



Guillaume Apollinaire
Selected Poems

WITH PARALLEL FRENCH TEXT

New translations by Martin Sorrell

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

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SELECTED POEMS

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE was born in Rome in 1880, the first son of a Polish mother and an undisclosed Italian father. Apollinaire's schooldays were spent on the French Riviera. By 1899 he was in Paris, which, apart from a year in Germany, became his home. He soon established himself in the artistic avant-garde. A prodigious gourmand and lover, and prolific writer, his stories, poems, and erotica began to be noticed, and thanks to his gift for publicity, the new Cubist painters also attracted serious attention. In 1911 he and Picasso were wrongly implicated in the theft of the *Mona Lisa*; Apollinaire was briefly imprisoned. His first major poetry collection, *Alcools*, appeared in 1913, as did his book on the Cubists. Some of *Alcools*, combined with his interest in Italian Futurism, marked Apollinaire out as a leading modernist. After World War I was declared he continued to bring modernist aesthetics to bear on the poetry he wrote from the war zone. Seriously wounded in 1916, he returned to Paris and immersed himself again in its artistic life. His second major collection of poems, *Calligrammes*, containing the poetry that distinguishes him as the one great French poet of World War I, appeared in 1917. He wrote two plays, coined the word 'surrealist', but produced scarcely any more poetry. In May 1918 he married Jacqueline Kolb; on 9 November he died of Spanish influenza, two days before the Armistice. He was 38 years old.

MARTIN SORRELL is Emeritus Professor of French and Literary Translation at the University of Exeter. He has published translations of Baudelaire, Claude de Burine, and a bilingual anthology of modern French poetry by women. For Oxford World's Classics he has translated volumes of poetry by Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Lorca.

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GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

Selected Poems



Translated with an Introduction and Notes by

MARTIN SORRELL

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CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	ix
<i>Note on the Text and Translation</i>	xxvii
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	xxix
<i>A Chronology of Guillaume Apollinaire</i>	xxxii

SELECTED POEMS

From *Le Bestiaire/The Bestiary or Orpheus' Cortege* (1911)

La Souris 2	The Mouse 3
La Chenille 2	The Caterpillar 3
La Puce 2	The Flea 3
Le Poulpe 2	The Octopus 3
L'Écrevisse 4	The Crayfish 5
Le Paon 4	The Peacock 5
Le Hibou 4	The Owl 5

From *Alcools/Alcohols* (1913)

Zone 6	Zone 7
Le Pont Mirabeau 16	The Mirabeau Bridge 17
La Chanson du mal-aimé 18	Song of the Ill-loved Man 19
Les Colchiques 38	Crocuses 39
Chantre 38	Cantor 39
Crépuscule 38	Twilight 39
Annie 40	Annie 41
Cortège 42	Cortege 43
Marizibill 46	Marizibill 47
Le Voyageur 46	The Traveller 47
Marie 50	Marie 51
La Blanche neige 52	White Snow 53
L'Adieu 54	The Farewell 55
Salomé 54	Salome 55
Saltimbanques 56	Cap 'n' Bells 57
La Tzigane 56	The Gipsy 57
Automne 58	Autumn 59
L'Émigrant de Landor Road 58	The Emigrant of Landor Road 59
Le Brasier 62	The Brazier 63
Nuit rhénane 66	Rhenish Night 67
Les Femmes 68	The Women 69

La Dame 70
 Les Fiançailles 70
 1909 78
 À la Santé 80
 Automne malade 84
 Hôtels 86
 Cors de chasse 86
 Vendémiaire 88

The Lady 71
 Engagement 71
 1909 79
 In the Santé Prison 81
 Autumn Ailing 85
 Hotels 87
 Hunting-Horns 87
 Vendémiaire 89

From *Vitam Impendere Amori* / *Life Devoted to Love* (1917)

'Tu n'as pas surpris . . .' 100
 'Le soir tombe . . .' 100
 'O ma jeunesse abandonnée' 102

'You've not found . . .' 101
 'Evening comes . . .' 101
 'O my youth abandoned' 103

From *Calligrammes* / *Calligrams* (1918)

Liens 104
 Les Fenêtres 106
 Les Collines 108
 Arbre 122
 Lundi rue Christine 124
 Sur les prophéties 128
 Le Musicien de Saint-Merry 130

 La Cravate et la montre 138
 À travers l'Europe 140
 Il pleut 142
 La Petite Auto 144
 Fumées 148
 À Nîmes 150
 Veille 152
 S P 154
 Guerre 156
 Mutation 156
 Les Soupirs du servent de Dakar 158
 Fête 162
 La Nuit d'avril 1915 164
 Tourbillon de mouches 166
 L'Adieu du cavalier 166
 Le Palais du tonnerre 166
 Fusée 170
 Désir 174
 Océan de terre 176
 Merveille de la guerre 176
 Exercice 180
 Il y a 182

Links 105
 The Windows 107
 The Hills 109
 Tree 123
 Monday rue Christine 125
 On Prophecies 129
 The Music-Maker of
 Saint-Merry 131
 The Tie and The Watch 139
 Across Europe 141
 It's raining 143
 The Little Car 145
 Smoke 149
 In Nîmes 151
 Keeping Watch 153
 S P 155
 War 157
 Change-over 157
 Sighs of the Gunner from Dakar 159
 Fête 163
 April Night 1915 165
 Swarm of Flies 167
 The Cavalryman's Farewell 167
 The Palace of the Thunder 167
 Rocket 171
 Desire 175
 Ocean of Earth 177
 Wonder of War 177
 Exercise 181
 There's/There are 183

Simultanéités 184	Simultaneities 185
Le Vigneron champenois 186	Wine-grower of Champagne 187
Carte postale 186	Postcard 187
Souvenirs 188	Memories 189
L'Avenir 188	The Future 189
Un oiseau chante 190	A Bird is Singing 191
Chevaux de frise 192	Chevaux-de-frise 193
Chef de section 194	Platoon Commander 195
Tristesse d'une étoile 196	A Star's Sadness 197
La Jolie Rousse 196	The Pretty Redhead 197

From *Il y a / There Is* (1925)

'Linda' 200	'Linda' 201
Montparnasse 200	Montparnasse 201

From *Poèmes à Lou / Poems to Lou* (1955)

