
ARTICLES – FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE

Sex, Wine and Statelessness: Apollinaire's Verse without Borders in 'Vendémiaire'

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Guillaume Apollinaire is a perfect stateless European. Originally a subject of the Russian Empire, born Wilhelm Kostrowicky in Rome to a Finland-born, Polish-Italian single mother, later becoming a prominent French poet and a soldier and eventually being granted much-desired French nationality, his biography reads like a novel. His 174-line poem 'Vendémiaire' (*Alcools*, 1913) is titled after the French Revolutionary Calendar's windy month of grape harvest, and as such centres on wine. In this 'chanson de Paris', a personified Paris' thirst for wine is met by the enthusiastic response of multiple towns and rivers, their water changed to wine, offering themselves to the capital in an orgy-like feast. This glorification of Apollinaire's adoptive city mixes sexual double meanings with religious references, founding a half-parodic new religion. It also touches on the poet's own painful strangeness, which leads him to dream of a liberated, borderless world of 'universelle ivrognerie', in which a godlike poet creates the world anew from primordial wine, and which also links to issues of national and cultural identities. This exceptionally dense poem, in which several meanings, tones and verse forms overlap, provides an exemplary specimen of Apollinaire's daring versification, which bears an important role in the construction and circulation of meaning, and is foundational to his prominence as a modernist poet. Its disorienting blending of old alexandrines with free verse places Apollinaire both within and without a metrical tradition that he enjoys and transgresses. Ultimately, rather than a world without borders, Apollinaire offers the image of a world full of borders, and the exhilaration comes not from their abolition but from crossing them. The poet's orphic power overrules boundaries, alters the world order: rivers of wine flow up towards Paris; a new religion allows him to create the world anew, and to gear it towards poetry, with a form of verse described as 'tordu', deliberately and richly imperfect.

Guillaume Apollinaire is a perfect stateless European poet (Boschetti 157). Born in Rome in 1880 to a Finland-born, Polish-Italian single mother, he was originally a subject of the Russian Empire, and was eventually granted much-desired French nationality in 1916, after he enlisted in the army and fought in the First World War. His biography (Campa 2013; Décaudin 2002) reads like a novel, complete with a mysterious birth, a gambling, penniless, aristocrat mother, occasional trouble with the police and extensive travels throughout Europe, during which he invariably fell in love and was mostly rejected. His poetry is informed by his geographical and

amorous wanderings, and by the collision of his Catholic upbringing with his hostility towards limits and limitations, be they national borders or social and sexual norms. Apollinaire is one of the most prominent poets of French modernity. His departure from academic forms, his inclusion of everyday topics, the polyphony of his poetry, bound to the cubist movement, on the subject of which he was a major authority, are mirrored in his versification. Apollinaire's playful free verse is strongly reminiscent of the alexandrine, and this kinship oversteps the border between free and strict verse. The sheer diversity of his poetry, which was the focus of criticism in 1913 (Duhamel 1913), is a founding stone of his poetics. Apollinaire does not attack old forms so much as he attacks the separation of forms, of subjects, of tones. This is illustrated by the first line of *Alcools*, 'À la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien' ('Zone'): the desire for novelty stems from a weariness, not a dislike, of old forms. This ambivalence is expressed in the choice for this very line of an alexandrine, the most characteristically traditional metre, giving way to unexpected free verse from the second line.

Alcools (1913) is a deeply European collection, with almost every poem referring to Apollinaire's intertwined travels and love stories throughout Europe. The last one is the 174-line 'Vendémiaire' (149), the title of which sets wine as the primary theme. The poem features an overheard 'chanson de Paris' (16), in which a personified Paris expresses its thirst for wine and for European towns, to which in turn a number of rivers and towns reply, offering themselves to the ever-thirstier capital in an orgy-like feast, until eventually, the devouring capital drinks up the entire universe. This exhilarated glorification of Apollinaire's adoptive city mixes sexual double meanings with religious references, in an effort to found a half-parodic new religion (Burgos, Debon and Décaudin, 104–8). Instead of Apollinaire's own painful statelessness, the 'chanson de Paris' portrays a liberated pan-Europeanism, ultimately opening onto the 'universelle ivrognerie' (171) in which a godlike poet creates the world anew from primordial wine. This is an exceptionally rich poem, overcrowded even, with multiple and overlapping meanings, tones and verse forms making it difficult for the reader to follow (Read 73). Such depth and complexity exemplifies several of the creative liberties taken by Apollinaire (Alexandre 1994; Campa 1996; Décaudin 1960, 1967), with versification playing an important role in the construction and circulation of meaning (Bobillot).

