

Reading and Translating

Invention and Disaster in Guillaume Apollinaire, *Le Poète assassiné*

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Poised. Suspended. Hanging alone, and together. Balanced, but unhinged. A touch that hovers over phantoms and guffaws in debauchery. The freedom of wit caught up in the rules of its own spontaneity. The generosity of play, but also its violence. Apollinaire's fiction is barely fiction at all, reading it feels like getting dressed, moving into the clothes of life and wearing them, but also watching them, in those silent observations which seem to need art to survive. Thought and its disarray. Ambition and its wanton scattering. Humour and disaster.

Ease of access then, snug as a bug, knife through butter? There are certainly many amusing anecdotes and turns, and hilarity is everywhere. But smiles and giggles will creep up as well, they develop over the time of reading, and especially different readings, and echoes begin to fester and irritate the memory. Opening books on Apollinaire, anyone is faced with a choice: books that show the scholarship spilling everywhere, scholarship of Apollinaire's own scholarship going off in all directions, mythological, historical, cultural, as well as the whimsical and the impulsive, as well as auto-biographical fits and starts; or books that hide it. It is like choosing between showing or hiding the tracked changes in a Word document, seeing or not seeing the paths to a finished piece. It is a vast commonplace that the digital has transformed not only the opportunities of scholarship but the ways of using it and enjoying it. Commonplace itself fascinates Apollinaire, and this one resonates with his own

never-ending, at once enthusing and melancholic, labyrinthine fascination with the modern, his own modern-day ways of engaging with the world. Bolts from around the blue world turn benign as we come to understand them, they might even become friends or anyway familiar props in the meeting places where what we know turns into what we wear. Creative or alienating? Does progress signal greater understanding of the present or simply greater ignorance of the past? The modern look expresses our own way of seeing and using the world, it is the idiom of our day, of life lived with no fear of loss. But gaiety and spontaneous consumption also signal a passive enjoyment of the here and now, and loss of anything else. In any case, tracking down Apollinaire's frequently obscure allusions using internet resources is a very different experience from reading about them in notes to learned editions of his writings. Each has its own story to tell, one of immediate access and reverberation, the other of the work, life and generosity of the editors, and both a story of Apollinaire himself, his absorption in learning for its own sake, its store-houses of surprise and its prison-houses of orthodoxy.

There are any number of ways of imagining Apollinaire following his private leads, his silent enthrallment in the Bibliothèque nationale, rue de Richelieu, or the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, two of his favourite haunts. *Le Poète assassiné*, *The Assassinated Poet*, is a frightening title which speaks of the violence done to the right to think and speak. What it does not show immediately, and what insinuates itself into the imaginings of the reader, undermining my patience but soliciting my fragile sense of purpose, is the censorship, fear, deafness and resentment woven into education, scholarship and learning, into the silent voices of learning as well as the loud ones, and along routes as unpredictable as ways of thinking and remembering are endless. Facility with styles will not get to the bottom of these highways and byways, and Apollinaire's deftness with the written voice flirts with horror as well as ecstasy, or just suspicion and fun. But urgency seeps through everything, even the flippant - an urgent desire to be on the move and not miss anything, to be there and be a witness. Creating and simple recording seem to rely on each other, highlighting moments when anything creative is overwhelmed, which in any case are packed with an energy of their own.

A sexually irreverent approach to kinship and work characterizes the birth of our poet whose assassination is foretold. The image of his illegitimacy bounces off at a point into a chorus of midwives singing in a harmony only possible on the page: each to her own, her own body, enclosure and whim. The lyrical reaches out to the communal and stops. Then there is death in childbirth, the travelling optimism of the father and widower turned gambler, his staged suicide when all is lost—his money as well as any hope of hooking up with anyone. Now we find the poet-to-be orphaned and under the tutelage of another traveller, witness to these rapid and barely noticeable events, a Dutchman with a taste for Humanist and enlightened thinking. The natural world and the social one are both organized by love—so imagines this tutor wishing happiness for his pupil, and generally seeking love as much as reason, with a distant Rousseau-esque air. Faintness turns into an improvisation on the who and the where, and on the name. The collapse of love, but also the love of life both grow in the nomadic existence of the poet-thinker-vagabond, the Dutchman believes; but in its unpredictability, light or dark, the poet's life is both unique and common to everyone, like life at large and loss. For the Dutchman the mobility of souls is a life force, he draws on the Ancient theory of metempsychosis and extends it to objects, souls pass not just from one body to another in endless life, but from the animate to the inanimate. Life is breathed everywhere, not only in all the living world but, in a moment of spontaneous lyricism, even in the dust of the streets and the roads: the ashes of the living and of life itself?