IV ['Je pense à toi mon Lou . . .'] 202	IV ['I think of you my Lou . . .'] 203
VI ['La fumée de la cantine . . .'] 202	VI ['The field-kitchen's smoke . . .'] 203
XII Si je mourais là-bas . . . 204	XII If I died up there . . . 205
XVI Dans un café à Nîmes 206	XVI In a Nîmes café 207
XVIII Adieu 208	XVIII Farewell 209
XXIII ['Quatre jours mon amour . . .'] 210	XXIII ['Four days now my love . . .'] 211
XXVIII ['Et prends bien garde aux Zeppelins'] 212	XXVIII ['Watch out for Zeppelins'] 213
XXX Train militaire 212	XXX Troop Train 213
XXXII ['Ma Lou je coucherai ce soir . . .'] 214	XXXII ['My Lou tonight I'll sleep . . .'] 215
XXXIII ['Mon très cher petit Lou . . .'] 220	XXXIII ['My dear little Lou . . .'] 221
L Les Attentives 222	L Attentive Women 223
LXXV Épigramme 226	LXXV Epigram 227

From *Le Guetteur mélancolique / The Melancholy Watcher* (1952)

Un soir d'été 228	A Summer's Evening 229
Lettre-poème 228	Letter-Poem 229
Lettre-poème 230	Letter-Poem 231
'Ami je vous écris . . . ' 230	'Friend I write to you . . . ' 231

From *Poèmes à Madeleine / Poems to Madeleine* (1952)

'Le ciel est d'un bleu profond' 234	'The sky's a deep blue' 235
Lueurs 236	Light Flaring 237

Peu de chose	236	Nothing Much	237
Le Quatrième Poème secret	238	Fourth secret poem	239
Le Neuvième Poème secret	240	Ninth secret poem	241
La Tranchée	240	The Trench	241

From *Poèmes retrouvés/Rediscovered Poems* (no unifying date)

Chapeau-tombeau	244	Hat-Tomb	245
4 H	244	4 a.m.	245
'Maria'	246	'Maria'	247
'Voici le cercueil'	246	'Here's the coffin'	247
L'Avion	246	Avion	247
'La nuit descend . . .'	248	'Night comes down . . .'	249

From *Poèmes épistolaires/Epistolary Poems* (no unifying date)

'Premier canonnier conducteur'	252	'Leading gunner'	253
'Enfin mon vieux suis brigadier'	252	'Been made corporal at last old friend'	253

From *Poèmes inédits/Unpublished Poems* (no unifying date)

'Élodie Louise'	254	'Élodie Louise'	255
'Émélie'	254	'Émélie'	255
'J'ai rêvé que j'allais . . .'	256	'I dreamt I was going . . .'	257

<i>Appendix: L'Antitradition futuriste</i>	258
<i>Explanatory Notes</i>	263
<i>Index of Titles</i>	273
<i>Index of First Lines</i>	276

INTRODUCTION

Apollinaire: Life and Times

THE life and the work of Guillaume Apollinaire were as colourful and varied as a kaleidoscope. Shake the kaleidoscope and you get: the clever schoolboy full of knowledge but self-doubt too; the poet of innovative free verse but also backward-looking symbolist narrative; the awestruck worshipper of The Feminine alternating with the dedicated sensualist; the pornographer nostalgic for the delicacy of chivalry; the charmer loved and mistrusted in equal measure. Apollinaire was as well a prolific writer of short stories, the founder of literary reviews that flourished only briefly, and the first champion of Cubism. He wrote two plays, one good, one bad. He was a fan of technology but still had a penchant for the Middle Ages. And when war came he became the most patriotic of warriors, even though his adoptive country hardly recognized him. And to the end of his short life he continued to believe in humanity as it crashed through one of the worst periods in all its history.

Guillaume-Albert-Wladimir-Alexandre-Apollinaire Kostrowitzky was born out of wedlock in Rome on 26 August 1880. His mother, Angelica de Kostrowitzky, was a very young woman of aristocratic Russo-Polish descent. Her family had fled Poland and settled in Rome. She was spirited, determined to kick over the traces, wedded to a bohemian life that lasted up to her death. Guillaume's father was entered as 'unknown' when the birth was registered five days later, although there is scarcely any doubt that he too was an aristocrat, an Italian army officer by the name of Francesco d'Aspermont. On 2 November a legal document was drawn up recognizing the boy under the name of Guillaume-Albert Dulcigni. It is just as certain that Francesco d'Aspermont was the father of Guillaume's brother Albert, born some two years later, also in Rome. But in all events, Francesco left Angelica in 1885, and she then took off around Europe's casino-land, leaving her two boys behind in Italy. Two years later she was back to remove them to Monaco. There, young Guillaume Kostrowitzky (Cointreau-Whisky, to use the nickname he would acquire) entered the Lycée Saint-Charles, where he did very well, winning many school prizes over the next six years. But when the

school closed in 1896 he was transferred first to the Collège Stanislas in Cannes, then to the lycée in Nice, where, using the pen-name of Guillaume Macabre, he wrote his very first poems.

In 1899 Angelica and her sons left the Riviera and made their circuitous and slow way to Paris. Not long after their arrival Angelica's new partner, Jules Weil, took them all off to Stavelot, in southern Belgium, only for the mother and 'uncle' Jules to abandon the two boys for some weeks. In the end the boys had to do a midnight flit from their hotel, sneaking back to Paris, bill unpaid. The infamous incident entered Guillaume's personal mythology, soon to appear in the poem 'Le Voyageur'. Stavelot has become a sacred site for devotees of Apollinaire. It is also the place where the adolescent Guillaume first fell in unrequited love. The object of this first of many excursions into hopeless adoration was a local girl called Mareye.

Back in Paris, impoverished, Guillaume looked for work, but unsuccessfully. He wrote an erotic novel to make ends meet. At the same time, ambitious and socially skilful, he was making his mark on the city's literary scene, though not getting noticed as much as his impatience required. There was another bout of love, this time for Linda, the sister of a friend. It went nowhere. However, in the summer of 1901 he was taken on by the Vicomtesse de Milhau as the live-in French teacher of her daughter Gabrielle. The household, which included a young English governess called Annie Playden, decamped to the Vicomtesse's Rhineland estates. Importantly, before they left France Guillaume sent some poems to various Parisian reviews, and in September three were published (in *La Grande France*), his first poetry to make it into print.

Once settled into the Milhau way of life, Guillaume sent off more poems, as well as some journalism. His impressions of the Rhineland were published in *La Grande France*. It is at this time too that he settled on the surname Apollinaire. And it is during his Rhineland year that he fell for Annie Playden, whom he described to friends in a mixture of chivalric and crude language, though whether he ever slept with her is a moot point, despite all his affirmatives. The more she sent him packing the more his infatuation grew, a pattern of exquisite pain that would develop and fuel much of his poetry ('La Chanson du mal-aimé' is based on the Annie non-story). Alongside the vagaries of love, Apollinaire's poetic vocation was defining itself more clearly. His talent was becoming truer and firmer, and he was beginning to mix short and lyrical pieces with the

overblown Symbolist poems that tended to be not much better than vehicles for his erudition.