Crossing of Borders

One is tempted to trace some of Apollinaire's scorn for limits and limitations back to his unusual upbringing. Wilhelm Albert Włodzimierz Apolinary Kostrowicki was already well accustomed to crossing borders, geographical or otherwise, before he became Guillaume Apollinaire. His extensive travels throughout Europe, and the associated heartbreaks, would prove an important source of inspiration and provide the subjects of nearly all of the poems in *Alcools*. His mother, Angelica Kostrowicka, deserted in Rome by her own unstable father, relied on the generosity of protectors in and around the Vatican to provide for herself, Wilhelm and her second son Albert. There is no certainty as to who fathered the boys, who like their mother were raised in Italian and Polish, and like her lived a nomadic, tumultuous childhood, from Italy to Monaco in 1887, through France and to Paris in 1899. In Monaco, Angelica changed her name to Olga, and appeared in police reports as a prostitute, where she was described as having an 'extremely violent nature' (Campa 2013, 41). Indeed, she was nearly deported after a bottle fight with another woman on a café terrace. As the family moved from one rental room to the next, often gravitating around casinos, the brothers were raised in strict Catholic piety, enrolled in private schools, yet sometimes entirely left to their own devices. They spent a long summer in Stavelot, Belgium, in 1899, during which Wilhelm fell in love with 'Mareye' (Maria Dubois) and her quaint Walloon language before leaving in a hurry, instructed by their mother to flee the hotel before dawn in order to skip the bill. Belgium inspired in Wilhelm many poems gathered as *Stavelot* in the posthumous collection

Le Gueux mélancolique. After the family settled in Paris, Wilhelm became a private tutor for a wealthy family, and accompanied them on a tour of Germany and the Rhineland, using the opportunity to visit Prague and Vienna as well, between 1901 and 1902, this time falling in love with the English governess, Annie Playden. This trip can be credited for the inclusion of German folklore and the recurring figure of Lorelei in *Rhénanes*. He would later go to London to unsuccessfully try and win Playden's heart, in 1903 and 1904, writing London-inspired poems such as 'L'émigrant de Landor Road' and 'La Chanson du Mal Aimé' (*Alcools*) and striking up a lasting friendship with the Albanian intellectual Faik Bey Konitza. The poet's unconventional upbringing, travels throughout Europe – and the love stories attached to them – together with his multilingualism and multiculturalism had a profound influence on his work, which regularly overlaps religious fervour and sexual obsession and is, like him, utterly European despite his pressing desire for 'un pays, une race, un passeport en règle' (Giladi). His poetry is rooted in more than one place, such as with 'Zone', set in an undefined elsewhere, or 'Vendémiaire', spanning multiple European towns and rivers. Apollinaire often uses various European myths (Campa and Read; Geyer; Naliwajek) as themes, amalgamating them in a hybrid cultural system far from the neoclassic insistence on the rejection of German influences and promotion of a Latin heritage, and readily identifies with the figure of Orpheus (Apollinaire 1911; Décaudin 1970) who can walk across the ultimate frontier.

Later, the poet would combine the French versions of two of his given names and become Guillaume Apollinaire, calling for the protection of the god of music and poetry, and crossing over to a French identity – he who so desperately wanted to become French. To his family, he remained Wilhelm, to others mostly Kostro. His friends nicknamed him the 'bouc-en-train', a portmanteau word combining the *boute-en-train* (joker), and the horny *bouc* (billy-goat) (Fongaro 36), and his fellow soldiers replaced the unpronounceable birthname with the more eloquent transposition 'Cointreau-Whisky' (Cornille 164). Apollinaire's writings and sense of humour, his drawing too, with a keen eye for grimaces, are readily outrageous and radically modern, sharing in the cubist appetite for dislocations and disruption (Debon and Read). His contributions to pornography, both as an author, with the dark and oddly comical novel *Les Onze Mille Verges*, and as a publisher, exhuming texts such as those of the Marquis de Sade from the National Library's Enfer Collection (1909; 1919; Delon), though a marginal part of his activities, are another of his transgressions, pointing to his Dionysian vision of sexuality, far from the Apollonian patronage. Indeed, Apollinaire's writing typically overlaps and hybridises multiple voices and tones, combining irony with ingenuity.

