Rimbaud's works. Delas quotes Jean-

Jacques Rousseau to explain: "Je puis bien dire que je ne commençai de vivre que quand je me regardai comme un homme mort." Death supplies the writers with the rebirth of a fantastic observation of reality, even a reconstruction of their own worlds. Death gives a new dimension to their writing.

Delas (1968: 68) theorises: "Faire être, faire vivre ce qui n'est pas, ce qui est mort, peut-être n'y a-t-il jamais eu d'autre urgence en poésie!" Rimbaud succeeded in the creation of a unity between the material and the spiritual world using symbols. Nourissier gave objects of his past a life through his writing. Rimbaud's childhood inspired him to use symbols while Nourissier used metaphors. Their grief is a necessary stimulant for their creative writing. Creation out of despair often leads to despair, because of the impossibility of sustaining the vision. Nourissier's past is vague: "Non passé de cette masse d'oubli, amorphe, silencieuse" (Guillon et al. 1996: 18). His childhood was full of appearances. In *Le Musée de l'Homme*, Nourissier tells of his dreams for money he never had. He never dared to make a first move and he feared strangers, thieves and domestic workers..."les chats et d'une façon générale toutes les espèces d'artistes" (Nourissier. 1978: 190-191).

War

As Nourissier's father and Rimbaud's father were both in the military, they both knew the war as children. To make things worse, Madame Rimbaud was a rather militaristic person herself. She treated her children as if they belonged to her own, private army. People always stared at the children lined up, holding hands upon visits to the market or when going to church (Bonney. 1961: 6-8).

Nourissier was influenced by the war and he writes of war in several of his works. In a letter to me dated 9 June 1998 (unpublished) he explains: "Avant juin 1940 j'appartenais à un grand pays, qui avait une longue histoire, le sens de l'honneur, etc. Après la défaite et l'Occupation allemande mon pays était humilié, après 1944, déshonoré par les haines." In novels such as *Allemande*, Nourissier recounts incidents of his past. It is the war, opposing political thoughts and the changes that took place, especially in Paris that are of value to the reader who tries to grasp the impact of the situation on society. Nourissier is such a child of wartime for whom the liberation of Paris was just another transformation: "Sans doute, à cette époque, mon père m'a-t-il gravement manqué. S'il avait été là, il m'eût parlé ... il se fût passé

quelque chose. Je n'aurais pas vécu cette épreuve dans l'environnement mou, élastique, prudent qui était le mien" (Guillon et al. 1996: 48).

Rimbaud lived in the Ardennes during the war (± 1870). He hated war, as this meant he could not get any new books from Paris. In *Le Dormeur du Val* he sketches a scene of War as in some of his other poems, such as *Mauvais Sang*: " Plus de vagabonds, plus de guerres vagues"(Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975:176). Rimbaud longed for peace, as his life had been exposed to war and its brutality. *Mauvais Sang* provides some detail as Brunel (1997: 66) points out: "La biographie offre non seulement une clef, mais plusieurs clefs: la blessure causée par l'invasion prussienne, le désir de <<quitter l'Europe aux anciens parapets>>, la hantise du service militaire, le sentiment de savoir interdites pour lui ... l'absence d'une main amie ou même d'un compagnon."

Nourissier writes about his war experiences in Paris through a character called Patrice in *Une Histoire Française*. Patrice hated the restrictions that were laid before them as children, none of it made any sense. France changed, ... "la France acariâtre et fatiguée, qu'il est si difficile d'aimer." (Nourissier.1965: 87 - *Une Histoire Française*). The character Patrice was afraid of the war. He lacked a sense of security, especially without his father and so he pretended to be the man in the house: "Et rien de mieux Patrice dévora dans les journaux, avec une avidité de père de famille, les consignes de prudence données par les autorités" (Nourissier.1965: 104). He had to grow up faster, as he is expected to be a man in the house for his mother: "Patrice avait vaguement honte de sa promotion ... ce côté petit vieux qu'il prenait ainsi installé en face de l'accablement de maman" (Nourissier.1965: 121).

It is difficult for a child to accustomise himself to death and destruction. Nourissier's later interest in cemeteries is a sign of his deep-rooted fears. He uses these poverties of the past as a metamorphosis to win his own battle. Rimbaud's *Guerre* is also a return to himself, hinting at a personal war. Ruff (1968: 235) refers *Guerre* to his personality: "Sa personnalité formée par les acquisitions de l'expérience, d'une part, et de l'autre soumise aux pressions qu'elle subit, et ce destin est alors comparé à "une guerre, de droit ou de force, de logique imprévue."

For Nourissier, the years 1940 up to 1942 were influenced by German propaganda: "Heureusement, les Allemands inspiraient peur et détestation, qui sont bonnes

conseillères.” These themes are repeated in *En Avant Calme et Droit* and *Allemande*.

Fears: Dreams and Reality

Rimbaud's anxiety is somewhat unnatural and to the extreme as expressed through the shipwreck in *Le Bateau Ivre*, "...je navigue désormais dans des eaux où les naufrages se multiplient" (Nourissier.1990: 17). Death multiplies its members as in some of Nourissier's works.

Nourissier's art is a solitary quest where he uses his fears as inspiration: "C'est moins le passage qui nous obsède que le chemin vers le passage. Je cherche désespérément, avec mes personnages de vieux messieurs, à leur inventer un apaisement auquel je souhaite croire et que je souhaite partager" (Guillon et al. 1996: 321). *Un Petit Bourgeois*, one of his major works, illustrates his struggle to cope and his will to survive: "Mais je dois continuer si j'espère m'en purger une bonne fois" (Nourissier. 1963: 16). Nourissier's fear of death runs twofold as his father's heart problem became his own reality when doctors warned him about his weaknesses. He was haunted by death, prohibited from cycling too much and climbing stairs that were too steep at an age (fifteen) when most children only thought about playing. The fear transgresses into indifference, later in his adulthood, "...la sagesse et son contraire, le régime et la bouteille" (Nourissier. 1963: 14). Nourissier's indifference towards death is perhaps his way of overcoming the threat. Several characters are buried in the course of the novel, *Le Bar de L'Escadrille*, "...pour mériter, la mort venue, cet hommage ostentatoire. On peut le griller, maintenant, il ne servira plus" (Nourissier.1997: 20).

Nourissier also grants himself the right to dream and fantasize as a way of handling fear: "Je suis un homme moyen qui possède les moyens de rêver... Il ne faut pas croire qu'un peu de fantaisie soit interdite aux hommes"(Nourissier.1968: 100) yet Nourissier's dreams are not as important in his work as are Rimbaud's dreams in his poetry. Rimbaud uses dreams as a part of reality while Nourissier clearly makes a distinction between dreams and reality. Nourissier feels young again in his dreams where he sees his adult body belonging to the child he was: "Je me sens vivre à l'intérieur d'un corps presque juvénile ou de moins sans âge, mais la silhouette que de temps à autre j'aperçois est maintenant celle d'un homme très mûr: une sorte de

stéréotype du "vieux monsieur" de mon enfance" (Nourissier. 1978: 296). His wish to be a newborn adult is a subtle manifestation of his fears.

Nourissier quotes Jacques Chardonne in *Le Musée de l'Homme*: "Tout finit bien, puisque tout finit" and he repeats the idea in *Le Maître de Maison*. He found some comfort in these words, considering his fear of ageing. He writes about death and its unpleasant characteristics: "Tout au plus pourrait-on dire que la longue fréquentation des mots – avec ce qu'elle impose d'humilité, d'intuition de l'ombre - fait des écrivains les familiers de la mort ... Heureux celui à qui suffisent les rêves" (Nourissier. 1978: 83-*Le Musée de l'Homme*). His father's death created such fear that he could not even enter a sick person's room, which was aggravated by his mother's illness in her old age. His mother was the walking symbol of death.

