

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The following study seeks to analyze Guillaume Apollinaire's literary and artistic reception by members of the European and American avant-gardes during the early twentieth century. In order to reduce this task to manageable proportions it has been necessary to define its parameters fairly closely. Without a set of controls, it would have required highly specialized linguistic skills and would have occupied several volumes. At the very beginning, therefore, I decided to limit the investigation's scope in three important ways. In the first place, the latter is concerned with tracing the impact of Apollinaire's ideas as they radiated outward in increasingly larger circles from Paris. As such the project focuses almost exclusively on his presence outside France. Although it necessarily touches on the poet's relations with his French colleagues from time to time, it concentrates on his international significance.

In the second place, I chose to limit the inquiry to the period leading up to 1920. Since Apollinaire died in 1918, his initial influence was restricted to his contemporaries and to those writers and artists who came immediately after him. At this point, however, it is necessary to insert a brief disclaimer. Although it may appear to violate my preliminary guidelines, the period of study has been extended to 1930 in the case of Latin America. Since the rise of the avant-garde in this part of the world dates from about 1920, its members encountered Apollinaire's writings somewhat later. Despite the apparent chronological discrepancy, therefore, the underlying principle remains the same. What interests us is Apollinaire's initial reception in avant-garde circles on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. In both instances this would seem to have been the period when his presence was the most keenly felt. Interestingly, this period coincided with the

initial phases of the avant-garde itself whose direction he helped in so many ways to determine.

Another advantage to choosing 1920 (or 1930) as our cut-off point is that the data we will be examining is still relatively fresh. The large number of commentaries, translations, testimonials, and other documents that have come down to us still bear the imprint of Apollinaire himself. In many cases, as we will see, the poet corresponded with the individuals in question and sent them copies of his publications. In some instances he met avant-garde representatives during trips abroad and/or welcomed them to Paris when they came to visit. Shortly after Apollinaire's death, however, a process of myth-making set in that was responsible for much of the subsequent confusion that surrounded his career. By the end of the 1920s Apollinaire's mythic status was secure in France and in most of the Western Hemisphere. While there is no shortage of anecdotes that illustrate this transformation, one account, by a South American author, will demonstrate the extent of this process. Writing to his brother from Paris in 1929, the Argentine poet Raúl González Tuñón described a new literary cabaret called La Boule Blanche. The opening ceremonies, he reported, were dedicated to the memory of two of Montparnasse's most beloved denizens: Modigliani and Apollinaire.¹ By this time both men had undergone a sort of avant-garde apotheosis. In the space of some ten years they had become the patron saints of the modern movement.

The third limitation is concerned with the avant-garde itself, or rather with its international aspect. For several reasons I decided to restrict the study to the major European and American nations. For one thing, these were the countries in which avant-garde experimentation flourished during the early years of this century. For another thing, these countries were destined to make the most important contributions to modern literature and modern art. What concerns us primarily, therefore, are the main lines of development linking Apollinaire to the international avant-garde. This is not to deny that many other countries were aware of Apollinaire or that they profited from his writings. To the contrary the poet seems to have had admirers virtually everywhere one chooses to look. In Scandinavia, for instance, the Danish periodical *Klingen* (*The Sword*) included an article devoted to Matisse, while the Swedish playwright Pär Lagerkvist read and reread *Les Peintres cubistes* "as if it were gospel."² Similarly, among the various Low Countries, the Flemish review *De Goedendag* (*Good Day*) featured an article on Apollinaire and Verlaine, while Herman van den Bergh published several studies of the poet in *De Vrije Bladen* (*The Free Press*) in Holland.³ Traces of Apollinaire, including a number of substantial texts, appeared in Eastern Europe with considerable frequency as

well. In addition to *Ma (Today)* which was headquartered in Budapest, the Ukrainian review *Nova Generatsiia (The New Generation)* and a host of other Slavic publications published translations of his works.⁴ Additional examples, taken from Latin American as well as European periodicals, could be multiplied almost at will.