This is a life of universal community, a re-awakening to the word, which is always on the move, binding things together, and people. The word triggers memory and is itself absorbed in memory's tapestry. Some of the rabbis are turned to as living proof, thought to have the same soul that occupied the bodies of Adam, Moses and David, we are told; and the Hebrew letters aleph, dalet and mem which their names share are invoked as living proof. These letters themselves travel via the alphabets of Phoenician, Aramaic, Arabic, Greek and Latin. Has the meme of metempsychosis survived, or lost out and disintegrated in this alphabetical replication, in which its source is as much lost as re-discovered, and in the same breath? In Apollinaire's eye selfishness is not circumscribed, both empowered and dissipated in genetics and evolution. Culture seems to grow and stagnate in the same breath. Perhaps that is the

salvation of the self and the ego, at least its route to creativity, but it cannot be chosen, it is as passive as it is practised or willed. This moment of improvisation, episodic, invisibly demarcated, ends there, as vulnerable to disappearance as the anonymity of the Dutchman himself, the widower-nurturer. If souls reappear in whatever form, perhaps there is nothing new and creation is at a standstill. I wish you happiness as though I were always wishing people happiness, and as though it were forever out of reach and beyond understanding.

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What sort of wish is that, and what does it say about the longed-for interaction of education and poetry? Asking the question contributes, it seems, to losing the answer. In Apollinaire, as in Flaubert before him and Sebald or Pamuk after, covering the traces of learning is part of learning, learning and forgetting absorb each other. The excitement created by ceremonial plaques expropriated from Benin into the museums of Europe covers over the violence by which they are viewed there on not in West Africa, now forgotten in the moment. Ways have to be found of asking without asking, in other words without presupposing the answer, and it seems that fiction provides that mode of thinking with a form and a vessel. Learning is wrapped up in influence, to learn is in part—but what part?—to be aware of influence, to recognise it, to adopt positions and attitudes in relation to it. But to learn is also to learn that influence cannot be recognised, influence is wrapped in the ways it is recognised and lost there. The more an influence is seen the more it hides in plain view. It seeps through the pores of anyone's spontaneity. The translations of influence into ways of knowing cannot simply be made visible by strategic acts, which serve as much to hide as reveal. The vast error which Sartre addresses throughout his writing, culminating in the huge work on Flaubert, of privileging prose over poetry, organization over sensation, is a dramatization of this confusion of influence and voice. Apollinaire explores this unseeing vision in wandering between his own domains of poetry and prose, separate and combined, each hovering all the time between invention and disaster.

Hilarity and illegitimacy have set the stage. Croniamantal, our poet, steeped in thoughts on love and the word, turns his full attention, such as it is, to medieval

legend, like many before him. Don Quixote has already merged with La Fontaine in the story of what makes Croniamantal tick, and La Fontaine will emerge again shortly in a loud but unplaced echo. He gets bounced into a contemporary version, and an inept one, of the art of the fable. So: ineptitude, or satire? Both are possible, it depends on you and me as readers, on who we imagine is listening—but to what? Croniamantal has only ears for Arthur’s round table and future lovers. In body and mind together, in the sweat pushed out by ideas pushed in, scream the silent screams and aches of sex-need. He wanders by Italian workers repairing the road surface, and the voice of the narrative veers off into the etymology of the words they use. The French ‘câlin’, meaning affectionate and cuddly, drifts narratively backwards and forwards in time, as well and sideways across frontiers, to evoke a local usage ‘calignaire’, meaning girl-friend or boy-friend, lover, sweetheart, suitor, betrothed. But science and fantasy rub shoulders. We have only the narrative voice to believe in, which tells us that Croniamantal has learned this usage and at some point has absorbed its provenance, just as readers are drawn into believing what we are told. ‘Calignaire’ is just a word Croniamantal knows, like he knows the legends of King Arthur, and now I know it too, or think I do. History has turned to legend and returned *into* it, each is the placenta of the other. Etymology joins forces with fantasy, knowledge with received knowledge, and together they forge the attachments of which orthodoxy is made and which give it life.

Where are we? In the narrative, this is a place dissolving in its own mobility and the mobility of its telling. Croniamantal could be walking anywhere, unless he is riding by like an imaginary knight: perhaps Don Quixote has returned to the scene, but so distantly that the echo is silent and the laughter has gone quiet. Suspended between the languages with which he is familiar, Croniamantal is affected in the moment by Boccaccio’s medieval Italian along with the contemporary Provençal French. Nothing unusual there, or in the combination of languages, registers and usages from anywhere making up anyone’s idiom. But all the mobility and all the wit in all the associations of hearing and speaking cannot break the loudly inaudible iron web of sex and obedience. ‘Calignaire’ may be a local word but the locality itself could be anywhere, its uniqueness is not protected. Ironically, the illustration of its meaning given by the online *Trésor informatisé de la langue française* is this very sentence of

Apollinaire's. Croniamantal is Croniamantal is Croniamantal, and his own silent cry for sex is not only lost but enclosed in his voice voiced in voices. Nostalgia voices danger.