Nourissier's fear of death as well as ageing can be compared to Rimbaud's quest for eternity. In both cases, they want to continue life and their creative capacity. Nyssen (1969: 13) found through his research that writers are concerned with the last part of our lives; showing an intellectual courage to overcome the problem: "Mais, sans s'attarder déjà à d'autres rapports entre eux, on voit qu'ils ont en commun d'une part le respect du métier dans l'écriture et d'autre part la conviction que celle-ci leur donne accès à une sorte d'éternité. Ils écrivent pour arrêter le temps." Rimbaud's poem *L'Éternité* shows a desperate attempt to capture time, repeated in *Alchimie du Verbe* with almost the same wording:

Elle est retrouvée!
Quoi?- L'Éternité.
C'est la mer mêlée
Au soleil.

(Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975:198)

In the same poem, he refers to "Mon âme éternelle" as a further consolation.

Soon after his father's death in 1936, Nourissier woke up one day believing that his entire family was dead. Often in his books there are situations which remind him of past events and the related fears. Each time he faces important problems, these fears tend to reappear. He then crosses his desert alone feeling unsure in unfamiliar surroundings. His mother had spent six months in full mourning after his father's death, all dressed in black, followed by eighteen months "en demi deuil" wearing only grey, white and mauve. This might explain his obsession with half-light colours in his

novels. Even his bed was moved to his mother's room after his father's death. She clung to him, unaware of his own suffering. Rimbaud's mother showed similar possessive behaviour, only aggravating the feeling of isolation and the concern with death of the young Rimbaud as seen in *Enfance*. These are expressed from the start in the poem: "la petite morte", "la jeune maman trépassé", "l'auberge vide", "les vieux ... enterrés" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 216-217). In the same poem, "la petite morte" refers to the death of his sister Vitalie. Fowlie (1965: 9) confirms the mother's role in his misery: "His mother isolated him in feelings of rebellion and hate". Rimbaud was alone all of his childhood especially with his father who left the house only hours before his birth. He only returned two years later and then thereafter never again. Rimbaud experienced rejection and feared isolation for the rest of his life.

Rimbaud is afraid of becoming an ordinary man, upset by the tiresome logic of the world around him with its wars and injustice. This is expressed in *Guerre* and *Angoisse*: "Se peut-il qu'Elle me fasse pardonner les ambitions continuellement écrasées - qu'une fin aisée répare les âges d'indigence - qu'un jour de succès nous endorme sur la honte de notre inhabilité fatale?" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 220). The "Elle" is ambiguous but functional and could refer equally to his mother and to his anguish. The equivalence between the two words can be easily understood, as his mother continues to exert her influence over him.

Illuminations, with a poem such as *Aube*, show Rimbaud's fears of a sudden, unpredictable loss of imaginative experiences. Rimbaud fears losing his special gift upon entering the adult world. This is the result of his preoccupation with the broken family where he often portrays the character of the dislocated, isolated child. He feared that the severed connections with his own family would lead to abandonment. He was faced with a premature independence, as was Nourissier after the death of the paternal figure.

Nourissier fears the ongoing flow of time, as it brings him closer to death. Time holds the key to death "... comme je te hais, ô mort" (Nourissier.1968: 198 - *Le Maître de Maison*). Nourissier disliked changes as a child, because he feared the unknown. Boredom and silence were all negative experiences for him, however through an improvement of himself and his writing, he feels free and in control: "Je ne me suis jamais inventé un avenir. Je ne rêvais pas de vie ... j'ai laissé la vie couler vers moi à sa façon" (Nourissier.1978: 302-304). If he could have enforced the power of

dreams, he would have been able to experience the same type of freedom as Rimbaud did.

Rimbaud's fear of death is expressed in *Enfance*. It adds a sombre tone to "a displaced soul compelled to live the life of a bohemian in search of a surrogate family" (Macklin.1996: 55). In *Enfance II* it is again the theme of death: "C'est elle, la petite morte, derrière les rosiers. – La jeune maman trépassée descend le perron ... les vieux qu'on a enterrés tout droits dans le remparts ..." Nothing can console for this loss, not even "une éternité de chaudes larmes" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975:216).

Anxiety is at the very source of the two writers' lives. Time carries them towards death. Nourissier fears death as Death takes place in time, while Rimbaud fears a loss of creative instincts with age. They are both enslaved by time as their worst enemy yet, in lucidity one can easily perceive life around you to be ridiculous. All of us have an appetite for clarity, yet Rimbaud's horizons and his quest lead to the unknown, and Nourissier is unsure of his fate. They create dream spaces, rooted deep within their imagination.

Man would be incomplete without his fears, for without fears, there can be no sense of happiness. Rimbaud feared failure, as did Nourissier: "J'ai peur de manquer de force, d'élan, de résistance, mais pas de devenir indulgent envers mon travail, ni de renoncer à l'ambition de mener chaque texte jusqu'au degré de perfection qui m'est accessible" (Guillon et al. 1996: 296).

Rimbaud's fear of the loss of his inspiration is expressed in *Matin*: "N'eus-je pas une fois une jeunesse aimable, héroïque, fabuleuse, à écrire sur des feuilles d'or, - trop de chance!" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 206). The mystic experience commences with silence, and there is an underlying silent fear in many of his poems.

Silence and Solitude

Both Nourissier and Rimbaud experienced isolation, silence and solitude as children because of their individual situations, and because of the absent father figure, yet they both needed these at times in order to create. Rimbaud's poetry written in isolation (at the time that he locked himself up in the granary at Roche to write) is a confessional style of writing, which relates to his trauma, as do Nourissier's autobiographical novels.

Nourissier, in the silence of his house, is in harmony with his solitude, especially when night falls: "Je me suis forcé au plus profond et au plus sourd de moi, dans une sorte d'alerte ou de pétrification dont je ne supporte plus qu'on me tire à l'improviste" (Nourissier.1978: 214 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*). Nourissier then works in his study, in a creative capacity, "Qui s'aviserait de douter que dans le silence de mon bureau je ne sois occupé aux soins minutieux requis par le texte, l'ergotage langagier, la délicieuse correction? Téléphone débranché, porte fermée à clé parfois. Forteresse imprenable ou somnolence bien protégée?" (Nourissier.1996: 148). Rimbaud also struggled with his isolation and solitude and he often found himself in a delirious state. He is the boat at sea, without direction or destination. A maze trapped him in his own thoughts where his isolation is a spiritual presence at least, as he is master of silence in *Enfance*. His silence is shared with the presence of Nature: "À la lisière de la forêt – les fleurs de rêve tintent, éclatent, éclairent ... Des fleurs magiques bourdonnaient." (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 214, 216).

In addition, a silence can be explained as a keeping back of information or the mystery in the author's writing. In *Un Petit Bourgeois* Nourissier has to determine the boundaries of his silences, as the autobiography is a potential tomb stone for his children. He remains silent about aspects of his life, but with *Un Petit Bourgeois* he decided to voice his silence as a witness of his childhood. Nourissier searches his essence for he needs to be reborn as an author and thus reflects back on his childhood in several of his books. The memory he desperately wants to portray is that of a truthful man who did not wear too many masks in his life. It is a portrayal of the truth as a source of advice, but evidently, we know that Nourissier could not have said everything. By sharing his past, he is expanding his world and he is attempting to shape his bad memories into admirable memories for his children: "Il a essayé de manger le morceau"(Guillon et al. 1996: 100).

Rimbaud's silence was spontaneous which makes it more difficult to interpret. He is both master and slave of his silence as in *Vies*: "Dans un grenier où je fus enfermé à douze ans j'ai connu le monde, j'ai illustré la comédie humaine. Dans un cellier j'ai appris l'histoire"(Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 228).

