

GUILLEVIC: THE IMPERFECTION OF APOTHEOSIS

Est-ce qu'il comblera
Ce qu'il a su creuser?
Il saura le combler
D'un creux plus évident. (E, 172)¹

If we exclude from consideration the effect of a slim volume of poetry, *Requiem*, that appeared with a rather obscure publisher just before the second world war, Guillevic had reached the age of thirty-five before becoming known to the general public with his collection subtitled *Terraqué* (1942). Since then he has published, principally with Gallimard, at very regular intervals and he has become one of the most prolific, widely appreciated and translated poets of his generation. Two volumes of his have appeared in the Gallimard "Poésie" Collection and in the last four years alone major volumes such as *Du domaine* (1977), *Etier* (1978/79) and, just a few months ago, *Autres* (1980) have been published. Many of Guillevic's poetry collections, particularly the shorter ones often put out by smaller presses, have been graced by the illustrations of artists such as Dubuffet, Léger, Beaudin, Staritzky and Sugita², and such affinities are matched by those between Guillevic and various writers and painters – Aragon, Ponge, Braque, Picasso and many others³ – whose work and thought have affected him deeply over the years in so many ways. Like Ponge, known broadly as a "poet of matter", though quite distinct from him both stylistically and conceptually, Guillevic has attracted the attention of influential contemporary critics such as Jean-Pierre Richard, Jean Onimus, Georges-Emmanuel Clancier, Jacques Sojcher, Jean Tortel and Roger Munier, and his seventieth birthday was recently honoured by a special number of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* to which these and other writers – Michel Deguy and Mohammed Dib we may note in particular – contributed⁴. "Encore et toujours/Parler de ces choses?" asks Guillevic in *Du domaine*, astonished at the extent of his own fascination and obstinacy in the face of the world, factors which will retain our attention in the liminal part of this essay. But what will concern us most is the "hidden" factor in this question he addresses to himself, the one so frequently neglected in consideration of Guillevic's work, yet so central, namely the intermediary role of "speech", of language in the self-world equations he continually computes. We shall thus observe that Guillevic's poetry follows what is very much a modern tradition in its self-reflexive mode of operation and that it offers throughout a coherent though at times paradoxical or dialectical analysis of its own purpose and manner of functioning, a poetics which is thus invaluable to an appreciation of the conceptual structuring of his work as a whole.

The world as Guillevic perceives it is at once relaxed with itself, posses-

sing its own natural logic, and restless, shifting and becoming, tending to seek outside itself a state it seems oddly unable to achieve within. Despite the “precision”, the discreteness of things, they continue to be haunted by a certain vagueness (cf. G,90) that renders the “lessons” (cf. G,91) Guillevic, like Philippe Jaccottet, sees them as offering less than readily absorbable, less whole, less definable than their evident spatiality and distinctive concreteness would suggest is the case. Yet the many phenomena Guillevic’s senses apprehend decidedly inscribe themselves, their dynamic yet flat, self-repeating significations, upon the world. In a certain way they “write”, even “tell” themselves – like the water of the stream, flowing down below in the earth, “(qui) raconte pour qui sait entrer” (S,12), or “la libellule,/Dans l’air qui tremble sur les joncs,/(Qui) écrit sa geste” (I, 82). Each thing, like each moment, emits its signs with their special, individual, and yet overlapping, pooled meaning and relevance, and to each phenomenon there is, for Guillevic, both an independent and a collective logic. What characterises, then, initially, the world about him, is not simply a stasis and sameness in the identity of things, but also a degree of interaction and fluctuation which blurs somewhat their features and complicates their perception. Moreover, Guillevic is extremely sensitive to the idea that phenomena are not there in some kind of sealed, “objective” vacuum. The signs they constitute are in effect transmitted, turned into signals which afford a giving of themselves. “Nous savons bien”, he writes in *Gagner*, “tout vous fait signe et puis se rend” (G,18). In this optic the world is held to be that which constantly seeks some return gesture on the part of man, “ce qui peut venir/Demander l’accueil” (I,74). As with Pierre Reverdy, Francis Ponge or André Frénaud, and indeed many other poets of the modern era, Guillevic may take the world to be absurd, tending naturally towards entropy, dispersal, chaos (cf. I,85; S,59), yet it is there, for man, for Guillevic, caught in some network of “coordination”, intimacy and ephemeral sense despite its fragility and vulnerability. “Pour vous qu’il chantait”, Guillevic says in another poem from “Coordonnées” in *Gagner*, “l’absurde coucou” (G,59). The earth may even at times be thought to be indifferent, enclosed within itself, uninterested in emergence and relationship, yet Guillevic always senses the firmness of its presence, the fortune and potential nourishment it offers (cf. S,120,123). For if the things of the world still tend to withdraw or else articulate themselves with a certain inscrutability – “Sur chaque chose,/En pleine lumière,/Le goût du secret”, we read in *Du domaine* (p.65) – they are by no means inherently secretive, furtive. Indeed, availability and openness mark their multicoloured presence, and their cry, for Guillevic, does not echo in a cold void, but, directing itself to the desire and will of man, beseeches an involvement, an intermingling that, for him, is irresistible, crucial. “Tout”, Guillevic says a little later in the same recent volume – “Tout/Dit: pénétrer” (DD,85).