By the summer of 1902, back in Paris, Apollinaire found bread-and-butter employment in a bank, and set about gaining a firm foothold in the capital's literary and artistic world. Little by little, he did establish himself. He frequented the literary circles of the Left Bank; he met the young Turks of poetry. He came under the influence of Alfred Jarry, the eccentric, unclassifiable creator of *Père Ubu*. Bits of Apollinaire's writing were getting published here and there, he collaborated on literary reviews, and in October 1903 founded his own, *Le Festin d'Esope*, which ran to only nine issues. In November 1903 Apollinaire went to London, the first of two visits to find Annie Playden. Despite his best endeavours, the handsome and not yet podgy poet failed to charm the young lady from Landor Road, Norwood, who demanded not to be further importuned. Nevertheless, when Apollinaire tried again in 1904 things went so awry that, almost impulsively, Annie accepted a post as governess in California and quickly left England. Apollinaire's temporary heartbreak would be commemorated in two of his most compelling poems, 'La Chanson du mal-aimé' and 'L'Émigrant de Landor Road'.

But a more significant event of 1904 was Apollinaire's first encounter with Picasso. Apollinaire had already met Derain and Vlaminck, and after meeting Picasso he started to frequent the group of young artists and writers assembled in a curious Montmartre house known as the *Bateau Lavoir* (boat wash-house) because of its bizarre architecture. Apollinaire soon got to meet Braque, the Delaunays, and others. From the friendships and artistic experimentation that developed emerged a new aesthetic that later acquired the name Cubism. In 1905 Apollinaire wrote an article on Picasso, the first critical study of the painter to be published, and his proximity to the *Bateau Lavoir* and avant-garde painting gave his own work a significant push away from Symbolism and the antiquated world, as he would call it in his poem 'Zone', and towards a modernist style.

The next years, up to 1911, were a period both of consolidation and of development. A guiding influence on Apollinaire and many of the Parisian avant-garde was Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* of 1909. Its glorification of speed above all was an irresistible seduction. Energized and ever-more prolific, Apollinaire saw many of the poems he was now writing, or had written earlier, published in a variety of journals, such as *La Revue immoraliste*, *Vers et Prose*, and *La Phalange*. He continued

to write appreciative criticism of the Cubist painters. He wrote a regular column in *L'Intransigeant* and then in *Paris-Journal*, though it was later, in 1912, that the revolutionary aesthetics of these painters were most loudly championed, in *Les Soirées de Paris*. Apollinaire also wrote occasional prefaces for exhibition catalogues. His renown as a creative writer, after some penurious times which were eased by royalties from a couple of erotic novels, grew steadily after 1906. As well as individual poems, his short stories were getting published. In 1907, the year of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, he took up with the painter Marie Laurencin, the 'Marie' of many of his poems.

By 1910 his first collection of poetry was almost ready. In August he approached the artist Raoul Dufy, who agreed to illustrate the book, a collection of thirty single-stanza poems, each on the subject of an animal. The delightful, if slight, *Le Bestiaire* appeared in 1911, each poem accompanied by a Dufy woodcut. Two other events, unhappy ones, made 1911 a memorable year for Apollinaire. His relationship with Marie Laurencin ended; and on 21 August the *Mona Lisa* was stolen from the Louvre. Because he had inadvertently been caught up in some shady business in the past involving statuettes also stolen from the Louvre, and because he feared that, not having yet obtained French nationality, he might be deported, Apollinaire panicked and managed only to bring suspicion on himself. The result was that he found himself locked up for almost a week in Paris's La Santé prison on suspicion of the theft. But the experience did give him the inspiration to write a sequence of six haunting little poems about his incarceration. In the event, no charges were brought, either against him or Picasso, who was also briefly a suspect, and several months later the *Mona Lisa* turned up in Italy and was restored to the Louvre.

Apollinaire's bustling and gregarious life began again. In February 1912 the first issue of *Les Soirées de Paris* went on sale. It included his article on modern painters, as well as two of his poems, one of which is the celebrated, lyrical 'Le Pont Mirabeau'. In a later issue, 'Vendémiaire' appeared, crucially the first poem in which Apollinaire suppressed all punctuation, a decision he soon applied to nearly all the poems he had written and those he would write. This was also the year of the visionary 'Cortège', one of Apollinaire's frequent, troubled searches for identity, and of 'Le Voyageur', a most successfully controlled longer poem, based on poignant memories.

The year that followed has been described as an *annus mirabilis*

in the artistic life of France. In 1913 the first volume of Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu* appeared, as well as Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* and Cendrars's *La Prose du Transsibérien*, a long and remarkable poem-painting with accordion-style binding that allows it to unfold to its full length; 1913 also saw the premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and new paintings by a number of the Cubists. And it was the year of two important books by Apollinaire, as well as a flamboyant artistic manifesto. First, in March, came *Méditations esthétiques: les peintres cubistes*, rapidly followed in April by *Alcools*, his first major collection, a number of whose sixty or so poems were startlingly modernist. Then, in June, Apollinaire published his short and explosive *L'Antitradition futuriste, manifeste synthèse*, a polemic, diatribe even, in uncritical support of Marinetti and against the old artistic order. Later in the year Apollinaire issued a defence of what he termed 'simultanism', a key Cubist technique which he had tried to import into some of the poems of *Alcools*, and which he would develop subsequently.

The year 1914 began strongly for Apollinaire. He was writing substantially, and individual pieces were continuing to get published and noticed, if not always favourably. He took such exception to a review by Arthur Cravan, an untamed Dadaist, that he issued a challenge. However, the matter was dropped and no duel was fought. In June *Les Soirées de Paris* published Apollinaire's first calligram, *Lettre-Océan*, later collected in his second volume of poems; and in July he followed it up with a handful of what he termed *idéogrammes lyriques* (i.e. picture-poems). But everything was blown off course by the announcement of war, which Apollinaire heard on 31 July. He happened to be with a friend on a journalistic assignment in Deauville that day, and, according to his poem 'La Petite auto', the two returned immediately to Paris, although in the poem's first line Apollinaire changes the month to August. A 'patriot without a country', as one friend called him, the Italo-Polish Apollinaire quickly put in a request to enlist in the French army, but received no reply. By September he had decamped to Nice, where again he tried to join up. While he awaited a reply he attempted the seduction of a young aristocrat, Louise de Coligny. She refused, but when, in December, Apollinaire was accepted by the army, Louise—the Lou of subsequent poems—yielded, and there began a very brief, very intense affair. Almost concurrently, he began another relationship, perhaps the most remarkable

of all. In January 1915, on a train between Nice and Nîmes, he met a very young woman called Madeleine Pagès. Months later, on being sent up to the war zone in Champagne, impulsively he wrote to her at her family's address near Oran in Algeria. A correspondence ensued, and both Madeleine and Guillaume began to convince themselves they were in love. More than that, Apollinaire's letters became ever more sexually explicit. The outcome was that, in the summer, and by correspondence alone, they became engaged to be married.