In *Le Musée de l'Homme* Nourissier's evolution as a writer and his past are all interwoven in the text. There is an evolution from, "le fantôme" in chapter one to "L'Homme Secret" in chapter 2. His silent childhood and his dreams become reality

in chapter two when he consciously faces his past. As an adult, he tries to free himself from this world and he seeks a female companion to help him with the process. The road is long to overcoming his fears of estrangement and rejection is long, so he rather rejects before being rejected (Nourissier. 1978: 116-118). Rimbaud also needed liberty, which explains his many escapes from home in feelings of rejection.

Nourissier had found creativity in his solitude and his silence, yet at times he hated it: "Un mal (silence) dans lequel je m'obstine à m'enforcer, quitte à le subir dans un dérèglement extrême de mon ordre, une déroute de toutes mes défenses." Nourissier explains his solitude in the chapter *L'Écrivain* in *Le Musée de l'Homme*: "Portrait de l'artiste en solitude: La solitude, qu'il me semble avoir aimée, cherchée, m'est devenue maladie" (Nourissier.1978: 21). In silence, he thinks of his past and he becomes fragile and vulnerable again (Nourissier.1978: 254-256 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*). Nourissier would have liked to become an innocent writer again, but he cannot cowardly ignore the adult that he is. Nourissier makes peace with his past and he accepts it as an unchanging factor, which would always remain relevant in his adult life. The way in which he continued his life showed a daring creative spirit: "J'avais réussi à fausser compagnie à ma famille et à ma jeunesse" (Nourissier.1978: 50-51). Rimbaud also believed that the essence of creation was in childhood inspiration. He needed to remain a child to be original.

Their house "sans grâce ni songes" aggravated Nourissier's isolation in his youth. They travelled little and they visited little: "On y enfermait dans un meuble prudemment isolé les trois cents livres laissés par mon père à sa mort. On n'en achetais pas – des livres – peut-être cinq par an. Fontaine et "Autant en emporte le vent ... J'ai crapahuté à travers cette aride enfance avec une patience et un héroïsme de petit soldat. Il n'a pas fallu moins, pour me sortir de là, que la guerre et la débâcle, compliquées de drames familiaux qui secouèrent la casserole Nourissier et nous transportèrent à Paris, où la liberté m'attendait" (Nourissier.1978: 254).

Rimbaud's mother was possibly an example of isolation. She thrived in her solitude with Captain Rimbaud away so much of the time. They were separated in 1860 and ever since then she lived the life of a widow, yet it is believed that Rimbaud inherited his father's adventurous, lively nature characterised by solitude (Bonney.1961: 8-10).

In *Le Musée de l'Homme*, Nourissier quotes Léon-Paul Fargue in his chapter *Le Fils*: "On ne guérit jamais de son enfance." Nourissier had realised this, which explains the nature of this autobiography. He feared what would happen if he should lose his mother (Nourissier.1978: 97-98). Nourissier's isolation is such that it seems completely distanced from spirituality. He explains his views in *Le Maître de Maison*. He dismissed God from his life, because he believed that God was absent from his life: "Je vous parle des silences et des immobilités de Dieu. Je vous parle des impatiences et des agaceries de Dieu. Je vous parle de l'inépuisable stupeur d'habiter un monde oublié de Dieu. Je risque un signe..." (Nourissier.1968: 248).

Rimbaud's view of a spiritual battle is similar to Nourissier's view of God. Rimbaud fears God as he fails to see His presence in his life: "... Le combat spirituel est aussi brutal que la bataille d'hommes; mais la vision de la justice est le plaisir de Dieu seul" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 208). Rimbaud prefers to possess truth in one body and soul. He escaped from his hellish wilderness, "... 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" (Fowlie. Œuvre.1975: 206). The worst part of his experience was his isolation, his boat in motionless mist, his body eaten by plague and worms in *Adieu*. Fortunately, he escapes this death and the terrible memories. He gave himself over "...je m'offrais au soleil, dieu de feu" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 196).

One must live Rimbaud and Nourissier's text to understand their silence and their solitude. Rimbaud knew silence and solitude, his "ne-plus-parler" is perhaps "un avoir-dit" (Heidegger in Munier. 1976: 16). Nourissier is also a silent creator as he claims: "L'homme important, c'est celui de la solitude et du silence" (Guillon et al. 1996: 310).

Nourissier is also aware of the force that silence has over man. As a father he decided that his father's silence would never become his children's silence: "... un peu de lucidité ... Je n'ai pas envie qu'on ne me raconte jamais à vous" (Nourissier.1963: 26 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*). Nourissier knows that much of man's impact on life lies in what is not said. He becomes accustomed to silence: "Ce n'est pas plus agréable d'être transparent, invisible, que d'être allumé" (Guillon et al. 1996: 243). He can appreciate it when necessary, because as a public author, he can never be completely isolated. Rimbaud wrote with intermittent silences as a prevailing force of his character.

Freedom and Travelling

In *Aube* Rimbaud expresses bountiful freedom. He embraces the summer and in this freedom he finds happiness, "une fleur qui me dit son nom". Dubois (1975: 3-4) thinks of Rimbaud as an unknown poet, "...il manque le secours des confidences de Rimbaud lui-même sur son enfance, ses curiosités ... sur ses relations avec les autres ... sur sa découverte de la vie." Rimbaud in all liberty is hiding behind his text to preserve this state of harmony. He never found freedom or harmony at home, but fortunately, his poetry allows an escape. *Ma Bohème* shows the poet in touch with his muse as he travels, "... à la belle étoile" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 62).

As a child, Nourissier chose to invent a life of travels and literature in order to escape his misfortune: "Bourgeois de petit tonnage élevé parmi des bourgeois aux assises larges, je souffris tôt, et abondamment, de ces brûlures sociales que les enfants s'infligent les uns aux autres" (Nourissier.1963: 5 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*). His travels and escapes multiplied towards adulthood, as did Rimbaud's travels all over the world. Nourissier's travels are many as in *Bratislava*. Each of his books is a return journey to familiar places. His novels "s'accommodent du travelling" (Nourissier.1990: 101). He takes risks in his books that he perhaps would not take otherwise. Nourissier gained meaningful ideas from his silence and he would have enjoyed the ability to change life. It is often that which is not said, that is of value for the author in his creation: "Le silence vaut mieux, dont profitent les hommes, qu'il couvre" (Nourissier. 1990: 101).

Rimbaud's liberty started with a disregard for social norms and conventions channelled through his revolt. He felt subjected to his mother's domination, but he revolted against the cleanliness and the very hygienic surroundings. Finally Rimbaud lived if only for a while the life of a tramp.

Nourissier's mother was also very rigid; they were never even allowed to keep pets because of her hygienic obsessions. Nourissier pretended to accept the maternal strictures. Rimbaud and Nourissier assert their independence differently. Rimbaud separates from conventional norms, while Nourissier accepts the bourgeois culture and selected surrogate families to replace his own, even if it was only temporary. Nourissier's hope of freedom was to go to Paris. After his father's death in 1935 and

his mother's divorce, they went to Paris in 1940, "... nous étions sortis de l'immobilité où la mort de Papa nous avait englués" (Nourissier.1978: 106 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*). Nourissier's elder sister (more interested in men) and his mother kept him under their surveillance - his female tribe ruled his life. Once in Paris, he decided to change the situation: "J'avais commencé mon voyage solitaire" (Nourissier.1978: 107). Nourissier had realised that his complaints were to no avail: "On est d'un lieu et d'un sang, il faut s'en arranger" (Nourissier.1978: 107).

