

Bestiary: Or the Parade of Orpheus

Guillaume Apollinaire , Raoul Dufy (Illustrator) , Pepe Karmel (Translator)

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An early and influential champion of cubism, Apollinaire was seminal in the revolutionary art style of Surrealism, a term he coined some seven years before Breton formally founded the movement. This text was originally published in 1910.

Bestiary: Or the Parade of Orpheus Details


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Author : Guillaume Apollinaire , Raoul Dufy (Illustrator) , Pepe Karmel (Translator)

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From Reader Review Bestiary: Or the Parade of Orpheus for online ebook

Dana says

This is as close as I've found to a perfect book of poems. Each idea is short, thoughtful, and often humorously absurd. My copy has translations by Pepe Karmel, who lays the French verse underneath the English on the page, and who beautifully captures Apollinaire's succinctness and wit. One of my favorites:

The Dromedary

With his four dromedaries
Don Pedro D'Alfarubeyra
Traveled the world and marveled.
He did what I would do,
If I had four dromedaries.

The book also has woodcut illustrations by Raoul Dufy. It's really a gem. Go out and buy it right now.

Shane Hurst says

I have been aware of Guillaume Apollinaire for a long time, but I never devoted time to his writing. But what better way to access a poet than through his first book of poems?

(Apollinaire was also a journalist and a champion of contemporaneous movements in visual art, including Cubism, Fauvism, and Futurism. He coined the term "surrealism" and was close with Pablo Picasso.)

This is an interesting play on the medieval Bestiaries, books about animals (real and mythic). As in the bestiaries of the Middle Ages, Apollinaire draws parallels between the human world and that of the animal with observations that range from the creative to the spiritual to the romantic to the mundane.

I read the 2011 bilingual edition translated by X. J. Kennedy and published by Johns Hopkins University Press. There's a nice, succinct essay by the translator that precedes the text as well as following notes by the poet himself and supplemented by Kennedy. Four unpublished poems and the woodprints from the 1911 edition are also included in this edition.

The translation was quite well done, but (even given my limited French), the original scanned even better. Apollinaire was almost thirty when he penned these so they deserve a more careful read than the juvenilia of other poets.

I rather liked them though they do feel a tad ephemeral. The slim but well-presented edition as well as the subtler truths in the writing pushed my review from three to four stars.

It was a nice find in a used bookstore, which goes to prove that there are many beautiful things lying around us unobserved. I'm glad I found this one.

Javier says

My favorite from the Bestiary:

L' écrevisse

Incertitude, ô mes délices
Vous et moi nous nous en allons
Comme s'en vont les écrevisses,
À reculons, à reculons.

Crawfish

Incertitude, my secret joy,
To travel you and I
Do as does the craw
And withdraw and withdraw

Earmarked a few of these charming quatrains (Le Dromedaire, La Sauterelle, Le Poulpe) for future reference or to use as epigrams, and loved the effort of the compilers of this edition; the introduction, the inclusion of anthological material, the choice of paper, font and cover art, and the reproduction of the original woodcuts by Raoul Dufy. I'm also going to take the liberty of humbly submitting my own translated version of my favorite quatrain in the book, L' écrevisse, to both English and Spanish below:

Crawfish

Incertitude, my delight
You and I travel along
As is the wont of crawfish
Backwards, backwards

El Cangrejo:

Incertitud, mi delicia
Tú y yo, caminamos juntos
Como andan los cangrejos,
A retirada, a retirada

Perhaps I should try my hand at my own translated edition of the Bestiary? Pity, Je n'ai pas le temps maintenant

buttercup says

mostly v cute pretty lil animal poems and some dark ones. its a cozy lil book. here are my favs

Tortoise

O madness from magical Thrace!

My sure fingers fondle the lyre.
Beasts go by in time to my songs,
To the sound of my tortoise's pace.

Housefly
Songs they've learned in Norway
Are the songs our houseflies know,
Taught them by wonder-working flies,
Divinities of snow.

Owl
My sad heart is a hoot owl nailed,
Torn loose and then again impaled.
Its blood and ardor end their days.
All those who love me, those I praise.

Mary says

A lucid, though sometimes self-indulgent, portrait of a young artist's life. Or so I think...