During most of 1915 Apollinaire served in the artillery. He still wrote and sent work back to Paris. His experience of war thus far had energized him; his mood was optimistic, as reflected by those of his poems which were upbeat and bedazzled and often charged with erotic memories and fantasies. The fact was that, as an artillery officer, he did not have to come face to face with those grim realities of war so powerfully evoked by his fellow soldier-poets from Britain. Nonetheless, among the poems that seem to celebrate war there are ominous signs that he knew it was a disaster. After November, when Apollinaire had transferred to the infantry to obtain his commission, his attitudes and his poems changed. His war would now be in the front-line trenches, where, except for a spell of leave in Oran and Paris, he remained through the winter and into March 1916, when finally he was granted French nationality, only to receive a serious shrapnel wound to the head eight days later. In May he was trepanned and sent back to Paris. His war was over. By July, so too was his engagement to Madeleine.

From that time until his death Apollinaire did not stray far from Paris. Though still energetic, his manner became less ebullient. He continued to frequent his former milieux and to contribute to the city's avant-garde life. He was given work, first in the Office of Censorship and then in the Ministry for the Colonies. He published in some of the new adventurous reviews that had sprung up, such as *Nord-Sud*, *SIC*, and *391*. He was instrumental in getting the remarkable multi-media stage work *Parade* premiered in May 1917. His play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, in whose preface he coined the word *sur-réaliste*, was staged in June. The six poems of *Vitam impendere amor*i appeared in November, and in the same month he gave an influential lecture entitled *L'Esprit nouveau et les poètes*, a clarion-call for a new tradition of poetry.

Early in 1918, doubtless weakened by his head wound, Apollinaire

spent several weeks in hospital. Nevertheless, his writing in the various genres continued to be published. One piece, his final, great poem, entitled 'La Jolie Rousse', was inspired by Jacqueline Kolb, his last love, whom he married in May, one month after the appearance of the second major collection of his poems to be published in his lifetime. Entitled *Calligrammes*, it gathered poems written since *Alcools*. Along with the war poems, it is notable for Apollinaire's most obviously experimental pieces, the picture-poems that give it its title.

Apart from his second play, *Couleur du Temps*, completed in August, that was the end. On the afternoon of 9 November, two days before the Armistice, Apollinaire died in his bed, upstairs in his apartment at no. 202, boulevard St-Germain, a victim of the Spanish influenza pandemic. One irony that fortunately he would have known nothing about was that the crowd below his windows, celebrating the imminent end of the war, were chanting 'À bas Guillaume!'—the Kaiser, of course, not the poet.

Guillaume Apollinaire, aged 38, was buried on 13 November in the Père-Lachaise cemetery.

Apollinaire: The Poetry

Apollinaire wrote prolifically, though not as spontaneously as he liked to claim. Often directly prompted by a circumstance in his own life, he would send off a poem to one of many journals, or to a friend, or a lover. Editing this abundant output of material has always been something of a headache. Much of the poetry was collected after his death. The greater proportion of Apollinaire's best work is contained in *Alcools* and *Calligrammes*, both of which he himself lived to see through to publication.

In what follows, I consider each of the collections in the order they appear in the Pléiade edition of the *Oeuvres poétiques*. Although inevitably *Alcools* and *Calligrammes* receive the most attention, space allows for a discussion of only a handful of the poems in this selection.

LE BESTIAIRE, OU CORTÈGE D'ORPHÉE

In all likelihood the idea for a book of poems about animals came to Apollinaire in Picasso's studio at some point in 1906. Picasso was doing some animal engravings at that time. However, any collaboration with Apollinaire was short-lived. Instead, Raoul Dufy agreed at

a later date to do the illustrations, and by 1910 he and Apollinaire were at work on the book. At that point Apollinaire had already composed two short animal poems; now he wrote the remainder. After some persuasion by Dufy, the publisher Deplanche agreed to bring out *Le Bestiaire*, but in an edition limited to 120 copies. Of those, just some fifty were sold before the rest were remaindered.

In their form and scope, the thirty little poems, each with a Dufy woodcut, are reminiscent of some medieval and Renaissance emblematic poetry. Though slight, they are wry and sharp. They have a satirical edge too; via his animals, Apollinaire often targets humans, himself included. In 1918–19 Francis Poulenc composed a song cycle using six poems from *Le Bestiaire*.

ALCOOLS: POÈMES 1898–1913

As its subtitle indicates, Apollinaire's first major collection brought together poems written from before the turn of the century to the eve of the First World War. That meant just about everything he had written, and covers a fifteen-year span from the heavily Symbolist verse of his teenage years to the time when he had become more experimental and modernist.

Apollinaire's career began as one artistic movement reached its zenith. The 1890s were the high point of Symbolism, and it is scarcely surprising that the precocious schoolboy should fall under its spell. Symbolism set itself against what it considered the Realists' misconception that art has its truth in the material world. Rather, art needed to find its way back to the timeless mysteries best revealed by poetry and, especially, music. In the wrong hands, however, mystery could become mystification, a trap Apollinaire did not avoid. Too often, poems such as those that explore Germanic medieval legend have a significance appreciated only by Apollinaire himself. Examples such as 'Merlin et la vieille femme', 'L'Ermite', and 'Le Larron', dating from 1899 to 1901, are overwritten and obscure. Apollinaire's temperament was not best suited to Symbolism. He was more an excellent reporter than a meditative thinker, more reactive than reflective. For these reasons, his most egregiously Symbolist poems are not represented in this selection. However, other poems from around the turn of the century are included, such as those he wrote in the Rhineland during his year in the service of Vicomtesse Milhau. They show that when he reined himself in and was not so eager to impress, when he

wrote with a lighter and more impressionistic touch, he became more assured. The Rhineland poems are those of a poet close to finding his true voice.