Although it would be interesting to study Apollinaire's reception in some of these lesser known areas, the following pages are devoted to the literary and artistic mainstream. To the extent that it has been possible, and despite considerable overlap on more than one occasion, the chapters are arranged in approximately chronological order. The second chapter (following the Introduction) is concerned with Apollinaire and the British avant-garde, which paradoxically included several Americans. The third chapter extends the investigation to North America and centers around the New York avant-garde. Returning to Europe, the fourth chapter examines the poet's presence in Germany and in neighboring areas with German-speaking populations. The remaining chapters concentrate on Apollinaire's Hispanic reception, which assumed a number of different guises. Beginning in Catalonia and then expanding to cover the rest of Spain, the investigation culminates in Latin America where the poet played a significant role in Argentina, Uruguay, and Mexico. Among the various movements that one encounters during this avant-garde odyssey are Cubism, Dramatism, Orphism, Simultanism, Imagism, Vorticism, Expressionism, Pathetism, Dada, Surrealism, Ultraism, Creationism, Simplism, Stridentism, and the Contemporary School.

Despite the ambitious itinerary outlined above, some readers may object to the absence of one or more countries that are known to have made important avant-garde contributions. In a study such as this, one would expect to find a chapter concerned with Apollinaire's presence in Italy, for example, and perhaps even in Switzerland. And since it includes Latin America as well, one may wonder why there is no discussion of the poet's role in Brasil. If anything, avant-garde activities in the latter country were even more pronounced than they were in Argentina and Mexico. Let it be said at the outset that unlike the rest of Latin America, the Brazilian artists and writers were not particularly interested in Apollinaire. Instead, for reasons that appear to have been largely accidental, they were drawn to another French poet: Blaise Cendrars, who visited Brasil on several occasions. Not only was Cendrars popular among the avant-garde there, but he heavily influenced several of its members.⁵

The absence of Switzerland, which is perhaps more apparent than real, does not pose a serious problem. For one thing, references to Apollinaire that appeared in German-language periodicals are discussed

in the chapter devoted to Germany. For another thing, the French references that appeared in Switzerland, which have recently been examined by Pierre Caizergues, tended to occupy a peripheral position in the international avant-garde.⁶ Despite the undeniable interest of these references, like those by Belgian writers, they do not belong to the historical mainstream. The major exception to this rule is offered by Tristan Tzara, who corresponded with Apollinaire during the war and who published a moving poem on the occasion of his death.⁷ Under Tzara's aegis the latter's poetry was recited at various Dada soirées in Zurich, and references to his work appeared from time to time in *Cabaret Voltaire* and *Dada*. In addition the former review published a *poème simultané* by Apollinaire entitled "Arbre."⁸ Nevertheless, since the poet's influence was neither decisive nor widespread, there is not enough material to merit a separate chapter. In any case Tzara abandoned Zurich for Paris before long, where he joined the French avant-garde.⁹

The absence of a chapter devoted to Italy, as readers who are familiar with Apollinaire will attest, is much more surprising. There is certainly no shortage of documents to examine or of interesting conclusions to be drawn. In an important work, which has since become a classic, P. A. Jannini demonstrated in 1965 that Italian artists and writers were unusually receptive to Apollinaire's aesthetic message.¹⁰ Indeed, more and more examples of his influence have surfaced in the years since Jannini's book appeared. As subsequent studies have shown, even some of the Futurists were seduced by Apollinaire's achievements and strove to incorporate them into their rival aesthetic. Unfortunately, several considerations have prevented me from including the Italian avant-garde in the present volume.