This infinite imperative pronounced by things is met with wave upon wave of delicate finite responses on the part of Guillevic. In order to

respond adequately, however, the primary requirement is that the openness of the world be matched by man's openness upon the world. In "Episodes", from *Gagner*, Guillevic asks quite pointedly:

Pour l'homme qui se ferme,
Qu'est-ce que c'est
Qu'on appelle terre?

Qu'est-ce que c'est:
Etre sur terre? (G,220)

Guillevic's dream is that of endless receipt of the world's throbbing signals. Man – the poet in particular – needs to be "l'accueil./Le lieu d'accueil./Un accueil provoqué", we are told in *Inclus* (p.106). But, as we can observe here, welcoming and receipt are not at all purely passive responses. Outgoing "provocation" may be locked into the in-coming movement, and, indeed, this very receipt may be synonymous with that penetration and entry demanded by things and so persistently sought after by Guillevic himself. "Inhabitation" (cf. S,57), whilst implying an occupying of space external to the self, also evokes the converse notion of building a place for the self, within, as it were, with the *paysages*, the phenomena, that flood into the self's open inner space (cf. S,59). In a certain sense the world inevitably "leads" and the self follows (cf. G,24). But the movement between them is certainly reciprocal, once man's perception is truly awakened and sensitised to his basic existential, phenomenological condition as Guillevic understands it. Looking and seeing – those twinned functions so characteristic of Guillevic's response to the world about him (cf. I, 111-17) – are governed, as a writer such as Bernard Noël has so finely demonstrated, by a mechanism that tends to equate the seen, whether aleatory or elective, with the thought, the objects contemplated, again whether chosen or retained (cf. TE,22; I,203,109), being caught thus between gestures of attachment and detachment, empathy and cerebration – a distinction between *choses* and *conscience* in Guillevician terms. Moreover, it should be appreciated that, despite the sense of alienation and injury Guillevic may experience, along with other men, in his contact with the world – "Aliénés/Dans tout le vague autour de nous/Qui fait la plaie" (G,90) – his response remains strongly positive, coloured by no defeatism, no emotional surrender. Whilst from a certain point of view pain may be said to come precisely from a never-refused openness upon the world which tends to draw the self in so many directions, pulling, tearing, quartering him (cf. I.102), it is only in this streaming wound that true response for Guillevic may occur and a healing perhaps may come about.

A few remaining characteristics of Guillevic's general, as it were non-linguistic sensitivity to the world should be briefly commented upon before we turn to an assessment of the logic of language, specifically, in relation to the poet's broad sense of his phenomenological condition. We may notice in particular that Guillevic's awareness extends to the most humble, the most

