

also by Beverley Bie Brahic

POETRY

Against Gravity

TRANSLATIONS

Francis Ponge, *Unfinished Ode to Mud*

Hélène Cixous, *Hemlock*

Hélène Cixous, *Hyperdream*

Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan*

Hélène Cixous, *Dream I Tell You*

Hélène Cixous and Roni Horn, *Agua Viva (Rings of Lispector)*

Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*

Hélène Cixous, *Reveries Of The Wild Woman*

Hélène Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*

Jacques Derrida, *Geneses, Genealogies, Genes and Genius*

Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*

OTHER

the eye goes after

(limited edition artist's book of digital images by Susan Cantrick

accompanying poems by Beverley Bie Brahic)

GUILLAUME
APOLLINAIRE

The Little Auto

translated by
Beverley Bie Brahic

Contents

Introduction	vii
<i>Zone / Zone</i>	2
<i>Les Fenêtres / Windows</i>	14
<i>Lundi Rue Christine / Monday Rue Chistine</i>	18
<i>Un Fantôme de Nuées / A Ghost of Clouds</i>	22
<i>La Petite Auto / The Little Auto</i>	28
<i>Fumées / Up in Smoke</i>	32
<i>À Nîmes / In Nîmes</i>	34
<i>Veille / Night Watch</i>	38
<i>Ombre / Shadow</i>	40
<i>Reconnaissance / Reconnaissance</i>	42
<i>Guerre / War</i>	44
<i>14 Juin 1915 / 14 June 1915</i>	46
<i>Les Soupirs du Servant de Dakar / The Sighs of the Dakar Gunner</i>	48
<i>La Nuit d'Avril 1915 / The Night of April 1915</i>	54
<i>La Grâce Exilée / Grace Exiled</i>	56
<i>Les Feux du Bivouac / Bivouac Fires</i>	56
<i>Tourbillon de Mouches / Swarm of Flies</i>	58
<i>L'Adieu du Cavalier / The Horseman's Farewell</i>	58
<i>Le Palais du Tonnerre / The Thunder's Palace</i>	60
<i>Photographie / Photograph</i>	66
<i>L'Inscription Anglaise / The English Inscription</i>	68
<i>Dans l'Abri-Caverne / In the Cave-Shelter</i>	70
<i>Fusée / Flare</i>	74
<i>Désir / Desire</i>	78
<i>Océan De Terre / Ocean of Earth</i>	82
<i>Merveille de la Guerre / Wonder of War</i>	84
<i>Exercice / Basic Training</i>	88
<i>Il y a / There's</i>	90

Thanks to the editors of *Ambit*,
where some of these translations first appeared.

First published in 2012
by CB editions
146 Percy Road London W12 9QL
www.cbEditions.com

All rights reserved
Introduction and translations © Beverley Bie Brahic 2008

The right of Beverley Bie Brahic to be identified
as translator of this work has been asserted in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

Printed in England by Blissetts, London W3 8DH

ISBN 978-0-9567359-4-2

<i>Le Vigneron Champenois</i> /	
The Grape Grower in Champagne	94
<i>Carte Postale</i> / Postcard	96
<i>L'Avenir</i> / The future	98
<i>Chevaux de Frise</i> / Chevaux-de-Frise	100
<i>Chef de Section</i> / Platoon Leader	104
<i>La Victoire</i> / Victory	106
<i>La Jolie Rousse</i> / The Pretty Redhead	114
Translator's Notes	119

