



## Rimbaud and Jim Morrison: The Rebel as Poet

By Wallace Fowlie

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"The poet makes himself into a visionary by a long derangement of all the senses."—Rimbaud

In 1968 Jim Morrison, founder and lead singer of the rock band the Doors, wrote to Wallace Fowlie, a scholar of French literature and a professor at Duke University. Morrison thanked Fowlie for producing an English translation of the complete poems of Rimbaud. He needed the translation, he said, because, "I don't read French that easily. . . . I am a rock singer and your book travels around with me." Fourteen years later, when Fowlie first heard the music of the Doors, he recognized the influence of Rimbaud in Morrison's lyrics.

In *Rimbaud and Jim Morrison* Fowlie, a master of the form of the memoir, reconstructs the lives of the two youthful poets from a personal perspective. In their twinned stories he discovers an uncanny symmetry, a pattern far richer than the simple truth that both led lives full of adventure and both made poetry of their thirst for the liberation of the self. The result is an engaging account of the connections between an exceptional French symbolist who gave up writing poetry at the age of twenty, died young, and whose poems are still avidly read to this day, and an American rock musician whose brief career ignited an entire generation and has continued to fascinate millions around the world in the twenty years since his death in Paris. In this dual portrait, Fowlie gives us a glimpse of the affinities and resemblances between European literary traditions and American rock music and youth culture in the late twentieth century.

A personal meditation on two unusual, yet emblematic, cultural figures, this book also stands as a summary of a noted scholar's lifelong reflections on creative artists.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Fowlie, a leading translator of Arthur Rimbaud and professor emeritus of French literature at Duke, here attempts to trace the aesthetic affinities between the French symbolist poet and '60s rock icon and Doors lead singer, Jim Morrison. Fowlie contends that both Rimbaud, the iconoclastic young poet who at the age of 20 forsook poetry for a peripatetic life as a merchant-adventurer and Morrison, the macho, nihilistic, self-styled shaman of late-'60s acid rock, refigure the boyish archetypes of the clown and the rebel; for Fowlie, both were restive, bohemian, visionary poets who attained an extraordinary, posthumous mythical status. He prefaces his readings of Rimbaud's and Morrison's "poetry" with a brief memoir stressing his pedagogical aims: to recruit readers of French poetry among jaded kids who can only deal with high culture in the context of familiar pop cultural icons. Missing from this study, however, is a critical perspective of the tawdrier aspects of Morrison's fame, which sprang, in part, from his talent for turning avant-garde and multicultural tropes into psychedelic clichés. Fowlie's style is lucid and highly personal, if humorless. Readers who are not fans of the Doors may roll their eyes at Fowlie's earnest attempts to explicate their lyrics in terms of Nietzsche, Antonin Artaud and ancient mythology.

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From Library Journal

Attempting to reconcile the life of a 19th-century French poet with that of an American rock star/poet of the 1960s can be a daring juggling act. In this dual portrayal of Rimbaud and Morrison, Fowlie (Duke Univ.) mostly succeeds in reconstructing their twinned stories, which are rich in uncanny symmetries, among them adventure, rebellion, a brief but rich career, public admiration, and the early death both cult figures experienced. Morrison read and admired Rimbaud, after whom he modeled his life. In this literary analysis, Fowlie seeks to bring out affinities and similarities in their poetry and lyrics. The result is an interesting if curious reading of Rimbaud and Morrison that would appeal to both Doors fans and readers of French symbolism. Recommended for large collections.

*Ali Houissa, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, N.Y.*

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From [Booklist](#)

Rock singer Jim Morrison was a fan of nineteenth-century French poet Arthur Rimbaud. Well before he became a star, Morrison was so impressed by Fowlie's translation of Rimbaud that he wrote to him. Fowlie, a distinguished scholar of French literature, later became fascinated by the enigmatic emblem of 1960s youth culture, and especially by Morrison's fascination with Rimbaud. Ultimately, Fowlie became aware of an uncanny symmetry between the two men's careers. Rimbaud created a revolutionary body of alienated and visionary poems, then abandoned poetry at age 21. After a career as an arms trader in Ethiopia and a 20-year absence from France, he died of gangrene. Morrison pursued a self-consciously rebellious career in which he combined an abnormally high level of personal alienation with intense interest in poetry and produced a genuinely visionary body of songs, until his death at 27 from a heart attack, brought on, in part, by longtime substance abuse. Fowlie's unusual essay in comparative biography deserves its admittedly unusual place in libraries that have learned that Morrison is one rock idol whose fans can't read enough about him. *John Shreffler*

## **Users Review**

**From reader reviews:**

**Janice Smith:**

The experience that you get from Rimbaud and Jim Morrison: The Rebel as Poet could be the more deep you excavating the information that hide in the words the more you get interested in reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to understand but Rimbaud and Jim Morrison: The Rebel as Poet giving you buzz feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in specific way that can be understood by means of anyone who read the item because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This book also makes your personal vocabulary increase well. Therefore it is easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having this particular Rimbaud and Jim Morrison: The Rebel as Poet instantly.

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