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He got back on his horse and took the road to his home. Unhappy in love for the first time, he discovered the extremes of melancholy in the countryside he had ridden across earlier. The sun was low on the horizon. The grey leaves of the olive trees were filled with a sadness just like his own. Shadows stretched in a flow around him. The river where he had seen the women bathing was abandoned now, and the quiet noise of the water made unbearable fun of him. He spurred his horse to the gallop, and then it was dusk, and lights began to shine in the distance. When night fell he reined in his horse and drifted into a frantic reverie. The slope had cypress trees on either side, and in the gloom of the night and of love Croniamantal followed the road to melancholy.

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In the first days of 1911. Poems scribbled down and kept in a cigar box are the last things evoked beforehand. In narrative, changes of perspective can be made to feel like an eruption of different sensations—not new ones necessarily, or if they are new, they produce a return of associations and thoughts which are still without shape. After all these years. The new and the rediscovered illuminate each other but also absorb each other. Apollinaire's disregard for chronology and for unity of tone is not organised in a premeditated attack on narrative convention, or on cultural expectation and ways of knowing. It does not sound like an anticipation of postmodern self-importance, the affective stakes are too high, attachments are still the stuff of life, love and grief. Nor does it read like the complexity of Proust, its epistemology is more intuitive and impulsive. Apollinaire's sense of the contingent is temporal, life as it is lived. His melancholy arises from the disappearance of everything in sequence, and his excitement comes from sequence too, the emergence of the new to replace

what was there. If things disappear and are then forgotten, the colours of the new are easily created, too easily, with every appearance of spontaneity and authenticity.

In the first days of 1911. These could be first days lived by any person, and then the phrase has no meaning to anyone, or rather meaning to anyone and no-one. And yet still, the date... It comes from before our time, and if it reaches out to readers now, it does so by gradually moving up on people, perhaps these effects resume, perhaps they overwhelm, perhaps they dissolve again. This date opens a tiny bit of narrative in which Apollinaire gives voice to the avant-garde of the pre-1914 period, in Paris and Berlin particularly, that early twentieth-century Renaissance in all art; this is Apollinaire's way of offering it again to his community of readers after the start of the War. How do the two relate – a person's own way of engaging with things, and the offerings made by others? The year 1911 and the tone in which it appears engage with you as a reader on the basis of not knowing you. An everyday feature of reading is turned here to the novelty and ambition of this avant-garde moment, a different moment, not fatally connected with the moment of reading. Disconnection seems to be needed for invention, the only way for it resist repetition: invention cannot be invented, it seems. In the first days of 1911. Where might I have been in the first days of any year, and where might you? Nostalgia, attachment; detachment, and translation from one point of view to another: all are in this together, in a ballet without contact or touch but which breathes embrace nonetheless.

In 1909, Marinetti's *Manifeste du futurisme*, *Futurist Manifesto* had already pushed its way onto the front page of *Le Figaro*. Apollinaire had risen to the visual examinations of speed in the pictures of Boccioni and Severini, a speed hoping to shape the ability of all voices to speak together and even at the same time. Solidarity of experience makes solidarity of modern meaning, and a force challenging the compartmentalizations of directed thought. Apollinaire is energized by what Clive Scott calls this 'dissolution or multiplication of human identity'; but wonders too about the speed of passage from living forms, from living with forms and even making them, to passive impression and an easy, joyous consumption. The fits and starts of the living mind are different for him, and by 1916 as he was putting *The Assassinated Poet* together, 1911 might have appeared bathed in its own purity, simply

asking the questions still in such need of an answer: in the name of what power is power fragmented and re-formed?

Toneless explosiveness. Pieces of description chaotically assembled. The great cries and the distant angers of the city. But there is still the sensation of continuity in reading this, taking us far back or inward, and the familiarity of that sense of inwardness returns, it spreads a clarity over all the shifts of content and tone and the sharp intakes of breath. Joy and anxiety together conjugate anticipation. Eyelids turn into jaws and devour the world, both seen and unseen. Vision is taken out of the inside of the eye and away from physiology, and is put onto the body outside, vision is re-discovered and re-shaped on the body, in a combination which is both monstrous and empowering. But this is not predominantly sensuous writing, and nor is this strange figure with jaws for eyelids. The whole little piece is made up of propositions rather than equivalences, and the basis for these ephemeral propositions is under construction; and it also dissolves. Will individual sensations of living form the basis of renewed understanding or not? In relation to this writing, can readers even be sure what the sensations being evoked are, or of their meaning?

Sensations nonetheless indicate the kind of relation being forged, and open up the possibility of reaching beyond the already known. My sense of the familiar is not the same as yours, even if it neighbours it. Understanding needs to be suspended to be renewed; but how can it then be communicated if not sensually, swimming in the endless mediations of life? 'Il mit l'éternité en miettes', he put eternity to the sword, he devoured the endless of time with his jaw-eyes, he ground away the lines of vision which enclose each one of us. Each one of us faces division and enclosure in this unresolved play of suspension and continuity. But each reader is offered an invitation to explore inwardly the dissolution of our sense of self, in a place where being moved combines optimism with anonymity.