Introduction

Apollinaire was never meant to live an ordinary life. Born Guillaume-Albert-Wladimir-Alexandre-Apollinaire-Kostrowitzky in Rome on 26 August 1880 of an unknown father (the candidates include a Catholic prelate and a Bourbon officer) and a Polish mother whose own adventurous life has the makings of romantic fiction, opening, say, with her ejection from a convent at the age of sixteen. Six years later Guillaume was born, and two years after that, his brother Albert, births registered as 'of parents unknown'. From 1885, Madame de Kostrowitzky travelled in Europe; but Guillaume was soon enrolled in school in Monaco, then Cannes and Nice, where he won prizes for his scholastic and artistic excellence, and signed his first poems 'Guillaume Apollinaire'. In 1899, moving with his mother and brother to Paris, he found work in a bank, and as French tutor to a German family whose travels took him to Germany, Vienna and Prague, and led him to meet and fall in love with the family's English governess, 'Annie'. Generous in friendship, prompt to love, Apollinaire seems to have charmed most people he met, though he was rejected in the end by 'Annie', who fled to Texas (his rueful poem begins 'On the coast of Texas/ Between Mobile and Galveston . . .'), and later by the painter Marie Laurencin, who left him for a German painter. He was a bon-vivant with his heart on his sleeve, a man of letters whose letters turned into poems, author of outrageous erotic tales, member of the Paris avant-garde (friends with the Cubist painters Picasso and Braque, and with Matisse, whose aesthetics he helped through his criticism to define); and, from 1914 to 1918, when he died, he was a soldier.

A 'war poet', Apollinaire? After all, he is so much better known as a proto-Surrealist experimenter with language, or Simultaneist, as he liked to say, thinking how his Cubist friends depicted scenes and figures all at once, collapsing space and time. Still, five

of the six sections in Apollinaire's still startling third, 1918, volume of poems, *Calligrammes*, were composed while he was on the front lines in World War I. It is tempting to compare these poems with Wilfred Owen's. Wading through a sludge of consonants, the reader physically understands battle fatigue – not to mention the anger and irony of a man heartsick at old pieties about the ennobling qualities of war. Had Owen been a painter his palette would have been dark:

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

Apollinaire, though he was initially excited about the sights and sounds of war and its machinery, as he had been excited – like early Auden – about trains and planes, the machines of industrialization and travel (Apollinaire's brother Albert had moved to Mexico), would have shared many of Owen's experiences, even if, like his modernist painter friends, Apollinaire expressed himself in flights of fantasy, playfully and with vivid colours, softening his characteristic melancholy with humour – 'a most humorous sadness,' as Jacques says in *As You Like It*. Apollinaire, who could compare a bottle of champagne to a bomb, rarely lingers over his feelings of desolation but when he does, as in a poem-letter to his fiancée, Madeleine Pagès, the effect (see 'In the Cave Shelter,' page 70) is devastating:

. . . tonight I have a soul that feels hollow that feels empty
As if one fell endlessly without ever touching the bottom
Without a single thing to hang on to

In 'Wonder of War' (page 84) Apollinaire describes what Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est' calls 'the haunting flares':

I feel as if I were a guest at some great feast lit up a giorno
Earth is throwing herself a banquet
Hungry she opens long pale mouths
Earth is hungry and this is her cannibal Balthazar's feast

Who'd have thought we could be such cannibals
That it would take so much fire to roast the human body
That's why the air has a slight acrid taste . . .

while one of his most quietly elegiac poems, 'Shadow' (page 40), finds simple words and images simply juxtaposed, not logically connected, to evoke dead comrades:

Here you are at my side again
Memories of my companions dead at war
Olive of time
Memories now all sewn into one
As a hundred furs make only one coat
As the thousands of wounds make only one newspaper
article . . .

Like Owen, Apollinaire died in 1918. Both were subversive of established attitudes, but Owen was a realist and Apollinaire, influenced by Cubism and by the Italian poet Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*, published in 1909, was more fanciful, more hyperbolic – 'magic' realist? Today the *Futurist Manifesto*'s aesthetic of violence can be linked to the rise of fascism (Marinetti would become a follower of Mussolini); at the time, however, the *Manifesto*'s celebration of 'the limits of logic', and new machinery ('. . . a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace') inspired artistic movements across Europe. What Apollinaire experienced on the battlefield, as chronicled in his correspondence and in his poems, quickly gave him a more complex vision, marked by strange beauty, erotic yearnings and camaraderie, but also loneliness, fatigue, destruction and death.

