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THESIS ACCEPTED IN SATISFACTION OF THE  
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## *ERRATA*

- p 22 line 2: "fragmentation" for "quantumation"
- p 261 line 19: "In this quantum, the speaker constructs a magic moment" for  
"The speaker constructs in this quantum magic moment"
- p 271 line 22: "In the following quantum, the speaker declares" for "In the  
following quantum the speaker declares"
- p 275 line 21: "the past trauma: The present" for "the past trauma. The present"
- p 279 line 13: "In the following quantum, the stability" for "In the following  
quantumthe stability"
- p 280 line 25: "One is, shivering" for "One is shivering"
- p 280 line 26: "the other is, trembling" for "the other is trembling"
- p 291 line 16: "of Part III, the poet" for "of Part III the poet"

# **The Poetry of Guillevic:**

**Discourses of alienation, the erotic and ecology in**

***Requiem, Terraqué, Carnac, Du Domaine and  
Maintenant***

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*To the memory  
of my wife,*

*Marjorie*



### Abstract

This work argues that the driving force of Guillevic's poetry between 1938 and 1993 is that of alienation, which is experienced by the writing subject in his intimate world and reflected as a wider ecological and social alienation. The writing subject is driven by this experience, not only to make a static metaphoric representation of it, but, by working in and through language, to transform that experience, arriving at an ecology – a balance within the material world and between writing subject and his world. Guillevic's poetic journey of 55 years is traced through five works signposting it as a historical poetic progression of engaging in such a transformation and arguably achieving it in *Maintenant*. The journey begins by the subject's denial of the erotic and his fear of death that generate a personal "ecological" dislocation in his inner, intimate world. Here the speaker is pursued by memories of a flawed emotional relationship to his mother, in which he claims to have suffered sadistic persecution. In the outer world of materiality, instead of being given recognition of their right to individual existence, the objects of materiality are ecologically devastated and turn towards hateful opposition against humanity.

These experiences form the poetic foundation of both *Requiem* and *Terraqué* and the starting point of the journey towards the speaker's re-creation of his self through writing – his "autography" – and towards ecological symbiosis in the world. This is a journey in and on language and much of the language of the two anthologies has its origin in the speaker's disturbed unconscious. Such speech is a discourse of pain and death, which breaks into the poetic performance. The writing becomes a defiance of death as Brophy puts it about another of Guillevic's poems: "Le poème n'offre qu'une continuelle approche, mais, [...] il efface dans son mouvement la menace de la mort" (Brophy 1993: 73). The other language component is drawn from dominant discourse, which Guillevic endows with new freshness and energy. The two are joined in concrete, material discourse – a kind of thingspeak – in

which the objects of materiality speak themselves: *ils se parlent*. In *Carnac*, the speaking subject moves out of the closure imposed on him by alienation from his native Brittany. In a partial metaphoric shift, he now represents its land component affectionately as benign, sensuously rich and diverse, while he still views the sea as a potentially hostile *mer/mère*. In *Du Domaine*, he moves further to construct a vision of an ecologically harmonious community of material objects, radically reducing previous human domination to the metaphor of usufruct and his own role to those of *régisseur* and *porte-parole*. However, he remains doubtful about the intentions of the *étang/mère*. Finally, in *Maintenant* the speaking subject opens himself to materiality as an equal and becomes reconciled with the mother through a warm metaphoric vision of her. He completes the journey of re-construction of his self by displacing his fear of death through a vision of poetic immortality.

I hereby state that this thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Jaroslav B. Havir

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### A Note on References

The following abbreviations have been used within the text to refer to Guillevic's works and to interviews with Guillevic:

- R: Requiem* (1938), Paris: Tschann.  
*T: Terraqué* (1942), Paris: Gallimard.  
*Ex: Exécutoire* (1947), Paris: Gallimard.  
*G: Gagner* (1949), Paris: Gallimard.  
*EV: Envie de vivre* (1951), Paris: Seghers.  
*TB2: Terre à bonheur and Envie de vivre* (1985) [1952, 1951], Paris: Seghers.  
*TS: Trente et un sonnets* (1954), Paris: Gallimard.  
*C: Carnac* (1961), Paris: Gallimard.  
*S: Sphère* (1963), Paris: Gallimard.  
*A: Avec* (1966), Paris: Gallimard.  
*Eu: Euclidiennes* (1967), Paris: Gallimard.  
*V: Ville* (1969), Paris: Gallimard.  
*P: Paroi* (1970), Paris: Gallimard.  
*D: Du domaine* (1977), Paris: Gallimard.  
*Et: Etier* (1979), Paris: Gallimard.  
*Mt: Maintenant* (1993), Paris: Gallimard.
- GH: 'Un poète matérialiste'* (1979) Charles Haroche s'entretient avec Guillevic, *France Nouvelle*, 24 juin: 44-51.  
*VP: Vivre en poésie* (1980) Interview with Lucie Albertini and Jean Vircondelet, Paris: Stock.  
*CP: Choses parlées* (1982) Interview with Raymond Jean, Seyssel: Champ Vallon.  
*GM: Guillevic* (1989) Interview with Anne-Marie Mitchell, Marseille: Le Temps Parallèle-Éditions.  
*GW: 'Guillevic, un menhir en ballade'*, (1994) Interview with Jean-Luc Wauthier, *Le Journal des Poètes* 64, 5: 4-5.  
*GL: Humour - Terraqué, Entretiens - Lectures*, (1997), Interview with Jaques Lardoux, Vincennes: Presse universitaire de Vincennes.

## INTRODUCTION

### Methodology

The main contention of this thesis is that the fundamental driving force of Guillevic's poetry is his response to alienation – psychological alienation on a personal level reflected in a greater ecological alienation on a cosmic level. Both kinds of alienation are represented as driving life, whose foundation is erotic, towards its opposite, some form of death. Both kinds of alienation involve the domination, within the speaking subject and his world, of death. In the struggle between *eros* and *thanatos*, the death drive is powerful and imposes itself in and through a language in which the subject is separated from the material world, stands apart from it as a place of his destruction. And yet that world is the object of the speaking subject's desire, the world in which he desires to live and can only live. The way into that material world of life, of the erotic, is through language, through the language of *thanatos* but transformed, broken as a certain discourse and reinvented as another discourse. This struggle and this process will be followed and developed through a detailed reading of five works from the poet's vast opus: *Requiem*, *Terraqué*, *Carnac*, *Du Domaine* and *L'Instantané*, which represent the evolution of Guillevic's writing from beginning to end. The aim of such a historical approach is to follow the evolution of the ecology of Guillevic's poetic world, founded in the relationship between his voice forging the poetry and the material world it evokes. This ecology is an extended metaphor for the relationships between a speaking subject embodied in a language, and a self, others and a material world which also speak there, whose language it also is. These relationships are fundamentally marked by alienation and conflict, and poetic discourse becomes a verbal performance of transformation both of the language and, through it, the alienation, moving towards a reconciliation of the forces in language, shifting



from anxiety and confrontation towards ecological and personal reconciliation and harmony. The work of interpretation of his concrete, elliptic discourse and its thematic richness, follows the poet's passion as he searches for words to break into and through an alienating and destructive experience. He lets the experience speak in his place to change it, constructing himself and his world there as yet again other.

Guillevic's texts are dense, opaque and allusive, and he makes even silence outside the printed lines speak as *blanc codé*. Asked about the significance of the *armoire* with the dead inside in the first poem of *Terraqué*, he answered: "Cercueil-armoire. C'est dit par le blanc. Du blanc codé" (*VP*, 27).<sup>1</sup> Guillevic's vocabulary and syntax are often elliptic, resulting in highly reduced language redundancy so that his work confirms the opinion of Yuri Lotman on the reduced redundancy of artistic texts: "[...] an artistic text conveys considerably more information than a non-artistic text" (Lotman 1977: 31). In Guillevic's work a concentration of lexical, syntactic, phonetic, prosodic and figurative elements is meticulously fashioned to produce a poetic density of experience and a multiplicity of content. Its interpretation requires a pluralistic methodology relying first on close textual and inter-textual reading with the emphasis on structural, syntactic and lexical analysis, and accepting the underlying principle that texts may be ongoingly readable. Given readings move towards definite validity or closure, but may never be fully stable and meaningful. Yury Lotman, suggests that "those things that are original and unique in a work of art are not involved in any structure and therefore accessible only to impressionistic 'empathy' and not precise analysis [...]. [...] they occur at the intersection of many structures and belong to them simultaneously" (Lotman 1977: 300).

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<sup>1</sup> In the poem either the dead or some bread might have fallen from it had it been opened, "Peut-être il en serait tombé des morts,/Peut-être il en serait tombé du pain" (*T*, 7). Not only is the *armoire* a coffin because it may contain the dead, but it is also what, by being opened, may become the "box of death" of whoever opens it. The victim of this "cadaver-slide" is implicitly somebody small, a child, or rather a child still in the man-poet, still standing fearfully in front of the *armoire* in the *blanc codé* of the poem.

### **Alienation, ecology and the erotic**

Ecology, the erotic and alienation are closely linked in Guillevic's poetry. Ecology is for Guillevic the relationship both of himself personally, and of humankind, to the material world and to all the forces that animate and drive it. Life in the physical world is subject to the operation of a cycle of life and death, which comprises both forces that are erotic and life-enhancing, and those that negate life and drive it towards death, from which life is renewed again. At the beginning of his writing the poet finds this cycle threatening because he fears death and sexuality which are embodied in the materiality of the world and his own embodiment. Guillevic's personal involvement in his ecological quest is the fundamental creative force of his poetry, which draws on his empathy with people, animals and objects that have been ecologically marginalized, and whose existence and freedom have been endangered. The poet posits that objects of materiality have desires that demand to be recognized, which means recognition of their self-consciousness and autonomy. This ecological thinking is represented by an image of opposition between a closed and an open hand, which recurs four times in the texts read for this thesis. The closed hand signifies closure, ecological domination by humanity, destruction and death, while the open hand figures open co-existence and acceptance, freedom and infinite possibilities of life, which are the way to ecological symbiosis and harmony in the world.

Guillevic's poetry further suggests that the disturbed ecological balance in the material world reflects a similar disturbance in its social fabric, and that both are being driven towards destruction rather than towards symbiosis and cooperation. The poet represents the relationship of mankind with the material world as dominated by exploitation, greed and cruelty, and finds modern industrial society driven by similar motives. Consequently, in *Terraqué* he begins to turn to the promise of social justice offered by Marxism in poems that mark the beginning of his later poetic phase of social and socialist realism.

Guillevic's interest in, and commitment to, ecology is recognized only in Gavin Bowd's study *Guillevic: sauvage de la modernité* (1992), in which he argues: "Si, dès 1956, le communisme décline comme une alternative crédible à la société capitaliste, une autre alternative est proposée par *l'écologisme*" (Bowd 1992: 53). He defines its thrust in this way: "[...] l'écologisme rend l'homme responsable au non-humain" (*ibid.* 54). This moral concept is fundamental to Guillevic's ecological thinking, which is founded on seeking a balance between *eros* and *thanatos*.<sup>1</sup> This means sustaining *eros*, the life principle, against *thanatos* and its overwhelming drive of all life towards death. The erotic manifests itself in Guillevic's poetry on two levels. On the conscious level it is a beneficent, life-giving and life-sustaining liberating force that not only generates life, but also promotes serenity and ecological harmony in humanity and nature. This ecological force is common to the animal and vegetable worlds, and is figuratively extended by the poet even to the mineral world. However, the beneficent aspect of the erotic is only one component of the cycle of life, decay and death, which the poet feared. His poetry contains much evidence that his erotic drives were disturbed and dislocated, dominated by powerful feelings of yearning, rejection, frustration, despair, hatred, and sado-masochism. The same evidence points to his mother as the source of this troubled sexuality. In his interviews he corroborates the evidence from his poetry by claims that his mother openly disliked him as a child, made him feel permanently guilty and punished him sadistically. His desire of her affection was rejected, and the twin emotions of desire of her love and fear and hatred in anger at her rejection come to dominate much of his poetry as childhood traumas find representation in dreams and are never forgotten: "In dream-life the child that is in man pursues its existence" (Freud 1962: 63).

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<sup>1</sup> Guillevic is really a forerunner of *écologisme* in poems written in 1930s. His poem "Fourmi" in *Requiem* (R, 6) is explicitly ecological and some poems in *Terraqué* condemn domination and killing of animals by humankind. Further, several poems in *Terraqué* contain metaphors of an open and a closed hand (T, 91,92,98,111), which shift the ecological thinking from condemnation of individual cases of concrete abuse to a more general formulation of a moral and philosophical basis of Guillevic's ecology.

Alienation in its widest sense – emotional, psychological, economic and social - is such a deep-seated experience for Guillevic that it may be useful to look at his poetry as, at least at first, a Freudian metaphoric and metonymic repetition of childhood experience. Critical studies, except those of Dax (1954), Tortel (1962) and Pierrot (1984), seem to be anxious not to draw on the poet's past or childhood experiences, which may increase understanding of Guillevic's poetry. *Terraqué* and much of Guillevic's other poetry reveal that the deepest source of his feeling of alienation and exclusion was his traumatic emotional experience in childhood brought about by his mother's denial of affection, that is in Lacanian terms, castration by refusal of *jouissance* (Lacan 1966: 827). This experience went much further than Oedipal separation, and its consequences were emotional trauma, and a feeling of erotic emptiness and marginality. This feeling of marginality persisted into adulthood and was repeated on other levels as his comment on his military service shows:

Moi, *comme toujours*, j'étais un déplacé, un déclassé, car je n'étais ni un paysan, ni un cordonnier, mais un semi-intellectuel, et je n'étais pas admis par les intellectuels, qui étaient des bourgeois. En marge donc, malgré moi! (VP, 86-87, my emphasis)

### Psychoanalysis and autography

Some critical studies acknowledge that Guillevic's unhappy childhood experiences did have some bearing on his poetry. Pierre Dax in *Guillevic* (1954) speaks of the period of the thirties being for Guillevic one of "ses propres drames, sa propre angoisse" (Daix 1954: 50). He suggests with great insight that in *Terraqué* there are poems that represent the poet's past personal anxieties which, in other words, indicate a form of alienation: "Les poèmes de cauchemar, où Guillevic se délivre de ce qui lui fait peur" (Daix 1954: 41). The words "poèmes de cauchemar" suggest that the speaking subject represents his unspecified alienation metaphorically, while "se délivre" indicates that he

engages in an individual self-psychotherapy by work in and on language. Driven by his ideological commitment to socialist realism, Daix undervalues these individualistic attempts at transformation and perceives the poetry of *Terraqué* as Guillevic's apprenticeship for socialist realism, which he embraced in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During that phase the poet continued his efforts at transformation through a collectivist approach as exemplified in the *étang* poem (*T*, 71-72), efforts that proved fruitless.