By the early 1900s Apollinaire was leaving Symbolism behind, and moving towards a more modern aesthetic. The year 1905 is generally considered the last of his Symbolist period. Although he never abandoned traditional verse, he began to free his writing. This included a loosening of French prosody's tight bonds. In France, the movement towards free verse, which had begun with poets such as Jules Laforgue (1860–87), made fitful progress. But by 1908 Apollinaire was ready to give a definition of the sort of aesthetic he now wanted to embrace, 'un lyrisme neuf et humaniste à la fois' ('lyricism that is both new and humanist'). He envisaged a poetry that, for one thing, would be immersed in contemporary science and technology, an ambition that would have been anathema to Symbolists. The new poetry, said Apollinaire, would glorify the achievements of the new century. So, inevitably, he took a keen interest in Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* when it appeared in *Le Figaro* in February 1909. After the publication, also in 1909, of 'La Chanson du mal-aimé', perhaps his best-known poem, Apollinaire moved yet more deliberately towards a lyricism for the modern age. 'La Chanson du mal-aimé' itself, though hardly part of the new aesthetic, does point in that direction. Even if its stanzas employ the long-established five-line form, even if the rhyme scheme is regular, as it progresses along its considerable length the poem breaks out, as it were, and takes excursions from the main narrative in order to interpolate some commentaries, whose form and tone are very different. And yet, for all the risks of disunity, the poem holds together wonderfully well. Here we have evidence, in a relatively early poem, of that fusion of opposite impulses that Apollinaire would soon label Order and Adventure.

But in 1909 he had not yet arrived at that fusion. Some of the poems which he hoped would sing with the new lyricism were, ironically, some of his most difficult. Pieces such as 'Le Brasier', 'Les Fiançailles', 'Cortège', 'Vendémiaire', all explorations of the possible ways forward, rely substantially on symbols, harking back to the youthful work. Nonetheless, in the years immediately before the outbreak of war Apollinaire was writing poems in a few different styles. Beside the wry and witty little portraits that make up *Le Bestiaire*; beside the poems of love and loss, such as '1909' and 'L'Adieu'; beside

the much-quoted, haunting 'Le Pont Mirabeau' and the plangent La Santé sequence, he wrote several sharper poems of a less personal stamp, some of which rate among the finest in *Alcools*. Though one of them, 'Le Voyageur', starts in autobiography, it becomes much more than personal. It is one of his most successful evocations of alienation, of the modern world's lack of fixed centre. The modernism of Apollinaire's vision appears not only in the subject and tone of this poem; it is in the prosody too. The poem's eighteen stanzas vary randomly between one and seven lines, and these lines themselves vary in length from four to sixteen syllables. But the poem holds together. Behind its semblance of disorganization it has shape and direction. Again, it tells us of Order and Adventure.

The poem that Apollinaire decided should open *Alcools*, 'Zone', was the last to be written, and is among the most important poems he ever wrote. In French *zone* means both 'zone' in a general sense, and more specifically an area of urban dereliction, usually on a city's outskirts. In other words, a wasteland. Apollinaire's poem prefigures Eliot's celebrated poem, published a decade later. Eliot was reading French poetry around 1920, and though there is no proof that he read 'Zone', or that if he did he admired it, 'The Waste Land' shares much of Apollinaire's vision of desolation and disorientation. Modern cities, vast and overwhelming, become emotional and spiritual waste grounds, unredeemed by history, tradition, myth. Apollinaire's Paris, Eliot's London, are the new cities of the industrial age, the sites of that spiritual fracturing first mapped by Baudelaire. Through a twenty-four-hour cycle the poet-hero of 'Zone'—vacillating between identities, in or out of himself, *je* or *tu* (I or you)—wanders the streets and bars of Paris, surrounded by people who could just as well be ghosts. He circles around a continuum of memories—other places and countries, other times, past loves. He yearns for the peace and solace of religion, but finds instead mental exhaustion. The poem comes to an end where and when it began, in Paris, on a bright morning. The sun is rising, a circle bleeding like the stump of a neck from which the head has been severed. Despite the poet's double farewell, the cycle has begun once more.

The modernism of 'Zone' is striking. Apart from the protagonist's unstable identity and the dislocation of experience and emotion, reflected in the rapid switch of focus from one place to another, one time zone to another, there is the fragmentation of thought and

feeling on which the poem is structured. Attention to one thing cannot be sustained; the focus is not steady. Thoughts come, go, come back, consolidate for a moment, only to fragment again, until all is exhaustion and we are left with that shocking image of the executed sun. The disposition of 'Zone' on the page is equally unsettled. Stanzas vary in length from one line to dozens. And yet this wandering, seemingly improvised poem is tightly controlled in one crucial regard—it is written in that most orthodox, traditional of French verse forms, *rimes suivies*, couplets of full rhyme and near rhyme. As in 'Le Voyageur', which 'Zone' resembles, an underlying sense of structure fights against the disintegration which the poem's physical and spiritual drift threaten more and more to cause. Order comes to check Adventure.

The placing of 'Zone' at the start of *Alcools* seems to be Apollinaire's assertion of modernism, but the confident gesture is also a pessimistic one. The inexorable movement of the poem is towards sleep and oblivion. The sun that rises over Apollinaire's apartment in Auteuil is dead. In studied contrast, however, the collection is closed by a poem that is as bold as 'Zone', but which gives a thoroughly optimistic sense of the future for humankind. 'Vendémiaire' takes its title from the first month of the year in the French Revolutionary calendar, late September to late October. This Occitan-derived noun connoted the grape harvest; Apollinaire's poem creates the vision of a world united in a drunken harvest festival. Influenced to a degree by the contemporaneous Unanimists' vision of a world joined together by unseen links, 'Vendémiaire' has the energy and hopefulness that came to characterize Apollinaire.

'Vendémiaire' was also the first poem Apollinaire wrote entirely without punctuation, and, when *Alcools* was at proof stage, he made the decision to suppress all punctuation in all the poems. Thus, with one sweep, he contrived to give the entire collection a much-changed aspect. Why he made this change was explained in a letter some months after the publication of *Alcools* in April 1913. Punctuation, Apollinaire wrote, served no purpose; what created a poem's real punctuation were its rhythm and how a line was divided up. No other punctuation was needed. Here, the influence of Cubism is clearly discernible. An object depicted on a typical Cubist canvas is shown from several different perspectives simultaneously. For Apollinaire the issue was how to get simultaneity in words, how to get a line of words

to yield more than a single meaning *at one reading*. He was able to suggest, if not fully to achieve, simultaneity by jumping, at the speed of a thought, from one geographical location to another, one point in time to another, even one identity to another (*I to you*), as happens in 'Le Musicien de Saint-Merry', 'Zone', and many other poems. But the suppression of punctuation allowed Apollinaire to go somewhat further. Here are three simple lines from 'La Chanson du mal-aimé':

Great Pan love Jesus Christ
Are dead and cats mew
In the yard I weep in Paris

The words underlined, 'In the yard', is a single adverb phrase that complements two verbs, 'mew' and 'weep'. Cats mew in the yard; and I weep in the yard in Paris. Without comma or full-stop after 'mew' or after 'yard', the syntax flows in two directions simultaneously.