minimal of phenomena. The simple, the slight, the elemental thus assume privileged status and significance by virtue of their becoming objects of attention. The “merest” of things is sensed always to possess a “fundamental”, crucial value (cf. P,40) that serves to rivet attention and counteract the distress otherwise possibly engendered by the apparent triviality ordinarily associated with it. Furthermore, and resulting in part from the somewhat tense, dialectical nature of this affective response to the significance of phenomena, in part from the fuzziness of the actual meaning the latter exude, the mind is filled with a mixture of suspicion and desire, hesitation and eagerness in its probing of matter. Questioning thus comes to be a principal mode of addressing the world, of returning its signal, a questioning whose theoretical absolute aim is to decipher definitively, to expose the Meaning of material signalling, in order, as Guillevic tells us in *Inclus*, not to have to continue questioning (cf. I,127-8). And yet, given that questioning/deciphering of what is, is irremediably Guillevic’s, subjective – a closing of the gap between world and self, certainly⁵, but one that is always somehow perverted, distorted, never innocent – given the fact of this inescapable bias, questioning is condemned to non-resolution, to a kind of echoing circularity, for it attracts the very doubt it seeks to dispel, its only hope being in the *justesse* of those echoes trapped in the bubbling circles drawn by the mind in its response to things. What Guillevic understands here in essence, then, is that the “initial” sensory, corporeal and emotional response of which, despite all, he never tires (cf. DD,108), is doubled by another response, intellectual, conceptual, more thoroughgoingly, if still ambiguously, articulated. The world presenting itself and met by wariness and desire, doubt and need, becomes an object of the self’s transformation, of his efforts of translation. Its quiddity, its original *what*, is filtered through the mind – and, of course, complication upon complication, the grill of a specific, culturally bound and binding language. The stage of being with the multifarious things of the earth in their “original” simplicity/complexity rapidly gives way to an at once vitiating and exhilarating sense of the fact that “la terre où tout se joue” is simultaneously “la terre chargée de nous”, that self-world relationships are crucially humanised, never objective, external, but a meeting-place between, a zone of interaction, a locus in which earth finds its dream and dream makes tangible its territory (cf. DD,26). “Mere” things – stones, leaves, worms, birds, water – may appear to be sealed into a kind of smooth, monolithic materiality resistant to our conceptual prying. Yet Guillevic’s questions work to bare them before us in a manner that stresses precisely the stunning equivalence of the simple and the complex, the negligible and the essential, as well as the vulnerability, the terribly human frailty of those relations upon which depend both world and self in the risky, interlocking adventure of their being.

It is bearing these preliminary points of reference in mind that we turn now to what concerns us principally, namely Guillevic’s view of the function of (the) language (of poetry). What we may observe initially and by way of a

general characterization ascribed to the logic of language as Guillevic sees it, is that the role and purpose of poetry are distinctly plural, wide-ranging and obsessively articulated throughout his entire opus in a tone that is ontologically, ethically inspired whilst remaining always aesthetically, formally aware. Guillevic's poetics is, moreover, never, finally, dogmatic, despite its telescoped, apothegmatic, gnomic qualities – he is, for instance, quite able to appreciate the hygienic pudency of Mallarmé and still remain a poet of relatively overt *engagement*, both political and philosophical. And yet, if open, becoming, uncongealed, Guillevic's attitude towards language and poetry is nevertheless oriented along particular, broadly constant lines according to a sharp existential sense of the brittle crucialness of one's acts, one's being-in-the-world in a partly imposed, yet also partly chosen, perspective. The overall purpose of writing is thus to do with Guillevic's ever-felt need to insert himself more concretely, almost "sculpturally", via the action of language into the flow of time in which he is caught. "De toute façon./Il faut inscrire", he argues in *Paroi*, "il faut noter, graver./Insérer ce qu'on grave./S'insérer/Avec ce qu'on grave./S'insinuer/Avec lui dans la succession/Des temps, des actes, des combats./Marquer le sien" (P,197). In this way Guillevic entrusts to the written act the profoundly existential task of leaving, inscribing, the self's trace within the spatio-temporal context in which he briefly finds himself – a gesture that is, as we shall see better later on, an inscription of the self's immanence and ephemerality rather than an effort to transcend them. Another, and related, aspect of this general "intentionality" of language is Guillevic's steadfastly held view that each slender trace or gesture, like the delicate, fugitive notes of the blackbird loosed upon the air or the colour and scent of the rose in its apparently restricted locus (cf. I,233), has the capacity to expand, as it were metonymically, synecdochally, in order to fill space, all space, thus extending its ontological relevance, assuming a generality of import it might initially have been thought to lack. "Tu écris/Pour emplir l'espace", Guillevic writes in *Inclus*, "être tout l'espace" (p.232; cf. I,209). Although, then, Guillevic feels, with so many poets of so many earlier ages, that a major function of poetry is, as he says in *Exécutoire*, to "rendre compte/Des beautés du monde" (TE,195), to echo and translate dutifully – and, indeed, all of his writing may be said to be under the sign of his sense of a "prescribed duty" (cf. TE,183) – the aesthetic wonders of the world – despite this, then, it should be understood that the broad function of (the) language (of poetry) is in no way purely decorative, superficial, or blindly ethical, moral in its orientation. On the contrary his poetics is reasoned, constantly exposed to analysis, even if passionate and obsessive. It is, moreover, as we shall now proceed to show, centred on the aware *articulation* of the ontologically characterised interrelation of self and world, Guillevic's poetry constantly revealing a self-reflexive intention and thereby transforming what at first seems a simple self-world dialectic into a more complicated tripartite structure in which language itself mediates in its meditation upon its mediation.

