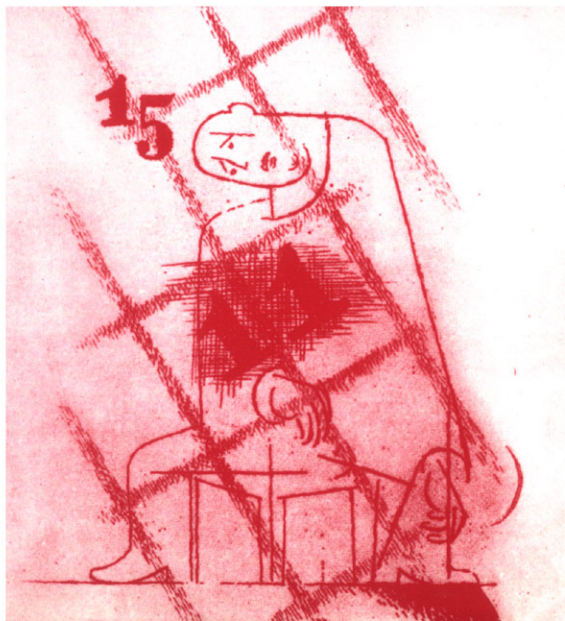


ATHLONE FRENCH POETS

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

Alcools

edited by GARNET REES



Guillaume Apollinaire, a leading figure amongst the young writers and artists in France until his death in 1918, published *Alcools*, his first book of poems, in 1913. With its wide range of verse forms and contrasting registers of style, *Alcools* had a considerable influence on Surrealist poetry. The poems provide a splendid example of the lyrical art in which the paradoxes of Apollinaire are held in high poetic tension. The editor's introduction and notes place the volume in the development of French poetry in the twentieth century and explain allusions and difficulties in the text.

Professor Rees held a Chair of Modern French Literature at the University of Hull.

The cover illustration is by Marcoussis (Louis Casimir Ladislas Markus 1883-1941), a painter and illustrator of Polish birth who settled in Paris in 1903 and became a friend of Apollinaire and a supporter of Cubism. The figures refer to the number of the cell occupied by Apollinaire in La Santé prison and occur in the poem 'A la Santé' (p. 110). Reproduction by courtesy of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc.

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Athlone French Poets

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General Editor EILEEN LE BRETON

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Athlone French Poets

General Editor EILEEN LE BRETON

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Bedford College University of London*

This series is designed to provide students and general readers both with Monographs on important nineteenth- and twentieth-century French poets and Critical Editions of representative works by these poets.

The Monographs aim at presenting the essential biographical facts while placing the poet in his social and intellectual context. They contain a detailed analysis of his poetical works and, where appropriate, a brief account of his other writings. His literary reputation is examined and his contribution to the development of French poetry is assessed, as is also his impact on other literatures. A selection of critical views and a bibliography are appended.

The critical Editions contain a substantial introduction aimed at presenting each work against its historical background as well as studying its genre, structure, themes, style, etc. and highlighting its relevance for today. The text normally given is the complete text of the original edition. It is followed by full commentaries on the poems and annotation of the text, including variant readings when these are of real significance, and a select bibliography.

E. Le B.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- C.A.: Guillaume Apollinaire, *Chroniques d'art, 1902-1918*, ed. L.-C. Breunig, Paris, Gallimard, 1960
Doss.: Michel Décaudin, *Le Dossier d' 'Alcools'*
F.D.R.: *Le Flâneur des deux rives*, bulletin d'études apollinairiennes
F.R.: *French Review*
F.S.: *French Studies*
G.A.: *Guillaume Apollinaire* (periodical)
M.F.: *Mercure de France*
O.C.: Guillaume Apollinaire, *Œuvres complètes* (4 vols.), ed. M. Décaudin
O.P.: Guillaume Apollinaire, *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. M. Adéma and M. Décaudin
P.M.L.A.: *Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America*
R.L.C.: *Revue de Littérature comparée*
R.S.H.: *Revue des Sciences humaines*
T.S.: Guillaume Apollinaire, *Tendre comme le souvenir*

