

religion of society'. A poet attempting to create original tragic values sacrifices 'cohesion and emotional unity' in his audience, and all pathological or exceptional cases lose their tragic power. The dearth of tragic poetry in our age is 'a failure of civilized consciousness'. There are a number of illuminating remarks in this essay and it will be found more useful than most academic discussions of tragedy, but less than justice is done to the religious element in the tragic experience, the 'breaking of the dykes which separate man from man', the vindication of life at a profound impersonal level.

It can hardly be said that these essays offer a convincing answer to the questions raised in the preface and quoted at the beginning of this review, but at least they make a number of relevant points and suggest possible directions for further critical enquiry.

R. G. Cox.

## GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

*APOLLINAIRE. CHOIX DE POÉSIES, edited by C. M. Bowra (Horizon, 10/6).*

*APOLLINAIRE, by André Rouveyre (Gallimard, 120 francs).*

Apollinaire's work is not so well known in England nor his reputation so established in France as to render superfluous a longer commentary than Professor Bowra's brief prefatory remarks to this first English edition. Nor are those remarks sufficiently cogent to answer any of the questions that arise from a perusal of this selection: 'songs which have all the ease and grace of the sixteenth century', 'alexandrines that will stand comparison with those of any French poet', 'the new nature of his material', 'his brilliant intellect', 'being quite free from any metaphysical or ethical prepossessions . . . Apollinaire relied above all on his sensibility', 'he wrote in a kind of ecstasy which made everything significant and exciting', 'the inexhaustible delight of living'—these are some of the things which suggest that Professor Bowra did not trouble himself greatly with definition in writing his preface. M. Rouveyre's long study might have supplied a need, but proved to be a tedious and uncritical hagiography. The portrait of Apollinaire (alias Wilhelm Apollinaris Kostrowitsky) as seen by M. Rouveyre and in the evidence of Apollinaire's letters, is not an interesting one, although he appears to have been something of a 'character' to his friends. 'Je ne prétends pas donner la clef de son être', writes M. Rouveyre. 'Il faudrait réfléchir longuement et prudemment pour en approcher. Encore y parviendrait-on sans assurance, car il était un homme mystérieux et inconnaisable. Il était aussi un dieu . . . La terre craquait sous la pression de son imagination. Nous avons craqué, parfois, tous deux, sous la pulsation de notre mutuelle action idéo-magnétique. Avec lui on

était dans la lune . . . Mieux que Dieu, qui fit, dit-on, un homme de rien, Apollinaire en fit beaucoup, lui, avec la même absence de matière'. Testimony of this sort, which abounds in M. Rouveyre's book, is plainly intended for the amorphous *hebdomadaire-littéraire* public, amongst whom primarily, the Apollinaire legend circulates. When M. Rouveyre makes a show of criticism, in his last chapter, he offers this: 'Sa suppression délibérée de toute ponctuation permettait encore à son jeu mental d'exprimer toutes les insinuations de sa pensée, toutes les inflexions généreuses de son beau délire conscient. Elle augmentait son oxygène et alors lui permettait de contenir la complexité, l'étrangeté, le nombre de ses aventures morales, spirituelles et verbales, comme en plein éther, hors du temps et de l'espace . . .'. 'Étant donné qu'il pratiquait une consommation d'astres inusitée à ce point jusque-là chez les poètes, et qu'il était le premier et le seul usager immodéré de tels itinéraires célestes . . .'.

*Étant donné* an earnest and attentive audience, *étant donné* a sincere post-war search for some construction upon which to rejoice, perhaps, M. Rouveyre hopes, he may interest us in a little Apollinaire? For example, in the spectacle of normal feelings turned inside out and stood on their head . . . 'Oh que la guerre est jolie!' The blurb slips easily into cathartic metaphor: 'They are rich in those tonic mineral salts of intellectual vitality and the courageous welcoming of experience that most contemporary poetry lacks, and which recall the buoyant spring-time of the age'. 'C'est au sens de Virgile que je dis "je chante" quand je le dis—arma virumque cano'. The last quotation is from Aragon, who, we know, has done for this war what Apollinaire did for the last.

Not that Apollinaire hadn't more genuineness than his imitator. He was probably an amusing companion and quite a brave man. But our concern is with his poetry, and the major claims made for it in this English selection; in which Apollinaire appears as a kind of clown in verse, blest with a strong constitution and high spirits but little capacity for interesting experience or for writing poetry. 'On admirait cet air de ténor marseillais d'opéra-comique qu'il avait', writes M. Rouveyre. ' . . . Comme un véritable Athénien, Guillaume négligeait cette pudeur, à propos de rien, qui est la maladie chrétienne. Il était naturel et voilà tout . . . Apollinaire a fait, jusqu'au zénith, les plus éblouissantes pirouettes, et ce clown divin y emportait toujours avec lui son cœur intrépide'.