In the remaining discussion we shall thus have occasion to examine principal factors of Guillevic's poetics such as exorcism and integration, linguistic baptism and appropriation, as well as language as invention, and questions of truth, non-being, and the dialectics of rootedness, worship and apotheosis. Our final assessment will show how these factors interlock with others to create a poetics that is truly modern in both its structure and tonality.

In the volume of poems published in 1970 under the title *Paroi* we come across the following tellingly self-focussed text:

Encore une fois,
Je me sers du même procédé:

Pour atténuer le malaise,
Pour me sentir un peu d'aplomb,
Pour me débarrasser en le fixant
De quelque chose de vague
Qui me contrarie, qui me gêne,

Je figure, je projette,
Je visualise, je spatialise.

J'imagine des choses
Qui se situent dans un espace,
Qui en occupent une partie.

Je me fabrique des anecdotes,
Je romance ma vie. (P,186)

What we should retain here, in the context of our present concerns, is that, for Guillevic, writing comes about not merely as either a fortuitous or hedonistic response to the world, but also, and this seems particularly to be the case in the early writing, in order to counter an intense feeling of *malaise*, discomfort, generated by his very being-in-the-world. Language, poetic creation, is thus directed against suspicion, against fear, even anguished terror: like the infant in the dark labyrinth of its insecurity, the poet "chantonn(e) contre la peur" (TE,25). The nightmares that oppress Guillevic, those persistent visions of the monstrous and the unnameable that plague him from his earliest days and which he boldly faces in his first collection, *Terraqué* (1942), such horrors as the man knows, the poet seeks to overthrow, operating a typically Reverdyan reversal of perspective, an inversion of the world's subjection of the self. As *Terraqué* unfolds before us, we increasingly sense this reversal, this poetic liberation of the self, the newly appreciated capacity for opposing to the destruction of terror an act of tender construction and affirmative transformation (cf. TE, 76-7, 117). The exorcism thus permitted by language is certainly not that of Henri Michaux, virulent, aggressive, derisive, directed to a significant degree against the sterility and clumsiness of language itself, yet, in its mediation on behalf of the self, its violently felt personal function, exorcism through words comes about in essentially the same spirit and with the same fundamentally ontological intention both writers recognise⁶.