In the first place, as Jannini discovered, there is simply too much material. The volume of the primary documents alone would have necessitated a book-length treatment. In the second place, my own role would have been drastically altered. This is a problem that confronts anyone who attempts to summarize someone else's work. On the whole, the subject of Apollinaire's reception outside France has received remarkably little attention. Of necessity, therefore, the scholarship that has gone into making *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde* is almost entirely original. In the absence of existing studies, I have attempted to reconstruct the relations between the poet and his foreign colleagues based on what I could discover from the primary sources. Rather than devote a chapter to Apollinaire in Italy, which would merely have repeated Jannini's findings, I have preferred to refer readers to the primary texts on the subject. This decision was rendered all the more necessary by the recent publica-

tion of two volumes of letters by Apollinaire to Italian correspondents, many of which are previously unknown.¹¹

As the reader will rapidly discover, the guidelines described above are somewhat elastic. Since the study seeks to illuminate the main paths of exchange between Apollinaire and other avant-garde figures, not to falsify them, it seemed wise to avoid unnecessary constraints. Whenever the nature of the material calls for it, therefore, they have been temporarily suspended. This is especially true of the first two guidelines, which impose not only chronological but geographical limitations. In point of fact it has not always been possible to restrict the discussion to areas outside France. For one thing, much of Apollinaire's avant-garde activity expressed itself in articles which he wrote on behalf of one foreign cause or another. For another, several individuals with whom he corresponded, such as Ramón Gómez de la Serna and Herwarth Walden, sought him out whenever they came to Paris. Furthermore, many members of the international avant-garde resided in Paris themselves for long periods of time. Any attempt to describe their relations with Apollinaire must take this fact into account as well.

In addition, it has been necessary to ignore the study's chronological restrictions on several occasions. Whenever a particular author's evolution, or the evolution in his attitude toward Apollinaire, extends past the cut-off date, I have followed it as far as necessary. This policy also applies to a few movements that continued to develop in significant ways in subsequent years. In most cases the period in question exceeds the 1920 (or 1930) limit by only a few years. Thus the various chronological transgressions are relatively minor. The principal exception to this rule concerns individuals who were destined to play a major role in modern literature, a number of whom have since become famous.

Confronted by authors such as Ezra Pound or Jorge Luis Borges, I found it impossible to ignore their later development. To have abandoned them so early in their careers would have been not only frustrating but irresponsible. In order to discover what these writers really thought of Apollinaire, therefore, I have expanded the discussion to include their entire *oeuvre*.

Although Apollinaire eventually rose to become the head of the French avant-garde, his origins were extremely humble. The illegitimate son of a Polish adventuress, he spent his formative years first in Italy, where he was born, and then in Monaco where he went to school. Ironically, the future poet of Paris, whose glories he was to celebrate in so many works, did not settle in the French capital until he was nineteen. During the next ten years he eked out a miserable existence as a bank clerk

and part-time journalist but succeeded in establishing himself as a poet, novelist, and critic of modern art. By 1911, when he published *Le Bestiaire* with Raoul Dufy and was awarded a column in *Le Mercure de France*, Apollinaire found himself poised on the brink of success. Before he could capitalize on his good fortune, however, the scale tipped in the opposite direction and threatened to destroy everything he had worked so hard to accomplish. Without warning Apollinaire was arrested in connection with the theft of the *Mona Lisa*, which had recently disappeared from the Louvre, and threatened with permanent expulsion from France.

The story of Apollinaire's imprisonment and his subsequent release has been told many times.¹² What interests us here is the immense amount of publicity that it generated and its effect on his international reputation. Before this bizarre episode relatively few people had ever heard of the poet outside France. Suddenly, thanks to a gratuitous incident, he acquired instant worldwide recognition. His career was subjected to public scrutiny not only by the French authorities but by the international press. Concentrating on Géry Pieret, who was suspected of being the actual thief, the *London Times* described the proceedings as follows: "Two separate individuals are attracting attention as having possibly been concerned in the disappearance of *La Gioconda*. One is a former associate of M. Apollinaire, who was arrested on September 8 for having harboured the thief of the Phoenician statuette [which had been stolen previously]. This individual, who was allowed to escape by M. Apollinaire, is in correspondence with *Paris-Journal*, to which he sold the statuette for £200."¹³ In contrast to its British counterpart, which was preoccupied with the details of the theft, the *New York Times* focused on Apollinaire himself. Four days later the following account appeared which portrayed the latter as a respectable *homme de lettres*:

M. Apollinaire, a well-known Russian literary man living in Paris, was recently arrested and underwent a searching examination on the charge of having shielded Pieret from the law. . . . In June M. Apollinaire employed him as his private secretary, but learning of his past history, on August 20 he showed him the door. . . . M. Apollinaire, who is very popular in Paris in literary and journalistic circles, was accused of having put his delinquent secretary on a train for Marseille and given him the sum of \$32 to quit the country. After a searching cross-examination by the investigating magistrate, M. Apollinaire has been set at liberty provisionally.

Among the interesting details of his relations with the alleged thief of *Mona Lisa* and the latter's tale of many adven-

tures, Apollinaire said that Pieret was known for a considerable time under the name of Baron Ignace Dormeson.

Le Journal publishes a letter from Berlin signed "Baron Dormeson," in which the writer emphatically states that Apollinaire had nothing whatever to do with the theft of the picture.¹⁴

Thus the first reference to Apollinaire in the United States, as in most other countries, was occasioned by the theft of the Mona Lisa. Although the article was generally favorable, it implied that he had somehow been an accomplice and implicated him in the growing scandal. This pattern was repeated in the other nations we will be studying, where it generated a certain amount of negative publicity. However, since the incident itself was of no interest to the international avant-garde, it has been excluded from the remainder of this volume. The members of the latter group were preoccupied above all with aesthetic issues. The decade stretching from 1910 to 1920 witnessed a tremendous burst of creative energy as one revolutionary invention led to another in quick succession. Significantly, this was the most important period in Apollinaire's career as well. During these years he published two major collections of poetry, a book of short stories, a ground-breaking study of Cubist painting, an avant-garde novel, two influential manifestos, and a revolutionary play in addition to a host of other works. The outbreak of the First World War, in which he actively participated, scarcely seems to have made a dent in his various projects.

Apollinaire's chief rival during this period was none other than F. T. Marinetti, the founder of Italian Futurism. Beginning in 1909, the Futurist movement received considerable publicity in both Europe and the Americas and counted numerous artists and writers among its adherents. Since Marinetti was independently wealthy, he was able to travel all over the globe writing explosive manifestos and lecturing on Futurist goals. However, since Apollinaire was virtually penniless, he was forced to carry out his own campaign to modernize art and literature in a number of other ways—mainly through the medium of the written word. While his books and articles covered a wide variety of topics, he was associated primarily with Cubism during his lifetime. Thus the principal competition during the early part of the century was between the Futurists, on the one hand, and the Cubists on the other. The former explored the connection between modern art and the new technology, while the latter investigated the nature of contemporary reality. In contrast to Futurism's infatuation with the machine, Cubism adopted an aesthetic that was based on fragmentation and rupture.

During this same period the members of the international avant-garde were searching for a fresh means of expression that would enable them to capture the unique spirit of the twentieth century. As we will discover, Apollinaire provided them with many of the things they were looking for. Some of these, such as concepts, themes, and techniques, represent instances of direct influence. Others, such as attitudes and ideas in general, are less easy to identify. In this context, which is related to the history of ideas and to the history of aesthetics, it is instructive to study Apollinaire's reception: how his work was received by various artists and writers and what they thought of it. Above all, I hope to determine the nature of his contribution to the different avant-gardes and the manner in which it was adapted to the specific needs of the countries in question. In analyzing the different ways in which Apollinaire's writings were utilized I also hope to shed new light on the paths of aesthetic exchange that characterized France's relationship with the rest of Europe and with the Americas.