By 1914, and the eve of war, Apollinaire was publishing his work – essays, poems – in journals and catalogues to art shows, among them the Georges Braque Exposition and a Robert Delaunay show for which he composed his wonderfully disjunctive ‘conversation poem’ ‘Windows’ (page 14). He was already the author of two collections of poems, *Bestiary* (1911) and *Alcools* (1913), with haunting Symbolist music. From *Alcools* Apollinaire had – a last-minute revision – deleted all punctuation, deciding that lineation and enjambment could do the job as well. That he was turning away from turn-of-the-century Symbolism towards something much more experimental is also evident in his long poem ‘Zone’ (page 2), which sets out as a stroll through the streets of Paris –

Shepherdess O Eiffel Tower your herd of bridges is bleating
this morning

– and ranges in space-time from China to America and from Antiquity to the present. It was Apollinaire’s manifesto for the poetic experiments he was to carry further in his 1918 volume *Calligrammes*, in which pronouns shift without warning, a fragmentation of the self that was inaugurated by Rimbaud’s 1871 declaration that *je est un autre*. *Calligrammes* uses collage and juxtaposition, jump cuts, variable line lengths, and *calligrammes*, or ‘beautiful writing’, concrete poems (one is reproduced here) in which print is arranged so that the poems’ visual aspect is as striking as the semantic – more than any other previous poet he raises the question of the relationship of words as such, when they appear on canvas, to image, and vice versa. Apollinaire’s language, in *Calligrammes*, remains simple; he prefers plain diction and often childlike syntax (‘Everything only connected by “and” and “and”,’ as Elizabeth Bishop was to write decades later in her poem ‘Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance’); he avoids the preciousness and crystalline fixity of his Symbolist predecessor, Mallarmé; and in this ‘naïveté’ Apollinaire might be thought to resemble another of

his painter friends, le Douanier Rousseau (who painted a double portrait of Apollinaire and Marie Laurencin), or, indeed, Picasso in many of his drawings and paintings. Before war broke out, Apollinaire hoped to collect these poetic experiments in a volume called ‘Me Too I’m a Painter’. By the time he did publish them in a volume, he had added five more sections composed during the ‘Grande Guerre’.

Apollinaire enlisted in December 1914. On his way to Nîmes in the south of France to join the 38th Artillery Regiment, he met a young school teacher, Madeleine Pagès, who became his friend, then fiancée and regular correspondent. Broken off in 1916, their love affair has left a trove of letters with poems and the raw material of poems written from Champagne-Ardennes, where Apollinaire had been posted, first in the artillery and then, at his request, in the infantry. In June 1915, at the front, he published a pamphlet containing the first group of war poems. Nine months later, in March 1916, days after being granted French nationality, Apollinaire was wounded in the head by shrapnel (his ‘punctured helmet’ is immortalized in ‘Victory’, page 106) and was evacuated, operated upon, and then transferred to Paris, where he was trepanned and, in June, awarded the Croix de Guerre. His last letter to Madeleine was in November 1916: ‘My dear little Madeleine . . . I am tired . . . I am not what I was at all . . . I send you a thousand kisses.’

Assigned to office work in Paris, Apollinaire was promoted to the rank of lieutenant (acting). He took up his literary life again, but in November 1918, not fully recovered from his head wound, seven months after the publication of *Calligrammes* and his marriage to Jacqueline Kolb, to whom *Calligrammes*’ last poem (‘The Pretty Redhead,’ page 114) is dedicated, Apollinaire caught Spanish flu and died. Paris was preparing to celebrate the Armistice: ‘His funeral cortege followed the boulevard right to the Bastille and Père-Lachaise Cemetery through a crowd still delirious with joy,’ his friend André Billy wrote.

*

This selection of Apollinaire's work includes a single poem – 'Zone' – from his 1913 collection *Alcools* and a selection from the six sections of *Calligrammes*. The poems in *Calligrammes*' first section ('Windows', 'Monday Rue Christine' and 'A Ghost of Clouds' here) are prewar poems. The other five sections contain poems written between 1914 and 1918; they continue Apollinaire's experiments with language, and chronicle the war years. The second to last poem, 'Victory', looks forward to the artistic challenges of the post-war period –

Oh mouths men are seeking a new language
Which no grammarian of any language will find fault with

And these old languages are so close to death
Truly it's out of habit and for lack of daring
That we still use them for poetry
[. . .]