Rimbaud's dreams of escape led him to Verlaine in Paris. He believed that he would find liberty and acceptance in Paris. Although Paris disillusioned him, he continued his escapes and travels throughout his life. His first escape came in 1870. During the summer holidays, the children were forced to stay in Charleville, because of the war they had to be ready to evacuate at any moment. Rimbaud felt depressed ... "Ses rapports avec sa mère se firent plus tendus que d'habitude, et rien ne pouvait alors le détourner de sa solitude" (Starkie.1982: 74). Without friends and without books arriving from Paris, he needed an escape. Rimbaud is a victim of his past, but also a victim of history, as Brunel (1997: 66) explains, "...en poète, il aspire à s'évader, non seulement hors du lieu, mais hors du temps «Anywhere out of Time» pourrait être l'une de ses revendications fondamentales, celle qu'il prête aux enfants – à l'enfance en lui -, dans *Les Illuminations*: "Change nos lots, crible les fléaux, à commencer par le temps" (*À une Raison*).

Nourissier explains his love for travelling in *L'Empire des Nuages*. It is the knowledge he hungers after as well as the exposure to situations that test the individual's capacity to adapt: "On ne cherche jamais qu'un miroir, un mur qui renvoie l'écho. Voyager, c'est être soi ailleurs. C'est éprouver sa résistance aux frottements, aux défis, aux altérations: ce n'est pas être altéré; c'est être fortifié. Je ne me dépayse pas: je me re-payse" (Nourissier.1981: 213).

There is a duality in the personalities of the two authors, for both of them this is also a way to escape: "Je raffolais du mensonge intérieur, de la duplicité. Toute ma vie j'ai été capable de merveilleux retournements, d'adieux brefs et sans retour, une <<doublure>>, un personnage de remplacement parfaitement rodé et invisible..." (Nourissier.1963: 147 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*).

Rimbaud also has a complicated personality, as he could be timid and violent all at once. Bellemin-Noël (1996: 82-83) sees this duality in Rimbaud, "...le mot de scission, une dynamique du partage, ou mieux du partagement, en insistant sur une séparation en perpétuel devenir ... aux réactions outrées et imprévisibles ..." One could call this a split personality, but it seems more likely the result of his confusion, considering all the choices he had to make on his own. He confronted stereotypes, fearing stagnation and he thus freed artistic creation from all the restrictions that existed. He is child versus adult, innocence versus knowledge. Nourissier believes that truth and lies become mixed up in writing: "Une vie double devint la condition nécessaire à mon équilibre. Je me sentais à l'aise stable sur deux chaises comme d'autres le sont sur une seule ... Ce n'était pas le bonheur, mais c'était un état qui permettait au moins de durer" (Nourissier.1963: 201).

Quest

Our quests, as well as our longing for happiness, is possibly something that unifies us all. Cuccurullo (1974: 95) is convinced that, "... In the heart of every man there is an inexplicable and confused longing: the search for happiness. This illusory happiness is beyond the reach of humanity, and cannot be attained. One may have a glimpse of it; then it disappears, like Chrétien's grail. The message of the legend is quite clear: "Each man is a Perceval in search of the grail". Rimbaud and Nourissier were both searching, reaching back to their childhood for a possible key to their future. The search for an ideal is universal in literature.

Through their separate quests, Rimbaud and Nourissier seek happiness and love, which is often met by the silence of the world. They need hope and some certainty and therefore they turn to other sources they believe could satisfy their needs. Nourissier's quests for a house is about as obsessive as Rimbaud's quests to see the world. Nourissier is aware of his obsession as were some of the estate agents: "Ils devaient se passer le mot: <<Attention, il a l'air intéressé, passionné, mais il n'achète pas...certains prétendaient leur voiture en panne afin d'user mon essence...à la poursuite de mes fantasmes..." (Guillon et al. 1996: 261). Nourissier sees the value of a car as a way of travelling and a way of seeking a house and it is thus an important symbol in his liberation as an author and traveller. In *Autos Graphie* he tells of all his travels by car in different parts of the world. This reminds us of the love Rimbaud had for travelling. His love for roads in the countryside shows his appreciation for Nature, as was the case with Rimbaud.

Nourissier had forgotten so many happenings of his past, that it is astonishing that he remembers cars so well. Perhaps seen in the light of an escape it would make more sense. While Rimbaud took refuge in the outside toilet to escape his mother, Nourissier went to the car, "...quand on pénétrait dans la voiture, au lieu du parfum printanier qu'on y avait laissé, flottait l'odeur fade des fleurs mortes. Elle est inséparable des moments où j'allais chercher refuge au garage" (Nourissier. 1980: 104).

The lack of love in Nourissier's life explains his opinion on love: "J'aime aimer qui n'est pas aimé ou qui l'est mal" (Nourissier.1963: 290-*Un Petit Bourgeois*). He loves images from his past ... "que ne retouche pas le temps" (Nourissier.1963: 149). After all his ordeals, he feels deserving of some happiness: "Il était indispensable qu'un peu de bonheur me fût la traversée du désert. Je voulais ma terre promise" (Nourissier.1963: 153).

Rimbaud's manifestation of love and happiness is expressed in *Génie*: "Il est l'affection et l'avenir, la force et l'amour que nous, debout dans les rages et les ennuis, nous voyons passer dans le ciel de tempête et les drapeaux d'extase. Il est l'amour, mesure parfaite et réinventée, raison merveilleuse et imprévue, et l'éternité: machine aimée des qualités fatales" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 254). Love finds a new name in *Génie*, which Fowlie (1965: 222) associates with the force that recreates within us. The poet's dream can be fulfilled, because nothing seems useless in the eyes of Love. The poet becomes exhorted to ecstasy because in love there is innovation.

Macklin (1996:50) describes Rimbaud's quest as a separation from his mother, which leads him through Nature: "Rimbaud emphasizes the visionary and imaginative proclivities of the boy as nascent poet, in his exotic dreams of deserts, forests and savanna." The numerous foreign terms in *Illuminations* are part of his transcending and creation of a language across cultural boundaries. Rimbaud's bohemian life reflected in poems such as *Ma Bohème* and *La Maline* show his affinity for language and his quest for a new language. In *Le Bateau Ivre* Rimbaud takes a vertiginous voyage, hoping to reach a new horizon. Nourissier also describes himself as a child with an adventurous mind, but he regrets the fact that through his inventions, he had not been a more daring traveller.

Nourissier also regrets that there would never be a true return to his childhood desires. As a child, he experienced fear so intensely that his perspectives had lost all their spontaneity. Yet he consoles himself: "L'innocence a peu d'imagination" (Nourissier. 1963: 54 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*). Rimbaud is of course an exception as his innocence was his creative force. He judges childhood innocence to be the preferred state of creation as in his letter to Delahaye (May 1873): "Je travaille pourtant assez régulièrement; je fais de petites histoires en prose, titre général: Livre païen, ou Livre nègre. C'est bête et innocent. O innocence! innocence, innocence, innoc..." (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975 : 316). The recapture of innocence is part of his quest for spiritual intimacy. Rimbaud was never without ambition, his letter to Verlaine, followed by an invitation to Paris, was all part of his hope to achieve something. For Rimbaud, acceptance would have been sufficient to give him hope, as he was yearning to belong.

Rimbaud perceived love very differently from Nourissier, yet both yearned for love throughout their childhood well into their adulthood. The way they searched differed and so did their understanding of love. Rimbaud was a precocious child, especially as far as his sexual development was concerned. His sexuality became an obsessive manifestation of physical love, distorted by his homosexual relationship with Verlaine. As far as Rimbaud's quest for love is concerned, his homosexuality is a contradiction. It was his way of seeing life differently and a liberation from maternal domination. He truly found love in the feminine Verlaine as a mother as well as a lover. His ability to distance himself from Verlaine shows courage and a control over his liberty, but it is clear that he was the antithesis of Verlaine.