Relationship with things, whether of anguish or joy – and by and large, without losing his sense of the lurking horror of materiality, Guillevic has sought to “sing” the world in combative, positive tone – relationship is, as we saw at the beginning of our discussion, what basically preoccupies Guillevic. Writing, language, imagination, thus operates “à la charnière . . . /A la jonction”, as he puts it in *Avec* (p.16), at the intersection of world and self. It is pivotal, articulating itself – and self and world – in the “espace intersticiel” that is the page (cf. I,96-7). But, of course, this does not mean that the space of its operation and the character of its intention are neutral, detached. Writing may come about, as we have seen, as an act of exorcism, of self-liberation from negative, somehow falsified, distorted contact with the world, but it also constitutes a giving of life and of being to things (cf. A,161), and as such is a crucial gesture of affection (cf. I,95), of love – a love “(qui) lui donne/Un autre aspect des fleurs”, as Guillevic says in *Sphère* (p.14), capable thus of radical “secondary” transformation of any prevailing distress engendered in primary self-world interaction. The element of love, a factor of great socio-political significance, moreover, in the work of this writer whose life was intimately bound up with the thought and practice of communism and surrealism⁷, must also be recognised as a force striving, through writing, to prevent entropy and disjunction (cf. I,85). Writing becomes in this way a means of uniting, of “coordinating”, as Guillevic often likes to put it (cf. I,145; DD,66), whether the points of coordination are held to be purely external and thus a series of Baudelairean *correspondances*, or else those linking language and reality, words and things, in a quasi-equivalence or -symbiosis⁸, or yet again, and this is so frequently the case with Guillevic, those occasioning a wedding of world and self, matter and man. Love and marriage, then, are what Guillevic craves, but not merely in flux, according to the haphazard emotional see-sawing of day to day experience, but love and marriage formalised, formally articulated through language (cf. S,194; P,81). Furthermore, this love via language is very much a two-way process in Guillevic’s eyes. As we have seen, the world is deemed to need the self, to proffer itself, its desire, and the language of the poem thereby becomes the channel via which the self contrives to correspond to this desire (cf. EN,99; A,78; DD,52). The upshot of all this means, quite understandably, that Guillevic’s poetics is in a large measure one of integration, even consubstantiality, and thus very much in line with the aesthetic theory so subtly expounded by Reverdy from his early *Nord-Sud* “editorials” to his later essays on Braque, Matisse, Laurens and Picasso.

This is not to forget for a moment, in the case of either poet, that a residual consciousness of the frailty of all human, and therefore poetic, endeavour (cf. I,73; DH,20), and a sense even of the impossibility of reconciliation of the discontinuous, the incongruous (cf. S, 197), continue to make themselves felt. Guillevic realises only too well that his dream of equilibrium, harmonious interpenetration and integration is, can be, to a degree, only a dream (cf. S,209). But this diminishes neither the dream nor

the ambition, neither the theory nor the practice, of Guillevic's poetics which remains resolutely, and perhaps principally, one of poetically, linguistically achievable consubstantiality and interaction. Language, initially, may be regarded, as with Claudel in his *Cinq grandes odes*, as a kind of baptism of the world, a re-creation through nomination (cf. I,65) whose intention extends, however, beyond the simple naming of things to an affirmation of *présence* not unlike that found in Yves Bonnefoy's *Dans le leurre du seuil* and thus concerned with "tout ce qui n'a pas de forme et pas de nom" (TE, 143), "ce qui veut s'unir/Prendre forme, présence" (I,70)⁹ – precisely that shapeless, nameless realm of relationship wherein world and self may find and know themselves, not merely as themselves, but through each other. For, if in order to realise this "presence", Guillevic advocates repeatedly the possession and appropriation of the world – "J'écris sur toi", he declares in *Ville*, "comme j'écris toujours: /Pour posséder" (V,60) – what he is really after is an exchange, a possession that is mutual, one of love, an act and the establishment of a realm, in which "le pouvoir/Est indiscernable" (DD,19). Power and domination are not therefore part of Guillevic's scheme of things; they would constitute a perversion and denaturing of a relationship that can only truly realise itself through gentleness, openness and caress. The language of poetry exists to ensure a coincidence of desire and being. It thus shuns hierarchy and despotism, seeing in all things, to the point nearly of a kind of metempsychosis reminiscent of Nerval or Gautier, a potential equivalence with the self, the moment when the bird hovering in the air may become, be articulated as, "mon pareil, mon écho, mon autre,/Peut-être moi tout simplement", as Guillevic has said in his 1979 collection, *Etier* (p. 103).