On the first days of 1911, a badly dressed young man was running up the hill of rue Hudson in Montmartre. He had an exceptionally mobile face which expressed how the extremes of joy and anxiety are connected, or so it seemed. Croniamantal followed him to a door with a note saying 'To the Studios'. Autobiography combines with a moment in cultural history. But why? What is the story Apollinaire is telling, and the one given anyone individually to hear? What can be learnt from these

disguises, not simply by trying to say what they mean, but trying to follow the way the voices are bound up in each other and live? The combination of personal anecdote, contingency, narrative adventure and fantasy is clear, I think; but that thought involves imagining that this is clear to everyone differently. The there and not there of this blended melancholy, also of this optimism untroubled by origins and traces, resonates differently in each one of us. The sudden flattening of time when speaking uncluttered to a loved one lost in clutter; or showered in the light and the lightness brought in by a lover; speaking together as though skin had dimensions all its own. The joy of waiting and the fear of never understanding.

The books piled on the shelves looked like pats of butter. And as it pushed at the draughty door, the wind brought in unknown beings lamenting all known pain in their tiny cries. All the she-wolves of distress would then screech behind the door, ready to devour the herd, the shepherd and his friend, and prepare there and then the foundation of the new City. Inside the studio there were joys in all colours. There was a window along the whole north wall, with only the blue sky, like a woman singing. Croniamantal took off his overcoat which fell to the ground like a body fished from the sea, sat on the sofa and looked for a long time without a word at the painting standing on the easel. Dressed in blue canvas and barefoot, the painter looked at the picture as well, where two women in the freezing mist were remembering.

To be close to this way of painting and is neither to show nor describe it. It is more like finding a painting by allowing it to melt into others. Remembering it needs its own way of... remembering: of imagining the possibilities of remembering it, reading and re-reading it, hearing the inward voices which form anyone's relation to things and to others. Picasso's women, those that Apollinaire had seen, and seen transform, combine freedom from the imposed and visible shapes of the body with the shapes the body assumes in pain, or freedom: the body imagined in pain, or freedom. The picture on the easel is not there as we read the page, it lives in reading, formed, unformed and de-formed, formed again by the disconnections of word and image. The cries of pain, timeless, pointless, or on the other hand the pain of birth and re-conception—all pain is lamented; or contemplated: in any case projected on a surface which is there only in these words. The narrative both combines word and image and detaches them from each other. And in juxtaposition rather than harmony,

the tiny voices of singular pain sing with myth in the wind. Myth has turned into the legendary, then the familiar, over time, but without understanding, leaving the new city simply to emerge and in that way to be founded at last. Is it the city of freedom or empire? In combining ever differently, does the diversity of colours sing in a new voice or confirm the old? What should we think of the newness in which things appear, does it seduce us into thinking or just seduce? The City of God waits to become the city of each one of us individually, waits to be born now, in reason and respect. The joy of the blue sky is framed for each one of us as we watch, and imagine poet and painter watching together, each to his own. Everything remains to be done.

In this studio leaking breath, vision and voice, joy is connected to melancholy and fear, is disconnected from them too. The clarity of joy and the clarity of fear is the clarity in which each is disguised in the other. The blue of Picasso's blue style, which infiltrates some of the ones to follow, challenging period, moment and place, is simply worn on his clothes. In a further flattening effect, which is the opposite of monotonous, these clothes are made of canvas, which is the conventional surface material of painting. Active and passive are re-fashioned, each melts in the other in the forms of individual taste and everyday impulse. The painter is making the work and the poet is discovering it, and they contemplate together without yet knowing what is being made, or in what collaboration. They watch still women remembering, they watch the frozen fascination of remembering itself, the echoes of a past belonging only to each one, and to you. But a different memory is born just the same: born as much as hidden in the clear light, and in the company of readers together, alone.

The blue of the bright sky framed for you extends the memory of blue in Picasso's pictures. But here we find work is lost in life, blue is the colour of the painter's clothes. Anyone could find themselves imagining this blue on the loose, the colour of any moment of surprise by joy or catastrophe. It is transported back onto a picture living in the unique sound of these words, which reaches out to the distant sounds of memory being reformed. Blue and its stylization continue their travels inwards and outwards, propelled by melancholy towards optimistic living.

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There was also something implacable in the studio, a big piece of broken mirror was hung on the wall with hooks. It was a bottomless, vertical dead sea at the bottom of which there was an untrue life breathing life into nothing. Opposite art there is the appearance of art, of which people are unafraid and unaware, and which demeans them just when art uplifts them. Croniamantal hunched over further and further with his arms on his knees, he looked away from the painting and his eyes rested on a card on the floor with these words written on it in paint:

Gone to the bar.