Apollinaire wrote 'Vendémiaire' between 1911 and 1912 – the poem's swollen rivers are no doubt inspired by the 1910 great flood of Paris – at a time when he was becoming quite a prominent figure within Parisian artistic and literary society (Campa 2013, 305–410). This period was also an upsetting one: wrongfully accused of being involved in the theft of the Mona Lisa, Apollinaire had been imprisoned for six days in September 1911 (Campa 2013, 352–65). Being essentially stateless – although the word had not yet fully entered the European vocabulary – he worried about deportation. This short stay in prison resulted in the writing of 'À la Santé', a group of six poems within *Alcools* (140–5), but 'Vendémiaire' also seems to convey something of the young man's fear and raises the issue of his strangeness (Clancier) through the staging of his dreamy enthusiasm and of his fantasised pan-European belonging (Ernst and Geyer). In a time of rising nationalism, this universalist attitude is one that is risky and difficult to manage for a foreign poet. The neoclassicals of his time were quick to denounce avant-garde artists as suspiciously cosmopolitan and unpatriotic. As a journalist and a defender of cubism in particular, Apollinaire opted to promote cubism as essentially *Latin*, or at least *Parisian*, and thus defensible. His inclusion of German folklore in his work highlights his fundamental disagreement with Pan-Latinism, but the focus on Paris is part of his efforts to 'récupér[er] le discours nationaliste et panlatiniste tout en l'inversant' (Giladi).

The Borders of Free Verse

Apollinaire is one of the pioneers of free verse (Décaudin 1967; Murat 2008, 2014; Delbreil and Purnelle). Amongst other features, he infuses the form with an apparent disregard for the distinction between free and strict verse, as well as between natural prosody and regular versification. In *Calligrammes*, he transgresses the very body of the verse, using it as a physical sketching line. In *La Maison des Morts* (*Alcools* 66), he bridges the gap between prose and poetry by cutting up his own prose tale *L'Obituaire*. In *Alcools*, the dropping of all punctuation abolishes the neat syntactic borders of sentences, giving priority to the prosodic rhythm of the verse (Décaudin 1960). Although his poems promote a fluid association of formal and informal tones, recordings show that when reading his own poems aloud Apollinaire interpreted strict verse following the traditional rules of French versification, whilst his renderings of free verse were closer to standard French pronunciation rules (Purnelle), demonstrating an acute awareness of the divide between the two. This finding conflicts with the use Apollinaire makes of rhythm and periodicity within his poems. Indeed, the near-metrical construction of his free verse, although it does not fit the strict rules of French verse language, is also in contradiction with standard French pronunciation; it is a subtle and precise mix of strict verse and prose, blurring this generally accepted divide. To achieve his canny overlapping of rhythms, Apollinaire relies heavily on the metrical knowledge of readers of francophone poetry, on their learnt urge to look for familiar metres and rhythmical structures, and particularly on the influence of the alexandrine.

The most canonical French verse is without a doubt the 6 + 6 alexandrine metre, with its remarkably stable structure: twelve syllables, distributed in two groups of six syllables each, a caesura separating the two units – the hemistichs – such that one should be able to mark a pause between them (Gouvard 110–36). This line of 'Vendémiaire', for instance, is a regular alexandrine: 'Hommes de l'avenir – souvenez-vous de moi' (1),¹ whilst a subsequent one, in which the caesura runs between the verb and its clitic negation, is a dissonant alexandrine: 'Et que la Grèce n'a – pas connue ni l'Orient' (36). Furthermore, an essential attribute of verse is that a line needs to be paired with at least one other line of the same metre, for it is this sameness, this periodicity of syllable groups, that produces the metric value. This necessity is in reality greatly diminished in the case of the alexandrine. To understand French free verse in its specificity, one must keep in mind that a French reader is likely to be heavily influenced by his or her training and prior readings, and would therefore be inclined to detect an alexandrine rhythm beneath lines approximating twelve syllables. A metrically exact 6 + 6 is such an unmistakably familiar metre that it can be identified as such even in the absence of a metrical context, as is the case in another poem from *Alcools*, the one-line 'Chantre' (63): 'Et l'unique cordeau – des trompettes marines'. In fact, a metrically exact 6 + 6 is acknowledged as a verse line even in the absence of a poetic context, as with this surprisingly classical line which used to be painted onto the doors of the Paris metro: 'Le train ne peut partir – que les portes fermées'.

The specific influence of the alexandrine on French versification plays a fundamental role in the emergence of free verse, as the alexandrine rhythm is almost always either avoided or evoked, but can hardly be ignored. This intrinsic presence of the tradition of versification means that the French free verse poets, unavoidably constrained by their relationship with the traditional metres (and, in particular, the alexandrine) cannot actually compose their poems without the shadow of this restraint. Some poets succeeded in disregarding the alexandrine, and produced a free verse not haunted by it, at least apparently. This is the case of Valéry Larbaud, whose free verse appears to progressively liberate itself from the

¹ Double hyphens added by me to signal the location of the caesura.

alexandrine's influence, neither mentioning nor avoiding the conspicuous metre. This effort towards a more universal versification is part of a deliberate refusal to submit to a national cultural heritage. Yet upon closer inspection, Larbaud's ostensibly international free verse – although an exemplary specimen of the form – can be shown to avoid subtle signals associated with traditional French versification, such as well-defined syntactic groups of six syllables at the beginning of lines, in a purposeful effort towards a 'blocage des schèmes métriques' (Murat 2008, 230). Apollinaire's versification is also bound to traditional metres, and to the alexandrine in particular, with efforts to always very nearly miss it revealing its influence.