It is in the early pages of this same collection that Guillevic expresses fairly succinctly certain aspects of his poetics growing out of the factors discussed above and with which we must now deal. The first section of the poem "Le Ciel" has the object of attention, here the sky, address the self and comment in effect upon man's/the poet's tendency to invent the world, to create it as a fiction or what he has elsewhere called a "romance":

Je ne suis pas
 Je ne suis que par vous,
 Pour vous,
 Ceux de la terre.
 C'est vous qui m'inventez.
 Et même cela
 – Que je ne suis pas –
 Cela ne peut venir
 Que de vous
 Qui me prêtez visage
 Et parole sur moi. (E,35)

The text, elegantly simple on the surface yet full of overlapping ripples of meaning, highlights the tensions within Guillevic's poetics. "Invention" of the sky/world is thus at once a way of revealing its face, of allowing it to articulate itself – or at least a borrowed form of itself – and a necessary masking, a "lie", an inevitable projection of myth upon, and as, reality. As the preceding text, "La Feuille" (E,30-4), tries to show, writing finds itself caught between the seeking of knowledge and truth and a creation perceived to be, if not inauthentic, then at least regrettably disfiguring, "approximate" as Tzara would have said. Similarly, as "Le Ciel" implies, writing, for all its ontological pretensions, is felt to be wedged into some crevice between being and non-being. It is, however, clear that Guillevic, whilst recognising these tensions, opts to cope with them, to rise above them, in continuing to write. There are, indeed, moments when he cares to stress that his poetics is based rather on non-invention. "Je n'invente pas./Je ne mens pas./Je vois. Je dis", he proclaims in the earlier *Paroi* (p.188), thereby bestowing upon the relative, intuitive truth of his speech, his language, the seal of existential authenticity and immediacy. Moreover, Guillevic is fully aware – the same text will suffice to show it – that to shift from the truth, *in the right intention*, entails no necessary ontological distortion: "Et puis encore:/Pourquoi ne pas jouer/Ou tenter de jouer./Même avec la paroi./Quand jouer c'est guérir./Aussi peu que ce soit" (P,188). Provided that there is an ontological advantage to be gained, play, inventiveness, untruth, *objeu* rather than *objet*, for Guillevic as for Ponge, are admissible. Unlike the world, man, and the poet especially, is characterised by a certain suppleness – "Mais l'homme./Il peut", Guillevic puts it concisely in *Gagner* (p.100). He is not condemned to a mere reiteration of himself, in the manner of a stone or a tree¹⁰. He has that capacity, ephemeral, vulnerable, imperfect perhaps, so lauded by Ponge also, *la parole*, language, that mode of being and doing hovering between a kind of mimetism and a pure surrealism, at the intersection of dream and reality, where humanity is capable of finding a measure of ontological *justesse* with materiality.

The many texts of *Inclus* show quite unmistakably Guillevic's continuing, even growing obsession with the logic of writing, the relation of language to reality. A number of the earlier poems deal with questions arising from his conception of poetry as invention and pull taut the line between immanence and a certain vague drift towards a form of *angélisme*. Rootedness, always to a degree evident in this poet of matter, nevertheless has to be opted for. "Les fruits ne viendront pas/Dans un espace déraciné", he affirms, "Ecrire/Dans l'espace des fruits" (I,38). The point of departure is thus always the world, the immediate, the tangible; and yet, for Guillevic, the fact remains that writing must work towards a kind of "otherness". Indeed, his poetry often takes on an air, not precisely of detachment from or unconcern for the immediate, but rather of straining beyond the given, the visible, to a seeing and a touching that denote a certain mysticism of the immanent, quite