The Bird of the Benign

Imagine the new quivering in style; imagine watching it grow in flights of the benign and the generous. Fantasy flights, perhaps. From Benin to Paris in any case. The distances are so varied and indeterminate that they become in themselves a witness to life. And after all, Croniamantal's life as a poet has already begun, and so has his author's. Where it begins and where it is found are questions unanswered and lived. This generative—or is it?—confusion of beginnings itself begins in a hilarious jumble of satire and lyricism, mythology and medicine: doggerel and melody too. *Prospectus for a New Remedy*.

Elle prit le soleil
Et le plongea dans la mer
Ainsi les ménagères
Font tremper un jambon dans la saumure
Mais malheur ! Les saumons voraces
On dévoré le soleil noyé
Et se sont fait des perruques
Avec les rayons
Maï Maï ramaho nia nia

A daughter of Donegal sings to the distant sound of Celtic songs sending heroes on their way. But legendary language is losing its depth and memory speaks in the echoes of our time, the momentary activities of the day. But perhaps what appears as day to day flatness has new stories to tell instead of the old ones of depth and distant swan

songs. The sea into which stars fall and from which they rise again is simply brine as well as the stuff of mythology—brine for preserving, and also good for a stock. But there are salmon in this brine, and unlike the ham being soaked they are still alive, and meat-eaters all of a sudden, and they simply polish it off. Despite pulling in opposite directions, brine and salmon sing a little assonantal song together, the confusion of category does not appear alienating, and this glow of the now, of present living, is made out of a hilarious irreverence for the past and anything symbolic. The vastly different Apollonian and Romantic ways of adoring the sun going up or down are divested both of rational power and inward depth—in fact of any depth of association at all. Instead sun adoration is translated sideways into an interest in wigs; and produces a concentrated and surreal little satire of fashion and all the guises of seeing.

But what about the chorus which returns at the end of each stanza? It reads like a phonetic evocation in French of a song without words, or just humming. Or like a sound-sketch of a French sound-idea of singing; French ideas of the Celtic and the folkloric. Things still remain unplaced, because they are experienced affectively, from the inside: these are subjective sounds as well as generally French ones. The self is spilling over into the non-self, but still does so in its own way. The stories of travel away and into the past of others are translated into French simply by being understood in a French ear. On the other hand, the inventiveness of the French sound-sketch surprises me as anyone into recognizing sensations and memories I had thought unique to me, and without voice. Everywhere hilarity exceeds limits which are then re-formed in the chorus, where for a moment melancholy adds its own notes to this little community of song.

But it is soon lost in the rest, Croniamantal's first foray into modernist irregular verse goes off in any number of directions: after all the whole point of free verse is to adapt. On the other hand, Croniamantal's starting effort is wrapped in obscurity, and understanding something easily slips into not understanding at all. A sense of false knowledge burgeons and drifts away in these random as well as organized sound patterns, which for that reason also encourage a fascination with etymological sources. The true is fashioned in the false, and guidance dissolves in any number of little labyrinths. Mythology, folklore, etymology, prosody, horticulture, cookery all join in a

witty, discordant and energizing harmony which is also pointless. The new free verse multiplies layers and perspectives which may free people from the weight of the past and past thinking, but which bury people just as much under an avalanche of association turned shapeless information. The power of myth to indoctrinate is re-kindled as much as cut loose, and alienation resurfaces in abandoning a place in which to think about how each one of us remembers and forgets.

On the one hand eclecticism, boundless renovation: modernity. On the other consumption, tending to thoughtlessness: modernity. Confusion re-calibrates its own source, the context and the possibilities of life, but at the cost of purpose and a sense of self. But perhaps a sense of identity gets in the way in any case of allowing identity to develop. On the other hand again, perhaps subjective response does not simply incarcerate people in their own point of view, but does after all generate ways of re-engaging with it. Cubism displays an enjoyment of flatness, displayed also in Brecht's theatre as well as post-modern fiction. In Brecht in particular suspicion of depth creates the basis for a resistance to supposedly impenetrable causes of devastating effects, which can then be presented as outside our control. In Cubism this flat exuberance is also a dark one, visibly without colour, colour is itself a source of suspicion, attached as it is to the appeal of the way things are and its power, closing our eyes to the vitality of *why*. Cubist darkness expresses re-immersion in history in the very moments of trying to re-cast it and re-direct it—the history of painting, at least: a history of how the world is understood by representing it in two dimensions. These pictures do not simply abandon perspective, and it is not just a question of multiplying lines of perspective and ways of seeing. There is always another way to look at any picture and its relation to the world beyond, but there is no way of guaranteeing the plurality of seeing. Like remembering, seeing is locked into the moment, which joins with others to make the time of each one of us. Viewing shows the temporal flattening of the plural into the one, the funnelling of many angles of seeing into one. But in Cubist viewing the place of viewing is lost, the view-point—or at least it is dispersed. New configurations are still always possible. But they are not endless, and two-dimensional flatness signals not only optimism but melancholy. Such is Croniamantal's viewing as he discovers the studio of Benign the Bird for the first time. Even the irreverent extravaganzas of collage express a kind of nostalgia, as

though their ambition were beyond reach, the ambition to fragment the frame of vision. Frames emerge from frames as much as from their collapse—frames without end, visible and invisible. Once out of context and stuck in a new one, any bit of coloured paper, any bit of a letter or a word, any perceptual flotsam spreads liquidly into all sorts of shapes on the surface of the mind. And flotsam and jetsam reconnect with primeval attachments, which spread over the indefinite surface tensions of the now and assume their form.

