

RIMBAUD'S CITIES II / MAGIC LANTERN SLIDES

—themselves are cities— For those who live in them, imcomprehensible mountains—an empire's names—remake themselves in light— Afloat in distance, on its high peaks, steep-rooved houses, their dazzling windows, slide sideways now on rails— Its soundless machinery of pulleys and ropes— Now Vesuvius, lit through smoke, bright swarm adrift in its closed circle— The blank flesh of colossal statues— Copper palm trees aflame with the sound of bells— Long canals flooded with light— Streets narrowing back to that vanishing point, behind the houses, where love feasts on itself— Its bells ring back down those gulfs— More than life-size, its singers hurry forwards, mouths opening and closing— The light on their banners is the same as the light on its frozen Alps— Over the viewing platform, its abyss, the Green Knight rides forever in his painted wood— Along the handrails at the edge of its precipice, like light through cloud a white ray hangs rags of drapery, tourist villages which flap and swell—and each thing becomes itself in vanishing— Angelic centuar-girls plunge back into its soundless avalanche— Over its mountains, waves pour back from that place where Venus is rising still out of the sea, complete with zephyrs, a redolence of south sea pearls and rare shells— Sea darkening intermittently with blotches, scratches on its lens glass— Sumptuous flowers, outspread like a battlefield, crying when the wind pours through— One by one its May Queens, dressed in russet, opaline, rise up out of its precipice— In the distance, at the source, standing in the waterfall, in the tangled vines, Diana's deer drink from the goddess— The bacchantes of the suburbs cry without sound— Over them the moon burns, raving, and Venus steps into the bedsits of loners and blacksmiths— Everywhere the belltowers ring with people's thoughts— Ossuaries, palaces, have unheard-of music— Cloud by cloud the myths rise— Their gods walk in the streets, this paradise folding tempest by tempest back into itself—and Caliban is dancing in his island, night— One time I stepped into a Baghdad street—road-gangs singing the day's work, the wind in my face—circling its Round City without ever escaping the backdrop of those hallucinatory mountains that the two of us were going to cross to safety—

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Now what hand, what gentle hour, will return me to that province, home of my sleep, and
the least of my gestures?

Lisa Gorton—translated from Arthur Rimbaud, 'Villes II', 1886