unreligious, non-transcendent to be sure, yet nonetheless dissatisfied with pure surface, conscious of a need that simple confrontation or juxtaposition cannot appease. Writing, after all, for Guillevic, is not merely a matter of nomination, representation, reproduction of what exists already. As Reverdy said, where would be the profit in reproducing in art what is already there in nature. No, Guillevic seeks to touch, to seize, what, elsewhere, otherwise, cannot be touched or seized (cf. I,30). His writing busies itself with “ce qui n’existe pas/Avant le sacrifice” (I,53); it strives to house the unhousable (cf. I,225)¹¹, to establish an ontological domain arguably at a remove from materiality yet in effect only apparently transcendent in that the domain is the only space in which a true Heideggerian “caring” and a real exchange of being may come about¹². It is no doubt in this perspective that we should understand Guillevic’s view of the language of poetry as a process of apotheosis (cf. I,43,166), for what he seeks is an access to the world – and himself, his own “reality” – that will be governed by transmutation, (ex)change. This involves not so much worship and glorification, then¹³, but what may be thought of as a qualitative upsurge in relationship, an ascensional “ontological” movement welling up from below (cf. I,201) and soaring upwards in the pure joy of making, of writing, “quelque chose/Qui s’inséra/Dans un mouvement/Vers la verticale” (I,125). Writing as apotheosis is thus associated very much with joy, with a happiness “going beyond”, “rising above” difficulty and anguish (cf. I,152,218). It is a form of celebration that is of mutual ontological advantage, a celebration of the possibilities of man and world through man’s poetic capacity¹⁴, rather than of some dispassionate ethereal godliness for which man can have no responsibility. As such it is inevitably marred, because human, built on pain and doubt. Its movement is explosive, meteoric, finite, never capable of attaining to any measure of absolutism, for writing takes place in the perspective of no definitive accomplishment (cf. E,170; M,206). In the eyes of Guillevic the only advancement comes about in the poet’s expenditure of himself through his writing (cf. S,133). Indeed, in this way, his art resembles the very phenomena with which he works briefly to enshrine a fugitive relationship: both are characterised by impermanence, both carry within themselves their frailty, their death.

And yet it is precisely in this cracked, marred condition that is the being of poetry, in the persistence and doggedness it imposes upon “ce travailleur/ . . . qui noue ensemble terre et mot/Et continue/A s’acharner” (I,94), that the joy of celebration is to be found. The real power of Guillevic’s work shows itself in his desire to say what cannot be articulated by the thing imprisoned in its monolithicity, and what has not yet been said by man – and which could well be their most legitimate bond. Doing this, however, whilst involving man in the articulation of the apparently most simple, yet ill-perceived aspects of the endless drama in which he is plunged, requires a willingness to take risks, a degree of brinkmanship in one’s relation to this drama. “Va jusqu’au bout,/Va jusqu’au bord”, Guillevic recommends in

Encoches, “tords-lui son cri,/A cet à-pic” (EN,50). But, in this danger, where failure threatens to swamp imperfection, Guillevic’s poetics never assumes an air of complaint. To write, for him, is to combat, to manifest a force beyond any need to justify itself otherwise than by its effort (cf. TUS,47). Fear, consciousness of difficulty and the fragility of what is achieved, may erode the spirit of celebration, but then Guillevic is fully aware, too, that poetry is exposed to “le va-et-vient/Dans cet entre-deux” (A,107), that the “hollowing out” he patiently works at (cf. A,192) is not always a matter of uninterrupted joy. The anger he feels, too, at times, is thus absorbed within the poetics and, like his very real experience of the monstrous, the hideous, is transformed into a further strength, a low point perhaps, but one from which he may rebound with uncoiled vigour in his continual pursuit of what obsesses him.

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Notes

1. The following abbreviations are used throughout: E: *Etier*, Gallimard, 1979; TE: *Terraqué, suivi de Exécutoire*, Gallimard, “Poésie”, 1968; DH: *De l’hiver*, Edns Galanis, 1971; TUS: *Trente et un sonnets*, Gallimard, 1954; A: *Avec*, Gallimard, 1966; V: *Ville*, Gallimard, 1969; P: *Paroi*, Gallimard, 1970; I: *Inclus*, Gallimard, 1973; EN: *Encoches*, Ed. Fr. Réunis, 1971; DD: *Du domaine*, Gallimard, 1977; S: *Sphère, suivi de Carnac*, Gallimard, “Poésie”, 1977; PS: *Guillevic*, ed. Jean Tortel, Seghers, 1978; M: “Magnificat”, in PS. The best comprehensive studies of Guillevic’s work remain Jean Tortel’s essay in the Seghers “Poètes d’aujourd’hui” volume given above and, more recently, Jean Dubacq’s *Guillevic* (Paris: Edns de la Tête de Feuilles, 1972). Other valuable shorter criticism has been offered by Jean-Pierre Richard, Jean Onimus, Georges-Emmanuel Clancier, Jacques Sojcher, Roger Munier, Hubert Juin, Serge Gaubert, Jacques Borel, Raymond Jean and others mentioned in note 4.