Jean Tortel in *Guillevic* (1962) accepts that it can be very arbitrary to relate poetry to childhood experiences or memories, but concedes that "[...] certaines 'enfances', toutefois, contiennent la figure du poète futur, inexplicable si on ne s'y réfère" (Tortel 1962: 28). He argues that the disturbing hardships Guillevic endured in childhood formed him as a man and as a poet: "Cependant, on doit constater que son poème à lui reste la même figure complexe que celle dont une enfance vécue nous révèle les traits. En quelque sorte, il la reproduit" (*ibid.* 29). In spite of recognizing Guillevic's disturbed childhood, Tortel does not accept its usefulness for interpreting his poetry: "[...] on ne peut [en] tirer aucune conclusion définitive quant à l'origine ou à l'intention du poème, mais il nous aidera du moins à esquisser son portrait moral" (*ibid.* 29). He is the only one to recognize the erotic and sado-masochistic drives of Guillevic's poetry and to utter the word *l'érotisme*: "Violence/Tendresse, rarement séparées, mais au contraire s'exaltant l'une l'autre, et contenant ensemble l'érotisme" (*ibid.* 33).

Michael Brophy in *Eugène Guillevic* (1993) accepts the connection between the actual repression and condemnation of young Eugène by his mother, and the poetry on the other hand. For evidence he points to the poet's wordplay on the words "mère" and "marâtre" in *Paroi*: "L'écriture rejoint à tâtons le vécu pour porter remède à une angoisse encore tenaillante, celle de l'enfant culpabilisé [...]" (Brophy 1993: 54) and he sums up the relation of the mother and son: "La mère n'est pas partenaire, mais adversaire" (*ibid.*). Surprisingly, Brophy does not mention that the poet's painful relationship with his mother dominates a large number of poems in *Terraqué* and, to a lesser

degree, much of his poetry. In *Carnac* Brophy finds homophony between the words "mer-femme", "mer-pierre", "mer-marais" and many others (*ibid.* 24), but not "mer-mère".<sup>1</sup>

Jean Pierrot, in *Guillevic ou la Sérénité Gagnée* (1984), takes the poems in *Terraqué*, which represent killing of birds and gouging out a cat's eyes, rather literally, as acts in which Guillevic as a boy took part, rather than as metaphoric representation of erotic and ecological dislocation in the world. Pierrot takes these acts as confession of what occurred in the poet's unhappy childhood: "[...] aveux courageux de l'adulte, révélateurs de l'amertume accumulée par un enfant mal-aimé [...]" (Pierrot 1984: 57). The important factor recognized here by Pierrot is that Guillevic's being "un enfant mal-aimé" contributed to the poet's alienation from the world and his "horreur de vivre" (*ibid.* 10) that dominate *Requiem* and *Terraqué*. The confession of the cruel acts in poetry, continues Pierrot, is a part of self-psychotherapy, illustrating:

[...] la puissance de la création poétique, son pouvoir de transformer, de transfigurer et dans une certaine mesure de guérir de ses douleurs profondes l'écrivain qui s'y livre. (*ibid.* 6)

Such an approach, according to Pierrot, is "mieux peut-être qu'entrer en psychanalyse" (*ibid.* 7) and seeks "le chemin de la réconciliation" (*ibid.* 7).

Daix, Tortel, Brophy and Pierrot acknowledge that the speaking subject embodied in the language of Guillevic's poetry engages in representing his anxieties originating in childhood, and in transforming them through poetry in a process that is "psychoanalytical". Jean-Marie Gleize in *Poésie et Figuration* (1983) comes some way towards that position, but shrinks from the notion of psychoanalysis. He accepts the *étang* in *Du Domaine* as figuring *l'eau matricielle*, and therefore the mother, and states that "tout un poème est consacré à la peur, autour de l'*étang*" (Gleize 1983: 205). The fear is a

<sup>1</sup> Guillevic himself states: "J'étais sans doute coupable d'être là et d'être le portrait de mon père" (*VP*, 71).

manifestation of alienation that stands between the subject/speaker and the pond, and materiality that surrounds the pond. As evidence of the fear/alienation Gleize quotes from the poem images of suffering, culpability, memory, dreams and crimes, which all have the appearance of neurotic symptoms repressed in the unconscious:

Le sang, les plaies, la cicatrice ("les massifs d'orties/servent de cicatrices" (39)), la torture. [...] les battements d'une conscience qui se sent coupable, le "soi-même" (66) autour d'un soi-autre figuré par cet *étang*, par l' "eau/mémoire". D'abord, l'*étang* est bien lié au rêve: "Certains rêvent/Les rêves de l'*étang*" (44), et ce rêve à un crime: "Les crimes que recrachent/Les eaux nocturnes" (143) [...]. "Il y a des crimes/Sans définition" (101). (Gleize 1983: 224)

Gleize concludes this display of Freudian symbols by quoting two quanta<sup>1</sup> from *Du Domaine*, one of which begins with "Aller jusqu'à l'*étang* (D, 211)" (Gleize 1983: 225), while the other ends with "Je parlerai (D, 234)" arguing that "où l'on voit bien ce que 'parler' veut dire: *avouer*" (Gleize 1983: 225). The two quanta clearly represent an attempt to engage in a psychoanalytical process of revealing the repressed so that it can be remembered by the conscious mind and then forgotten.

So far it seems that Gleize points to the importance of the content of the text for the poet's autographical re-creation of his experience, and of himself as a speaking subject in his poetic world. For such a poetic outcome a psychoanalytical interpretation would seem to be useful. However, in spite of his awareness of the symbols of the unconscious and his emphasis on the fear

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<sup>1</sup> Guillevic considers *Requiem* and *Terraqué* to be collections of individual poems, but insists that *Carnac*, *Du Domaine* and *Maintenant* are each one poem, as specified by their subtitle *poème*, which indicates their thematic and structural unity. He calls the individual components of these *poèmes* "quanta":

Chaque texte ayant cette autonomie verbale à l'intérieur de la suite, je ne peux l'appeler strophes, fragments; étant donné l'unité de l'ensemble, celui-ci constitue un poème. Je n'ai trouvé de solution qu'à partir de *Du Dmaine*, où je les ai baptisés quanta, par référence à la théorie de Max Planck. (*VP*, 170)



around the pond, Gleize does not probe further what the fear is, what the origin of it may be, nor what connection to the "eau matricielle"/mother it may have. He refuses to attempt any psychoanalytical interpretation: "[...] nous ne tenterons pas une toujours pseudo psychanalyse de Guillevic à travers les données du domaine" (Gleize 1983: 223). It is difficult to see why psychoanalytical interpretation should always be "pseudo" and why it need be directed at the person of the author, rather than at his work. Guillevic's poetry is a poetic construct, which sometimes draws on the interpretation of his childhood memories or their imaginative reworking. Such personal material lends itself legitimately to psychoanalytical interpretation, not as autobiographical, but as autographical representation, that is as the speaker's active (re-)creation of himself in his poetic world. In Guillevic's work there is ample evidence that he, as the speaking subject, engages at times in self-psychotherapy of a psychoanalytical character, pseudo or not. Gleize continues his argument by dismissing the content as less important than the structure of the poetry:

Ce qui est ici en jeu c'est, davantage qu'un contenu (quel crime? quel fantasme de culpabilité chez Guillevic?), la mise en évidence d'une structure, la construction d'un domaine autour d'un trou, [...]. (Gleize 1983: 225)

Poetry means to him "[...] faire surgir du vide dans le plein des mots, déjoindre ces mots des mots contigus, et les mots des choses" (*ibid.*).

What appears to underlie Gleize's comment is a dislike of facile analysis that is centred on the author/poet by either using his work to take it back to explain the psychology of the author, or to use the known facts of the author's life to analyse the literary work as a reflection of those facts. The first approach is not very interesting because what matters in literature is the work itself. The other would be a very unreliable tool for analysing a literary work that creates its own fictional world. There are aspects of Guillevic's work in which the speaking subject embodied in the poetic discourse engages in psychoanalysis of



his own disturbed and alienated self by employing signifiers of his personal and family life. How far the speaking subject can be identified with the person of the poet is largely irrelevant because once created, the text assumes its own independent existence. Only exceptionally knowledge of some fact of the poet's life may be useful to throw light on some stubbornly obscure point of the poetry, while other personal details may provide corroboration for findings arrived at by textual analysis. The essential point to be studied, however, is how writing produces change, becomes an act of autography, of re-creation, through language. Guillevic is well aware of this process of renewal of his poetry and himself through writing:

Ecrire, c'est bien *s'inscrire* dans le monde, et cela n'est pas sans effet sur celui qui écrit. Je ne veux pas dire que chaque poème modifie celui qui écrit, mais il est vrai que si je n'avais pas écrit *Terraqué*, je ne sais pas ce que je serais. (VP, 176)

### Writing as poetic performance

Guillevic's representation of alienation that he experiences on a personal level is only a part of a wider alienation in the world, which he represents to be in a state of imbalance and conflict. This is verbal representation in which writing constructs the transparency of a vision of the conflict to be seen in itself. He perceives this conflict in the unbalanced state of ecology of the material world, of the socio-cultural world of human society, and in their alienation both within themselves as well as in relation to one another.

On the second level of representation, such conflict is often a metaphor for conflict on another level and for conflicting drives within the poet's self. His perception of alienation is fundamentally erotic, meaning that the forces of *eros* that create and sustain life are in conflict with the forces of *thanatos*, which destroy life. Much of the time he sees their struggle as being uneven with destruction and death having the upper hand. Hence the obsession with death,

cadavers and putrefaction in his early poetry and his fear of both death and the erotic.

On the third level of representation the poetry is a poetic performance, *une représentation* of the representation of the two previous levels. It is work not only in language but also on language, by which Guillevic attempts to give his poetic language the power to change the prevailing experience of alienation and make life more harmonious and liveable. He perceives his language – or rather the dominant discourse that embodies it – as part of the dislocation that he experiences. He is alienated from it and forges for himself a new, powerful, concrete poetic discourse. Bernard Noël calls Guillevic's discourse "une langue naturelle" (Noël 1994: 9) and, after quoting the first poem of *Terraqué*, the *armoire* poem, as an example of the new language of this collection, he describes both the dominant poetic language of the time and the impact produced by this new poetic language of *Terraqué* as follows:

Il est difficile d'imaginer, aujourd'hui, la rupture radicale que représente un tel poème à l'égard de ce qu'on appelait alors 'la poésie', avec son lyrisme, ses états visionnaires et ce stupéfiant-image que le surréalisme pratiquait. (Noël 1994: 11,12)

Guillevic fashions his discourse to subvert and renew the received poetic discourse of his time. The poet's work on language creates a discourse that embodies qualities of material objects by being, like them, concrete and dense, a discourse that is syntactically elliptic and distorted, and shuns metaphors, adjectives and abstractions. This new concrete poetic language of ecological transformation can arguably be called "thingspeak" because its power of representation relies on objects of materiality to speak themselves by carrying figurative power and richness without becoming metaphors, that is without substitution of one term for another. Jean-Marie Gleize calls this representation "La figuration non figurative" in which "La réalité ronge la fiction" (Gleize 1983: 196-197), "[...] cette armoire, ou cette mémoire, demande à être ouverte [...] Mais aussi: l'armoire demande à rester close"

(*ibid.* 201). It is "[...] la réduction des choses à elles-mêmes. Et ceci est en relation avec le refus de la métaphore" (*ibid.* 202), while "[...] la figure s'impose à travers la syntaxe, l'articulation, la liaison, le discours" (*ibid.* 204).

Gleize characterizes Guillevic's discourse as "une poétique du constat" (Gleize 1983: 221) and the poet himself is well aware of it: "Mes poèmes sont des constats toujours" (CP, 76). Since the words that make up the statements are generally concrete, material words, they are the basis of what is termed "thingspeak" in this thesis. Some studies support this concept without using the term thingspeak. Jean-Patrice Courtois characterizes the poet's concrete statements as follows: "Le mot, chez Guillevic, [...] ce qu'il dit et ce qu'il évoque sont une seule et même chose" (Courtois 1994: 208). Deleuze and Guattari express a similar idea about "speech" of animals:

L'animal ne parle pas "comme" un homme, mais extrait du langage des tonalités sans signification: les mots eux-mêmes ne sont pas "comme" des animaux, mais grimpent pour leur compte, aboient et pullulent, étant des chiens proprement linguistiques, des insectes ou des souris. (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 40-41)

In Deleuzian terms it is "langue mineure", which has the characteristics of the Deleuzian concept of "la littérature mineure":

Les trois caractères de la littérature mineure sont la déterritorialisation de la langue, le branchement de l'individuel sur l'immédiat-politique, l'agencement collectif d'énonciation. (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 33)

Clearly, Guillevic's concrete discourse is a vehicle of minor literature because it has the three qualities posited by the definition: it is a language taken away, that is deterritorialized, from the mainstream of the existing literary language, it connects the speaker as individual to political immediacy of the issues of ecological and general alienation, and makes the poet an agent speaking on behalf of, *au nom de*, those lacking an effective voice.

Guillevic's poetic discourse becomes the very material fabric of the poetic experience and of its transformation. It becomes things and speaks them, not of or for them. This vision and practice are more complex than mere representation and generate a discourse that is tightly constructed and whose salient features are careful choice of words, concreteness, conciseness, and syntactic ellipsis. Such meticulous work reveals the poet as a conscious poetic craftsman who rejects as a delusion the simple recourse to dreams, chance and automatic writing by the surrealists of his time: "Donc, le rêve, le hasard objectif, c'est tout à fait en dehors de moi, surtout j'ai toujours pensé que l'écriture automatique était un leurre" (CP, 38). This does not mean Guillevic rejects the role of the unconscious in poetry. His poetry sources the images of the unconscious, whose existence he accepts: "L'inconscient ça existe. Le semi-conscient aussi" (CP, 112). He calls such symbols "fantasmes". "Je n'essaye pas de déchiffrer ce qui est pour certains un symbole. Je prends mes fantasmes comme ils viennent. Et ils ne se définissent pas" (CP, 131-132). However, he does not just repeat them, but subjects them to a working out process of lexical and syntactic integration into his poetic idiom. They are symbols rising from the part of the poet's unconscious, which is the domain of the other, and reveal themselves through dreams or slips of the tongue. Such symbols represent traumatic experiences driven from the conscious speech into the unconscious: "La parole est ici chassée du discours concret qui ordonne la conscience [...]" (Lacan 1966: 280). In the unconscious this rejected speech becomes symbols or neurotic symptoms and each such symbol "[...] participe du langage par l'ambiguïté sémantique [...]" (Lacan 1966: 281). There are then two discourses operating in competition with each other: the concrete language of the conscious, which is close to *parole vide*, into which the discourse of the other from the unconscious penetrates or breaks through in the form of slips of tongue or dreams. When such a lapsus occurs, the language of the conscious shifts towards becoming *parole pleine*:

Mais c'est une parole de plein exercice, car elle inclut le discours de l'autre dans le secret de son chiffre. (Lacan 1966: 281)

In psychoanalysis the patient may offer resistance to speaking and either remains silent or speaks irrelevantly in "empty speech". Such empty speech is largely the stuff of meaningless, repeated everyday discourse for which Lacan borrows Mallarmé's metaphor of a silent passing from hand to hand of a badly worn coin, which is still accepted as a token of currency, that is as potentially meaningful (Lacan 1966: 251). The analyst guides the patient by working through the empty speech until a lapsus occurs that allows the secret symbol of the other to break into the discourse. This is the first step towards conscious full speech in which the patient may remember his/her traumatic experience, which then can be dismissed and forgotten.