In addition to metre, another prominent aspect of French poetry is the use of a distinct language. Verse language ('langue des vers') refers to the set of rules defining how metric syllables are counted in French versification. These rules, which include the prohibition of hiatuses, mostly apply to atonic /e/'s, some of which are counted as metric syllables and some not, depending on their phonetic environment, and to diphthongs, counted either as one syllable (synaeresis) or two (dieresis), depending on the word's etymology and morphology. Thus, many syllables are counted as metric syllables within verse language that would otherwise be muted by standard pronunciation, lending a particular tempo to French verse. This linguistic specificity works as a signal of verse for a French-speaking audience, and more broadly, plays an important role as a genre marker. Moreover, as is the case with any culturally specific practice, mastery of it can be taken as a sign of one's belonging. Apollinaire's lines force the dropping or maintaining of syllables by suggesting strict metres, displaying a freedom that comes from a complete impregnation with this language-specific aspect of French verse.

Apollinaire, by playfully transgressing both metre and verse language, indeed by hijacking verse language to distort metrics, exhibits a conspicuous mastery of this daunting cultural acquisition. Significantly, the opening and closing poems of *Alcools*, 'Zone' and 'Vendémiaire' respectively, both make a particularly visible display of this mastery-transgression stance. These two unusually long poems are evocations of epic poetry, with references to historical remembrance ('Hommes de l'avenir souvenez-vous de moi', *Alcools* 149), the use of epithets ('C'est Ferdine la fausse ou Léa l'attentive', *Alcools* 44), alexandrines, some very exact, the archaic feel of imperfect rhymes and the frequent use of a simple couplet rhyme scheme. And, simultaneously, adding to the floating narrating voice and sense of time, they set the tone for a bold dislocation of traditional verse, with inconsistent rhyming, unexpected syllable counts ('À la fin tu es las de ce monde anci-en', *Alcools* 39) or the collision of strict alexandrines not just with free verse but with lines closely approximating the alexandrine metre, a destabilising proximity.

In 'Vendémiaire', as Apollinaire takes advantage of the national metrical situation, the versification constantly slips from strict alexandrines to free verse, back and forth until the two become closely blended. One is unsure whether to call this versification *free verse*, for it does not fit the expectation of free verse as non-metrical. The syllable counts are all but random. If a free verse is 'uncounted, unrhymed, without caesura' (Roubaud 128), then this is clearly not the case of 'Vendémiaire'. Moreover, the actual syllable counts are very often approximate, deliberately undecidable. Alongside many 6 + 6 alexandrines, a typical line in 'Vendémiaire' might have something in the range of twelve syllables, but reducible to a 6 + 6 count by bending the rules of syllable counting, such as in 'que le mystère clôt comme une porte la maison' (32). With fourteen syllables according to verse language (que le mystère clôt comme une porte la maison'), or eleven according to standard pronunciation (*'que le mystère' clôt comme un' port' la maison'), this line approximates twelve syllables. The first six (que le mystère clôt') are a well-defined syntactical unit, quite naturally followed by a caesura, guaranteeing a remarkable kinship with the alexandrine. The remainder of the line can be reduced

to a six-syllable hemistich by switching to the rules of standard pronunciation for syllable counting, thus applying a different set of rules to each half of the line. This contrasting and contradictory metrical structure, far from being accidental, is typical of Apollinaire's playful versification, and offers a clear case of its staged and carefully proportioned instability. More ambiguous are the many lines that begin with a hemistich-like six-syllable segment, carrying on with a syllable count close to twelve – thus vividly bringing the alexandrine to mind – but which no amount of twisting can reduce to twelve syllables, such as the six-, then seven-, syllable groups of: 'Nous voici ô Paris – Nos maisons nos habitants' (23). This layered play on dissonance also expresses the complexity of an ambivalent desire for the stability and safety which derive from a sense of belonging, alongside a resistance to national recuperation.