2. The following artists have in fact collaborated with Guillevic: Jean Dubuffet (*Élégies*, 1946; *Les Murs*, 1950), Fernand Léger (*Coordonnées*, 1948), Édouard Pignon (*L’Homme qui se ferme*, 1949), Jacques Lagrange (*Temple du merle*, 1969), Staritsky (*Choses*, 1970; *De la prairie*, 1970), André Beaudin (*De l’hiver*, 1971), Roger Bartemes (*Dialogues*, 1972), Robert Blanchet (*Racines*, 1973), Yutaka Sugita (*Hippo et Hippa*, 1973), Alfred Manessier (*Cymbalum*, 1973), Lise Le Coeur (*Supposer*, 1974), Arnaud Laval (*Médor-Tudor*, 1975), Sophie Mathey (*La Danse des Korrigans*, 1976), Bernard Louédin (*Delta*, 1976), Gïai-Minet (*Babioles*, 1977), Le Yaouanc (*Magnificat*, 1977), Soulages (*Etier*, 1978). Many of the above are luxury-edition *plaquettes*, some of which have been collected into the major editions of Guillevic’s work.

3. In *Terraqué* and *Exécutoire* alone we find dedications to writers and artists such as the following: Aragon, Ponge, Braque, Follain, Audiberti, Arland, Albert-Birot, Eluard, Paulhan, Jacob.

4. The special section of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (293, May 1977), entitled “Présence de Guillevic” was prepared by Pierre Oster Soussouev and gathers together texts by Nina Cassiou, Clancier, Deguy, Dib, Jean, Juin, Munier, Onimus, Claude Prévost, Roussetot, György Somlyó, Tortel and Oster himself.

5. Cf. P.40, where Guillevic equates, almost, the deciphering of matter and the “accustoming” of the self to matter: “. . . cela/Que tu passes ta vie/A déchiffrer, à t’acclimater”.

6. For example, the simple “saying” of madness, for Guillevic, is, if done with intensity and authenticity, to accomplish its exorcism, its banishment: “D’avoir dit: la folie./De son nom le plus vrai/Autant qu’on peut savoir/. . . /Elle est beaucoup plus calme, on dirait./Et s’éloigne” (TE, 160-61).

7. The political, sociological dimension of Guillevic’s writing is powerfully evident in *Gagner* (pp. 50-1, 55, 68, 85, 155-7, 160, 172-3, 175, 188 and elsewhere) and *Trente et un sonnets*

(passim) and generally in the early and middle stages of his work.

8. Words, Guillevic may argue on occasion, have the “colour” of things (cf. I,27) and certainly acquire a special, culturally determined relation to the latter (“Si le mot nacre/Désignait la prairie./Autres seraient/Mes rapports avec lui” (I,88)). On other occasions, however, he is inclined rather to stress the fact of an otherness of language emanating from the latter’s “deadness” (cf. I, 163, 165), though words, for Guillevic, are clearly not “tombs” (cf. I, 221): they have life and being, too, and, despite their independence and, thus, once more, the “otherness” of their mode of being (factors which depress, initially, a poet such as Ponge), words are perceived as a locus of very real ontological potential.

9. With respect to this crucial factor of affirmation, see, for example, TE, 75 and 107, or I, 160.

10. Cf. A,135: Guillevic, too, will say, like Ponge, that “il faut faire au-dehors/Ce que ne fera pas le bois”.

11. “A quoi bon le poème”, asks Guillevic in this text of *Inclus*, “Si ce n’est/Pour avoir quelque chose à tenir/Qui tient lui-même/Ce qu’autrement/Rien ne pourrait tenir”.

12. Writing is precisely the place “(où) pouvoir soigner la rose” (TE,53), the place for which things are drawn to “se lever/S’offrir tout entiers/Et venir en nous/Pour continuer” (TE,155).

13. See I,37, where the notion of paying “homage” to things is manifest, and yet A, 84, where it is a question less of praise than of a weighing, a taking into account, of mutual needs.

14. Guillevic’s poetry, particularly that of *Inclus*, but also elsewhere (S,137; EN, 22; A, 63, for example), is very fond of altar-temple-sacrifice imagery via which he seeks to convey the notion of a human, linguistic celebration, a self-world communion through language.