In their "écriture automatique" the surrealists imitated some aspects of the psychoanalytical procedure by writing down what they thought was their language of the unconscious, without working it out and fashioning it into poetry. Without such working through, their writing comes close to empty speech or to repetition of literary language of major literature. Deleuze and Guattari call such discourse "le calque" and the action "décalquer", employing for it the metaphor of a tree that traces and reproduces itself in a straight line from its roots to its fruit:

Elle (la logique de l'arbre) a pour but la description d'un état de fait, le rééquilibrage de relations intersubjectives, ou l'exploration d'un inconscient déjà là, tapis dans les recoins obscure de la mémoire et du langage. Elle consiste à décalquer quelque chose qu'on se donne tout fait, à partir d'une structure qui surcode ou d'un axe qui supporte. (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 20)

Guillevic's discourse may be called "disturbing" of the poetic status quo because of his failure, or rather refusal, to repeat not only the language of the surrealists, but more importantly that of major literature in general. He creates his own poetic idiom and insists that this is the mark of a true poet in an

interview with Ann-Marie Mitchell when discussing the popular view that Brassens is a *poète chansonnier*:

J'aime beaucoup Brassens, mais quand on me dit que c'est un poète, je répond qu'il est plus versificateur que poète. Il a une sensibilité, mais il ne crée pas un langage. (GM, 23)

Guillevic's effort to create his own poetic language, by which he attempts to reconstruct his fragmented self, finds itself under the pressure of two of its sources. One is that of the received literary language that he has to work with, but which he refuses to repeat and the other is the speech of the symbols of his unconscious, which lock his emotional traumas in his unconscious. Both of them try to impose alienation on him. To move his self out of the alienation, he controls the conscious discourse of the self, and although he may begin by taking the unconscious symbols as they come, that is "décalquer", he integrates them by working, or breaking them through into the poetic discourse by means of *l'effraction*. Tortel recognizes the poet's obsession with language, by which he wants to grasp what is often *informulé* and *informe* and he concludes that Guillevic finds the language *étrangère* and difficult to manage, but that he largely succeeds in imposing control on his discourse: "Nul langage n'est plus contrôlé que le sien" (Tortel 1962: 30). The importance of Tortel's opinion is that he does not see this poetry as merely a static representation of alienation of the writing subject, but as going beyond passive representation by effecting a shift away from it by working on and through its unconscious sources.

In *L'écart et l'accord du Requiem au Magnificat* (1983), Serge Gaubert perceives as the underlying theme of Guillevic's poetry a creative tension between the notions of *l'écart* and *l'accord*, tension which is resolved by acts of a sort of sacrifice of a part of oneself to accede to a more glorious self. For Gaubert it means "[...] écrire ou s'écarter d'une partie de soi pour accéder à soi (*ibid.* 26). He concedes that psychoanalysis could explain or exploit the poetic practice of *l'écart/l'accord*, which makes Guillevic speak more freely,

particularly about his relationship with his mother. However, such a practice does not interest Gaubert: "L'origine m'intéresse moins que les résultats, moins les scènes primitives que les mises en scènes poétiques et surtout l'affirmation de l'impérieuse nécessité d'écrire" (Gaubert 1983: 27-28). He feels that Guillevic "[...] ferait aisément sienne la formule de Proust: 'La vraie vie, c'est la littérature'" (*ibid.* 28). One can agree with Gaubert in as much as accepting that literature is not apart from life, but is a living, a reworking of the patterns of living through a work on language. This thesis too is most interested in what writing does, its force for change in Guillevic's world, in his ecological vision of a world seeking balance and of writing that works towards that balance for him. This thesis too is interested in Guillevic's writing as a (possibly endless) working through and working out. But this working also implies a working from, as a Deleuzian process of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization through lines of flight, and the territory from which Guillevic works - the recurrent images, motifs and themes, the shift of a repetition he seeks to break from - is also important.

In another article in *Lire Guillevic*, titled *Ecriture -- Chemin* (1983), Gaubert discusses the poem "Chemin", written in 1959, which heralds a return by the poet to his writing that preceded the phase of socialist realism - "Retour de Guillevic dans le domaine dont il s'était écarté" (Gaubert 1983 a: 167). The poetic journey now has to be repeatedly taken up to redo the accord by transforming the discords into language and poetry (*ibid.* 167). The important notion of this poem-journey is that it sees Guillevic's writing as a continuous displacement and progression, not just as a representation of a static state of alienation, but as a shifting metaphor of interaction of the opposing forces, a journey that has no definite end. This is a movement through shifting balances and temporary moments of accord by shaping poetry in such a way that the poetic discourse becomes the very fabric of experience and of the effort to change that experience. Such writing is no longer "tracing" ("le calque"), but "mapping" ("la carte"), represented by Deleuze and Guattari by the botanical metaphor of a rhizome, which grows and spreads irregularly in all levels and



directions, and figuratively depicts the movement of thought, desire and the construction of a poetic experience:

Si la carte s'oppose au calque, c'est qu'elle est toute entière tournée vers une expérimentation en prise sur le réel. La carte ne reproduit pas un inconscient fermé sur lui même, elle le construit. (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 20)

The poetic journey becomes a movement in many directions without an ultimate end through a web of temporary zones of intensity or plateaux:

Un plateau est toujours au milieu, ni début ni fin. [C'est] une région continue d'intensités, vibrant sur elle-même, et qui se développe en évitant toute orientation sur un point culminant ou vers une fin extérieure. (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 32)

The process initiated by the metaphors of mapping and plateaux constitutes itself as a state of unstable equilibrium: an "état d'équilibre instable" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 87). In the words of Tortel it is a search for an equilibrium, which the very act of searching destroys: "La recherche nécessaire d'un équilibre que la recherche détruit, et pour qu'elle le détruise" (Tortel 1962: 13). This thesis seeks to map these processes.

Deleuze and Guattari's representation of the writing process is useful for understanding the nature of Guillevic's work at the attempted transformation of the experience of alienation and ecological dislocation, which never appears to fully succeed, because it does not follow a linear form of thinking whose aim is a final and definite solution. The nature of his poetic work seems to be that of a self-transformation or re-creation protracted over 60 years. At stake is the integrity of his desire, which has been partly alienated on two fronts: one is the ecological dislocation and imbalance of the world he lives in and the other is the psychological persistence of the memory of his mother's domination in childhood. He struggles for the full re-possession of his desire, which will restore his self-consciousness and the recognition of his status as an autonomous human being. To some extent he finds himself in the position of a



subject in psychoanalysis, who has to find metaphoric language with which to express repressed experience and then keep working through it (*durcharbeiten*) (Lacan 1966: 249). Guillevic does not wish merely to represent that experience by a static metaphor for alienation, or *calque*, and neither does he wish to shift to some other ecology that would have a fixed, definite balance imposed on it, nor to find a better mother. What he does is keep re-forging his thingspeak by creating new lexical and syntactic units, whose figurative impact creates new ecological balances and offer new perspectives of his relationship with the mother. Such discourse and its new perceptions keep moving away from the previous ones to recreate and re-balance his old, flawed experience by constantly reconstructing the original experience of loss and desolation through new metaphors. Deleuze and Guattari use for such a procedure the terms *la déterritorialisation* and *la ligne de fuite*:

Ecrire, faire rhizome, accroître son territoire par déterritorialisation, étendre la ligne de fuite jusqu'au point où elle couvre tout le plan de consistance en une machine abstraite. (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 19)

Deleuze and Guattari's conception of mental processes helps understand the mechanism of Guillevic's work as a dynamic and developing process. This thesis finds such a concept useful and reads Guillevic's writing as having a fundamentally historical character, meaning that the metaphoric language of the poet's discourse does not merely represent the alienation of the writing subject, and of humanity, as static facts. When necessary, the language reaches into the past to bring out symbols that speak for the past traumas, and makes them break into the concrete discourse. On the other hand, the language also reaches forward, beyond a static representation, by forging metaphors that shift the speaker's self out of the closure of alienation.

Such a historical reading is found useful, indeed essential, for the interpretation of Guillevic's poetry, even though it is not the only one possible. In complete opposition to it stands an ahistorical and static interpretation offered by Jean-Pierre Richard. He sees Guillevic's poetry in terms of static

themes and traits that dominate the poetic landscape like geographical features. He begins with the theme of otherness and closure of the material objects against humankind: "les choses se ferment ou s'écartent, échappent à la prise" (Richard 1964: 225). The objects demand something from humanity and Richard calls this "le thème de la créance" (*ibid.* 231), which grows to a thirst for human blood, a theme of "un vampirisme de l'objet" (*ibid.* 233). The thirst of the objects leads to aggressivity and produces nightmarish fears: "Mer, étang, caillou, tout devient monstre: Le rêve de l'objet s'achève en tératologie" (*ibid.* 235), with the monsters finally becoming the universal, abstract monster of death, which threatens both humanity and objects (*ibid.* 237). Yet shelter lies only in the real world which is, however, the source of the threat and stands in complete opposition to humankind. The only meeting point between them is that of the cadaver, which belongs, for a brief moment, to both worlds (*ibid.* 243). For Guillevic, according to Richard, the terrible strangeness, opposition and duality of existence can only be resolved by the strangeness of language: "C'est pourtant cette étrangeté, et elle seule, qui nous conduira finalement vers les objets" (*ibid.* 252). Poetry is then for Guillevic "[...] une adhésion au monde (elle n'est même que cela)" (*ibid.* 253).

While the speaking subject fears objects in his world that thirst for his blood, he is also able to feel affection for trees, flowers, insects and animals. He is certainly terrified of death that threatens him with obliteration as an individual, but there is much evidence in Guillevic's poetry, not examined by Richard, of other reasons, of personal origin, for his alienation, fears, his yearning for affection, and his sado-masochistic despair. Richard singles out death as the only factor that would cause anxiety, omitting repressed sexuality. Further, he does not show how language will lead humanity to the objects and is not aware that the poet's work in and on language in *Terraqué* and *Carnac* has already been transforming his alienation from the two basic elements of his world, the sea and the land.

### The five works of poetry

The shifting of the poet's discourse away from the original and disturbing experience towards a representation that is more benign and harmonious is reflected in the manner in which he represents himself as both the subject of that experience and the subject in charge of the poetic performance. The performance is generated by a discourse of statements that work both on a literal, explicit, level and a figurative, implicit level of meaning. Attitudes and apprehensions of the speaking subject are often revealed as a subtext of the discourse. Both the content of the performance, the manner of representation, the role and the attitude of the poet as the speaker and a participant, change considerably from *Requiem* in 1938 to *Maintenant* in 1993. The selection and careful textual reading of the five poetic works attempt to demonstrate that these changes contribute both to a historical evolution of the work and to a shifting and reforming poetic unity of the work as a whole. The constituent parts of the work, the collections and the individual poems, each have a poetic unity – stand as plateaux – on their own, which the reading both respects and recognizes as a component of the total of the poet's lifelong work(ing through).

In *Requiem* the thematic range of its six poems is restricted, on the literal level, to death or dying of animals and plants relieved occasionally by erotic activity of flowering, growing and even human lovemaking. One poem represents an ecological observation critical of humanity and one can be interpreted psychoanalytically as an image of emotionally disturbed relationship between a mother and a son. However, the thingspeak of death dominates the poems. The discourse of all the poems has a metaphoric dimension that works on two levels, one of which is for all of them, except one, the operation of the cycle of death and rebirth of life in nature. The other level figures by implication a subtext of apprehensions of the intimate world of the speaking subject. The impersonal speaking subject observes both death and the erotic in a seemingly neutral and dispassionate manner and the language of his discourse

appears to be a thingspeak of death. However, his horror of death and his "detached" yet longing observation of the erotic activity in nature embodied in that discourse of death, break in to cry out refusal of death and desire of the erotic, breaking that discourse down. What began as *calque*, tracing of death and erotic alienation, has initiated a metaphoric shift away from them by lines of flight out of the bondage to death of the writing subject.

In *Terraqué* there is, in comparison with *Requiem*, a broadening of thematic interests by the addition of language as a subject of poetic inquiry, and by the introduction of the first poems of socialist realism. Above all, ecology, the erotic, the relationship between the writing subject and his mother, and the alienation that infects them all, become the dominant topics of the anthology. Human beings become participants in the poetic performance including the speaking subject who represents the poet and who often speaks through "je", "moi", "tu", "toi" and even "il" and "lui", making his overt appearance and signalling that he is in charge of the language performance. He speaks on behalf of, *au nom de*, ecologically endangered and exploited objects of materiality, of the dislocation of the world and of his own emotional alienation. Some objects are outside his control and insist on speaking themselves. *Terraqué* means earth and water together, but they are also in hostile opposition, while the thingspeak of the sea is death and that of the images of the speaker's mother is pain and possessiveness. The poet finds himself having a double subjectivity, one as a subject that exercises control over the discourse and one as a subject who is subjected to language, which he finds "étrangère". This language is sometimes generated in the unconscious by the other of his self, divided by alienation, and bursts into his conscious speech, by *l'effraction*, in the form of strange, emotionally charged symbols. They sometimes take control of his discourse, but as a rule he interprets and integrates them into his poetic speech. It means a working through his language to move away from simple representation, or repeating, of his or the world's ecological alienation, by creating a language that keeps shifting his self and the world from alienation towards reconstruction. In

*Terraqué* that shift only begins and does not become very apparent as the overall impact of its poetry remains one of quantamation, violence, suffering, death and erotic yearning.