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INTRODUCTION

THE BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

The temptation to dwell on certain of the odder aspects of the life of Guillaume Apollinaire has led to something of a falsification of the man and his work. Certainly, from his death in 1918 until the 1950s, considerably more attention was paid to curious biographical details than to the writings themselves, there was little exegesis and editions were few in number. However, many of his friends had piously celebrated Apollinaire's memory and legends began to accumulate. During his lifetime he had encouraged a certain mystery about his birth and origins for, in spite of his gregarious gaiety, Apollinaire had his own marked reticences. The task of literary criticism is too difficult to allow us to dispense with any aids and the poet has given us his own authority for relating discreetly his poetry to his life. 'Chacun de mes poèmes est la commémoration d'un événement de ma vie et le plus souvent il s'agit de tristesse, mais j'ai des joies aussi que je chante', he wrote to Henri Martineau, 19 July 1913 (*O.C.*, iv, p. 768) but before we are tempted to consider his poems as a kind of poeticised autobiography, we must remind ourselves that Apollinaire's brother Albert, brought up in the same bizarre and insecure circumstances, subject to the same shaping forces, developed in a totally different way. This is what Apollinaire wrote of him:

J'aime beaucoup mon petit Albert, esprit si droit, intelligence fine, plein de bon sens, travailleur, volontaire et très doux. Très pieux, il avait voulu se faire prêtre et très joli garçon, il était tant que je l'ai connu aussi chaste que St Louis de Gonzague ou St Stanislas Kostka qui fit pénitence toute sa vie pour avoir regardé une femme avec plaisir.

(*Lettres à Lou*, 2 February 1915, p. 154)

The difference between the two brothers who had a great affection for each other, could hardly be greater.

It was not until the publication of M. Adéma's authoritative biography, *Guillaume Apollinaire le mal-aimé* in 1952 that the strange circumstances of Apollinaire's birth became known. His mother,

Angelica de Kostrowitzky, of Russo-Polish descent, was well known to his friends but his father had remained a shadowy figure; Apollinaire himself hinted at a person high in the hierarchy of the Vatican, an allusion taken up by those Picasso drawings which show him smoking a pipe and wearing a high-ranking ecclesiastical hat. In fact, his father was Francesco d'Aspermont, an Italian officer of Swiss descent. Guillaume Apollinaire was born in Rome on 26 August 1880 and, being illegitimate, was registered at birth as Guillaume Albert Dulcigni, issue of an unnamed mother and father. One month later he was baptised and, shortly after, his mother officially re-registered the birth of Wilhelm Albert Vladimir Alexandre Apollinaris de Kostrowitzky. In 1887 his mother moved to Monaco with Guillaume and his brother, born of the same father. He was educated at the Catholic Collège Saint-Charles and made his first communion there. In 1899 the family moved to Paris to begin a precarious life. One essential point must be retained: Apollinaire was stateless and, although France became his *pays d'adoption*, the country to which he devotes all his admiration and even his love, he was not French. The search for identity which is a recurring theme in *Alcools*, hidden and allusive though it is, has its roots here. 'Je me sens abandonné sur terre depuis mon plus jeune âge' he wrote in a draft of 'Zone', only to delete this too-direct confession as he omitted from the same draft lines which revealed something of his heritage:

Et moi en qui se mêle le sang slave et le sang latin
Je regarde ces pauvres Polonais qui rêvent aux jours lointains.

Yet there is something more positive in Apollinaire's situation. He was *disponible*, more detached from the literary tradition which was the natural background of the native French writer. He makes this point in *Le Poète assassiné* (1916), a prose work with a considerable autobiographical content. In a story entitled 'Giovanni Moroni' he wrote:

Il y a maintenant, comme en tous pays d'ailleurs, tant d'étrangers en France qu'il n'est pas sans intérêt d'étudier la sensibilité de ceux d'entre eux qui, étant nés ailleurs, sont cependant venus ici assez jeunes pour être façonnés par la haute civilisation française. Ils introduisent dans leur pays d'adoption les impressions de leur enfance, les plus vives de toutes,

et enrichissent le patrimoine spirituel de leur nouvelle nation comme le chocolat et le café, par exemple, ont étendu le domaine du goût.