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Love follows the theatre which forges love. Croniamantal is trying to get his play performed, followed by a chapter called 'Love'. The chapter on theatre takes the form of a play, or really an allusion to a script. Tiny little verbal vignettes succeed each other, spoken by... Allusion and invention rub shoulders, the closer they get to each other the flimsier the likelihood of discovering anything new. But at least the flimsy is not the solid, and on that flimsy basis some kind of resistance to vested interest can be imagined, perhaps. But is caricature transforming or confirming what readers already know? Apollinaire seems to be starting again. Passing, somehow pre-categorized anecdotes seem to confirm and not re-direct our ways of knowing and recognising, which is the pleasure we find in them. At the same time, knowing is renewed in lived moments and explodes on their nerve ends. But for how long?

The charm of Apollinaire's transitions, in narrative as well as verse, is in the transition itself: it follows the confusion of remembering and forgetting. In this one love continues in the style of a script, it is prefaced by what sounds like a stage description in spite of the past tense, which makes it sound like story-telling and which displaces and disperses the whole scene. The stage is set, but where is it?

Description, storytelling, and prose monologue all digging inwards and sexualizing everything—verse song erupts in the middle of it all, and spreads the confusion of the new and the desired, with all its imprints of the past. Nursery rhyme idiom is invoked and plugs immediately into the intimate sounds within each one of us, the child lost and living in the adult. But by staying in tune with that model, Apollinaire has invented those sounds and verse-sounds, and they are now untranslatable—that

was always their nature. Still, intimacy can be re-made and re-heard at any time, and here the intimacy of everyone is anonymized, atomized, re-inhaled.

But the intimacy of voice does not affect people in the same way. This un-placed, self-dissolving poetry in the making could not be further removed from a political idiom. Equally, a political idiom could not be more easily discovered there. In aching to embrace and smother someone in kisses Croniamantal is steeped in the stories that have marked him. Arthurian legend and Celtic myth are his special favourites. The round moon, round loaves, round breasts, the round table and the round clearing are all confused in the mental forest in which Croniamantal is wandering about like a Prince seeking his Sleeping Beauty. Apollinaire has him start to probe. Not all roundness is the same. These ones are spatial, astronomical, sexual, digestive, mythological, and their confusion once again creates a confusion of depth and flatness. Such is the point of view: at once plural and impregnable. Not even the round table can break it, or make all points of view equal, or equally accessible to one another. The democracy of the round table is a testament to its own failure.

You haven't understood the joke about this clearing at all. Do you really think it's been made round like a round table for the good of man's equality and the equality of the weeks? Days are not alike, you know that. The decent knights sitting at the round table are not equal, one has the sun in his eyes and is blinded by it, then the next one has the sun in his eyes and is blinded by it, and the others have their shadows in front of them. They are all decent and you are decent too, they are no more equal than day and night.

Amorous longing spills over into thoughts on social and communal understanding, the divisions of which it cannot breach and which confirm its own. But still they are not the same. The person who loves me will not love my way of knowing but more my way of being ignorant and unaware. The one who sings and attracts me will be ignorant just as I am and dance a ballet of many fatigues. Sexual need, like any pleasure or pain, is referred to in indefinite and cumulative approximations, and in a mutual non-understanding which might perhaps form the basis of respect. But Croniamantal's quest for any understanding seems unlikely to be completed, or his quest for a community of friends with whom to discover the fantasies they share, sung in the voices known only to each one.

It seems that there is a transparent film of disintegrated myth which attracts people to each other just as much as skin and sweat and saliva; these paths may ever meet, even if they merge, like oil and vinegar or the yoke and white of an egg. Bare arms have become a leitmotif and they make a ballet out of the comings and goings of love and its memories. Stay with me my lips are exploding with kisses. Here they come, here they are, they are falling on your head and your hair. I bite your hair and the perfumes of ancient times. I bite your hair which winds like poetry on the pores of a corpse. Death and more death with worms growing like hair. There are kisses on my lips, here they come, here they are on your neck, on your eyes, on your eyes, on your eyes. My lips are exploding with kisses, here they come, here they are, they burn like a fever, they press on you and enchant you, kisses and kisses of panic on your ear, your temple, your cheek. Feel my embraces, bend to the pressure of my arm, be weary, be drained, be weary. There are kisses on my lips, here they come, here they are, kisses and panic on your neck, on your hair, on your head, on your eyes, on your mouth. I ache for the love of you this spring day when the blossoms have gone from the boughs and wait for their fruit to grow.