Simply put, the free verse of 'Vendémiaire' is a vacillating one, unequivocally yet loosely attached to the alexandrine, just tightly enough to clearly evoke the classical metre, but not so tightly that it would approximate actual strict verse. This oscillation highlights the tension between verse language – used by strict French verse – and standard language, which normally obeys a separate set of rules, and exemplifies what Roman Jakobson would later describe as the violence exerted by poetry upon the language (44). The reader of 'Vendémiaire' sees themselves time and again torn between two opposite urges: to yield to the alexandrine's metrical properties, forcing the lines into the familiar mould, or to choose and enforce a single rule – that of verse language or that of standard language – for the keeping or dropping of syllables. This double – or triple – movement subtly yet boldly undermines the separation between strict and free verse, introducing a distance and weaving irony within the fabric of the poem. Apollinaire's propensity to blur the limits of versification is in keeping with his talent for the mixing of subjects and tones. His darker and more anxious themes are readily paired with comic tricks, whilst sincere exaltations are mixed with parody. This systematic and joyous blending is closely connected with versification choices, and is a typical trait of Apollinaire's style, perpetuated by some of his many heirs (Alexandre 2014), notably Raymond Queneau (Bories 2014, 2017). Apollinaire systematically mixes old and new techniques in his versification (Décaudin 1960; Bobillot) and 'Vendémiaire' is no exception. One example is the use of assonances, or imperfect rhymes, which bring a distinctive medieval tone (Gouvard), but without the expected regular rhyme patterns, leaving the long poem without stanzas, lacking in structure, as if limping.

Furthermore, in the absence of punctuation, the reader is required to supply a syntactic structure for the text, and is most likely to rely for this on a prosody dictated by the versification. Thus, as one often stumbles upon verse lines whose likely metrical rhythm is incompatible with the prosody of natural language, the versification's ambiguity is used to layer and enrich the meaning, adding to its depth. One example is 'l'océan châtre peu à peu l'ancien continent' (38). Here the reader, encountering a rather long line without knowing its syllable count, is unwittingly brought to assume that it constitutes a twelve-syllable alexandrine. Thus, seeking a 6 + 6 metre, one naturally expects a syntactic break after the sixth syllable and initially forms the sentence 'l'océan châtre peu', only to find the phrase 'peu à peu' spanning the hypothesised caesura, to produce 'l'océan châtre peu à peu', a very different sentence.

Besides this metrical kinship with the alexandrine, 'Vendémiaire' is a self-declared 'chanson' (16). Of course, one can suspect that this is a *chanson à boire*, a drinking song, with the entire text being dominated by wine, and the initial 'chanson de Paris' (16) eventually becoming 'chants d'universelle ivrognerie' (171). Yet one cannot but notice the almost complete absence of sung verse. The closest traces of what French versification might traditionally admit as sung verse are two instances of six-syllable verse, three of seven-syllable verse and three eight-syllable lines. But there is one true feature of song to be found in the versification of 'Vendémiaire', and it lies rather in its very inconsistency. Sung verse is strongly constrained by the melody, which can balance out some discrepancies in the syllable count. Apollinaire

selects this tenuous song trait – the greater tolerance towards imperfect syllable count – for its understated powers of evocation. Rather than choosing his metres from the repertoire of song traditions, he takes advantage of his reader's familiarity with the flexibility of sung verse to create a vacillating impression of song.

All these formal choices made by Apollinaire – the blending of old with new, the playful disappointing of the reader's expectations, the stacking of incompatible meanings, the transgression of generic and stylistic norms – belong to the more general trend of 'découpage et discontinuité' that makes him a prominent modernist poet and possibly the 'précurseur des cubistes' (Oster-Stierle)

Towards and Beyond a 'Universelle Ivrognerie'

'Vendémiaire' conjures up a stateless man's fantasy: a world without borders (Boschetti). The many references to geographical borders are mostly fluid, quite literally, starting with the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. The island of Sicily (an unexpected inclusion here) serves as a border too, somewhere between Italy and the sea. The many rivers – Rhône, Rhin, Moselle, Saône and the Seine – miraculously carry wine rather than water, and throw themselves into Paris' welcoming arms, acting as links rather than as limits. In this free traveller's world, the geographical milestones are cities, listed by order of closeness: Paris first, at the centre, then Rennes, Quimper, Vannes, Lyon, Koblenz and Rome, whilst countries are stubbornly absent, states negated. Only France is named, and not individually, but rather as part of a sequence: 'villes de France et d'Europe et du monde' (17). The metaphor of rivers as wine spreads to the cities of Europe ('Venez toutes couler'), as if one fluidity freed the cities, rivers and peoples of Europe from national borders and from cultural conventions. Meanwhile, the very idea of singular countries is voided, replaced by the fluid belonging of a 'universelle' communion.