(*O.C.*, i, p. 310)

Herein, perhaps, is contained one explanation of Apollinaire's interest in innovation, in 'l'esprit nouveau', which remained so nicely balanced against his discriminating admiration of the masters of the past.

In 1899 the brothers were sent to Stavelot, in the Belgian Ardennes, for a three-month holiday which ended abruptly when they absconded without paying their bill. This stay was Apollinaire's first contact with the nordic side of his heritage and aroused dormant atavisms. Forests had a constant fascination for him; he wrote of 'cette prodigieuse matrice qu'est la forêt, créatrice de prestiges et de vies sans cesse renouvelés' (*T.S.*, 25 May 1915, p. 29). The enchanted forest of Brocéliande with its magical personages and his wide readings in medieval literature were brought vividly to life. Here he wrote verse, prose (in particular, *L'Enchanteur pourrissant*) and made notes of strange, rare words which will be recalled in *Alcools*. His fascination with language was heightened by his contact with Walloon and occasional *wallonismes* occur later in his verse.

This northern contact was renewed in 1901 when Apollinaire set out for a year as tutor to a German family with houses in the Rhineland. Here he saw a world rich in myth and legend, travelled extensively and met fleetingly those characters who decorate the group of poems known as 'Rhénanes' in *Alcools*. It was a fertile period for him since the challenge of change was something to which he immediately responded. His verse took on its own distinctive note, the physical splendour of autumn, his 'saison mentale', awoke in him the visual sense which was his most sensitive and he fell passionately in love with Annie Playden, the English governess of the family. The story of his relationship with Annie, the first of the powerful amatory experiences which contributed so much to the poems of *Alcools* and was bitterly elegised in 'La Chanson du mal-aimé,' has its own ironies. Some inspired detective work by M. Adéma and Robert Goffin, the Belgian poet, succeeded in tracing Annie to America where she had been sent by her father, a strict Anglican architect, in 1904

(see 'L'Émigrant de Landor Road'). In the fifty years which had elapsed since her last meeting with 'Kostro', the name under which she had known Apollinaire, she had married, become widowed and kept a boarding-kennel establishment with her sister. The subsequent fame of Guillaume Apollinaire had passed her by for she did not know the pseudonym, but her true Edwardian discretion did not allow her to divulge any intimate details of their relationship during the stay in Germany (see F. Steegmuller, 'Une visite chez Annie', *G.A.* 2). The oscillation between happiness and unhappiness which is apparent in his relationship with Annie is echoed in the poems of the Rhineland where Apollinaire found the secret of holding in a creative tension those contradictions and opposites which abound in his work: life and death, legend and reality, the supernatural and the ordinary, the solemn and the trivial, the real and the imaginary, hope and despair, all coexist in an ambiguous atmosphere of varied poetic forms and styles.

The ending of his love affair with Annie Playden and the irksome tasks of an *employé de banque* in Paris brought Apollinaire to a period of depression and near silence in which his powers seem to flag and his work to lack direction. He was jerked out of this apathy by a series of unconnected events. Apollinaire had met Picasso in 1904 although his friendship with the painters André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck had begun earlier. His relationship with the young painters, *Fauves* and *Cubistes* alike, had given him a great deal of pleasure and aesthetic excitement. His art criticism (collected in the *Chroniques d'art* 1902-18, Gallimard, 1960) reflects his lively defence of the new art forms; he was the first exegete of Cubism. In 1907 he met Marie Laurencin, herself a painter, fell in love with her and so found renewed hope and stimulus. This is the time of 'Le Brasier' and 'Les Fiançailles', poems which mark an evolution in his poetic achievement as well as in his views on the rôle and powers of the poet. J.-P. Richard has well said of this change:

Au lieu d'être celui qui dit *adieu* aux choses, et qui célèbre mélancoliquement leur sécession, il va devenir celui qui occupe activement, comme un 'brasier', ou un soleil tout neuf, le centre de l'espace, et à partir duquel seul les choses prendront sens. Le centre du monde n'est plus un là-bas stellaire, reculé en d'autres nébuleuses, c'est notre conscience vivante et

actuelle, inépuisable foyer d'être, centre infini d'expansion et de métamorphose.