Go away, go away and far from the perfumes of ancient times in my hair, for you belong to me.

And Croniamantal went away without turning his head and for a long time he could still be seen through the branches, and after he had disappeared his voice could still be heard ever more dimly.

I am a traveller without a stick, a pilgrim without a staff and a poet without a writing case, I am the least powerful of all men, I have nothing left and I know nothing.

And his voice no longer reached Tristouse Ballerinettes who was gazing at herself in the stream.

The perfumes of antiquity are spreading over the tips and tangles of affect, of love and longing, just under the skin. Neither myth nor sensation explains the other, the sense of antiquity is not explaining the sensations of affect, even though each confirms the other. Such is authentic time, the lived time of the self and the sense of others; and such are the revelations of history continuously promised by this sense of lived but un-narrated time. The sad-eyed ballerina dances to the rhythm of her time

which nobody can hear, for it is their own. From a distance I see her immobile and silent dance, and even as she looks at herself she expresses my own longing. The sad-eyed mechanical ballerina dances to her own time, as it is made and as it makes her, and as it makes me as I watch with longing. At another level again, in both harmony and unison with the others, Apollinaire himself looks back at looking with longing at his lover, the painter Marie Laurencin, with whom he had parted before the war. Each watches with his own eyes, with her own eyes, and Sad-Eyes hears people loving her with their own hands and eyes. She advises travel, and finding other words and other learning, other hands and verses and kisses with which to touch and squeeze. But all the while she watches her own image refracting and dissolving in the moving waters of her time. People feel in what they know the depths of their limitations stretching over the time of their living. The same feelings are suppressed and also live in silent denial. The mechanism of our knowing performs what we know and what we do not. Now I know nothing and my loving is all one. The image of our knowing is reproduced not just in what we know but the inability to reach it, and there lies its melancholic aura, its loneliness and solidarity combined. Even in continuing to look the other way, in continuing to look as we look, a generous community of people could still be imagined of people looking at what is hidden in their own plain sight.

Croniamantal's sense of being ignorant of everything, of having nothing to learn from or to offer either readers or lovers, echoes in the negative Apollinaire's narrator in 'Les Fiançailles', a sequence of poems which figures in *Alcools* and was first published in 1908. 'Je ne sais plus rien et j'aime uniquement'. Now I know nothing and my loving is unique. The date evokes an intersection. On the one hand, the inward looking experimentation with free verse, the explorations of impulse and primeval voices that seem to reverberate there. On the other, the invasions of the modern, airplanes and radio waves, coupled with the other cultures piling in, the non-European, African and Oceanic masks and fetishes that flooded Paris in these opening years of the twentieth century. Apollinaire the modern versifier meets Apollinaire supporter of Picasso, thinker on Picasso's art since the blue and pink acrobats, which started their still dancing in 1904; and then witness to the explosive birth of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in 1907, which seemed to break the nets of looking

and toss them so much more widely. The betrothal is made from broken pieces, but valued for their capacity to remain unique, to relate to each other without fitting together always in the same way, without always benefiting the visible, the apparent, the known, the consumable, the distributable and the saleable, all the illusions of capture, victory, adaptation—but to what?, adjustment and acquisition, suspicion transparent and dark in equal measure. Uniqueness of this kind may finally fragment the point of view rather than confirm it.

But it is a dangerous game. The opening poem of *Alcools*, the last to be written, in 1912, famously ends on sun slit throat. And in 1916, the capacity of Croniamantal, our poet, to speak in tongues turns into the capacity of tongues to speak as one, in a frenzied diversity now smelted into the hatred of all poets. Apotheosis, transcendence, redemption, even fertility—it all both frees and assassinates. What is openness if not the idea of it, then forever claimed and re-claimed and re-owned. A zone cannot remain indeterminate for long. ‘Les jours s’en vont je demeure’, Apollinaire sings in the very next poem, time passes and here I am, the loneliness of grief is also the devastation of hearing only the sound of your own voice. Apollinaire knows this and speaks it.

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One of the most generous readers of Apollinaire I know is Walter Benjamin, his way of reading is made of generosity, he writes of reading in recognition of the overlay of voices heard, perhaps just imagined, in our own way, by each one of us. He stages diversity of voice in his way of writing: his studied erosion of citing and speaking, speaking and remembering, half remembering, not remembering, being lost in mnemonics—what other impulses are there to utter a thought? To speak is to speak as me and mine, to remember and forget in equal measure, in the moment, neither meets the other, each is lost in the other. Benjamin recognises how we hear voices in smothering them, each one of us, and he finds voice for the pathos of our responsibility for hearing, for losing, each one of us.

