Take Two: An Alchemy of Machine Guns

Four days before Christmas
I sit in my office in Newmarket
reading lines from Ginsberg:
‘Here in Paris,’ he says ‘I am your guest’
& for the moment I recognise
the reverse is true —
(miraculously) he’s transported me
to the tomb of Apollinaire
& to the vision of
‘Tzara in the Bois de Boulogne
explaining the alchemy of machine guns’.

And while he does it
an ant runs over (his) corduroy sleeve
& I remember Apollinaire dying —
his complaint that there was
‘still so much to do’
which demonstrates — perhaps needlessly —
that most of us don’t know when to stop
including Ginsberg
who also reports (being obsessed with death)
Jacques Vaché as having invited him
to inspect
‘a terrible collection of pistols’.
'Pray for me,' says Ginsberg
addressing Apollinaire
   as if they were the closest of friends
‘pray for me on the phonograph record
   of your former existence’
& already his voice
   (although he’s unaware of it)
   sounds like history
as scratchy as his recollections
   of Paris, Picasso, Cocteau —
‘the princes of America’ driving
   towards Montparnasse . . .

ALISTAIR PATERSON