It was to be expected therefore that the relationship which he perceives between different levels of experience, his use of simile and metaphor, should be trivial. A surprising image justifies itself only if it immediately fixes and makes accessible a state of thought and feeling, and discloses more and more meaning as it is contemplated and accepted. It suggests the degree of control of the writer over his subject matter, the status of what is taking place. The simile 'like a patient etherized upon a table' is acceptable because it has this complexity, relevant to the ironic intention of the poem. The image suggests the sprawled glow of evening, the

tiredness, the quality of mental activity at the end of the day, a suffused fading pinkness underlined by the horizon, resembling the misty but luminous unconsciousness of ether, combined with the pungency and the orange flavour of the liquid, and the impression of surgical analysis in what is to follow. But the typical images of Apollinaire:

'Souvenirs qui n'en faites plus qu'un  
Comme cent fourrures ne font qu'un manteau'

'L'éternel avion solaire'

'Les virilités des héros fabuleux érigées comme des pièces  
contre avions'

'La religion seule est restée toute neuve la religion  
Est restée simple comme les hangars de Port-Aviation'

—have the same simple-minded pointlessness as Mr. Spender's pylons 'bare like nude giant girls that have no secret'. These images express not command of experience but the opposite, some pettiness in the impulse to write; and their failure is important in proportion to the amount of emphasis with which they are offered. Apollinaire's novelties are invariably thrown down with some violence, a challenging tone which betrays confused or ingenuous motives, and, reading them, the conviction grows that the stock word 'puéril' with which M. Rouveyre expresses his admiration of the 'mineral salts', would also be applicable to Apollinaire in the current meaning of its English equivalent.

There is reason enough for quoting at length from some of the poems which the fascination of a foreign tongue has led Professor Bowra to admire. The following is a complete poem.

#### Le Chant D'Amour

Voici de quoi est fait le chant symphonique de l'amour  
Il y a le chant de l'amour de jadis  
Le bruit des baisers éperdus des amants illustres  
Les cris d'amour des mortelles violées par les dieux  
Les virilités des héros fabuleux érigées comme des pièces  
contre avions  
Le hurlement précieux de Jason  
Le chant mortel du cygne  
Et l'hymne victorieux que les premiers rayons du soleil  
ont fait chanter à Memnon l'immobile  
Il y a le cri des Sabines au moment de l'enlèvement  
Il y a aussi les cris d'amour des félins dans les jungles  
La rumeur sourde des sèves montant dans les plantes  
tropicales  
Le tonnerre des artilleries qui accomplissent le terrible  
amour des peuples  
Les vagues de la mer où naît la vie et la beauté  
Il y a le chant de tout l'amour du monde

On one page, under the title 'Il Pleut', several dotted lines are printed vertically which on a second glance, prove to be words. These, if deciphered and transcribed in horizontal lines, discover poetry that has 'the clarity, the ease, the force of all good French verse', previously obscured by 'lyrisme visuel'. The result, after that, is disappointing. 'In "Les Soupirs du Servant de Dakar" he sketches with poignant insight the feelings of an African soldier torn from his primitive pastoral life to the violent and unintelligible routine of the trenches'. The following extracts represent more than half of this poem.

Je revois mon père qui se battit  
 Contre les Achantis  
 Au service des Anglais  
 Je revois ma soeur au rire en folie  
 Aux seins durs comme des obus  
 Et je revois  
 Ma mère la sorcière qui seule du village  
 Méprisait le sel  
 Piler le millet dans un mortier  
 Je me souviens du si délicat si inquiétant  
 Fétiche dans l'arbre  
 Et du double fétiche de la fécondité  
 Plus tard une tête coupée  
 Au bord d'un marécage  
 O pâleur de mon ennemi  
 C'était une tête d'argent  
 Et dans le marais  
 C'était la lune qui luisait  
 C'était donc une tête d'argent

J'ai connu l'affût au bord des marécages  
 Où la girafe boit les jambes écartées  
 J'ai connu l'horreur de l'ennemi qui dévaste  
 Le Village  
 Viole les femmes  
 Emmène les filles  
 Et les garçons dont la croupe dure sursaute

Je me souviens d'un lac affreux  
 Et de couples enchaînés par un atroce amour  
 Une nuit folle  
 Une nuit de sorcellerie  
 Comme cette nuit-ci  
 Où tant d'affreux regards  
 Éclatent dans le ciel splendide.