The importance of *Carnac* lies in its thematic and poetic return, after twelve years of socialist realism and silence, to the kind of poetry practised in *Terraqué*. It is, however, not a simple return, but rather one into a more advanced stage of poetic development generated and enriched by the shifting and working through of language in *Terraqué*. There is still fear, pain, bitterness, recriminations and alienation, but of lower intensity than twenty years previously. There are no poems in *Carnac* as bitter and hateful as "Naissance" (T, 43) and "Peut-être que la tourbe [...]" (T, 39), none as murderously violent as the second poem titled "Carnac" (T, 50) and none as palpably terrifying as the *étang* poem (T, 71-72). Of the three elements that constitute the poetic content and conflict of *Carnac*, the first in importance is the sea, waiting beyond the shores as a threat and being the object of the neurotic obsession of the speaker as the *mer/mère*. Then the land, which is eulogized by the poet in beautiful concrete language, and finally the unique Breton culture symbolized by the menhirs. They all contend to be Brittany, but to him the sea is the source of his personal alienation, object of his desire and an ever-elusive key to his identity. He harangues, cajoles and accuses it repeatedly, addressing it by the familiar "tu", but finally resigns himself to incomprehension. The rhetoric by which the speaking subject constructs Brittany speaks on its behalf, *au nom de*, because the poet feels that a long history of discrimination has made it inarticulate.

*Du Domaine* represents a radical attempt at a change in Guillevic's poetic praxis from authorial domination of this imaginary entity and of the discourse, which constitutes its world. He resigns his position of domination to become a mere usufructuary of the territory whose duty is to make use of its products without damaging its substance and this notion is a vision of a new

positive attitude that will heal the ecological alienation of humankind. At the same time the objects of materiality will have their desires recognized to become autonomous subjects, which will not need the speaker of the discourse to speak on their behalf. They will speak themselves – *les choses se parleront* – while his role will be reduced to that of a *régisseur* who only stage-manages the performance of the domain. This new physical arrangement and the discourse that constitute it, move from closure towards opening of not only ecological, but all relations in the world and represents Guillevic's vision of the new basis of his poetry.

When the writing of this thesis was first contemplated, *Maintenant*, published in 1993, was the last of Guillevic's major works. He was then 86 years old and the importance of this poem lies in summing up and bringing to completion all his poetic work. The poet continues here to explore all the themes already begun in *Terraqué*, and adds greater emphasis to those of the mystery of time, space, life and immortality. The notion of *maintenant* is linked to *Du Domaine*, where it is foreshadowed as eternity experienced in a present moment: "C'est maintenant/L'éternité." (D, 96).

*Maintenant* is formally divided into three parts and in Part I the attention of the speaker is mainly focused on two continuing concerns of the poet. One is to grasp and name the guises and essence of time, which dominates human life, but eludes symbolization. The other is the representation of the speaker's feeling of his ecological alienation from materiality, which manifests itself as being closed onto himself. While he desires to open himself to the world of materiality, including his own, at this stage he is unable to fully embrace that world because it contains both death and sex, which he still fears.

Part II reveals the speaker's growing awareness of his secluded, closed, existence and limited participation in the infinite, open world that lies outside of his experience. Opening oneself to the promise of infinite possibilities of the material world now becomes the poet's aim. He forges a new relationship with objects of materiality by shifting his poetic discourse towards openness to free

them from his authorial control and intrusion as creator and *régisseur*. Loosening of such bonds is to be achieved by letting them speak themselves in their own language of thingspeak more fully than before. The term *l'effraction*, which introduces the poet's final fusion with *maintenant* also goes to the root of thingspeak, which draws its power from the discourse of the unconscious breaking into the concrete poetic language performance.

Part III of *Maintenant* gives the impression that the speaker is saying farewell to what has been his poetic world for over 50 years in preparation for the coming of *maintenant* and the physical death it contains. He is opening himself to the world of the objects of materiality on the basis of equality, providing them with a language by which they can speak themselves to him and to the world. This discourse establishes their identity and his personal integrity, which will sustain him in the face of the eventual coming of death. Through this discourse, raised to a level of spiritual incantation, he heals the old emotional rupture with the mother, transforming their relationship to one of poetic wholeness and harmony. The changes the poet undergoes are accompanied by a feeling of *jouissance* that seems to put to rest his former alienation and his fear of death, which he no longer conceives as permanent obliteration because it has been transformed into the permanence of his poetry.

## *REQUIEM*

### **Guillevic's new poetic self**

*Requiem* is Guillevic's first, small collection of six poems, published in 1938 and never republished, nor included later in *Terraqué*. Jean Tortel questions that decision:

Il [Guillevic] ne la [la plaquette *Requiem*] reprendra pas dans *Terraqué*, par scrupule d'expression. "Ces poèmes", dit-il, "me paraissaient gauches, maladroits, pas ronds." Scrupule excessif, car plusieurs des poèmes de la suite, et notamment *Fourmi* s'égalent à ses meilleurs et contiennent déjà tout l'espace qui sera, plus tard, Guillevic. A tous égards, *Requiem* est un texte très important, et annonciateur. (Tortel 1962: 63)

Guillevic himself reevaluates the poems in 1979:

Ce *Requiem* compte pour moi en tant que tournant dans ma pensée et en tant que début de mon oeuvre poétique. (GH, 46)

The collection is indeed "annonciateur" because it introduces most of Guillevic's major themes: personal alienation and fragmentation of the self and the complex links between that alienation and fragmentation; his preoccupation with materiality, the erotic, death and ecology, and the relationship between these themes and the theme of the maternal, which draws on his relationship with his own mother. It is a "tournant", because it marks Guillevic's turn to materialism. Guillevic notes this turn to materialism in the interview with Charles Haroche:

*Requiem* témoigne de l'influence de mes lectures d'alors et surtout des lectures des oeuvres de Karl Marx vers 1936-1937. Il réunit mes premiers poèmes d'inspiration matérialiste [...]. (GH, 46)



Elsewhere he notes the great joy that the newfound Marxism and materialism provided for the writing of *Requiem*:

Ce sont huit poèmes sur la mort de végétaux et d'animaux, poèmes écrits avec une grande joie en 1935-36, après ma première lecture de Marx. (CP, 53-54)<sup>1</sup>

There appears to be a double incongruity in Guillevic's "joyful turn" to materialism. One is thematic in character: The poet seems to experience "une grande joie" when writing obsessively about death and physical decay. What, however, generates the joy is his finding in materialism a philosophical foundation for his new poetic self. The other incongruity is historical because in one sense the "materialism" of *Requiem* is not a break from the poetry he wrote before 1936-37. It can be argued that well before 1936 his poetry was anchored in images of material objects and concrete phenomena of nature. They feature prominently already in "Choses":

Les textes les plus anciens qu'on trouve dans *Terraqué* doivent dater du début des années 30: ce sont des poèmes de la partie *Choses*. (CP, 54)

Daix argues that in the late 1920s Guillevic was influenced by German symbolist and romantic poets, especially Rilke (Daix 1954: 50), who wrote three long poems titled *Requiem*. Rilke also frequently refers to "things" [*Dinge*] in his poetry and even invokes God as "you thing of things" ("du Ding der Dinge") (Rilke 1955: 265). Moreover, the poet claims that his attachment to material objects dates to his childhood:

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<sup>1</sup> There is some confusion about how many poems *Requiem* contains. Guillevic himself is ambiguous in the matter. He calls the anthology "un feuillet de huit pages" (CP, 53 and VP, 97), without giving the number of the poems, but in one of these sources he specifies the number as eight: "Ce sont huit poèmes [...]" (CP, 53-54). Pierrot refers to "les cinq textes de *Requiem* (1938)" (Pierrot 1984: 10) and to "une brève plaquette de huit pages" (*ibid.* 254). Bowd writes about "une plaquette de huit poèmes, *Requiem*" (Bowd 1992 a: 11). A reprint of *Requiem* in *Lire Guillevic* (1983) contains six poems. A copy of the original edition of *Requiem* obtained from the Bibliothèque Nationale consists of eight sheets of paper, each printed on one side only, containing two title pages and six poems. Guillevic's reference to eight poems in the interview quoted appears then to be a slip of the tongue.

[...] enfant je me suis réfugié auprès des objets, étant donné les conditions malheureuses dans lesquelles je vivais souvent, les objets ne me mordaient pas, ne me giflaient pas, ne m'agressaient pas, j'avais là des amis - (CP, 81)

The break with the past, which initiates Guillevic's new poetic self, comes in his espousal of the material world outside any transcendental religious faith: "Avant je n'écrivais rien de durable, parce que je mettais Dieu partout, dans le ciel, sur la terre, dans les arbres, etc" (GH, 46).

*Requiem*, with its clear allusion to the Mass and the prayer for the souls of the dead, the most solemn ritual of Catholic liturgy – "Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine" – can be taken as a sincere prayer for peace and resurrection of dying and dead plants and animals. They have no self to lose in death and the prayer glorifies their vitality, the joy of their existence and their repeated and eternal regeneration as species. On the other hand, the religious allusions of *Requiem* may be considered subversive. It rejects God and a self that appeals to God, embodying itself in the ritual language of liturgical Latin. But rather than being left with the nothing but death – an obsessive theme of this collection and of greater part of Guillevic's work – he now faces death as a compound of materiality, founded in and founding a cycle of life. Death is seen in a quasi-Freudian sense where the existence of all living organisms is subject to irresistible entropy and "the aim of all life is death" (Freud 1961: 32) without any transcendental element. Death results from "the most universal endeavour of all living substance – namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world" (Freud 1961: 56).

But Guillevic does not find peace in that quiescence and if his poetry is a "prayer" for the material world in which he is engaged, that prayer seeks salvation in an eternity that is cyclic and regenerative. Guillevic's "joy" is in the affirmation of the sacredness of the materiality of life which the prayer can maintain, its performance representing and celebrating the beauty and erotic vitality of the material. He, however, fears self-loss in death and therefore death itself, which excludes and alienates him from the experience of *jouissance* of the material world. *Requiem* is then also a prayer for peace from that exclusion,

for its transformation, and restoration of the *jouissance*, but the language of this prayer of his poetry does not yet exist. The prayer attempts to speak what has been, and will continue to be, for him the unspeakable previously held back in the heretofore rejected material world. It is the unspeakable of personal experience and of human experience of being in the world, rather than being only an observer. Language to symbolize and transform this experience of alienation from the death and the erotic of materiality, including his own, is being sought and fashioned by an effort that is ceaselessly repeated like a prayer. *Requiem* is then also "annonciateur" of this prayer, this poetic performance, which runs through all Guillevic's work attempting to transform the unspeakable into speech to bring peace to the poet's mind. It is unending work in and on language that aims at being included in the spectacle of life and death, work for which he later coins a metaphor of the *piste*: "Je me vois en piste,/Toujours" (*Mt*, 27).

As a speaker embodied in language, the poet speaks in two voices. In all the poems of *Requiem* he assumes the rôle of an objective, impersonal observer of a simple process of life and death of plants and animals with death being finally dominant. Viewing this life and death process from his newly acquired perspective of philosophical materialism, the poet/observer depicts the plants and animals accepting sex and death as natural constituents of a cycle of material regeneration of their species in the world. The observations constitute an explicit discourse, which appears to be unrelated to the human world or the intimate world of the speaking subject. The poems indicate that death is the dominant force in the world and the speaker reveals, largely by implication, that he finds sex and death deeply disturbing. In opposition to the phenomena of the explicit discourse, the world of the human and specifically the speaking subject is always present in the subtext of these poems. They "announce" that this will also be so in most of Guillevic's poetry to come. The subtext forms the implied discourse of the poems, which cries out against the experience of sex being troubling and against obliteration of self in death, which it finds unacceptable and unspeakable.

### Plants: sex, death and the mother

The topic of all six poems of *Requiem* is death and decay of plants, insects and animals as part of the natural erotic cycle of regeneration. The erotic aspect of the cycle of life renewal is generally given less prominence than the agency of death and this is what happens in the first poem, which begins and ends on the idea of death. The subtext of the poem reveals that the subject embodied in language has difficulties in accepting in his own intimate world the role which sex and death play in the physical world.

#### BRUYÈRE

Un brin seul  
Sous les pins se dessèche.

Le reste par milliers  
S'offre encore aux abeilles,  
Offre encore sa couleur  
Au jour gris. (R, 1)

The opening two lines of the poem introduce death in the image of a single, isolated drying stalk of a wildflower, dwarfed by a dark funereal canopy of towering pine trees. This individualization of death introduces the human subtext of the poem in the fear of the speaking subject that he will one day face self-loss in death alone. The dying flower is contrasted by thousands of similar flowers that are still flowering as the subject, when close to death, will be aware of all the living. The erotic profusion of life appears to be overwhelming, but it is only an appearance of temporary duration. The nature of their existence is ephemeral, implied in the death of one, while the others are already offering their life, "couleur", to death in the form of "jour gris". The word "encore", meaning here "still", is repeated twice to emphasize that the flowers are still alive, but are all about to die as autumn and death, "jour gris", have come. The thematic structure of the poem appears to be evenly balanced with three lines

signifying death against three lines of erotic activity of life because the last line belongs semantically to the darkness of death under the pine trees. Each of the two sets of three lines contains signifiers of death and life respectively. Death is suggested by "seul", "se dessèche" and "jour gris", while life draws on vibrant images of a living multitude and colour of the "milliers", which offer themselves bodily - "encore"/*en corps* - both to fertilization and death.

The apparent balance of three lines against three is subverted in turn graphically as the erotic lines 3-5 are enclosed and hemmed in by the opening couplet and line 6, all representing death. The subversion is magnified by the implied presence of the last line, "Au jour gris", in every line of the poem, including the title, which may be read as "Bruyère *au jour gris*", that is "Heathland of Death". Such a reading of the poem means that the feelings of the speaking subject revealed in the subtext are more depressed by the blanketing prospect of death rather than cheered by the erotic, life-sustaining activity of the flowers. However, the explicit text of the poem conveys a message that permanent death is not the fate of the wildflowers. Their drift to death is arrested by the power of erotic imagery of two lines: "Le reste par milliers/S'offre encore aux abeilles", which transform the threat of death into a vision of life. In the world of the flowers the erotic force triumphs over their apparent death so that resurrection prayed for by people in a requiem becomes a material certainty for the flowers the following spring. Such a conclusion of hope gives no consolation to the speaker, who lives in a different world and whose implied discourse speaks fear of his self-loss in death.