'Vendémiaire', Apollinaire's first unpunctuated poem, closes *Alcools* in a mood of forward-looking optimism. But the journey through the collection from the downbeat finale of 'Zone' to the positives of the last poem has not been a linear one. Poems have not been placed in order of composition, nor grouped neatly by themes. If there is overarching unity, it is in the mood of regret, mostly occasioned by the failure of love. And if the collection has a design, it is the loose alternation of longer and shorter poems. *Alcools* caused a stir on publication. One critic, Georges Duhamel, likened it to a second-hand shop, a random collection of bits and pieces, some interesting, some gems, but others little more than junk. Certainly the collection is a disparate one, but a key part of its modernity is the sudden swerves in tone and style. Perhaps the book contains too many poems, perhaps Apollinaire should have rejected more of them than he did, but that was not his way. He was famous for his huge appetites. He did not like to turn anything away. Each poem was there like a glass on the counter, an '*alcool*' ready to be drunk.

VITAM IMPENDERE AMORI

This collection, a pamphlet really, was published in 1917. The print-run was a mere 215 copies. Written in octosyllabic quatrains, these six tender poems speak of love and melancholy. Sometimes their delicacy is affecting, and to an extent they bring to mind the tone-poems of Verlaine, the poet of the Symbolist era whom Apollinaire perhaps

most resembles; at other times, though, Apollinaire's language and imagery scarcely rise above the ordinary.

CALLIGRAMMES: POÈMES DE LA PAIX ET DE LA GUERRE
(1913–1916)

As indicated by its subtitle, Apollinaire's second large-scale collection of poems is the chronological sequel to *Alcools*. But whereas the contents of *Alcools* are not organized by chronology, those in *Calligrammes* are, by and large. The collection's subtitle also indicates what the subject-matter will be: war and peace. Apollinaire's concerns continued, in the brief interlude between *Alcools* and war, to centre on love—the searches, the triumphs, the losses. At the same time, he continued to take experimentation forward. In tandem with the Cubist painters, notably Robert and Sonia Delaunay, to whom he had grown close during 1912, he became a champion of what between them they defined as Orphic Cubism. The term denoted a 'lyrical-abstract' style more focused on prismatic colour and less on the geometric predilections of analytical Cubism. One path of Apollinaire's experimentation led to the calligram, or picture-poem. Calligrams were not new. The form had been favoured by some earlier French writers, and by the Greeks. In fact, the form goes back as far as ancient China. It is unsurprising that Apollinaire's search for a Cubist aesthetic of simultaneity should lead him to the picture-poem. To fuse into a single entity a picture and the words describing that picture was an attractive way forward. It chimed too with the belief Apollinaire once expressed in a letter that traditional typography was done for, and must give way to brand-new means of reproduction, such as the cinema and the phonograph.

However, picture-poems constitute only a proportion of *Calligrammes*. Their potential was limited. While their *raison d'être* may be of intellectual interest, what Apollinaire's were able to do on the page scarcely fulfilled his ambitions. Unlike a painting, a picture-poem can be appreciated only in successive stages, not simultaneously. On first encounter, a calligram inevitably is a picture. The words that compose it cannot be read in that quick moment of encounter. Reading happens next, a discrete action, laborious if the page has to be turned this way and that to make sense of the syntax. Despite a few pleasing pieces, such as 'Il pleut', which perhaps comes as close as is possible to success, Apollinaire's calligrams do seem more exercises in theory than finished

works of art. Nevertheless, there is excitement in the ambition; and they do seem appropriate to Apollinaire's inventive times.

The two poems that open *Calligrammes*, though less formally experimental, are more substantial than any of the picture-poems. 'Liens' is both liminary and an immediate follow-on from the closing poem of *Alcools*. Like 'Vendémiaire', it offers a vision of unity. The cords (*liens*) that are the newest types of communication, such as the railways and the underwater electricity cables mentioned, tie the world together, and at speeds not seen before. Air-waves also carry the sound of bells and the resonance of poetry through the ether. 'Liens' exalts the joys of sight and sound, of all the senses. It looks forward to nothing less than a new way of being. It says farewell to the old self-indulgences, the regrets and tears, the desires. It beckons the future.

The second poem, 'Les Fenêtres', is one of Apollinaire's most celebrated. It is a paean of praise to the simultanist possibilities of colour explored by Robert Delaunay, in whose series of paintings, 'Les Fenêtres simultanées', of 1912, reds, greens, yellows burst onto the canvas, managing to blend and separate at the same time. It is as though what is painted is both several and one, universal and particular. For Apollinaire, Delaunay's Orphic work represented unity in diversity, diversity in unity.

Other poems explore simultaneity in less coloured ways. One such is 'Les Femmes', another 'Lundi rue Christine', both examples of the '*poème-conversation*'. That is, they mesh Apollinaire's own lines with random snatches of conversation overheard on a Paris street, and transcribed apparently word for word. Transitions from one voice to the other, back and forth, are not signalled. The movement from street to poet, poet to street, builds the poem's patchwork into something like a collage. Less ambitious than the calligrams, 'Lundi rue Christine' shows that a certain kind of simultanism can make effective poetry.

At least two more poems in *Calligrammes* deserve particular mention. 'Les Collines', which in some ways harks back to Apollinaire's Symbolist phase, is a lengthy allegory of the visionary powers granted to certain kinds of artist, among whom Apollinaire includes himself. It constitutes an important statement, though the rather contrived allegory sometimes can weigh heavy. The equally important statement of poetic credo that is 'La Jolie Rousse', the last long poem

Apollinaire wrote, works better. First, it is a gift of love to his wife Jacqueline Kolb, whom he married in the last year of his life. It is a celebration of her auburn hair, the fiery torch lighting the way to the future. Images of flames and fire become the sun, which now will light humankind through 'the season of violence' and towards 'ardent reason', a vision its creator did not live to realize.

'La Jolie Rousse' ends 'Ondes', the first section of *Calligrammes*. The remaining two thirds of the book are made up of poems the large majority of which relate to war. Apollinaire's first poem of this kind, 'La Petite auto', written on hearing of the declaration of war against Germany, is prophetic, evoking 'hovering giants' about to unleash their indiscriminate destruction. It ends on a portentous note, Apollinaire and Rouveyre understanding on that summer's day in 1914 that, although they were grown men, they had only just been born.