In *Vierge Folle* Rimbaud shows his compassion for the feminine side of Verlaine, yet in other poems and later letters to his family, it is apparent that he had continued his quest for love and a family. Although S. Bernard in her version of Rimbaud believes that *Un cœur Sous une Soutane* is satirical, there is perhaps more truth in the text than what she believes. This text was written before Rimbaud's involvement with Verlaine which could be an indication of the sincerity of his emotions: "Je me suis enfermé dans un confessionnal, et là, ma jeune poésie a pu palpiter et s'envoler, dans le rêve et le silence, vers les sphères de l'amour..." His love for a young girl opposes his religious upbringing: "...des événements qui doivent influencer sur ma vie future et intérieure d'une façon sans doute bien terrible!" His love for Thimothina is answered with laughter: "Thimothina crevait de rire! Cela me perça d'une atteinte mortelle..."

He turns to his muse, "Désormais, je laisse à la muse divine le soin de bercer ma douleur; martyr d'amour ..." (Fowlie.Œuvres.1975: 274-282). In later letters to his family, he is perspicuous about marriage: "La vie est comme cela, et la solitude est une mauvaise chose, ici-bas. Pour moi je regrette de ne pas être marié et avoir une famille ... trouver une famille, et avoir au moins un fils que je passe le reste de ma vie à mon idée..." (letter:6 May 1883 in Fowlie. Œuvres;1975: 340). His love is not yet found and he continues his quest into adulthood.

Nourissier developed more in equilibrium on an emotional level, although he searched for love in houses. His passion for women and houses are closely linked which possibly explains why he married three times and were constantly looking for a new house (Nourissier.1978: 90-91 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*). Nourissier's quest for a house, which would offer him security and love, is similar to Rimbaud's quest for a family. Rimbaud conveys the same need and loss of a welcoming home in *Les Étrennes des Orphelins*: " Mais comme il est changé, le logis d'autrefois: Un grand feu pétillait, clair, dans la cheminée" (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 12). He dreams and fantasises about objects in the room, which could be the gateway to another world. The object becomes a fascination in many of his poems, as do houses in the works of Nourissier.

Nourissier's encounters with women were many: "Mon mensonge a enveloppé parfois des passions... La passion s'accommode bien de l'ombre et le grand jour, hélas, l'étiologie" (Nourissier.1978: 87). Nourissier searched love in someone the opposite of his mother. In the chapter *L'Homme Secret* he elaborates on his female preferences and his mistakes. He had to overcome his low self-esteem, his fear of certain women and his need for love. He differs from Rimbaud in this regard: "Mais il ne m'est jamais arrivé de ressentir de la tendresse pour un homme" (Nourissier.1978: 91). Nourissier's anger and frustration felt towards his mother, persist silently: "Les Nourissier se taisent" (Nourissier.1978: 108). His only consolation is: "Et elle m'a aimé ... Elle use de toute sa fragilité, de sa lucidité vacillante, intermittente, pour glisser en moi une espèce de honte" (Nourissier. 1978: 108). She could never talk to him face to face, there was always something else that had to be done, direct confrontations were avoided, "... le silence s'est appesanti" (Nourissier. 1978: 109).

Macklin (1996: 53) uses *Mémoire* to explain: "... it is irrefutable that the poem has much to tell us about the Rimbaudian perception of how the past impinges on the

present and how formative moments in childhood haunt the adult consciousness.” The same could be said of Nourissier’s text, although he stretches the information over several books.

Rimbaud is often the abandoned child, as in *Les Effarés*. He even uses the Baker as a surrogate father figure in *Les Effarés*: “À genoux, cinq petits-misère! – Regardent le Boulanger faire Le lourd pain blond” (Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 48). He seeks an alternative to his disintegrating family as does Nourissier in *Le Maître de Maison*. Nourissier needs a house that will withstand his trials and tribulations. He invents a house and family to suit himself with Lossan as the décor to the narrator’s dream: “Et puisqu’on parle toujours de maisons d’enfance ou de famille, ou de campagne, sans doute me suis-je inventé une enfance, une famille, un pays. J’ai toujours eu besoin de passé. J’ai longtemps cherché à raciner ici ou là, mais l’entreprise manquait de décision ou de folie, de ce mouvement dont on jette le sac par-dessus l’épaule avant une longue étape” (Nourissier. 1968: 223). Nourissier thus becomes the master of his house, a personalised solution to his past. The challenge he faces to his personal achievement is acceptance and security. He recreates a childhood to secure his dreams of happiness, which would make him feel, as if he belongs.

Rimbaud and Nourissier’s quests differ in their ultimate end, but it is a ritual cleansing or purification to a fulfilment of their ideals. Lapeyre (1981: 245) supports the idea of a purification: “La quête de l’idéal rimbaldien passait par l’obsession de l’innocence, de la pureté, d’une virginité reconquise ... l’enfant omniprésent dans la poésie rimbaldienne est la matérialisation charnelle de ce potentiel de rénovation.”

Many critics believe that Rimbaud’s quest ended with his poetry. It is more likely that his poetry was just a phase to reach an ultimate goal. Hanson (1960: 10) believes Rimbaud to have had financial ambitions like his mother. His travels and trading in Northern Africa were a fulfilment of the maternal and paternal dream. Rimbaud needed to prove that he could be financially independent and he must have also dreamt of his father’s life in Africa, yet here he was exposed to a new country, a new language that his poetic innocence could not sustain: “Je suis dépaysé, malade, furieux. Bête, renversé; j’espérais des bains de soleil, des promenades infinies, du repos, des bohémienneries enfin; j’espérais surtout des journaux, des livres” (Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 298). It is as if Rimbaud knew the future. He worshipped the Muse and Liberty – a mad ambition that never granted him the opportunity to be

cured from his tortured heart. Nourissier is uncertain about the future and he avoids speculating on what may be: "Toujours est-il qu'en ce temps-là j'ai mené ainsi mon vagabondage, en essayant de tirer profit de l'espèce d'aboulie passionnée où l'on me laissait vivre" (Guillon et al. 1996: 36).

Nourissier's revolt was not his main objective in his novels, but it was tempered by a deeper philosophical insight as part of his quest: "J'ai fait l'économie des oppositions, des révoltes, de l'absurde et irremplaçable bataille sur quoi se fonde chaque vie d'homme" (Nourissier.1963: 28 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*). Rimbaud, however, had few options and no time to wait. His intoxication made him a visionary and he needed to discover new horizons without restraint.

Animals and Nature

Rimbaud is a child of Nature, his poetry is filled with images of nature such as the sea, flowers, and even magical creatures. Nourissier, a great admirer of nature too, especially the mountains, is more bound to his love for animals and houses. In a letter to me dated 9 June 1998 (unpublished) he explains: "Toujours eu une passion pour les animaux: chevaux, chiens. Les maisons? J'ai souffert, enfant, de n'avoir pas eu une vraie "maison de famille".

Nature is the birthplace of life, which is why Rimbaud calls himself the child of the sun. Rimbaud loves the sun that ensures the continuation of this life on his quest for an eternity. Brunel (19978: 69) believes that *Une Saison en Enfer* is the start of a new world: "*Une Saison en Enfer* ne se referme pas comme l'Enfer, elle ouvre sur une "aurore," sur la possible possession d'une vérité." In *Adieu* Rimbaud realises it is already autumn, Nature is forever changing: "Mais pourquoi regretter un éternel soleil, si nous sommes engagés à la découverte de la clarté divine, - loin des gens qui meurent sur les saisons" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 206). He does not fear the changes Nature brings, as she is his fulfilment and his Mother. Rimbaud's admiration for Nature is religious; but he is pagan, while Nourissier's appreciation of Nature is that of an observer.