Dying is represented through apparently detached, impersonal observation as a painless but implacable progression of natural forces beyond anyone's control. In contrast, the observation of the living flowers, although still impersonal in form, is charged with colour, erotic energy and activity in "S'offre" and "offre", giving the impression that the flowers are alive and in control of their existence. However, the singularity of the noun "le reste" indicates that the flowers are not acting as individuals. They are subsumed in the collective and the erotic force that drives them is that of their species. The

flowers, which are decorative sexual organs of their plants, offer themselves first to bees in an erotic gesture older than mankind. Great intensity is added to this image by their numbers, "par milliers", while the word "encore" also suggests that they do it as a body - *en corps*. The repetition of the words "offre encore" acquires, in the context of this erotic activity, an orgasmic suggestion of again and again. They offer themselves both to regeneration of their life - "aux abeilles" - and to death - "Aux jour gris" - that is an inevitable path to it. The repeated offer can be taken both as a gesture of defiance of death and the acceptance of it in the assurance of their rebirth the next spring albeit not as individuals, but as a species. The term "requiem" can be then figuratively applied even to the world of vegetation in its continuous cycle of death and rebirth. Requiem is a prayer for peace after death with the implication of ultimate resurrection and eternal life so that the flowers are figuratively asking for death in a demand for peace, knowing that on their death an erotic spark of life is left over to eventually revivify them as a species. Further, their need of rest and peace is well justified because during the warm part of the year they have been driven by relentless and exhausting forces of fertility - "encore" and "encore" - that dominate their existence. At the same time the imagery of death that pervades the poem suggests that they are afraid of death as individual plants and that by offering themselves to the "jour gris", they would be able to somehow placate it. Consequently they offer themselves to death "encore" and "encore", in a frenzied erotic activity of *une petite mort* which intensifies life, but also exhausts it, leading to a death which is real for their generation. What the poet then is "praying for" in this requiem is not the eternal peace of individual soul for which Christians pray, but rather a temporary peace of an erotic force that generates an ecological process of renewal of life.

The poet's materialist perspective of the world adopted in *Requiem* promotes what appears to be a detached, impersonal representation of the material world. The third person narrative of the poem signals the speaking subject as a would-be objective observer of organisms, which have for millennia undergone, without any feeling of fear and pleasure, a repeated

lifecycle of death and sexual regeneration of life. The speaker's own materiality places him in the same material world, but his human individual self-consciousness, which contains sexual desire and fear of death, excludes him from that world. The vivid representation of the sexual activity and dying of the flowers reveals the speaker's preoccupation with sex and death, the two fundamental drives of human life, indicating that he is personally involved in the scene he represents. This scene does not belong only to the world of the flowers because its subtext reveals the intimate world of the sexual desire and the fear of death of the speaking subject. His erotic desire and his fear of death remained unspoken and unspeakable until now when he begins to symbolize them in the subtext of the poem through the metaphoric language of the dying and mating of the flowers and the elaborate typographical structure of the text. He shows himself diffident in the face of the two basic facts of life through an indirectness of their representation. Death is only implied in the images of the "jour gris" and the drying stalk, which has also the sexual connotation of a withering phallus. Sex is concealed behind a two-tier figurative structure of the flowers. First, the word flowers is hidden by the metonymy "couleur" and then, the reality of a flower as a sexual organ of plants is only implied. He admires the flowers offering themselves both "encore" and *en corps*, first "aux abeilles" in an erotic demand of fertilization, then offering themselves to death, the "jour gris", by the same orgasmic gesture of "encore". They accept both sex and death and are thus included in the natural cycle of life and death, but the speaking subject begins and ends the poem on death because he does not accept the cycle. For him it is the "jour gris" which takes what the flowers offer and he does not renew the cycle here, but suspends it at the point of death, as if death might take all in the end.

The speaker/observer tries to conceal the attraction of the erotic gestures of the flowers from himself, from the desire of his "body", his *corps* of the "encore", by the indirectness of the imagery. However, the erotic language of the poem and the insistence of the repeated "offre encore", subvert that concealment and betray the ambivalence of his feelings towards sex and death.

The attempt at concealment of the erotic in the poem's imagery reveals the poet's fear of the erotic and his exclusion from the erotic activity of life of offering and accepting. Paradoxically, his fear and his avoiding of death drives him towards a kind of emotional death so that the solitary "brin" which is drying up is a figure of the body of the poet himself, isolated on the page from the "reste", the body of the flowers. The requiem in this context may be a prayer for the repose of the poet's erotic desire, which cannot find expression in this world. He does not want to commit himself fully to a world that unavoidably contains both death and sex, remaining excluded from full life. He therefore attempts to approach materiality only as a detached observer while his unspeakable desire of re-inclusion forms the subtext and implicit discourse of the poem.

Beginning and ending the poem on imminent death reveals that the poet is, at the time, more preoccupied with physical death than with life. Both *eros* and *thanatos* are fundamental components of the materiality of life. Vegetation and animals escape total annihilation in death through the cycle of death and rebirth, but this is only survival of the species, not of individuals. The problem for the human individual - the poet here - is self-loss in death. Indeed, Guillevic never considers in his poetry the continuation of his life through his descendants. In this poem the poet is also saying a requiem for his desire, in the sense of farewelling any hope of his engaging fully in material life as if his demand for the peace, which such an engagement would bring, cannot be granted. As a materialist poet he faces the problem that identification with the material does not preclude self-loss in death and consequently he remains fundamentally alienated from the material world.

The explicit discourse of the poem "Pin" represents first death and devastation in nature, which is followed by a contrasting picture of erotic activity, wellbeing and regeneration. However, the death and degradation of the first part of the poem is represented in images that have human and specifically maternal character in "matrice" and premature birth. These images point to an



implicit discourse revealing the speaker's preoccupation with the flawed relationship between himself and his mother, which remains an important theme of his later poetry. That the relationship is obsessively fundamental is stated by Guillevie in public interviews, for example in 1982: "Ma mère était une mère bourreau, castratrice comme on dit aujourd'hui, une mère mauvaise..." (CP, 23).

### PIN

Un pin est mort

Sur une terre avare de sang,  
Comme arrachée de la matrice  
Avant le terme.

La bruyère s'étale,  
Les insectes s'affairent,  
L'herbe croît.

Ce n'est qu'une blessure  
A la lisière du bois. (R. 2)

The interest of the poem is first focused on the isolated, dead pine tree introduced by a bare factual statement of the first line. The typographical layout of the poem detaches the opening line visually, but not syntactically, from the lines that follow to emphasize the importance of the line as the source of two parallel poetic discourses. One is the explicit discourse, set in the material world of nature, where the dead pine tree is in death firstly separated from the impoverished ground it grew on. Further, it is separated from the profusion of erotic life activity of the heathland, to which it in life belonged. The syntax moves over the typographical divide to the following three lines depicting a piece of barren, lifeless earth in which the tree has died and which caused its death. The earth was "avare de sang", an image that offers two possible meanings: the earth was the cause of the death because it lacked nutrients to sustain the life of the tree, or the earth was "thirsty" for the blood/nutrients and

actively withdrew them. The earth that was supposed to nourish the tree was metaphorically its mother, but *une mère en manque* because it was itself torn out prematurely from the womb, "arrachée de la matrice", of its own mother earth "Avant le terme". The deficiency of the earth had fatal consequences for the pine tree, but in the world of plants its death was common as the factual statement of the first line "Un pin est mort" indicates. According to the concluding lines of the poem, the death was not very significant either because it was part of a wider life cycle of death and regeneration. The regeneration is represented by images of erotic fertility and wellbeing in the following three lines. In these lines the stretching out of the heathland, "La bruyère s'étale", has erotic, sensual connotation. "Les insectes s'affairent" means that their business is to produce more insects. Finally, "L'herbe croît" is a powerful erotic assertion of thousands of blades of grass against the forces of death that occurs around and over the "terre avare de sang". The explicit discourse of the poem represents the working of the natural cycle of death and regeneration, which reduces the death of the pine tree to relative insignificance. The conclusion of the poem makes this death peripheral to the life cycle as only a wound on the edge of the wood, which contains many live trees of the same species. "C'est qu'une blessure" implies that it is only a small wound that becomes healed in a short time so that natural balance and harmony are restored because they were not seriously disturbed. However, the intimate human world of the speaker cannot accept such a balance of sex and death.

The refusal to accept this balance finds expression in the imagery of the three lines that describe the earth on which stands the dead pine tree. The horror of these images subverts fundamentally the harmonious vision of the explicit discourse and introduces a troubled intimate vision and discourse of the speaking subject. Thirst for blood and being torn out of the womb prematurely do not belong to the world of plants, and their violence is unnecessary to depict the death of a tree. Moreover, their shocking nature and impact destroy the possibility of final harmony of the scene because the blood and the premature tearing out of the womb constitute a wound that is not superficial, but one that

festers forever. These images belong to the human world and specifically to the intimate world of the speaking subject. He figures in the image of the dead pine tree whose desolation is singled out to figure, as the poem further shows, not physical death alone, but a man's emotional castration. In the context of the sexual imagery of the poem, the tree becomes a phallic symbol of castrated maleness. The other human presence in the poem is clearly indicated as being a mother by the imagery of the womb, "la matrice", and of the premature birth, "Avant le terme". She is a bad mother, herself born in violence, "unmothered". The piece of earth on which the phallic pine tree grew and now stands dead, represents then the mother of the tree and of the speaker, and this imagery constitutes a mother and son relationship, which denies rather than promotes life.

The central image and concept of the implied discourse of the poem is that of castration leading to erotic emptiness and devastation both for the son and the mother. Castration in psychoanalytical terms has been defined by Lacan as follows: "La castration veut dire qu'il faut que la jouissance soit refusée, pour qu'elle puisse être atteinte sur l'échelle renversée de la Loi du désir" (Lacan 1966: 817). This normally means Oedipal separation between a mother and a son, but in this poem the refusal of *jouissance* was a refusal by the mother of the pleasure of maternal affection desired by the son, the pine tree, as well as renunciation of it for herself. In either case the mother is figured as the source and the agent of the action of the refusal that initiates a trail of erotic devastation running through the speaker's life. The castration imagery breaks into the orderly progress and harmony of the explicit discourse of the poem through language that has the stamp of repressed, unspeakable symbols of the unconscious. This language initiates the implicit, intimate discourse of the poem founded on the flawed relationship between the speaker embodied in the language and his mother. That discourse turns the minor, peripheral wound, denied in the surface discourse of the text as serious, into profound personal devastation. During Guillevic's childhood this relationship was not only one of her withdrawal of maternal affection, but also of open hostility towards him.

The mother was to him "une terre avare de sang", a metaphor that gives two meanings to the nature of the mother and son relationship. First, the mother was bloodless or lacking in blood, that is in emotional warmth and support for the tree/son and was therefore *une mère en manque*. Second, she was bloodthirsty for the lifeblood of the son, which she drained from him in the act of hostile castration. Later poetry, for example "Mère aux larmes brûlantes" (7, 45), specifies her hostility as hatred of maleness.

The piece of earth that represents the mother is not only hostile and destructive to the son, but also to herself because the earth is itself bloodless, or lacking in blood, "avare de sang". The figurative level of the state of the desolated piece of earth is insisted on by its not being really torn out, but looking as if it were torn out, "Comme arrachée", from the womb, "de la matrice", of its own mother - "mother earth" - by an event taking place before the normal end of pregnancy, "Avant le terme". This means premature birth and being born by being "arrachée" suggests a violent and traumatic separation from mother earth. Such forced separation figures alienation from the erotic life forces of materiality, suggesting incompleteness and immaturity of the mother. She was "arrachée" by an unspecified agency, which forced onto her erotic alienation and emotional castration, resulting in exclusion from the erotic, life-sustaining processes of her own mother, the wider earth. In this two-tier relationship of son to mother and mother to mother earth, the progression towards emotional death is not given in terms of physical causes, like desiccation, but in images of erotic mutilation, which no longer sustains life, but belongs to the realm of sado-masochism. In the words of Freud, such sexuality has gone "beyond the pleasure principle" (Freud 1961), or its pleasure is not simply erotic, and in effect embraces a drive towards death.

The three lines of erotic mutilation are followed by three lines of erotic life-generating activity and a peaceful conclusion, which all seem to belong to the material, explicit discourse. However, in the personal discourse they have the role of offering to the traumatized speaker a vision of a wider world than his own, in which suffering, death and renewal of life rise above personal

experience to be meaningful as part of wider processes of materiality. For the speaker, whose life experience is personal, unique and painful to the point of being unspeakable, there is an implied warning in these lines that those who remain alienated from these erotic forces drive themselves towards living death. He seems to be heeding the warning because he approaches and articulates his unspeakable experience through the symbols of the unconscious to initiate a metaphoric shift towards deterritorializing his anxieties.

### Of insects and exclusion

In "Hanneton" the speaker examines again the role of death and the erotic both in the material world and in his own intimate world. The empty, fragile shell of a dead maybug gradually makes him aware of the emptiness of his own emotional life.

#### HANNETON

Ce n'est plus  
Qu'un schéma d'insecte, une épluchure du corps  
Qui travaillait le chêne.

Ce corps, un jour s'est arrêté de bouger;  
Le vent, la pluie  
Ont emporté dans le vrombissement du champ  
Les débris de son ventre ouvert.

Sur l'herbe jaune au pied du chêne,  
Reste une carcasse diaphane  
Que la rosée pourra remplir.  
- Pourquoi ressusciter?  
Va, tout se fait sans toi et le froment mûrit:  
Un couple s'est aimé au pied de l'arbre,  
On voit dans l'herbe la forme de la femme  
Et la marque des pieds de l'homme.

Au sommet de l'été, il ne restera rien  
A quoi te reconnaître.

(R, 4)

The maybug had a brief life and a peaceful, natural death: "Ce corps, un jour s'est arrêté de bouger". Eleven lines of detailed description of the appearance and state of the dead insect are opposed by six lines of erotic activity of animals, plants and of human beings. The empty "peel" of its body, "une épluchure", is almost a no-thing, but it speaks itself powerfully through the images of "un schéma d'insecte", "Les débris de son ventre ouvert", and "une carcasse diaphane". The "débris" of its abdomen, that is of its vital organs, have been carried by rain and wind back to the site of the life and erotic activity of the maybug, the "vrombissement du champ". The field that hums and buzzes with erotic activity, and the minuscule cadaver of unsubstantial form and weight, both weigh heavily on the poet's imagination. The explicit text of the poem returns compulsively to the almost nothingness of a lifeless, thin, translucent shell of the body, insisting on the insignificance of its appearance, but the speaker cannot dismiss it from his mind. The insistence and repetition point to the existence of a subtext of the speaking subject's erotic and existential anxiety generated by a comparison of his life with that of the insect. He is filled with wonder that what is now a tiny peel of a body, lived a full, satisfying life, leaving behind progeny to continue that life, while he himself has lived a life of exclusion from such existence.