After his army training the first months Apollinaire spent with his artillery regiment in Champagne proved fertile for his poetry. If many of his war poems sound surprisingly bright and even naive, the fact is that the bulk of them was written when his regiment was positioned safely, well behind the front line. Initially he had no first-hand experience of the fighting. War remained an abstraction, a blank page which he could fill with the words of his poems and the many letters he wrote to his women. Two things should be stressed: one, at the time he joined up Apollinaire was involved in an affair of erotic intensity (with Louise de Coligny); two, unlike the British soldier-poets with whom he is often contrasted, he was already armed with a fully working modernist aesthetic. The most modernist of the British, David Jones, did not write his masterpiece *In Parenthesis* until two decades after the event. Apollinaire went to war ready to apply his poetic techniques to what he found, the flares and flashes, the whizz-bangs and rockets, the soaring and swooping biplanes. In this mechanized warfare was Futurism's dream of pyrotechnics made real. What may now seem naive illusion would not have been nearly so contentious, given the mood of the war's first stages.

To start with, then, the battleground of eastern France was for Apollinaire an erotically charged landscape of modernism. The exquisite recollection of recent sensual pleasure certainly infused what he was now writing. Sometimes his war poems are little gems of erotica; at other times they are embarrassments—guns and rockets and valleys and crests get clumsily likened to genitalia, for example.

But things changed when, after seven months with the artillery, he obtained a transfer to an infantry regiment. In the grim reality of the trenches, where he proved a good officer, well liked by his men, he produced only seven poems. Numerically small, this group marks a darkening of tone, the premonitions of which were there in some of the superficially brighter and bedazzled poems of the months before. Apollinaire's outlook had altered. And then, just four months after he had joined the infantry, and having at last been granted French nationality, Apollinaire's war came to an abrupt end. In March 1916 he suffered a serious shrapnel wound to the head. Operated on, invalidated out of the army, and back in Paris, where he remained until his death, Apollinaire wrote just three more poems—the final three in *Calligrammes*—though he did continue to write in prose genres.

Because initially war suited his modernist aesthetics, because of lines such as 'Ah Dieu! que la guerre est jolie', ironically made famous as the title of Joan Littlewood's stage musical of 1963, *Oh, What a Lovely War*, Apollinaire has been accused of hiding his head in the sand. That is unfair. At the start of the conflict a similarly over-enthusiastic mood was felt by millions on both sides of the Channel. The point must be made again that the war Apollinaire was heading into provided him with a context for the modernist experiment he saw no reason to abandon. His new aesthetic had been formed already. And it must be said that the experiment yielded technically striking work. But, at the same time, poems such as 'Il y a', 'Désir', 'Mutation', and 'Guerre', which talk explicitly of the horrors of war, prefigure the hollow-eyed numbness that overtook so many of those who saw the fighting close to. The remarkable 'Les Soupirs du servant de Dakar' is unique in offering a homesick black soldier's perspective, out of place in a white man's war. Several other poems, published not in *Calligrammes* but elsewhere, show a similar attitude. They outweigh Apollinaire's more celebratory poems. Furthermore, while his poetry progressively dried up, the letters Apollinaire was writing to the women in his wartime life, Lou and Madeleine, reveal just how aware he was of the reality he and his comrades were facing. Reading the poems a century later, we can discern that reality. Those, for example, that seem neutral lists and descriptions of activities and daily routines fail to obscure the murderous absurdity of what was going on. And the glaring whiteness of endless trench walls that Apollinaire describes often and in great detail may seem preferable

to the mud the British poets endured, but it is no less deadly. That dazzling whiteness spells destruction, as did the rockets Apollinaire initially admired. None of this even a temperamentally optimistic poet could ignore. Apollinaire certainly did not hide his head in the sand when he went to war. It is more the case that he put pen to paper whenever he saw life—or whenever he recalled the best of it, as the urgency of his frequent erotic musings testify. Apollinaire's war poems would like to be affirmations.

OTHER COLLECTIONS; OTHER POEMS

The collections considered thus far were published during Apollinaire's lifetime. A look at his complete poetry shows that they account for about 40 per cent of his total output. While it is a convenient chance that, by and large, the strongest poems fall within that 40 per cent, the remainder do not deserve to be overlooked, as has been the tendency. Many a good poem was an interpolation in a letter to a friend or a lover. Apollinaire also wrote some *vers de circonstance*, occasional verse, and there was even a witty advertising jingle for a brand of footwear.

The collection *Ilya*, published in 1925, is a mixed bag. Many of the poems are early ones, some never published, some which had appeared individually in reviews. Some are pieces that Apollinaire himself had decided to exclude from *Alcools*. The collection also includes the set of love poems to Linda, Apollinaire's romantic velleity of 1901.

The *Poèmes à Lou*, edited and published in 1955, gather the verse and calligrams contained in the letters to Louise de Coligny. Some give accounts of and insights into the serving soldier's life; others are more amorous, some even explicit. After the war, taste and decorum kept them out of sight for many years. Apollinaire had revealed to a friend that he thought some of these poems his best since the start of war. Whatever else, they express the stabbing nostalgia of a man remembering the most erotic episode of his life. It seems, though, that Louise herself was more than relieved that the army had removed Apollinaire from her life.

The scattered poems of *Le Guetteur mélancolique* first appeared as a collection in 1952. Either they were previously unpublished or they had appeared individually in reviews. The title, chosen by its editors, is well suited to the content, as some pieces date from Apollinaire's sojourn in Stavelot in 1899, which was far from the happiest time in

his life. There are poems from Apollinaire's year in the Rhineland, and some from 1903, when he had an amorous interest in a certain Yvonne; and there are poems dating from various points later in his life. *Le Guetteur mélancolique*, like the other collections, is uneven. The best poems evoke the mistiness of northern Europe, the moods of its landscapes. Some, such as 'Un soir d'été', are most delicate, and are reminiscent of Verlaine.

The *Poèmes à Madeleine* chart the rapid progress of Apollinaire's chaste and ill-founded relationship with Madeleine Pagès, the young woman from Algeria whom he had met on a train. Whatever else, they testify to his remarkable powers of persuasion.

Finally, the scattered pieces that are *Poèmes retrouvés*, *Poèmes épistolaires*, and *Poèmes inédits*, none with a unifying date of publication, can be taken together. Much is of little value. But there are some very good poems. 'La nuit descend . . .', a simple account of the little routines of young soldiers on the eve of battle, is powerfully moving in its understatement, and ranks alongside the best of the war poems in *Calligrammes*. Lines such as 'Going to die tomorrow they sing like children' speak with quiet compassion of the pity and pain of a war that Apollinaire came to know too well.