Transgressions in the poem go beyond the drunkenness and the border crossing; they affect the very texture of language, exemplifying Apollinaire's particular 'ambiguous expressiveness' (Mathews 56). Sexual double meanings are ubiquitous. With five instances of 'mains' (29, 30, 45, 46, 130), two of 'doigts' (30, 47), two of 'face' (81, 84), one of 'bouches' (155), 'lèvres' (53), 'corps' (63) and 'caresse' (73), with 'mains innombrables' (45) and 'ouvriers nus' (47) to conjure up the image of either an orgy or a brothel. Alongside the versification, Apollinaire takes advantage of the graphic – and to a lesser extent phonetic – similarity between 'villes' and 'filles'. This playful pun allows an artful proliferation and blurring of meanings, and participates in the systematic blending of sacred and profane, so typical of *Alcools* and particularly visible in 'Vendémiaire' through the blasphemous sanctification of sex.

et les villes du Nord répondirent gaiement	(6 + 6)
ô Paris nous voici boissons vivantes	(6 + 4)
les viriles cités où dégoisent et chantent	(6 + 6)
les métalliques saints de nos saintes usines	(6 + 6)
nos cheminées à ciel ouvert engrossent les nuées	(8 + 6)

(39–43)

The double meaning starts with 'les villes du Nord' (39); the prosopopoeia and the spelling together suggest an alternative reading, 'les filles du Nord'. From this point on, two parallel interpretations coexist. Particularly in the plural form, 'filles' can mean not just *girls* but *prostitutes*, or 'filles de joie', hence their cheerful submissiveness: 'ô Paris nous voici' (40). The metallic 'saints' (42) are also the homophonic *seins*, and their superposition with the idea of sanctity adds to the double meaning. The chimneys obviously echo the word 'viriles' (41) just above, and on this very point, metrical pressure is applied to isolate 'ciel'. Two 6 + 6

alexandrines and a 6 + 4 decasyllable are followed by a slightly longer fourteen-syllable line, free verse so to speak, but free verse under a lot of contextual pressure: 'Nos cheminées à ciel ouvert engrossent les nuées' (41). Lulled by the preceding three lines, and in the absence of punctuation, one unwittingly expects another six-syllable hemistich-like group to start the fourth line, with a pause after 'Nos cheminées à ciel', blocking the phrase 'à ciel ouvert' and offering 'cheminées à ciel' which hardly means anything per se. In highlighting the 'ciel', Apollinaire stresses its ambiguity, as it is simultaneously the *sky* above the northern industrial towns, the more religious meaning of 'ciel' as *heavens* and maybe even – as would suggest the nearby density of sexual double meanings – the *canopy* above a bed: the 'ciel de lit'. Again, polysemy reflects a central aspect of the poem and of Apollinaire's poetics: the tight association of sacred and profane themes. This polysemy is reinforced by a canny appeal to metrical habits and expectations. Under this canopy or within this sacred sky, clouds are being impregnated by chimneys and are explicitly compared with a more mythological cloud, similarly impregnated by Ixion after Zeus gave it the shape of Hera. The 'ciel' goes on appearing several times throughout the poem, reactivating its initial insinuation. The double meaning of 'villes du Nord'/'**filles du Nord' extends to the 'villes du Midi' (59), until eventually there are 'villes [...] par centaines' (136) responding to Paris' mesmerising song. This brings together two separate ideas: of a transnational communion and of an orgy, with the many towns shipping their wine to Paris understood as communicants at one or as sexual partners, again fusing the religious and sexual themes with a more political positioning. At the poem's halfway point, as bodies are being shared ('partagez-vous nos corps': 63), the Mediterranean Sea 'se retire' (62) and there follows a 'rôle infini' (66). Soon after, 'le détroit avait changé de face' (81), in an equivocal and obscure segment. Not only are sexual double meanings used alongside pious themes, but they carry an obvious biblical subtext, with images of the Last Supper or of the Crossing of the Red Sea – a biblical image of migrants – weaving a mystical component into the wine and sex themes of the poem. Double meanings are everywhere, yet utterly lack consistency. One example is the accumulation of first-person pronouns. One 'je' (2, 19, 100, 137, 156, 157, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169) might be the narrator or Paris; most of the cities mentioned have their own 'nous' (23, 26, 31, 40, 49), as do the rivers (130, 131, 132). The very word 'ville' is partly homophonic with the poet's first name *Wilhelm* and seems to oscillate between an image of self, in the voice of Paris, and an image of otherness carried by the numerous 'villes' that are also 'filles'. The almost farcical orgy suggested seems to come to a predictable climaxing moment, at least judging by the versification. Indeed, when plotting all the verse lengths in the poem (**Figure 1**), we see very clearly how it is overwhelmingly dominated by twelve-syllable lines, but with meaningful disruptions.