This slight remnant of the beetle's body rests at the foot of an oaktree and dew will be able to fill it: "Reste une carcasse diaphane/Que la rosée pourra emplir". A syntactic shift to the future tense signals a shift to the speaker's thoughts about his own future and to the question of transcendence of death. He pauses to reflect on the image of the carcass filled with dew, which makes it appear to be alive and introduces the idea of resurrection after death. However, the speaker immediately rejects the idea of its resurrection, of a revival of life, by asking a rhetorical question that shows him thinking through the locus of the dead beetle - meditating on it and using it as a metaphor of self: "- Pourquoi ressusciter?" The implied answer to the question is that resurrection of the bug does not make any sense because insects have no self or individuality to

preserve. It is only human beings, who face self-loss in death, who wish to preserve their individuality for eternity. Reviving the beetle would serve no purpose because it has lived a full life that was meaningful and came to a natural end that was expected and accepted in its world. However, the imagined shell-like body filled with dew is going to sparkle in the sunlight like a precious jewel, speaking itself as a beautiful emblem that celebrates the insect's past life as being meaningful and in harmony with nature.

In the following line the poet dismisses the maybug, addressing it by the familiar "toi" as a member of a superior species, who refuses to accept a fate in death similar to that of the insect. He sends it on its way to oblivion with the line "Va, tout se fait sans toi", in which "tout" signifies life of erotic activity, in which the bug had participated, in the "vrombissement du champ". Having fulfilled its erotic role in its world, the insect has now become irrelevant to anything alive and by the middle of summer there will remain nothing by which to recognize that it ever lived: "il ne restera rien/A quoi te reconnaître". The limitation of the life and the fate of the bug is that it lacked individuality. It does not therefore suffer self-loss in death and its progeny will be its true replicas representing both it and the species.

So much elaboration and appreciation of a trite and common occurrence that is the death of a maybug draw attention to the observer's implied presence and involvement in the proceedings. All that now remains is the speaker's memory of the insect and once this happens, the "toi" ceases to stand for the maybug and begins to mean the holder of the memory, the speaking subject himself. He is not only the observer, but also the observed of the poem, and is of necessity present in it, not just on the level of insects, but on a human level, which is represented by three lines of evidence of human sexual activity. He belongs to the world of the human lovers, "Un couple s'est aimé au pied de l'arbre", whose traces in the grass he observes and with whom he forms the human erotic component of the scene. His erotic role, though, is rather negative because he is neither one of the lovers, nor does he dare to see them in the flesh, but prefers to observe their imprints in the grass after their departure. The

implication of such evidence is that he himself has not lived a full and satisfying life, remaining only an observer of the lives of others. The human lovers participate in the "tout" of the fullness of life, unlike the speaker, and their life will continue in their children. They can therefore die in peace, just like the maybug, but to the speaker, whose "je" is hidden in the "on voit", now applies the dismissal "tout se fait sans toi". He hasn't lived fully and is threatened with death that is absolute.

The transition to the human level is introduced by the preceding line, "Va, tout se fait sans toi et le froment mûrit". This line was firstly a dismissal of the dead maybug's flimsy presence from its own world, but because the line is syntactically connected to the following line by a colon, it acquires a new significance as an address of the speaker to himself which says "look at what has happened in the grass". The human sexual activity occurred in the grass under the oak tree, which was the last resting place of the maybug, replacing a fact of death by an act of life, and the poet is the only one to observe and understand the evidence of it. The colon of the introductory line draws and connects him to what he observes, but his observation is expressed in impersonal terms of "on voit" and "Un couple [qui] s'est aimé", by which he is attempting to distance himself from the scene. However, the effort at detaching himself betrays his attempt to hide his fearful "je" in the "on" and reveals him as a second degree voyeur who does not dare to see the lovers themselves but only their traces in the grass. His non-engagement with, and fear of, the erotic emphasizes his sexual emptiness and exclusion from the fullness of life. There is a note of wistfulness and regret in "tout se fait sans toi" suggesting that he does not, but would like to participate. His disconnection and alienation from the erotic life force of materiality into which both the maybug and the lovers enter, drive him towards preoccupation with death throughout the poem, in which he repeatedly and compulsively examines and depicts the remains of the dead insect whose life he finds more meaningful than his own. Finding traces of human erotic activity, from which he is excluded, is another blow to the speaker that reduces his vision of himself in the final couplet of the poem to images of



death and nothingness. The last couplet, "Au sommet de l'été, il ne restera rien/A quoi te reconnaître," applies literally to the physical remains of the maybug, but not to its life. However, the body shell of the beetle, sparkling with dew, now speaks itself as a figure of the possibility of a full life of the poet/observer. So far he has not fully engaged in life, which he finds, in comparison with that of the *humeton*, meaningless. Through the bug he addresses himself and, unless he transforms his life, in the ripeness of his time before he becomes old and approaches death. "Au sommet de l'été", there will be nothing, "rien", left of him: no progeny, no trace, not even dew for his cadaver, nothing "à quoi te reconnaître", nothing by which to tell that he ever lived.

The poem "Fourmi" is quite explicitly ecological in the conventional sense of the term because it tackles the basis of humanity's destructiveness by which it "excludes" other species, not just from full life, but from life itself. Dislike and killing of ants is taken as an example of arrogant conviction that people have divine, or some other, right to dominate the world and destroy "lesser" species.

#### FOURMI

Parle-t-on  
D'un cadavre de fourmi?  
Cadavre à peine  
Sur l'herbe verte...

Le monde  
A été fait pour l'homme - on le sait bien.  
Étouffons  
Les erreurs de la providence.

Affreuses choses qui grouillent  
Hors de la sympathie des hommes,  
Il faut en référer au ciel.

Ah! plus grandes un millier de fois

Et portant le fusil,  
Vous seriez dignes de l'estime

Au lieu de l'eau bouillante. (R, 6)

In this poem Guillevie develops his discourse not by means of statements, but by constructing an elaborate poetic performance as a series of speech acts in several voices, which variously address the reader. In the course of the performance, the speaking subject assumes roles and voices, which for the greater part of the text ostensibly defend the actions and attitudes of some people's hatred of ants. This rhetoric promotes their views as being the speaker's own, but his speech is charged with detectable irony, which exposes the assumptions, motives and prejudices of the ant killers. This process of ironic subversion is re-confirmed in the final address of the poem to the ants, which emphatically takes their side. The performance constitutes an ecological argument in favour of toleration of not only ants, but all living creatures, and reveals the poet's ecological commitment.

The first two lines of the first verse - "Parle-t-on/D'un cadavre de fourmi?" - ask a provocative question and suggest some ambiguity about the position of the speaker. The irony of the first verse as a whole, manifest specially in "Cadavre à peine", at this stage clearly distances the speaker from the pronoun "on", which therefore means "they", that is people who hate ants. In the second verse, "on le sait bien" indicates a shift in the speaker's voice towards his ostensible inclusion in the collective of the human ant enemies. That shift is made explicit in the following *nous* of "l'étouffons", which includes the speaker. In the poem, the speaker keeps shifting from inclusion to exclusion in the collective while the irony of his voice enables him to maintain a critical distance from the position he takes. The argument of the first verse raises the question whether a dead ant is considered a dead body - "un cadavre". The answer to that question is a denial given by the voice of the speaker, speaking for, and to, the ant killers as one of them, exposing their thoughts. In "Cadavre à peine", "à peine" is as good as "no", so that there is no dead body, meaning

there was no living body, therefore nobody (no body of anybody) was killed. No body means no killing and no crime. Here, hypocrisy of the human group is added to their killing lust.

The insecticidal people may have some scruples about admitting that killing is wrong, but the speaker anticipates them by offering, as one of them, a defence drawing on their firmly held - "on le sait bien" - religious convictions. The allusion to the firm conviction is rather ironic because it may be based on inaccurate and biased interpretation. The argument of the lines "Le monde/A été fait pour l'homme - on le sait bien" implies the notion of "dominion" in the account by the Old Testament (*Genesis* 1, 28) of the creation of the world and of the humankind. This argument should reassure them, but the cutting irony of "on le sait bien" denounces those believers, who arrogantly interpret the notion of "dominion", as a right to exterminate. The irony further points to a contradiction in their faith between a loving "God" and one that they implicitly appeal to, to justify their cruelty.

In the lines "Etoifions/Les erreurs de la providence", the speaker adopts a new voice, which not only appears to make him one of the human community so that he can speak what they think, but by which he also assumes leadership. He now addresses these people with a war cry: "Etoifions". The cry exposes a logical extension of those believers' acceptance of "dominion" over other species as the right of extermination. The subtext of the lines reveals that their religious beliefs have turned them into sadistic killers. In the next verse the speaker advances the surface case against the ants by a new argument and a voice that, still pretending to speak for the people, directly addresses the ants. He charges them with being hideous and offensive to humanity and therefore deserving to be killed. His argument implies that the basis of human destructiveness of small living creatures like ants is a deep-seated horror of small, swarming, creeping animals, "Affreuses choses qui grouillez". People find them ugly, horrible and threatening to their desire of neatness, beauty and rational order of the civilized world. Such organisms seem to belong to the horror of a world of primeval chaos in nature, which their existence appears to

be reimposing on humanity. To protect itself, humanity believes that it must shut out this threat by wiping out, smothering such creatures. In the case of ants it means killing them by pouring boiling water into their nests. One implied line of defence against a possible charge that killing ants is cruel and wrong, is their small size. When an ant is dead, it is a "[e]cadavre à peine" and therefore it hardly had a body, hardly suffered and it is hardly a crime. But the killers feel they do something wrong because the speaker in his mock defence draws on common justifications of their actions. The ironic subtext of the poem indicates that all such justifications reveal human fear and intolerance of what is different, that they serve to justify human sadistic drives, and that their results are destructive.

In the last four lines of the poem, the speaker's voice addresses the ants directly again – *Vous seriez dignes de l'estime* – but abandoning his former role of voicing – but in fact ironically ventriloquizing – the views of a certain section of humanity, he takes up openly the cause of the ants. He concludes that humanity is callous to the small and the different and will persecute them unless prevented by the same violent means, which it itself employs: Ants would be respected only if they were a thousand times bigger and armed with guns. Contrary to the other poems of *Requiem*, in this one the natural cycle of death and life is disturbed by human agency and the poem does not draw on the experience of the speaker's intimate world. Its dominant drive is that of personal and ideological commitment to world ecologic. | harmony.

### **Animals: death and beyond**

The squirrel is an animal abounding with energetic movement and vitality that represent the very opposite of the quietude of death. Yet in death its movement will cease and the animal will decay. The speaker reflects sombrely that this is the fate of all life, including his own, in spite of appearance to the contrary during lifetime.

## ÉPIQUE.

Il ne faudra pas beaucoup de soleil  
 Pour te dessécher.  
 Pas beaucoup de mouches dans l'ombre des pins  
 Pour sucer ta chair.

Être agile et savoir jouer  
 Pourrait durer - ne dure pas. (R. 5)

The future tense of "Il ne faudra pas" indicates that the speaker's sombre reflection is inspired by his observing a squirrel that is alive and playful, one full of "savoir jouer". It is precisely this abundance of the animal's erotic life force that drives him to his sombre conclusion because it is quite incongruous with the state of death. The speaker is impressed by the squirrel's agility and its ability of "savoir jouer". This means not only playing the game of life and enjoying its pleasures, but also being good at it. "Jouer" itself is not far removed from *jouir* and *jouissance* and the poet's choice of the word with these erotic connotations reveals the erotic intensity of the squirrel's life and the speaker's admiration for such a life. The vital qualities of the squirrel are so striking, and the animal is so full of energy during its lifetime that one could be deceived into thinking that this animated specimen of materiality could resist death, and last: "Pourrait durer". However, the explicit discourse of the poem devotes only one line to such a celebration of life, while the remaining five lines are devoted to decay and death. The conclusion, "ne dure pas", is not really surprising, but its syntactic terseness comes with the force of a shock. The fate of the animal as an individual is unavoidable: it will die and the small carcass will be desiccated by a little sunshine and its flesh sucked dry by a few flies. However, it will continue to exist as a species and it will pass its life force to its progeny, but in this poem the speaker does not consider this alternative of life renewal.

The impersonal narrative of "Il ne faudra pas" and infinitives "Être agile et savoir jouer" reveal the speaking subject as an observer/outsider who is

emotionally excluded from the erotic *jouissance* of material existence, in which the animal rejoiced. His concentration on the unpleasant aspects of the squirrel's death points to a subtext revealing his intimate world of fear of, and obsession with, death, which alienates him from that *jouissance*. This implicit discourse signals that the squirrel's fate is repugnant to him and the solemn conclusion of the last two lines takes up the desirability of continuation of the erotic life force beyond death. The agility and *jouissance* of life of the squirrel, "Être agile et savoir jouer", is generalized by the infinitive "Être" to the human world of the speaker. "Pourrait durer" points at the desirability of shutting out death and obliteration even if it is only temporarily, by engaging in life because the vital erotic force of materiality is so precious that it should be experienced. In the end it does not last permanently, "ne dure pas", neither for the squirrel nor for humanity, except that the animal and most people at least experienced the *jouissance* of life and passed the erotic life force to their descendants. This is the sense in which it could last for the speaking subject, "Pourrait durer" *for him (if he tried to engage in life)*. But the elliptic conditional sentence means that he has not tried and can therefore contemplate only a life of emptiness.

The poem "Vache" has an ecological aspect in the sense that it depicts the death and recycling of the mineral elements of the dead cow's body. The cow undergoes a reincarnation of sorts, but the symbolic language, which represents the transformation of the horrible, putrefied body into bread, introduces an unpleasant note both to the ecological process and to her transformation, and reveals the poet's ambivalence about the consequences of his embracing philosophical materialism as his new world view.

#### VACHE

Pitoyable tas tiède au pied du mur croulant,  
Cet amas noir et blanc  
Eut un regard d'ami.

Mais ton oeil,

Au long du temps sans fin du pâturage et de l'étable,  
 N'a rien sans doute  
 Attendu d'autre que l'arrêt du mouvement

Où tu entras sans résistance.  
 Ton muflé pâle, doux à la paume,  
 Se fie à l'air du soir.