(‘Etoiles chez Apollinaire’ in *De Ronsard à Breton: Hommages à M. Raymond*)

L'Enchanteur pourrissant, his first published work, appeared in 1908, but was hardly a success for no more than one quarter of the small edition was sold. *L'Hérésiarque et Cie* was published in 1910 and, according to Apollinaire came close to being awarded the Prix Goncourt. *Le Bestiaire ou le Cortège d'Orphée* came out in the following year with illustrations by Dufy.

His relationship with Marie Laurencin, tender and stormy in turns, came to an end in 1913; the resultant moral depression is reflected in *Alcools*, particularly in ‘Zone’. Another factor contributed to the blackness of this period. In 1911 Apollinaire was arrested on suspicion of stealing the Mona Lisa from the Louvre; the story of this half-tragic, half-farcical event is told in the notes to the poems ‘A la Santé’ (see pp. 173-4). There is no doubt that Apollinaire received a severe setback. As a stateless person, he might have been deported, losing at one stroke his career, his friends and France. This fear reinforced questions of identity, self-searching and insecurity. This was his mood when *Alcools* was published in 1913.

The rest of the story does not concern us here. It is enough to say that the mercurial nature of Apollinaire reasserted itself, his friendship with the painter Robert Delaunay led to a renewal of ideas, seen in *Simultanéisme*, in the typographical experiments in *Calligrammes*. The outbreak of war in 1914 provided him with a new challenge. Since he was not a French citizen, conscription did not affect him but he nevertheless volunteered and was called to the colours in 1915; he became naturalised French. In 1916, a Lieutenant in an Infantry Regiment, he was severely wounded in the head. This year also saw the publication of *Le Poète assassiné* and, in 1918, *Calligrammes, poèmes de la paix et de la guerre, 1913-1916*. These war years brought him a considerable amount of satisfaction for he seems to have found himself by the simple act of becoming a French soldier. His voice is graver and more self-assured, regret for the past is replaced by a prophetic look to the future. He can now write in ‘Merveille de la guerre’ (*Calligrammes*):

Je lègue à l'avenir l'histoire de Guillaume Apollinaire
Qui fut à la guerre et sut être partout.

He died of the *grippe espagnole* on 9 November 1918.

THE PUBLICATION AND ORDER OF *ALCOOLS*

Alcools, poèmes 1898-1913 with a portrait of Apollinaire by Picasso was published in 1913 by the Mercure de France. Remy de Gourmont, a power in the influential literary review published by the same house, had been very impressed by 'La Chanson du mal-aimé' and had recommended Apollinaire's volume to Alfred Vallette, the editor. M. Décaudin (*Doss.*, pp. 42ff.) has shown that in the year of publication there was a fair amount of interest in the volume as reflected in the sales, but this soon fell off although Apollinaire himself claimed in 1914 that *Alcools* was sold out. The critical reception accorded to the book was mixed. The poet had a good many friends amongst journalists, *chroniqueurs* and the younger literary critics who wrote understandingly. The most damaging account of *Alcools* was however written by Georges Duhamel in the *Mercure de France* itself (15 June 1913). It began:

Rien ne fait plus penser à une boutique de brocanteur que ce recueil de vers publié par M. Guillaume Apollinaire sous un titre à la fois simple et mystérieux: *Alcools*.

Je dis: boutique de brocanteur parce qu'il est venu échouer dans ce taudis une foule d'objets hétéroclites dont certains ont de la valeur, mais dont aucun n'est le produit de l'industrie du marchand même. C'est bien là une des caractéristiques de la brocante: elle revend; elle ne fabrique pas.

[The review is quoted in full in *Doss.*, pp. 49-50]

This accusation of a conspicuous lack of originality was calculated to hurt Apollinaire whose drive to *le nouveau* was already apparent. There follows an ironic tribute to the poet's erudition: 'M. Apollinaire ne manque pas d'érudition; on a constamment l'impression qu'il dit tout ce qu'il sait' but Duhamel judges this to lead to failure, to the 'image manquée'. 'J'aimerais mieux que M. Apollinaire fût illettré et qu'il écrivît plus souvent selon son cœur' again shocked the poet whose belief in the *truth* of poetry

was now paramount. The review so infuriated him that his first instinct was to seek satisfaction by duel but the situation was smoothed over by the intervention of friends.