Let's have new sounds new sounds new sounds

– a call to action that would be taken up by Apollinaire's poet friend André Breton, author of the 1924 *Surrealist Manifesto*, and by other members of the postwar avant-garde that Apollinaire did so much to inspire.

Particular questions of translation, and the circumstances surrounding the poems' composition, where available, will be found in the translator's notes at the end of the volume. I have tried to respect Apollinaire's preference for the plain word ('look', for example, rather than the more recherché 'gaze'); and his use of juxtaposition and simple grammatical constructions over more elaborate ones; and the contents of each, often expansive line, and the order in which ideas are expressed. Apollinaire was writing much more free verse now, but he was always a deft user of rhyme; I have tried to suggest, where poems in this selection are rhymed, his use of rhyme, as, for example, in the humorous couplet rhymes of 'Zone' and 'In Nîmes'. His poetics reflected his desire to capture the world in all its fleetingness, complexity, and

simultaneity of time and space, with an almost childlike freshness, creating out of the street scenes of early twentieth-century Paris and the often bleak and always dangerous circumstances of day-to-day life in the trenches a world at once magical, full of eros and melancholy:

Looking through the open entrance of the trench carved
out of chalk
Towards the far wall that looks as if it were made of nougat

says 'The Thunder's Palace' (page 60), a detailed description of a dugout that concludes with a profession of faith in simplicity and patina:

And whatever is burdened with ornament
Needs to age to acquire the beauty one calls ancient
And which is the nobility the force the ardour the soul
the lustre
Of what is new and what is useful
Especially if it is plain and simple
As plain and simple as the thunder's small palace

Apollinaire's poems are themselves small palaces of thunder.

BEVERLEY BIE BRAHIC

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

The Little Auto

Zone

A la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien

Bergère ô tour Eiffel le troupeau des ponts bêle ce matin

Tu en as assez de vivre dans l'antiquité grecque et romaine

Ici même les automobiles ont l'air d'être anciennes
La religion seule est restée toute neuve la religion
Est restée simple comme les hangars de Port-Aviation

Seul en Europe tu n'es pas antique ô Christianisme
L'Européen le plus moderne c'est vous Pape Pie X
Et toi que les fenêtres observent la honte te retient
D'entrer dans une église et de t'y confesser ce matin
Tu lis les prospectus les catalogues les affiches qui chantent tout
haut

Voilà la poésie ce matin et pour la prose il y a les journaux
Il y a les livraisons à 25 centimes pleines d'aventures policières
Portraits des grands hommes et mille titres divers

J'ai vu ce matin une jolie rue dont j'ai oublié le nom
Neuve et propre du soleil elle était le clairon
Les directeurs les ouvriers et les belles sténo-dactylographes
Du lundi matin au samedi soir quatre fois par jour y passent
Le matin par trois fois la sirène y gémit
Une cloche rageuse y aboie vers midi
Les inscriptions des enseignes et des murailles
Les plaques les avis à la façon des perroquets criaillent
J'aime la grâce de cette rue industrielle

Zone

In the end you're tired of this old world

Shepherdess O Eiffel Tower your herd of bridges is bleating this
morning

You've had enough of living with Greek and Roman antiques

Here even the automobiles look like relics
Only religion is still brand new religion
Remains as simple as the hangars at Port-Aviation

In Europe you alone are not antique O Christianity
The most modern European is you Pope Pius X
And you whom the windows are watching shame keeps you
from stepping
Into a church for confession this morning
You read the flyers the catalogues and the posters that sing
at the top of their lungs
There's poetry for you this morning and for prose you've got
newspapers
25 cents apiece with plenty of crimes
Profiles of the great and a zillion different headlines

This morning I saw a pretty street whose name I've forgotten
Bright and shining fanfare for the sun
Managers workers and beautiful typists
Monday through Saturday four times a day they go past
In the morning three times the siren wails
Towards noon the crazy yapping of the bells
On shop signs and walls on nameplates
On notices the lettering squawks like parrots
I love the charm of this industrial street