- Tu vas pourrir. Ce sera une chose horrible.  
 Nous la mangerons dans le pain  
 Après l'été. (R, 3)

The poem opens with an image that contrasts the pitiful, shapeless heap of the dying cow's flesh with the touching expression of her eyes. The repulsive state of its body is emphasized by the repetition of semantic, phonetic and graphic [as] features of "tas" and "amas". The body is no longer standing, having collapsed to the ground and having lost the form of a living animal. The word "tiède" confirms that she is dying or has just died being only tepid, cooling down as life is draining from her. The word "croulant" can be read either as a participle referring to the collapsing of the cow, and placed at the end of the line to rhyme with the word "blanc" of the following line, or as an adjective of "mur", meaning a crumbling wall. The reason for this rhyme, in a poet who rarely resorts to rhyming, associates "croulant", signifying dying and decay, with "blanc" meaning empty of life. This comparison associates the human world, whose failing, constructed world – the wall - is falling apart, with the cow whose life is failing. Moreover, the eyes of the cow were once alive and their look was friendly, that is almost human because friendship is a human notion: "Eut un regard d'ami." In the "regard d'ami", the cow and the poet are put on the same level, linked in a bond of an ecological community of all living creatures, in which friendship and goodwill transcend the purely material.

In such a community of friends, however, the various living creatures that comprise it are different and, according to the poet, have different awareness of the nature of their existence. The next two verses clarify the status of the cow, introducing a limitation to its membership of the community by a disjunctive conjunction, "Mais ton oeil". These lines revoke any suggestion of

transcendence, placing the cow squarely into the material world. Extending the image of the friendly regard to its source, the eyes of the cow, the poet specifies that behind those eyes was not a human mind and that, unlike human beings, she does not fear self-loss in death. She would not fight screaming and kicking against such a threat, nor accept death blissfully in hope of eternal life. The cow lived eternally in the time of here and now, the "temps sans fin du pâturage et de l'étable" and did not expect anything else but cessation of movement of her bodily functions, "l'arrêt du mouvement", which it accepted placidly. The animal did not fear death nor did it look forward and beyond its limited world to eternity, but only to the end of its time, accepting its participation in universal movement towards death, into which it slipped willingly, "Où tu entras sans résistance", and from which in its present form it will be transformed by physical decomposition. The cow will become humus, fertilizer, "blood and bone" and will be in a sense reincarnated in wheat and bread that people eat. This progression seems to be an ecological variant of the cycle of life and death that underlies most of the poems of *Requiem*. The cow belongs to the cycle because it must have produced progeny and now she willingly and confidently enters into the end phase of this material cycle, as in its dying moment its "mufle pâle, doux à la paume,/Se fie à l'air du soir".

The disjunctive conjunction "Mais" by implication also specifies the position of the poet in the material community as being different from that of the cow. He physically belongs to the material, but his existence also contains a metaphysical dimension of intellect and language by which he, during his lifetime, transcends his material condition. However, when it comes to dying, in spite of his newly-acquired materialist convictions, he does not accept his fate in the material cycle of life and death as confidently and willingly as the cow. In an implied rhyme, *mourir* becomes for him a very physical *pourrir* as "- Tu vas pourrir" applies both to the cow and to him and this implication becomes explicit further in "Ce sera une chose horrible". Whereas for the cow death is accepted as a natural and absolute end, for the poet, when it entails loss of identity or is devoid of spiritual transcendence, death becomes disgusting and



repulsive. It is here that the subtext of the poem becomes apparent: The speaking subject balks at becoming in death just another object of materiality.

The image of the eating of the bread in which the cow is naturally present - no ethereal transubstantiation here though - parallels the act of the Christian communion and for a philosophical materialist it should be a fitting and welcome introduction to the material community of this earth. Moreover, such a communion should be for the materialist poet a joyful event of transcendence of his death through becoming part of the common pool of the minerals of life and of the eternity of the material. However, the poet somewhat illogically rejects this possibility by representing the materialist communion - the eating of the bread in which the cow is naturally present - as an image of eating filth: "Ce sera une chose horrible". The sacrament of the Christian Eucharist is thoroughly subverted and rejected here. Not only that the poet rejects the idea of achieving transcendental communion with God through symbolic eating of His flesh, and thereby attaining eternal life, he also recoils from the eternity of the material in his repugnance for the transubstantiated body of the cow. He does not even consider continuation of his life in his descendants and finds himself in an ambiguous position of rejecting both the other possibilities. Yet, as the poem reveals, embracing materialism does not assuage the poet's longing for some form of metaphysical transcendence, nor does it deliver him from the fear of death that threatens him with self-loss. It is only later in his poetic career that he arrives at a conception of transcendence by language, one that may be achieved by forging poetry that will be "hard" and lasting, *dur*, poetry that will endure, *durer*, to carry his "spirit" beyond his physical death.

*Requiem* is indeed "un texte très important, et annonciateur" (Tortel 1962: 63) because it reveals Guillevic's new poetic self, his concrete poetic language and his main thematic concerns. *Requiem* has its own unique character, which it owes to the representation of plants and animals as dying, but also as having lived a full life and being reborn in their progeny. The speaker embodied in the language feels alienated and excluded from materiality

and its erotic processes, and rejected by his mother in childhood. He takes part not only in the scene of death, but also lays the foundations of the historical progression of the poetry as the poet's autography. In every poem there is a struggle between discourses, one in the world of plants and animals, one in the speaker's intimate world, each respectively representing life and death. His exclusion from the fullness of life appears to be almost complete, but he makes the cadavers the fabric of language to transform the experience of exclusion into re-inclusion. For him the prayer of a requiem means gaining peace and repose albeit not after death, but in life.

## TERRAQUÉ (I)

The son and the mother: "le cri de la déréllection"<sup>1</sup>

### *Terra, aqua and terror*

*Terraqué* is arguably the most diverse, complex and personal of all the poet's work. It takes up and amplifies all the themes announced and only briefly dealt with by *Requiem*, and engages with the themes of language and socialist realism. Especially important is the poetic fashioning of Guillevic's ecological views, whose moral and intellectual basis is argued out imaginatively and convincingly. Poetic discourse is not only an instrument of representation and transformation of a personal experience, but becomes for the poet a metalinguistic tool to examine its own effectiveness. The poet, as a subject embodied in language is always implicitly present in the dominant discourse of the impersonal third person, but sometimes reveals himself explicitly.

The title of the anthology signals the poet's engagement with the ambiguous materiality of the world, which nurtures him, claims him in death and with which he struggles to arrive at a better understanding of himself. The first, tentative title of these poems was *Argile* (VP, 97), which did not quite have the range of connotations of the two Latin words, *terra* and *aqua*, present in the definitive title adopted later and representing the two main elements that constitute the world. Fused together they form an amalgam, which makes up the soil of the world. The English word "soil" itself carries the ambiguity of the mixture of *terra* and *aqua*: On the one hand, it is the moist, fertile, life-supporting earth and, on the other hand, it is the foul dirt of putrefaction and decomposition of living matter into constituent minerals. The word *terraqué* also contains within its phonetic substance the word *traqué*, and Guillevic

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<sup>1</sup> Serge Gaubert 1987: 300.

admits that he actually thought of *Traqué* as a possible title for this collection. However, leafing through the *Petit Larousse*, he found the word *terraqué*, whose meaning was apparently not well known:

Bien des personnes ne connaissent pas le mot. Même Queneau qui savait tout m'a demandé ce qu'il voulait dire. Moi, j'avais pensé aussi à *traqué*. (VP, 127)<sup>1</sup>

Brophy suggests that the poet feels himself "traqué" by the elemental forces of the material world (Brophy 1993: 12) and the poetry of *Terraqué* confirms this view by often representing its world as a daunting place of stones, humus and dirty water, that is of forces that lay claim to human bodies in order to convert them to their constituent minerals. Guillevic is haunted by this threat as both the materiality of the world and his own pursue him with an offer of a full life that contains both the erotic and death, life that he not only fears but also desires. "Traqué", as a component of the passive voice, suggests that the poet as its subject undergoes an ordeal or a passion, which he shares with the world and with the language by which he tries to transform that ordeal. In his desire of a more harmonious life for himself, the material world and humanity, he is "tracking" language that will deterritorialize his ambiguous situation towards a more harmonious one, in which earth and water will form a nourishing substance to support life - a real *terreau*.

The word *terreau* is itself ambiguous, being close in sound to the Latin word *terror* (Brophy 1993: 12), inherent in the poet's view of some of the

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<sup>1</sup> Guillevic relates an anecdote that shows how the telescoping of the elemental of *terraqué* and of the atmosphere of fear and persecution of the times, generated *traqué*, adding an emotional dimension to the title. After the publication of *Terraqué* in 1942, Guillevic came across the poet Louis de Gonzague-Frick, who seemed to have read one word in the other. He remarked to Guillevic, "Cher poète, comme vous avez raison et comme nous sommes traqués" (VP, 128). Guillevic continues, remembering his *Résistance* activities:

Evidemment, traqués, nous l'étions! Moi, j'ai souvent eu peur, [...] quand je traversais la ligne de démarcation avec des tracts ou que je portais de fausses cartes d'identité. (*ibid.*)

forces of nature that "[m]e réclament le sang" (T, 30) and "me dissoudront dans l'humus" (*Ibid.*). The word terror, or anguish, appositely describes much of the atmosphere of this anthology, but it is mainly anguish of personal nature, not one brought about by the external threat of the war and its aftermath because these poems were written largely in the 1930s. Dalx claims that the poems of *Terraqué* were written in the ten years between 1932 and 1942 (Dalx 1954: 37). According to Guillevie, "Les textes les plus anciens qu'on trouve dans *Terraqué* doivent dater du début des années 30: ce sont des poèmes de la partie 'Choses'" (CP, 54). This indicates that the *armoire* poem, which belongs to this section, was written well before the war, perhaps close to 1932. On the other hand, he also adds, "*Terraqué* contient une partie des poèmes écrits après l'armistice en 41-début 42" (CP, 126), which means that some of the poetry drew on the atmosphere of terror and ever-present threat of death of the German occupation.

### Death, life and mother

Many poems of this collection represent some aspect of the relationship between the speaker embodied in language and his mother. The mother is in many poems referred to explicitly as "mère", once even as "Mère tu", while in others she is figured by the homophone *mer/mère*, or by imagery of motherhood or pregnancy, or some other implication. The relationship between the mother and the son is generally depicted as flawed and the son's experience as one of emotional rejection and alienation. To such poems belongs the first poem of *Terraqué*, which was written in about 1932 and is perhaps the best known poem of all Guillevie's work. As it is untitled, it will be referred to as the "*armoire* poem".

The *armoire* poem, belongs to a subsection "Choses", whose title and position in the collection not only emphasize the poet's interest in material

objects, but also introduce them as the key structural elements of Guillevic's poetry.

L'armoire était de chêne  
Elle n'était pas ouverte.

Peut-être il en serait tombé des morts,  
Peut-être il en serait tombé du pain.

Beaucoup de morts.  
Beaucoup de pain. (T, 7)

The word *armoire* means a solid, tall cupboard, no longer used for storing armour and arms as its *arm-* suggests, but it has become an all-purpose piece of furniture for storage, usually of linen, but even of bread. Therefore, the idea that things, like bread, might fall out of it down onto someone trying to open it is convincing even on a literal level. Stella Harvey claims that during the Second World War such *armoires* "were used to store both bread and dead bodies" (Harvey 1997: 38). This reading tends to attach the poem too closely to a much later wartime context and introduces an element of interpretation on a literal level, rather than emphasizing the more significant metaphoric level. For Guillevic it was not a real, particular *armoire*. When asked, "Est-ce telle armoire, en particulier?" (VP, 26), he simply refers to a general social setting: " - Non. C'est un type d'armoire sombre, en chêne [...]. Chez les gens plus aisés, les meubles étaient en noyer ou en merisier" (*ibid.*). An oak cupboard was therefore a piece of furniture of poor people like his family and therefore a symbol appropriate for his childhood. He stresses the metaphoric significance of the "armoire" for his life in his answer to another question: "[...] dans cette pièce unique, qu'est-ce qu'il y avait dedans? Pourquoi ces morts?" (VP, 27). Referring to the "armoire" of the poem, he replies: " - Cercueil-armoire. C'est dit par le blanc. Du blanc codé" (*ibid.*). It was a coffin in which his childhood and much of his life was buried.

Placed as a coffin into the "blanc codé" of the poem, the *armoire* becomes a signifier of death, that is, a metaphor for the part of the poet's life

that was buried in it, of life that was never fully lived. It is a place of an unrecognised self, a self that was waiting to be born. The poem implies a human presence of the poet before the closed *armoire*. He would have observed its being made of oak and not being open, and he represented in language his speculation about its contents. If he had opened the *armoire*, this fearful closet, he would have encountered death or life, signified by "des morts" and "du pain" respectively. "Du pain", which sustains life, is an implied signifier of life and sex which creates it and they are both fundamental components of human experience. But the poem says clearly that the closet was not opened - the experience was never attempted, the life never lived. Or at least, the life was never lived fully, for the presence of the poet before the *armoire* was alive, but refused the experience of what was in the *armoire* for fear of death in the place of life, refusing the fullness of human existence that includes both death and sexual desire.

The language of the opening line of the poem, "L'armoire était de chêne", is a concrete, terse, bald statement which introduces a solid, domestic object described only as being made of oak. That information also indicates the social background of the speaker as that of relative poverty. From the first line the concrete language reveals an erotic metaphoric dimension of female character through the concave shape of this family closet, which evokes domesticity and a feminine presence of the mother of a family. The familial and erotic connotations deepen with the knowledge that such *armoires* can contain bread, bed linen, underwear, and other items of one's private life.<sup>1</sup> The baffling second line, "Et n'était pas ouverte", introduces an element of mystery that intensifies the metaphorical aspect of the *armoire*. It is normal for a closet to be closed and ordinary closure would be signalled by a positive statement, *Et elle était fermée*. However, the poet chooses negative phrasing for the line, which places emphasis on the fact of closure, suggesting that the closet was never

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<sup>1</sup> In another anthology the poet writes about an *armoire* actually containing linen: "Le cri étouffé/De l'armoire à linge" (*Tr*, 34). The smothered cry of this linen closet suggests stifled sexuality.

opened because it generated fear that outweighed desire. In the past, opening the *armoire* was a threat to the speaker because it contained death and sex. This imaginary *armoire* was the secret closet of his unconscious, containing painful secrets of his private life, but rather closer to life and death, rather more weighty than *les squelettes dans le placard*.