Another poem of note is '4 H'; another 'Voici le cercueil', an effective little calligram; a third, 'Enfin mon vieux suis brigadier', a squib about army life. Finally, the short and ominous 'J'ai rêvé que j'allais . . .' points towards Apollinaire's own death, and as such fittingly concludes the selection.

Apollinaire died young, but not before he had established himself as perhaps the leading French poet of his age. *Alcools* and *Calligrammes* mark him out as a great poet. He stands alone as France's poet of the First World War. He went into battle full of hope for a new order both in art and life. Even after the deadly experience of the trenches he remained an optimist. His celebrated lecture, *L'Esprit nouveau et les poètes*, given not long before his death, was a major reaffirmation of hope, and, as it turned out, his last.

The paradoxical first words of the first line of the first poem of Apollinaire's first major collection are 'in the end'. In the end, Apollinaire tells us, he has wearied of a world grown old. So he bids it farewell and, simultaneously, sets his sights on the future he did not survive to see, but where the best of his poems continue to live.

NOTE ON THE TEXT AND TRANSLATION

THE French texts follow the Gallimard Pléiade edition of Apollinaire's complete poetry, first published in 1956, and edited by Marcel Adéma and Michel Décaudin. I have followed the order in which the editors present the collections, from all but one of which I have selected poems, though in some cases only a small number. I have also followed the Pléiade's order of poems within each collection, which means that war poems are mixed in with others, and do not have a discrete section. The one collection that does not feature is the *Poèmes à la marraïne*, a total of three poems and one calligram, all of them very slight. My aim has been to select more widely from Apollinaire's large output than have previous selections, whose tendency has been to concentrate almost exclusively on *Alcools* and *Calligrammes*. As explained in the Introduction, I have steered away from the early, heavily Symbolist poems of *Alcools*. These seem more objects of scholarly curiosity than good poetry. A number of true calligrams have been included, of course, though, given my reservations about the success of the picture-poem form, mostly I have opted to set out the translations in a conventional manner, line by line.

Apollinaire's poetry veers from the most traditional forms, as in 'La Chanson du mal-aimé', for example, and through the mix of old and new that defines his *vers libre* (free verse), to the prose-like long lines of a war poem such as 'Lueurs'. Most if not all of Apollinaire's gamut sometimes can be found in a single poem; a short line suddenly appears after a steady succession of long ones, recondite vocabulary sits alongside slang, intimate details alongside public events. Tidy boundaries did not always mean much to Apollinaire. But, as often happens in French poetry, even the most liberated poet cannot help but hear and write lines measured to those lengths that have found favour down the centuries. Traditionally, French poetry counts the number of syllables in a line. Even numbers have predominated over odd, eight-, ten-, and twelve-syllable lines being the most often encountered. Lines of these lengths are everywhere in Apollinaire's verse. There may be one such on its own among less regular lines, or they may appear in groups of any length, or in full stanzas. Their unpredictability contributes to the freshness and constant surprise of Apollinaire's poetry.

My aim as translator has been to reflect that freshness, that surprise, the sudden shifts, long lines up against short ones. I have not counted syllables exactly. Nor have I tried to reproduce the rhyme schemes Apollinaire often employs. I did not want rhyme to become the tail that wags the dog. Sometimes I use it, but mostly not. Whether to end a line on a stressed or unstressed syllable has been more my focus. And at the front of my mind has been Apollinaire's belief that punctuation is unnecessary because a poem's rhythm is produced by the *coupe des vers*, that is, internal divisions in a line, something akin to bar measures in music. And indeed, how Apollinaire shapes many a line, stanza, entire poem, puts me in mind of the jazz age which he only just missed—restless music that riffs, syncopates, hands melody from one instrument to another, while all the time it holds a beat.

I have tried where possible to reflect the word-play Apollinaire so enjoys. Just two examples: the punning rhyme 'neige/que n'ai-je' (in 'La Blanche neige') becomes 'let snow/let's know'; and the pun on 'or/or' (in 'Chapeau-Tombeau') is rendered by 'butt/but'.

An asterisk in the English text indicates a short entry in the Explanatory Notes at the end of the book. A more comprehensive commentary on Apollinaire's poetry will be found in the Introduction.

Professor Peter Read of the University of Kent, and Professor Susan Harrow of Bristol University, leading authorities on Apollinaire, dealt generously with my many questions. Sara Davies, at BBC Bristol, produced my Radio 4 feature on Apollinaire's war poetry and my Radio 3 Essay on *Alcools*, which led ultimately to the present volume, edited by Judith Luna with her customary elegance. To all, my grateful thanks. And to Claire, my own *Jolie Rousse* who has watched over the project, my love comes with this book.

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Discography

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A CHRONOLOGY OF GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

- 1880 (26 August) Birth in Rome of Guillaume-Albert-Wladimir-Alexandre-Apollinaire Kostrowitzky. Mother, Angelica de Kostrowitzky, of aristocratic Russo-Polish descent; father declared unknown, but almost certainly Francesco d'Aspermont, an aristocratic Italian army officer. (31 August) Registration of Apollinaire's birth under name of Guillaume-Albert Dulcigni; father's name not given. (29 September) Baptism in the church of San Vito.
- 1882 Birth of Apollinaire's brother, Albert.
- 1887 Angelica, Guillaume, and Albert move to Monaco. Guillaume attends Collège Saint-Charles, where over next eight years he does very well, winning many school prizes.
- 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris. Eiffel Tower completed.
- 1897 Attends Lycée in Nice. Writes first poems, under name of Guillaume Macabre. Marconi sends world's first telegraphic message across open sea.
- 1899 Mother and her two sons move to Paris, then to Stavelot, Belgium. Apollinaire writes more poems and stories. Left by their mother in Hôtel de la Clef d'Or, Guillaume and Albert flee without paying their bill, and rejoin their mother in Paris. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*.
- 1900 Universal Exhibition in Paris. The first line of the Paris Métro (underground railway) opens.
- 1901 Poorly paid office job; to supplement wages writes an erotic novel. (August) Given one-year contract as tutor by Vicomtesse de Milhau; year spent largely on Vicomtesse's estates in Rhineland. Falls for the Milhau's English governess Annie Playden. First published poems (in *La Grande France*).
- 1902 Bank clerk in Paris. Writes several poems and stories, and some art criticism; henceforth, uses surname Apollinaire.
- 1903 (November) First visit to London, to find Annie Playden. Wright brothers make first powered flight.
- 1904 Meets Derain and Vlaminck. (May) Second London visit. Sees Annie again, who refuses his offer of marriage and leaves for USA. Writes 'La Chanson du mal-aimé' and 'L'Émigrant de Landor Road'.