The title *Alcools* was a late choice, being preferred to the original *Eau-de-vie* which was included in a portrait of Apollinaire executed by the Polish artist Marcoussis in mid-1912. Both words occur at the end of 'Zone':

Et tu bois cet alcool brûlant comme ta vie
Ta vie que tu bois comme cette eau-de-vie

and he uses both in a rather precious dedication which he inscribed on a copy of the volume which he presented to Marie Laurencin:

MON ALAMBIC VOS YEUX CE SONT MES ALCOOLS
Et votre voix m'enivre ainsi qu'une eau-de-vie
Des clartés d'astres saouls aux monstrueux faux cols
Brûlaient votre ESPRIT sur ma nuit inassouvie.

Tristan Tzara has argued that Apollinaire preferred 'la nudité exacte, réelle, sans promiscuité possible, du mot [*Alcools*] qui n'est que lui-même' and, comparing it to the title *Les Fleurs du mal* which reveals the 'démarche allégorique et symbolique de la pensée baudelairienne', concluded that:

les *Alcools* brutaux et plébéiens, opposés aux fleurs aristocratiques et fines, résument la somme du réalisme lyrique qu'Apollinaire jetait dans la balance des temps modernes en contrepartie de celui, historiquement en tous points valable, de Baudelaire.

(*Alcools*, Club du meilleur livre, 1953, pp. 3-4)

The harmonics of the word *alcools* with its hints at joy and subsequent sadness, pleasure and danger, of distillation in the magic process of fire and water, convey well the excitements and contradictions of the poems.

The volume contains fifty poems of which forty-three had already appeared in different literary reviews, six ('La Blanche Neige', 'Un Soir', '1909', 'A la Santé', 'Automne malade' and 'Hôtels') were printed in the volume for the first time and one ('Chantre') was added on the proofs. As indicated by the title, the date of composition of the poems lies between 1898 and 1913.

The poems are not, however, printed in chronological order. A few of the poems are dated by Apollinaire but the problems of dating the remainder are very considerable. The pioneer work of LeRoy C. Breunig ('The Chronology of Apollinaire's *Alcools*', *P.M.L.A.*, December 1952) and M. Décaudin's *Le Dossier d' 'Alcools'* are indispensable tools for any examination of this complex issue. Apollinaire wrote quickly, often leaving lines and poems unfinished. They were set aside and fragments incorporated into poems composed at a much later date; examples are quoted in notes to individual poems. Mme M.-J. Durry has described the technique as that of a 'mosaïste' or 'marqueteur' and Breunig has used the word 'collage'. Nor are existing manuscripts always authoritative evidence for Apollinaire sometimes wrote on headed notepaper acquired years earlier.

Because the order of the poems is not chronological there has been much speculation on why any particular poem should occupy the place it does. Since the publication of *Les Fleurs du mal* and Baudelaire's confession to Alfred de Vigny sent with a copy of the second (1861) edition ('Le seul éloge que je sollicite pour ce livre est qu'on reconnaisse qu'il n'est pas un pur album et qu'il a un commencement et une fin'), it has become irresistibly tempting to try to discover in any collection of poems a secret order of presentation in which a poem gains added significance from its place, its meaning being influenced by what has gone before and by what is to follow. There is no such evidence to be found in the arrangement of *Alcools* nor did Apollinaire admit of any such underlying intention. The volume opens and closes with a long poem. 'Zone' (1912) with its private history of despair and alienation presents a moral portrait of the poet which succeeding poems both confirm and contradict. 'Vendémiaire', published the same year but almost certainly written three or four years earlier, closes the volume, not with any facile optimism but with strong affirmations of man's potential. In the first poem, the poet's geographical wanderings mirror the frantic movements of his mind in his search for explanation and justification, ending in the hopeless light of another despairing dawn; in 'Vendémiaire', it is the world and its cities which come to him, to pay homage to the poet, centre of the universe. Here the dawn has all the trappings of joyful promise. Scott Bates has argued that Apollin-