Throughout the poem, the near continuity of the alexandrine metre, with the sense of order it carries, is punctually interrupted (although never truly threatened) by other verse lengths, including by a number of near-alexandrines. This matches the slippery progression of meaning, tripping up the reader throughout the poem. Yet towards the end, from line 152 to line 168, after the sexual theme has reached its peak, this dominance of the alexandrines is temporarily abolished, replaced by an explosive diversity of verse lengths, from six to seventeen, with only three alexandrines out of seventeen lines. Staging a sudden and brief disorientation, this moment of metric discrepancy in 'Vendémiaire' features a disparate list of mixed elements, whether religious ('crucifix', 'vin pur', 'Adorations', 'douleur divine'), military ('armées rangées en bataille', 'Actions', 'Mouvements'), natural ('forêts', 'lacustres', 'fleurs', 'Végétation') or amorous ('Au bord des yeux de celle que j'aime tant', 'bouches', 'Accouplements'). It also dwells on the hopelessness that comes with endings: 'tout ce que je ne sais pas dire | Tout ce que je ne connaîtrai jamais', 'Je vous ai bu et ne fus pas désaltéré', 'je connus dès lors quelle saveur a l'univers', 'Je suis ivre d'avoir bu tout l'univers'. And in the final lines of the poem, as the

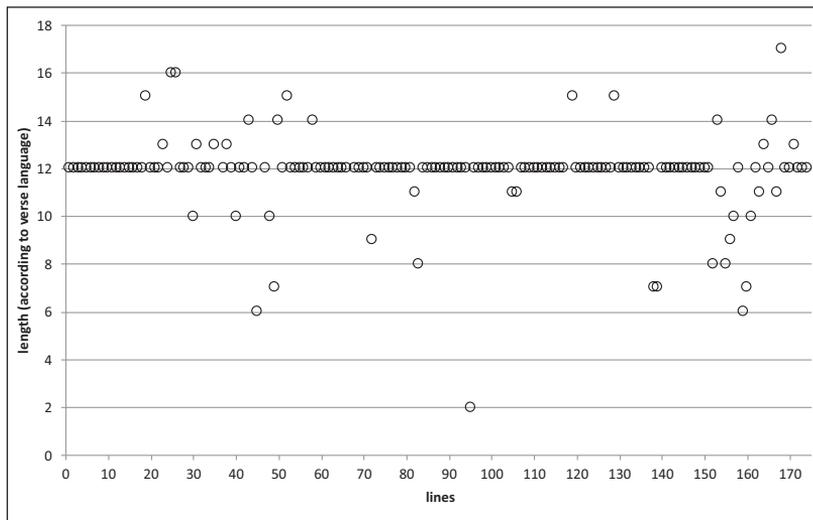


Figure 1: Verse lengths for every line in 'Vendémiaire'.²

versification settles down in a postcoital or hungover tiredness, a new 'je' we can only assume to be the poet erupts: 'écoutez-moi je suis le gosier de Paris' (170).

A New Religion

Repeatedly throughout the poem, wine is both described as 'pur' (65, 101, 158) and associated with sex, or incorporated in a religious theme with 'anges' (50), 'saints' (42, 55), 'divines paroles' (52) to mention but a few. This holy wine points to quite an unorthodox Eucharist, occasionally countered by mentions of Rome which generally assumes the role of an outlier against Paris' exuberance. A sign of Apollinaire's ambivalence, Rome's role within the poem is initially that of a killjoy: 'et j'entendis soudain ta voix impérieuse | ô Rome | maudire d'un seul coup mes anciennes pensées' (94–6). The 'impérieuse' Italian city is reminiscent of Apollinaire's colourful and ferocious mother, and curses the poet's probably impure 'anciennes pensées'. Throughout the poem, and although caesuras are often threatened by internal enjambments, Apollinaire generally avoids excessive enjambments between lines, with two noteworthy exceptions, both of them in the line group featuring Rome: 'Macèrent dans le vin que je t'offre et qui a' (100) and 'Une autre liberté végétale dont tu' (102). Rome here is placed in opposition to Paris and other cities, carrying wine but not joining in the feast, markedly set apart from the rest of the world. It is as though the city where Wilhelm grew up, the language he first spoke, were not to be simply thrown in with the rest of the world. This relative puritanism might be a reaction to the poet's family history and a reference to a time – the Kostrowicky family left Rome when Wilhelm was seven – when he was still unaware of his mother's activities: it was thus a time and place of innocent piety. Moreover, the exclusion of Rome from the secular communion proposed by Apollinaire marks a detachment from Catholicism, parallel to the creation of a new and blasphemous piousness.