He evokes Apollinaire through someone else, through an attribution between friends, each living the promise of a new moment, living also pressure and danger. ‘Son âme [...] a les caprices de l’océan’, his soul has the capriciousness of an ocean,

Apollinaire writes in *La Phalange nouvelle* in 1908 of Henri Hertz, a literary journalist, poet and story writer, and voice of the left. In the Chancellerie des universités de Paris there is a Prize named after Henri Hertz, established by his widow, for a work of history, criticism or fiction which communicates the ethical or civic concerns of its time. Benjamin hears this capacity in Hertz himself, and in turn evokes him quoting Apollinaire and gives his own readers in 1929, and now, Apollinaire's voice in the imagined memory of Hertz. Such is the story of how Hertz might have come to hear words such as these:

Open, graves, you, the dead of the picture galleries, corpses behind screens, in palaces, castles, and monasteries, here stands the fabulous keeper of keys holding a bunch of the keys to all times, who knows where to press the most artful lock and invites you to step into the midst of the world of today, to mingle with the bearers of burdens, the mechanics whom money ennobles, to make yourself at home in their automobiles, which are beautiful as armour from the age of chivalry, to take your places in the international sleeping cars, and to weld yourself to all the people who today are still proud of their privileges. But civilization will give them short shrift.

I am quoting this exhortation and vision in the translation of Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter of Benjamin's text, *Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia*. It follows a floating appeal inspired by the voice of André Breton in *Nadja*, in 1928: 'what form do you suppose a life would take that was determined at a decisive moment precisely by the street song last on everyone's lips?'. In his sequence of quotations, translations, evocations and adaptations, in his writer's travels between them and in the travels he can only hope for of his writing to readers, some close, some far, Benjamin stages the passage he knows from the political to the historical, as he calls them. In the form of his comment, in a narrative staging the dissolution of place and narrative voice, he gives life to his belief that theories high and low live and die in the sensations of historical time, its cues, the lived time of the moment now, once now, already forgotten.

Apollinaire makes a voice that is both his and not his, his Croniamantal drowns in the complexity and the diversity of its own making. At the same time it seeks the simplicity shared with anyone of having a voice, even as that simplicity turns with an equal simplicity into the equal pathos of not knowing how your own voice is made.

Unity of voice and purpose is sought for the generosity it offers, and the solidarity in which it might be made; but it is resisted too for the sense it fosters of the right to suppress and to silence. I have tried here to find an appropriate response, I have again felt the proximity of translation and criticism, of translating words that move me into a language I might know, and make a texture where I might find my way, my way of hearing Apollinaire, and the generosity of his witness. Respond, translate, respond again. Listen.

The case of the masked corporal, in other words the assassinated poet. The title of the last of story Apollinaire includes in *Le Poète assassiné* is made of an interplay of masks and resuscitation. The assassinated poet, and poetry annihilated in the pogroms are resuscitated in the masks of our time, anyone's time: the masks in which the present couches the past and absorbs it, silences it and voices it; the masks of our understanding which we share, each one of us alone, and for which we fumble, together.

'So tell me are you wounded?' said our new Lazarus.

'Gunner, this is a mask,' said the mysterious corporal, 'and it hides everything you would like to know and everything you would like to see, and it blacks out the answers to all your questions since you came back to life, it silences every prophecy, and you can thank it for making it impossible for you ever to know the truth again.'

Before the war, in a different voice Apollinaire had written his 'je ne sais plus rien et j'aime uniquement', I finally know how I love, to suspend the knowledge and the blindness given only to me, and to love. Now in the middle of war, in a silent shrieking and with the loudness of a person just standing there, Apollinaire has translated the symbolic masks of knowledge and ignorance into the lived violence of gas masks and head bandages. He lives not just the appropriation of art by war, and not just innovation colonized by investment empires. He lives the love of art and its capacity to speak destruction as much as fertility; and to voice the resuscitation of the masks in which we live, love and destroy.

Our new Lazarus walks past mobilisation posters on his way to re-enlisting in the armoured corps. There will be no end to violence, and resuscitation may only repeat. Such is survival, it seems, in mind as well as body; and yet loyalty is made here as well. In the story these posters appear in the form of one of Apollinaire's favourite idioms,

the ideogram. The word and all its ambition to free the mind by re-organizing the relations of seeing and reading is re-embedded in this moment, where appealing posters combine at a distance with mutilation and blood in the mud. What is our measure of such distances? What is our immersion in them? The jingles, the refrains and the slogans on your lips and the banners in your mind may just as easily re-direct as re-assert the psychic shape in which you live, or any of us. Apollinaire re-imagines a beautiful poster with the outlines of a coffin, and makes a flattened image made of words, 'voici le cercueil où il gisait pourrissant et pâle'. Here is the coffin where he lay rotting and pale. Translation may help us listen to the sounds of this assassinated poet, but they will be the beats in our own veins.