



## **Ardennian Boy**

*William Maltese, Wayne Gunn*

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Ardennian Boy, from coauthors William Maltese and Drewey Wayne Gunn, is historical romance and literary erotica blended into one masterful novel. Maltese's sensuous prose retells the tumultuous love affair between poets Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine, while Gunn's lyrical translations of their bawdy gay poems, woven naturally into the fabric of the story, enlighten even as they arouse. Together, the two authors bring this singular love story brilliantly to life. Arthur Rimbaud is an untamed teenage savage from the French provinces, randy and ready to try any and everything, convinced that a life of unbridled excess is the true pathway to great poetry. Rimbaud's creative outburst is consumed in the decadence of his lifestyle by the time he is barely out of his teens, but not before he has established himself as one of history's greatest poets, hailed today as one of the fathers of the French "symbolist" movement - and not before he has nurtured Paul Verlaine from a passable poet into a great one. Paul Verlaine is a henpecked, closeted and probably bisexual husband who is trapped in an undesirable marriage, and totally unprepared for the whirlwind that engulfs him when Rimbaud appears in his life. In the end, Verlaine too defies the conventions of his day, and though he finds himself ultimately reviled by polite society for his incendiary relationship with the younger poet, Verlaine emerges from it not only a great poet in his own right, but a major figure in French literature. In tracing their gay heritage through some of the most influential men of letters and of politics from his day back to ancient Greece, he becomes one of the proponents of gay historical studies. Often condemned for the frankness of their relationship, these two men stand today alongside Whitman and Wilde as literary pioneers in the struggle for gay rights in the 19th century. Maltese and Gunn have captured that frankness with unprecedented exuberance.

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