Eventually, Paris becomes sacred too, 'parce que c'est dans toi que Dieu peut devenir' (125), but the new religion displayed in the poem is of a peculiar nature:

² The vertical axis plots verse lengths and the horizontal axis plots all lines in 'Vendémiaire', from 0 to 174. I obtained the data for this figure as part of a research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation: 'Métrique et vers libre'. In this figure, the verse lengths are measured according to the likely metrical choices encouraged by the poet – a useful measure for Apollinaire or for Émile Verhaeren for instance – even though my data also include verse lengths measured according to the verse language or according to standard pronunciation.

mais nous liquides mains jointes pour la prière
 nous menons vers le sel les eaux aventurières
 et la ville entre nous comme entre des ciseaux
 ne reflète en dormant nul feu dans ses deux eaux
 dont quelque sifflement lointain parfois s'élançe
 troublant dans leur sommeil les filles de Coblençe
 (130–5)

The two followers speaking here are the Rhine and Moselle rivers, rivers of wine apparently, and their mission has more to do with affairs ('aventurières') than with piety. The image of the town held between them as between scissors, a rather accurate representation of the topography of Koblenz where the Rhine splits into two rivers, Rhine and Moselle, combines with the 'trouble' experienced at night by the 'filles de Coblençe', to conjure up the image of two legs holding on to a body.

Once the theme combining religion, wine and sex is well established, the poet becomes entrusted with a godlike mission. He must create the world afresh, from the sacred wine: 'l'univers tout entier concentré dans ce vin' (140). This is followed by the enumeration of creations to fill the world, including several sexual double meanings, such as 'hommes à genoux' (143), kneeling for prayer or for oral sex, followed by the 'fer' ('iron' or 'sword', 144). Within the enumeration of the poet's fanciful Genesis is a reference to versification. The ingredients are: six and six, to make 6 + 6 alexandrines; single units, to unexpectedly add or subtract counted syllables; and kilos of twisted paper. But, in truth, is it the paper that is twisted or the verse?

Tous les noms six par six les nombres un à un
 Des kilos de papier tordus comme des flammes
 Et ceux-là qui sauront blanchir nos ossements
 Les bons vers immortels qui s'ennuient patiemment
 (148–51)

Thus, just before he gets to taste the sacred wine himself, Apollinaire has seen to the creation of a flexible set of versification instruments, bringing together the 'papier tordu' of free verse and the 'bons vers immortels', the old alexandrines, rooting himself in the French poetic tradition whilst allowing himself to wander away from its rules and expectations. The religion he pretends to found brings together poetry, pleasure and freedom (Burgos, Debon and Décaudin 104).

Ultimately, the ambivalent versification of 'Vendémiaire' is quite representative of *Alcools* as a whole. Apollinaire chooses to harness the reader's familiarity with versification and use it as a powerful tool to trip us up. Taking this play on expectations to the limit between free and strict verse confers a vacillating movement upon his lines, one that is encountered frequently throughout the collection. The reader is continuously kept on edge, unsure about the rhythm or even the meanings, and can never truly anticipate the metre of the next line or ascertain the syntax of a verse. And this could perhaps be how the poet becomes godlike, by escaping predictability. He takes advantage of this unstable versification to address personal issues of instability and insecurity in a somewhat mischievous manner. This insecurity and the exaltation of the adopted language and culture is also likely to be a reaction to Wilhelm's fear of being deported. 'Vendémiaire' is a touching exhibit of Apollinaire's attachment both to Paris and to multiculturalism, of his excitement when faced with such a liberating city. It is a poem of systematic ambiguity with double versification, double meanings and ambiguous syntax – a delicate balancing act, hovering on the border. Exaltation and worry cohabit

in a form of irony, just as do the two possible readings of his versification in a calculated dissonance. One can choose to see here a loosened use of the familiar, traditional, lulling alexandrine, or to find only chaos in the accumulation of near-alexandrines, of dissonant lines, in the lack of a strong and stable rule. Obviously, both readings should be considered simultaneously, as the purposeful hesitation is meant to create a superposition of the two rhythms in the reader's mind, linked to the poem's polyphony, its overcrowding of actions and discourses.

Rather than a world without borders, Apollinaire offers the image of a world full of borders, and the exhilaration comes not from their abolition but from crossing them. To stage his new religion, Apollinaire agglomerates various myths. These matter immensely to him, as they bring together European cultures and turn his wealth of sometimes obscure knowledge into something fresh and relatable, a voice of his own. The stateless immigrant has mastered his adoptive country's cultural norms so well that he can actually offer a subtle play on their transgression, producing a poetry that hovers on the border between free and strict verse. Apollinaire's fascination with Orpheus is well known. Here, Paris' song is able not only to arouse but to hypnotise and physically move a vast world. The poet's orphic song overrules borders and boundaries. The world's order is altered: rivers flow up and out of their beds towards Paris, the wine is pure, sex a form of chastity, blasphemy a religion. And ultimately, the world is created anew, from then on with 'kilos' of poetry, its verse 'tordu', deliberately and richly imperfect.

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