The sea is a recurrent, powerful theme, showing the force of Nature and the power of Rimbaud's creative energy. In *Marine* the movement of the sea is fierce: "...Les Chars d'argent et de cuivre ... Battent l'écume Soulèvent les souches des ronces ... Et les ornières immenses du reflux, Dont l'angle est heurté par des tourbillons de

lumière” (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 234). Light and water diffuse in a mix of the elements where all boundaries are overthrown. Rimbaud is just as tireless, as his sea and his forever-changing skies. Their movement is a perpetual creative force. The sun is also a recurrent theme in his poetry as a symbol of life and inspiration in *Bateau Ivre*: “J’ai vu le soleil bas, taché d’horreurs mystiques.” (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 116) and in *Les Premières Communions*: “Mais le soleil éveille, à travers des feuillages, Les vieilles couleurs des vitraux irréguliers” (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 94).

Nourissier also uses the sun as an indication of the time of day in many of his works, but there is no mystery or creative force in Nourissier’s sun: “Le soleil le traverse en diagonale entre les troncs ... le soleil baisse vite à l’horizon” (Nourissier. 1981: 238-239). The sun is further used as an enlightening focus on the changing of the seasons. More interesting is the spectacle of nature surrounding him: “... rien que de naturel ... Mais le panorama remue dans l’homme une émotion vague et totalement inexplicée. Je passe désormais une partie de ma vie devant, et presque dans une espèce de champion des panoramas: à part la vague crainte qu’il m’inspire comme je l’ai dit, sa présence n’a rien éclairé ma lanterne” (Nourissier.1963: 312 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*). Rimbaud, child of the sun and boat-poet admires Nature to the point of adoration. His play with Nature is religious.

In Nourissier’s *Le Maître de Maison*, a couple moves to the countryside to restore a house. The owner enjoys the environment: “Moi, j’arrive ici, avec mon atavisme tout gris, tout citadin, mes vapeurs de trottoirs, mon envie de ciel et de verdure: je dois leur paraître imbécile. Côté ombre et soleil, il faut confesser que nous sommes de drôles de corps” (Nourissier.1968: 66). The factual background compares well with the life of Nourissier who knew the countryside and Paris as a child. Later in life, he spends his time between Paris and Ménerbes in the South, admiring the beauty of the South of France. *L’Empire des Nuages* shows another side of Nature in a very different milieu from the mountains and the countryside. Nourissier respects Nature: he notices that even the greatest of feasts have to be cancelled if the forces of Nature intervene. At an important event he notices: “Non seulement le ciel peut les modifier – ce vent, par exemple, qui avait forcé et dérangeait maintenant les coiffures, agitait des voiles et ranimait les visages...” (Nourissier.1981: 54).

Enfance is another example of Rimbaud’s vision of Nature, for we know that Rimbaud clung to pagan ideas and polytheism. Nature is a source of energy: “...des fleurs magiques bourdonnaient ... Les talus le berçaient” (Fowlie. Œuvres.1975: 216).

In Nature he could live forever: "Le monde est un polemos incréé et indestructible, ... un champ de lutttes sempiternelles..." (Marlaud.1984: 8). Nature is also a comfort and a friend to him. He feels close to Nature as in *Aube*: "Eucharis me dit que c'était le printemps "(Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 214). Life starts anew with a rainbow in the sky. As a child of nature he is not anti-religious, for the sun as a seal of God purifies, "blêmit les fenêtres." The sun's rays will help create a rainbow.

Greek Antiquity is an important source in *Soleil et Chair*, *Aube* and *L'Impossible*. Verstraëte (1980: 25) believes that this attraction can be linked to the Greek Gods' ability to communicate with the natural forces. Rimbaud embraces pagan ideas, because they are pure and he also wants to be part of the cosmos as in *L'Éternité* and *Âge d'or*. Nourissier's use of Nature is a theme that contributes mainly to the décor of his novels.

Bourgeois versus Anti-Bourgeois

Nourissier often criticises the bourgeois, yet he was influenced by the bourgeois way of living and became very bourgeois himself as an adult. Nourissier's attitude towards France is patriotic, a value that he absorbed unknowingly: "Je ne parviens pas à m'intéresser aux Français pour qui le patriotisme n'est pas une préoccupation essentielle, quelle que soit leur façon de le servir" (Guillon et al. 1996:184). He respects people, which is opposite to the character of the young Rimbaud. His only true dislikes are the imbeciles of society. France will always be his home: "S'agissant de mon pays, si je souffre de ses sottises je finis toujours par les lui pardonner" (Nourissier.1978: 193- *Le Musée de l'Homme*).

Rimbaud is a child in revolt against every superior including the bourgeois. He was shocked by his first visit to Verlaine in Paris who was by now very absorbed in a bourgeois household with his wife. Levi (1992:525) states the irony that Rimbaud actually alienated himself from everybody with his attempts to destroy the social order of the bourgeois. Social status, personal cleanliness or appearance was of no importance to him. He had hoped that others would join in his revolt, yet he found himself still dependent on others.

Rimbaud's disapproval of the bourgeois is explained in *Mémoire*. "Madame" goes against the grain of Nature that Macklin (1996: 53) calls "a repressive force." Her

parasol “embodies her status as bourgeois intruder in this natural world ... where mother-child relations are cold and formalized.”

Delort (1978: 28) discusses Rimbaud's outrages: “Mais c'est avant tout au «bourgeois» et à l'esprit « marchand » qui le caractérise le plus souvent que Rimbaud réserve ses paroles les plus acerbes.” Rimbaud preferred to make a hobby of scandalous behaviours, anything but conforming to a bourgeois existence. In a conversation with Delahaye, quoted by Delort (1978: 29), Rimbaud gives free reign to his revolt: “Une expression franchement nihiliste: Il est d'autres arbres qu'il faut abattre. Cette société elle-même on y passera les haches, les pioches, les rouleaux niveleurs. On rasera les fortunes et on abattra les orgueils individuels. Il ne restera plus que la nature.”

Rimbaud tried to enlist everyone he knew to support his protest against control as he wished to destroy the bourgeois social order (Levi.1992: 525). He hated his dependence on others as well as the middle-class poets. He did whatever he could to make a bad impression and he would rather sacrifice his hygiene than live a bourgeois life. He violently attacked Napoleon III, bourgeois conformism and Catholicism, rather showing pity for the victims of the war.

Nourissier envied the bourgeois with their stylish houses and cars. He actually would have liked a life with more glamour. In his book *Un Petit Bourgeois* he tells of his frustrations as a child, longing for a better life. In a letter to me dated 9 June 1998 (unpublished) he explains: “Phobie? Non, mais une détestation: le style de vie des tout petits bourgeois.”

Nourissier is a very bourgeois adult, yet he had many revelations as to the bourgeois society when they moved to Paris. He realised that there were people who lived very differently from what he knew or expected. These differences were cause for envy and disdain: “Je découvris quels petits ennemis peuvent être des enfants bourgeois élevés dans des familles irrémédiablement étrangères” (Nourissier.1963: 76 - *Un Petit Bourgeois*). He faced opposition and rejection throughout his childhood, creating his dream around a miracle that would change his life forever and that would offer him the comfort of a high society.

Houses were the start of Nourissier's adventure towards a bourgeois life, “...j'ai emmenagé dans cent maisons, annexé la mémoire...” (Nourissier. 1978: 64). A

house is often the reflection of his emotional state, combined with his personality. There is a soul in every one of them, and having grown up in a “cold” house, he is familiar with the identification of this type of house.