So much for the poignancy and the pastoral. The poem is fairly obviously the product of a lurid and commonplace imagination. 'He sought new adventures in the world and believed, as "Les

Collines" shows, that we should look for new possibilities in human nature and that if we can maintain the strength of our desires, we shall be greatly rewarded . Let the verses 'show' for themselves :

Certains hommes sont des collines  
 Qui s'élèvent d'entre les hommes  
 Et voient au loin tout l'avenir  
 Mieux que s'il était le présent  
 Plus net que s'il était passé

Et j'ai scruté tout ce que nul  
 Ne peut en rien imaginer  
 Et j'ai soupesé maintes fois  
 Même la vie impondérable  
 Je peux mourir en souriant

Habituez-vous comme moi  
 A ces prodiges que j'annonce  
 A la bonté qui va régner  
 A la souffrance que j'endure  
 Et vous connaîtrez l'avenir

Des bras d'or supportent la vie  
 Pénétrez le secret doré  
 Tout n'est qu'une flamme rapide  
 Que fleurit la rose adorable  
 Et d'où monte un parfum exquis.

And so on for some forty vatic stanzas. That Apollinaire considered himself one of the 'collines' and a large one, he does not leave in doubt, and he is accepted as such by his editor. 'In "La Jolie Rousse", written at the end of his life, he justified his case'. For example, with this :

Nous ne sommes pas vos ennemis  
 Nous voulons nous donner de vastes et d'étranges domaines  
 Où le mystère en fleurs s'offre à qui veut le cueillir  
 Il y a là des feux nouveaux des couleurs jamais vues  
 Mille phantasmes impondérables  
 Auxquels il faut donner de la réalité  
 Nous voulons explorer la bonté contrée énorme où tout se  
 tait  
 Il y a aussi le temps qu'on peut chasser ou faire revenir  
 Pitié pour nous qui combattons toujours aux frontières  
 De l'illimité et de l'avenir  
 Pitié pour nos erreurs pitié pour nos péchés

Mais riez riez de moi  
 Hommes de partout surtout gens d'ici

Car il y a tant de choses que je n'ose vous dire  
 Tant de choses que vous ne me laisseriez pas dire  
 Ayez pitié de moi

'Il y a tant de choses . . . ' Yet Apollinaire would have been the last poet to be struck dumb at the vision of the ineffable. A writer could not be more perfunctory or set a higher price on the least of his own creations. For him, of course, there is some excuse. But what is to be made of an invitation such as the following: 'Apollinaire, like Rilke and Eliot and Pasternak'? Some doubts must be felt concerning the purposes for which this Big Four is assembled. These doubts Professor Bowra's preface does not remove. There, the impression is given that the writer is protected, by some preconception of the appropriate response, from that open contact with the work under examination, which alone would reveal its quality. When the line 'les becs de gaz pissaient leur flamme au clair de lune' is served up, the editor stomachs it with the uneasy equivocation that 'some may think that he sacrifices charm to exactness, though they can hardly fail to admit that he does at least succeed in being exact'. The line was certainly enough to upset even a thoroughgoing taste for 'le mot juste'. Such a taste may be useful in the translation and construing of texts, but it is of little relevance to the act of reading and judging a poem as a whole.

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## THE SIGHTS OF CONEY ISLAND

*THE COSMOLOGICAL EYE*, by Henry Miller (*Editions Poetry* London, 10/6).

'Everything is sordid, shoddy, thin as pasteboard. A Coney Island of the mind'. (Henry Miller).

Whatever is decaying or physically disagreeable always catches Mr. Miller's eye. Under the impression that this constitutes 'cosmological vision', he is naturally impelled to let us share it, and when by doing so he can also tidy-up odds and ends of manuscript and produce a book, price 10/6, who can object to the practical streak in his generosity? No one needs be surprised by Mr. Miller's single-minded interest in what is moribund or rotten, nor in the proportion of his writing devoted to a detailed examination of it. Mr. Miller's view of the artist's function at the present time explains his enthusiasm. 'If you are an artist', he says, 'you have one consolation which is denied the others: *you can play the role of undertaker*'. His apparent fascination is simply a warm, professional interest. If he is obsessed with what is putrescent, it is in the interests of hygiene, and his task, like that of a burying beetle, is to search for the corpse and dispose of it. This view of the nature of his calling doubtless explains also the