Rupert Owen says

Guillaume Apollinaire who coined the term "Surrealism" and influenced absurdist writer Alfred Jarry makes merry here of Orpheus's inclination towards wooing animals and other living creatures - although Sirens are included amongst the bestiary, which Orpheus makes analogous to his own 'curse' of continuous song. The poems are mostly four or five lined poems about various animals and insects such as the Fly, Elephant, Ox, Crayfish, Owl, Ibis et cetera, and through-out several observational lyricisms by Orpheus admiring the lousy life around him. Rather than read too much into each poem I settled back and enjoyed the nuances of Apollinaire's text, and took to them all in the spirit of Guillaume's poem on the Peacock who in dragging plumage on the grass, showing its beauty, is also baring its arse.

Chris Schaeffer says

Not 'the greatest' Apollinaire but witty, sharp, even 'cute.' Balance out the canonical Apollinaire with this, enjoy the woodcut illustrations, just have a good time for once in your miserable life. I read this while eating beignets at the Magnolia Grill, having a cup of coffee and doing a little (shoddy) translation. Life can be a lot of fun, everybody. I don't know. Goodreads makes me a little melancholy.

Michael A. says

Whimsical and often cute and wholesome poetry about different animals. Greek mythology and Biblical

references aren't uncommon (a few different poems all called Orpheus). Wonderful woodcuts for each poem by Raoul Dufy. Here are a couple of my favorite poems from Bestiary:

Cat

I hope I may have in my house
A sensible right-minded spouse,
A cat stepping over the books,
Loyal friends always about
Whom I couldn't live without.

Elephant

As an elephant his ivory,
My own mouth sprouts its treasure.
Dignified death!...I'll buy my fame
With words in rhyme and measure.

Caterpillar

Toil leads to wealth. Poor poets,
Let's toil on! By and by
The worm that keeps on striving turns
To a monarch butterfly

and one of my favorite poems in general:

Peacock

When opening his fanlike tail
This bird whose plumes behind him trail
Looks lovelier than when it's shut,
But he reveals his naked butt

Jennifer says

Approaching the famed French Modernist poet Guillaume Apollinaire may at first seem daunting, but the Bestiary is a great place to start. These short poems seems simple, I was able to read the book in one sitting, but on rereading there offer interesting and complex ideas. I would recommend this book to both poetry aficionados and those who are unfamiliar with poetry and maybe a little frightened by it.

Kerfe says

Pepe Karmel, in his forward, says it is impossible to recapture the charm of these short poems as they sound in the original French. And it's true, only a few stood out for me. But they work well with the art.

And Raoul Dufy's woodcuts need no translations. They are as fresh as they were in 1911 when first published.

There is definitely an aura of melancholy hovering nearby; WWI was immanent, and Apollinaire himself was to know trouble and upheaval throughout his life.

Dolphins, you play in the sea
But the waves are always bitter.
Do I sometimes laugh with joy?
Life is still cruel.

TinHouseBooks says

Heather Hartley (Paris Editor): So far, it's been an Apollinaire kind of week, and in these past days it's been his *Bestiary: Or the Parade of Orpheus* published just over a century ago, with stunning, sharp woodcuts by Raoul Dufy to accompany each short poem (with two poems dedicated to Orpheus, whose parade it is anyway.) In the menagerie, there's *The Tortoise*, *The Rabbit* and *The Elephant*, among others, including *The Cat*, who throughout fine French poetry often slinks through verses and makes a quiet appearance here: "In my house I want: / A reasonable woman, / A cat passing among the books, / And friends in every season, / Whom I cannot live without."

Therese Broderick says

Beautifully illustrated, bi-lingual edition.

Steven Brown says

A very handsome little book, illustrated with strong and beautiful woodcuts by Raoul Dufy - often the woodcuts seem more significant than the whimsical poem it accompanies. The original text is given with the English translation in these brief poems, making for a pleasant way to review some French. Pepe Karmel, the translator, has given a short and very interesting note documenting his approach to the translation. Several poems reveal a religious side to Apollinaire I had not expected.

Hilary says

I really enjoy returning to these poems. They are poems on animals, and they are short, pithy, whimsical, and surprising. Some are ironic, some are funny and charming, some are bitter, some are joyful, some are wistful. There's a wonderful diversity here, and one never knows quite what to expect.

As a side note, this edition has the poems in the original French on one page and in English on the next, so it's a good exercise if you read any French at all.

Anthony says

this book made my day. tiny poems, most often quatrains, by apollinaire with corresponding woodcuts by dufy. a small masterpiece. i even think apollinaire's flea poem rivals donne's, in four lines no less.