Poetry versus Prose

Although it is often more valuable for the poet to make use of colour as a symbol in his work, the novelist is not restricted to the use of colour in his décor or his metaphors. Rimbaud's text is flooded with colour and we are looking at an impressionistic painting when we read his poetry. His *Les Illuminations* are dominated by blue and green and light mixed on the poet's palette even giving colour to his vowels. Nourissier's texts on the other hand are grey and solemn with the sun as the only salvation to lighten up his works.

It is interesting that both authors use the Flood as a symbol in their works. Nourissier describes his *Autos Graphie* as “un petit livre antédiluvien. Il date, pour le situer avec précision, d'avant le déluge des pluies acides. Que sont-elles? J'avoue n'en pas savoir grand chose, mais les deux mots font image. La pluie, censée fertiliser la terre, embellir les cheveux, voilà qu'avec elle ruisselle la mort” (Nourissier.1980: 70).

One important difference in the comparison of Rimbaud and Nourissier's writing is the fact that Rimbaud as a child-poet created an individual style, with its own vocabulary and unconventional meaning. Although his poetry hints at autobiographical facts, one is never sure whether Rimbaud wrote about himself or if he just used his preferred themes. His characters are universal, but the interpretation of his poems is challenging, sometimes even debatable. Although Rimbaud wrote as a child, he was a grown-up child, a precocious genius. He cannot be compared to an ordinary child of his age as he was ahead of the poets of his time and is still a controversial poet in modern-day writing (Fowlie.Œuvres.1975:5-6). Nourissier again is an ordinary man, nothing close to Rimbaud or “L'image démoniaque et fringante de l'artiste...” He is not the adventurer he would have liked to be, “...mais l'homme d'une table et d'un chien ...” (Nourissier.1978: 79-81). This is why their writing is so diverse.

The novelist Nourissier is more descriptive with prose as his preferred style. His works are lucid, facilitating interpretation. His vocabulary is diversified, often with

very descriptive metaphors. The majority of his works are autobiographical without a doubt, be it the setting, the characters or the topic of conversation. In a letter to me dated 9 June 1998 (unpublished), Nourissier states: "Des bribes de souvenirs, des hypothèses, l'utilisation de faits réels (Libération de Paris): rien de plus ... je suis présent dans mes livres autobiographiques; ma mémoire (des lieux, des événements) est dans les romans. Exemple: tous les décors des romans sont connus de moi."

Rimbaud wrote up to the age of about nineteen. He ceased writing poetry as far as is known after 1873 and then continued writing letters to his family and a few friends. Rimbaud is a child expressing himself in the language of a man. He is greatly inspired by a fairy-world, a world beyond what is known. His visions were a powerful creative force that allowed magic spells and dreams to become a literary reality.

Nourissier also experienced a haunting past, but he hid the negative thoughts deep in himself. There is no talking flowers or fairies as he is lucid when faced with the phantoms of his past. He is a realist who makes less allowance for dreaming. His childhood was already transformed by his adulthood. The fact that Nourissier wrote many years after his childhood would influence the way he sees his childhood. His life has changed with his marriages, his children and his dogs. His role in society has changed from dependent child to mature adult, husband and father. There is a distance between his past and his present, because his childhood has been altered by his objectivity as an adult in an attempt to recreate his memories. Rimbaud on the other hand, is subjectively involved in all his writing. He is writing his memories in the body of a child, often referring to children, families or mothers in general. Yet with some factual background information, we can find Rimbaud in his poetry.

Rimbaud's poetry was his way of looking at the world. Delas (1986: 60) in his interpretation of *Enfance* believes that the successive absurd or false figures are his metaphors in co-existence with his poetry. Rimbaud created a poetic world and language through which he comments on an unjust society, escaping the conscious, very aware of his supernatural powers. He is original in every sense of the word, giving himself completely to his poetry. He was constantly on the run, ready for a new nomadic adventure. His life as well as his poetry show resentment to conformity; he often judged people as idiots, and would take a long walk or read to escape. Jouffroy (1991:43) puts it simply, "ses écrits poétiques sont si intimement liés à sa vie qu'on ne peut que très malhonnêtement les séparer." Rimbaud even changed the meaning

of words or used them differently. As for Nourissier, he loves his dictionary and no deciphering is required to understand the meaning of the text. By his frequent use of metaphors, he merely tries to give depth to his text.

Both authors, despite their very different styles, remain lucid through their literary expression. Jouffroy (1991: 60) supports the idea that Rimbaud's poems are open to acceptable interpretation, despite their complexity: "Rimbaud voyait parfaitement et lucidement le monde ... Les Illuminations sont en effet des vues de lieux, de paysages, de villes où il s'est arrêté sans fréquenter personne dont on ait gardé une trace, mais il y mêle toujours autre chose, en abîme ou pardessus, qui n'est pas là: ... un double monde."

Rimbaud's poem *Enfance* is an example of the inextricably interdependent elements of his poetry, such as his childhood, a marvellous world of metaphors and sad images. The dead girl behind the rose bushes in the second part could well symbolise the death of his expended childhood energy. Ruff (1978: 234) confirms: "Quoiqu'il s'agisse là de l'enfance en général, le poème tire sa substance de l'expérience personnelle de l'auteur."

Still, some critics find Rimbaud's poetry difficult to interpret. Rivière (1877: 64) states: "Rimbaud n'a pas écrit son œuvre pour nous ... Il nous laisse absolument libres de ne pas la comprendre ... Il faut lire les *Illuminations* et *la Saison en enfer* comme un carnet qu'un savant bizarre aurait laissé tomber de sa poche et dans lequel il aurait noté ses observations sur un ordre de phénomènes jusqu'ici inconnus..." Although this might be true, Rimbaud's poetry opens up a new world where he lives according to his liberty in poetry.

Differences

Although there are many similarities, the differences between the two authors are as many if not more. For both authors their childhood had a unique effect on their lives, and on their writing.

A silent Nourissier distances himself from society, but exposes himself through writing, sharing his fears and his joys. Rimbaud on the other hand, was so different from established norms of behaviour that he was rejected by society. Nourissier

converses with the reader and when he decides to publish his works, he is always open to criticism. Rimbaud wrote in isolation, but never intended to publish his intimate poetry, as it was never destined to please a public. Rimbaud was in communication with his poetry, not with people. *Le Bateau Ivre* is perhaps the most explanatory poem of Rimbaud's childhood. It offers a celebration of his vision, a world isolated from adults, a cry for protection from his desolation. Comparing the two writers' works, we find that both were very autobiographical in style, although autobiography should not be confused with subjectivity.

Rimbaud's homosexuality, or rather bisexuality, influenced some of his writing while Nourissier was more inclined towards women, marrying three times before settling. Love and disorder go hand in hand for both writers.

Nourissier had two fathers, although the second his stepfather, only for a very short period. Rimbaud's father was mostly absent. The fairies and the dreams of Rimbaud's past were unreal, but very powerful magical images while Nourissier's ghosts were haunting, unknown thoughts or feelings. These forces drove them to greater inspiration.

Nourissier is subjected to the rules of his mother's empire, even after her death. His use of language is metaphorical, yet lucid and direct. Rimbaud's poetry is again more profound. Even as a child, Nourissier showed insight into adult situations: "Ai-je été un enfant trop lucide pour mon âge? (Guillon et al. 1996: 31). Rimbaud also showed maturity as a child and expressed adult ideas in his poetry. Rimbaud's open revolt is more dramatic and destructive than Nourissier's controlled revolt and criticism. In this sense, Nourissier shows more balance, but a "manque de courage." Nourissier's fears lead to indecisiveness, while Rimbaud always knows what he wants and what he dislikes, and he is not afraid to show it. Nourissier is a man of order, "un assez bon citoyen" while Rimbaud is the drunken boat-poet showing disorder upon disorder.

While Nourissier emphasised houses, Rimbaud developed a vision of a city as in *Les Illuminations*. Cities also rise up in *Adieu* and *Enfance V*. Rimbaud's poems in *Les Illuminations* are often set in a theatrical décor or a fairy world while Nourissier's décor is familiar to him.

Nourissier and Rimbaud behaved well at school and in public in their early childhood, yet both felt a burning desire to expose their revolt. Nourissier's revolt is tame compared to Rimbaud's total disorder. In *Le Bar de L'Escadrille*, the mother figure is as little loved as is Madame Nourissier. Nourissier's respect for his mother is subdued revolt so he uses the many "Madames Nourissier" in his novels to express his dislike: "Mon enfance est celle d'un autre, dans un autre monde ... Sans parler de la misère. A vingt ans j'ai eu faim, et pas seulement de pain. Je n'avais pas de mots assez cruels pour moquer ma mère qui s'épuisait à négocier au marché noir quelques bouts de viande à nous mettre sous la dent" (Nourissier.1997: 88).

Rimbaud's revolt was aimed at anyone who pretended a superiority over him. His behaviour was socially unacceptable with *Une Saison en Enfer* as an example of his outbursts. He believed that his happy childhood existed in another age. Fowlie (1975: 6) also thinks that by evoking a certain past, an age of legends with its centaurs, fairies, fauns and angels, Rimbaud showed his revolt in his own, peculiar way. He recreated a new world and a different age with his art. Nourissier's revolt did not manifest itself so forcefully in his behaviour, it is rather expressed in his literature. Rimbaud's rage is expressed in *Qu'est-ce pour nous?*: "Nous la voulons! Industriels, princes, sénats: Périssent! Puissance, justice, histoire: à bas! Ça nous est dû. Le sang!" (Fowlie. Œuvres. 1975: 124).

Nourissier is a pragmatic and lucid realist, with no extraordinary perceptions, while Rimbaud is spiritual and searches the unknown to maintain his vision. Nourissier is the patriot that also loves travelling, but Rimbaud is forever travelling, a universal being crossing one border to the next.

One of the main differences in Nourissier and Rimbaud's style of writing, is the time of their creation. With the progression of time, Nourissier must delve much deeper to find the hurt and the fears he experienced as a child. Rimbaud wrote at a time when he was actually experiencing pain and isolation. Nourissier's approach to his childhood is far more positive as he has the time to reconstruct his ideas: "Je les ai plutôt refaçonnées... je n'ai jamais menti, ni inventé ..." (Guillon et al. 1996: 22). In *Un Petit Bourgeois* Nourissier states: "Je possède peu de souvenirs d'enfance ..." (Nourissier.1963: 36). He struggles to rediscover a past he often would have preferred to forget. Rimbaud's sorrow-laden image of the child stands as a testament to his emotional experiences at the time of creation. Macklin (1996:52) is struck by Rimbaud's world where "his experience of adventure, followed by

disappointment is shown as an integral element of the child's world." This is a child with an immense lucid capacity that can analyse and express these oppositional forces in his life.

CONCLUSION

In trying to illustrate the importance of the childhood years of the two authors for their literary creation, we came to the following conclusions:

- Rimbaud's revolt and Nourissier's pessimism could be an example of the fragile beings children are. Divorce with the insecurity it accompanies, has a major impact on a child's life. Children are constant victims of adult conflicts and social problems. Although neither Rimbaud nor Nourissier were physically abused, their mothers' rigidity and domination over their children led to isolation, fear of rejection and revolt.
- Rimbaud was fortunate for having had paternal figures such as Izambard and Demeney in his youth, for they awakened his creative powers. Nourissier, who lost his father at an early age, comforted himself through an adoptive process. He sought foster houses where his friends' parents helped with his education.
- Although Rimbaud and Nourissier were from poor backgrounds and very unhappy in their isolation, they found peace in their silences. They created silence and used creative writing as an outlet for revolt and for the mystery of their individual quests. Something positive and of value surpasses the negative past. Rimbaud uses his creative powers to evoke a world where everything is possible. Nourissier only seeks happiness through his novels. He loves writing as it serves as a therapy to him, as in *Musée de l'Homme* (1978: 49): "un livre remède."
- Fear is a destructive emotion, one that is often carried over to children. Rimbaud feared the loss of his imaginative experience. Dreams and hallucinations are only temporary escapes for losses. Rimbaud created his own language as protective measure, a language he as a child could understand. Macklin (1996: 46) supports the fact that there are crucial connections between his exploration of the world of the child and his search for a new idiom. Rimbaud's idiom is a completely new poetry.

- Nourissier as a prose writer is always striving towards another, better novel. His strength as an author lies mainly with his very rich metaphorical language, possibly unsurpassed by his contemporaries.
- Rimbaud's miserable existence, his fear to face death makes him question the meaning of our existence: "La vie m'est devenue impossible. Que je suis donc malheureux! ... Enfin, notre vie est une misère, une misère sans fin! Pourquoi donc existons-nous?" (Letters: 23 May and 23 June 1891 in Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 360). Nourissier feared death from the day that his father died. One of the weaknesses in the communication between mother and son was her silence about his father's death. Nourissier could not comprehend his mother's inability to talk to him, she never spoke about herself: "Il n'est jamais arrivé à Maman de parler de son âge, ... ni du cimetière où mon père est enterré, ni de Dieu, ni de prière, ni de la mort ... je sais que je crie dans le vide, que je houspille alternativement une sourde et une muette" (Nourissier.1978: 109 - *Le Musée de l'Homme*).
- Nourissier's confessions as a reaction against his unhappy youth can be found in the majority of his novels, a few of which are purely autobiographical: "J'ai mis du temps à accepter mes origines" (Nourissier.1978: 47). Rimbaud's confessions are to be found in the metaphorical expression of his illusions, of his silences.
- With both authors the unhappy experiences in their youth indeed contributed to their literary creativity. The child's creativity is a power that no one can destroy. The well-known Jungian analyst, C.P. Estés (1992: 298-299) defines creativity accurately: "It is the love of something, having so much love for something – whether a person, a word, an image, an idea, the land, or humanity – that all that can be done with the overflow is to create."
- Rimbaud's literary creation was a monumental happening and an expression of his "énergie prométhéene" until he found a new challenge and a new horizon. It is likely that Rimbaud had a presentiment of his future, which serves as a possible explanation for his short literary career. In *Mauvais Sang* he foretells: "Ma journée est faite; je quitte l'Europe. L'air marin brûlera mes poumons; les climats perdus me tanneront" (Fowlie. *Œuvres*. 1975: 176). Nourissier in his

seventies, with more than a dozen best sellers lined up, is still pursuing his literary career silently dealing with the shadows of his childhood years.

- Nourissier and Rimbaud's writing is thematically very similar. Both authors become rulers of the Grail Kingdom through their separate quests, realising that a return to the innocence of their childhood would be inevitable to restore life-giving creative powers. The secret cannot be revealed, but the essence will always remain a child. Their prose and poetry were creative ways to solve problems and to elaborate on important factors in their lives. It is a highly intellectual process, hinting at numerous emotions, places and ideas.

Jungian analyst, June Singer (1973: 278), writes: "While the first part of life is directed toward achievement, the second part is directed toward integration. Where the first part is directed toward emergence as an individual, the second part is directed toward harmony with the totality of being." Nourissier and Rimbaud both needed to make sense of their life through a return to childhood. Their coping mechanisms as children were not well developed, which explains their magnetism back to the past. Nourissier only had memories, but Rimbaud had his poetry too as a possible solution to his happiness. However, in each an eternal child remains.

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