When the neurotic speaker finally confronts his unconscious fears, he does so reluctantly and indirectly by hiding in the impersonal syntactic structures of his discourse. He recounts the experience, but avoids directly attaching his person to it in a double refusal: a refusal to open his closet and, at least formally, disavowing that refusal as his disavowal of himself: pretending it is not his closet. The ambiguity of his attitude is generated by a split of the speaker's self between an unspeakable void, a silence on the conscious level, and the unconscious domain of the other, who speaks his own secret language of which the *armoire* is one of the symbols.

The *armoire* speaks itself - *elle se parle* - by the thingspeak of its forbidding appearance, and its possible content of the dead and the bread, through a cipher of the speaker's unconscious that tries to break into the unspeakable void of his conscious speech. As the threat and the silence come from the past, he begins by tracing the past, but continues by taking a line of flight that turns the past experience into a map of its transformation. The imperfect tense of the first couplet takes the poet's experience back to a moment in the past and a situation which is now over, but which the reader is invited to relive. However, the time of his utterance is now, in the present, the time of the poetic construct of *Terraqué* that stretches into the future. The speaker is looking back at his past life, and the implication of this time break, hidden in the *blancs codés* between *énoncé* and *énonciation* of the poem, signals that the present and the future are going to be different from the past. The closet has now been opened and the work of *Terraqué* is to face and transform its contents into a map of a poetic performance. The poet might have always known what was in the *armoire*, but he now has the courage to symbolize the past by metaphoric language that will shift him out of the



exclusion and alienation. This process becomes articulated later in *Terraqué* as "prendre pied" (*T*, 189), to gain foothold in materiality, and "s'en tirer" (*ibid.*), to extricate himself by his poetic performance from the fear of his own materiality.

One of the striking impressions of the poem is that of its powerful structural regularity, symmetry and lexical repetition. It consists of six lines arranged in three symmetrical couplets. The rigid, formal arrangement of the poem reveals clearly that a great deal of poetic shaping has gone into the disposition of the three ciphers of the unconscious that inspired it, namely the *armoire* itself, the dead and the bread - the staff of life - into the fabric of a poetic performance. The opening line of the poem, "L'armoire était de chêne", presents the object as solid and large, and further on the verb "tomber" confirms the impression of its great size and height by introducing a child's perspective of it. Things could have fallen down from it on the speaker, who is an adult but views the closet with a child's eyes. The terrors of childhood made the speaker/poet relive them in adulthood and retain this child's view when threatened with irrational fears not only in this poem, but in others, for example the "étang" poem (*T*, 71-72). The verbal affirmation of the first line, "L'armoire était de chêne" is in opposition to the second line, in which a syntactically negative phrase, "Et n'était pas", opposes a positive adjective "ouverte". The opposition of open and not-open reveals the indecision and anxiety of the speaker, as his mind moves between the positive and the negative possibilities of life, but the choice of the word "ouverte" points to his desire to open the closet. The verbal opposition of affirmative versus negative is taken over on a semantic level by "ouverte", which then, on its own, stands for openness and, within the sentence, for closure. Openness in the poem, however, can be either negative, meaning open to death, or positive, open to life. Closure, consequently, can be a negative, meaning closed to life and drifting towards death while being still barely alive, or a positive, meaning closed to death and not being dead, but not being very alive either.

In the second and third couplet of the poem there is even more insistence on absolute lexical and syntactic symmetry and on lexical opposition between the two lines of each couplet by "des morts" in one line being opposed by "du pain" in the other line. Semantically this opposition becomes that of the negative forces of death against the positive, erotic forces of life, symbolized by "pain" which, like *eros*, nourishes, preserves and perpetuates life. This absolute symmetry and semantic opposition point to an equality of the forces of life and death poised against each other in the mind of the speaker, with the qualification that death is always mentioned first as the main threat. The symmetry also points to their difference and their being seen as separate and unrelated. The rigid order of symmetry of difference both includes difference within its two opposing statements and sets limits to them, those of life and death. The thingspeak of solidity, rigidity and symmetry constructs the outer shape of the object itself: the angular, rigid, heavy and confronting, "not open" *armoire* which, however, figures an even more confronting inner dimension of death and life.

The rigid symmetry is imposed on language and the opposing drives of life that the language represents, as if the rigidity could contain them. The poet sees sex and death as unrelated entities, not as components of life, which terrify him so that he refuses to open himself to the fullness of human existence, which comprises both of them. Consequently, what he does by his refusal is to make life and death so negative that they become almost identical and collapse into each other: life is refused in its fullness and becomes like death, and death, which is also refused, is actually fundamentally accepted in the refusal of the risk of life.

The information contained in the first couplet, and the speculation of the second couplet, are given in the impersonal form of the third person singular, but only the poet can be the speaker/poet. Only he knows about the "armoire" and only he might have been affected by its contents. While he attempts to distance himself from the revelation, he conceals his "je" ineffectually. His distancing does not work as concealment, but it certainly points to a troubled

past, and his continuing uncertainty and anxiety, which are revealed in the second couplet of the poem. The speaker views the family closet, containing a womb-like cavity, as a symbol of his mother's body, which was severe and forbidding like the *armoire*, and whose affection was not open to him. The speaker has, in some respects, remained a child who now stands in front of the closet both afraid of it and yearning for affection that it might have brought him. The idea of his being a child in the man is suggested, as has been argued, by the use of the verb "tomber" of the second couplet, rather than *sortir*. "Peut-être il en serait tombé" does not then just mean might have *come out of it*, but rather *fallen down from it* onto a small child standing low before it.

The repeated "Peut-être" of the second couplet, "Peut-être il en serait tombé", has the syntactic function of making "might have fallen" out of the bare past conditional "serait tombé", meaning "would have fallen". This repetition intensifies the uncertainty of the event and relegates the opening of the *armoire* to the realm of the unrealized potential action in the past. The potential is that of some threatening forces of the two alternatives, which would affect the speaker adversely if encountered. The rigid symmetry and identity of grammatical and lexical structures of the two parallel lines, and the semantic opposition of their nouns, point out an equally rigid difference and opposition of the two alternative potential forces hidden in the image of the *armoire*. On the one hand, it is "des morts" representing *thanatos*, forces that bring about death, and on the other hand, "du pain", standing for *eros*, the life-sustaining force of the erotic.

The speaker not only hesitated to open the *armoire*, but he is actually hiding in the impersonal elliptic syntax of the two lines. His "je", or even the indirect "tu", by which he tends to reveal himself, is absent. The lines contain human speculation which only the speaker/poet can generate. "Peut-être" also introduces an element of uncertainty about which of the two alternatives might have fallen out. Perhaps one, perhaps the other, but it does not really matter which because the absolute regularity of the structure means absolute equality

of the threat. The speaker was equally afraid both of death and of the erotic *jouissance* of human existence and is hiding from both of them.

The last couplet of the poem, again completely symmetrical, insists on the equal magnitude of the two threats, of death and sex, and the word "Beaucoup" makes them overwhelming. In the material world, death and life are not alternatives to be had one without the other because the two are complementary parts of the biological cycle of life, death and life renewal, but the poet – in memory as child and now as the man for whom that child is within – is overwhelmed by, and afraid of, a vision of the world that contains both. He refuses to accept the fullness of life so that he accepts existence that has become half dead, and he refuses death but has unconsciously accepted it in the refusal of full life. Consequently, he became alienated both from the material world around him and from his own materiality, whose driving forces were those of death and sex, both of which he feared, but which also had a powerful hold on him. He feared these forces because they threatened to disrupt the restricted, closed, orderly world into which he had retreated and on which he imposed his control. According to Freud, the death drive disrupts life by restoring human bodies to a state of inorganic inertia, while the erotic drive disrupts the orderly state of life by building up tension, which needs to be discharged (Freud 1961: 56).

The *armoire* poem and the poetry of *Terraqué* suggest that the relationship between the speaker and his mother was flawed and consequently he feared not only death, but also life as a pleasurable experience, which found expression in a gloomy preoccupation with death, destruction and sado-masochistic fantasies. However, he also summoned enough cognitive and emotional strength to try to counter the threat of death by shaping his poetry as a poetic performance from and against the threatening and enticing ciphers of his unconscious rather than just tracing them. He forged his thingspeak as a means of deterritorializing them and transforming them into a map, *la carte*, which reconstructs the unconscious and shifts his experience away from his

alienation, rejecting the *calque* as simple mise-en-scène of the ciphers of the unconscious.

There is a connection between the word "armoire" and the notion of forging poetic language in the Latin word *arma*, which has several meanings, mostly of arms and implements connected with warfare, such as armour, shield, arms, weapons of close combat, all of which were forged by smiths/armourers. *Arma* also means other things connected with warfare like troops, defence and protection. There are several French words related to *arma* whose connotations increase understanding of the *armoire* poem. First, an *armoire* was once a chest for storing arms or weapons, *armes* in French, and the *armoire* poem can be seen as one of them, *une arme*, the poet's weapon. He forges it both to fight against his exclusion from full participation in the life-giving, erotic processes of materiality, and to defend himself from the pull of the warped erotic forces inside the closet, which have been driving him towards death. The next related word is *armure*, meaning armour, which encloses a body for protection in combat. The *armoire* poem is then forged like armour to protect the poet against the threat of contamination by the twisted and destructive "morts" and "pain" that might have fallen down from the closet on him. In this case he finds himself outside the *armoire*, but paradoxically he finds himself also inside it and armour then shields him against the death and sex of the material world, which are not contaminated, but which he fears because his perception of their nature has been corrupted. In this case the armour of his fears becomes a prison that gives him a false sense of security. The poetic *armure* that the poet wears was made by himself in the role of an *armurier*, a smith or a forger of weapons - figuratively, a forger of words or a word-smith - and his trade is then one of *armurerie*.

Finally the *armoire* poem may be read as the poet's *armoiries*, a plural noun meaning a coat of arms or armorial bearings and a related verb *armorier*, meaning to paint a coat of arms on something. While *arme* and *armure* relate to the significance of the *armoire* poem in the poet's private life of his emotions, the poem as *armoiries* has the character of public display. It becomes a coat of

arms displaying the profession and social standing of the poet to the world, as well as signalling that his poetry, at least that of *Terraqué*, is about confronting his past and transforming his experience of alienation. The poet is quite aware of the function of display of the poem and refers to it as such: "C'est mon poème réclame. Mon panneau" (*VP*, 129). The word "panneau" is in a way a modern equivalent of the feudal *armoiries*.

### Death in life

The consequence of a refusal to open oneself to both the danger and the benefit of the fullness of life in materiality is living a restricted and degraded life of closure that is near to a state of death. The following poem examines such an existence which has refused to open metaphorically the "armoire" of the previous poem.

Si la porte s'ouvrait  
Sur ton corps avili  
De mort.

Debout encore et nu  
Contre l'armoire.

Pâte à ne plus pétrir  
De joie. (T, 21)

The familiar address of the second person singular pronoun "tu" is one of the poet's ways of addressing himself, and a possible opening of the door on himself. "Si la porte s'ouvrait", figures a realization that his body/life would be revealed as that of a living corpse, "ton corps avili/De mort". The conditional "si" or "what if" structure contains an implicit proposition asking, "what would you do, or how would you react, if you found yourself in such a state of degradation and joyless existence?" The fifth line, "Contre l'armoire", is a direct allusion to the original *armoire* of the first poem of *Terraqué*. This line

links the present poem to the first poem by examining the hypothetical, sad state of the speaker's lifeless existence of "death in life", which would be like the one symbolized by the closed *armoire* and its "morts". "S'ouvrant" in a conditional clause refers to a hypothetical "present", so that the *armoire* makes a double appearance: once as a spectre from the past that appears as a temptation of death in life, and the second time as a challenge to embrace life in the present.

The *armoire* constitutes a temptation for the speaker not to open its door to embrace full life, offering in its closed state false security against the danger of death that has to be faced when living a full life. Such an offer means a withdrawal into a vegetative state of lifelessness lacking the joy of life. The acceptance of such a state of alienation and exclusion from life would result in a kind of living death, both physical and spiritual degradation. Such condition is represented in nearly every line of the poem by concrete images of an existence whose erotic life force has been degraded into lifelessness and decay. The lines "Sur ton corps/Avili de mort" contain a syntactic ambiguity that can be read, on the one hand, as a body belonging to death, "corps de mort", one that has rejected life, and therefore has become debased, "avili". On the other hand, the body belonging to life might have become a "corps avili de mort" debased by the forces of death that have been too strong for it and were difficult to resist. "Debout encore et nu/Contre l'armoire" is the image of someone akin to a living corpse, who is physically barely alive; still standing, but only because leaning physically for support against the *armoire*. This is no real support because the *armoire* has a hold over him, drawing him to the very source of his weakness. "Nu" emphasizes the speaker's vulnerability, the defenceless nakedness to which he appears to have been reduced, prefiguring a corpse being prepared for interment. One reading of the whole image is that of being captive to the forces of the *armoire*, and in this sense the preposition "contre" suggests leaning for support against the *armoire*, which is, nevertheless, destroying the body. Similarly, one reading of "Pâte à ne plus pétrir/De joie" is that of lifelessness of a body that no longer enjoys erotic contact, but that did so until

recently. "Pâte", in this case, is the negative image of lack of life as an intermediate state between a healthy corporality and the process of death, decomposition and putrefaction that eventually converts the body into inorganic minerals. It is an image of human life lacking the vital, erotic forces of the material world and therefore erotically unresponsive and joyless.

The positive challenge of the *armoire*, and the poet's response to that challenge, is represented by the other meaning of the words "contre" and "pâte", and expressions like "pétrir" and "ne plus", which subvert the apparent drift of the imagery of the poem towards death. First, the other meaning of "pâte" is that of dough, the material that bread, "du pain" in the first *armoire* poem, is made of as the symbol of life, and kneading dough is the first meaning of the word "pétrir". Its second meaning is to mould or shape, and taken together with "pâte" and the last line, "De joie", this group of words represents the erotic action of creating and shaping life in its fullness. The negative "ne plus" implies that the dough of life, which now might be turning into decaying matter, was recently, and may yet be, healthy and fit to be erotically kneaded, even though the pressure and temptation of death is a constant, compromising threat.

The state of health of the body depends on the interpretation of the lines "Sur ton corps/Avili de mort". If it were a "corps de mort", one that rejected life and gave itself to the forces of death, then the speaker had mistaken it for a body of joy and there was no hope of recovery. If it were, however, a body that belonged to life, a body of joy until now which, although tempted and weakened by death, "avili de mort", resisted the attack, then there is a hope of reversing the process. The presence of life-asserting, erotic imagery suggests that the drift towards decay and death can be reversed if only the subject of the poem takes a stand against the negative forces of the *armoire* by accepting the power of the erotic to shape life. The second meaning of the word "contre" reveals that this is what he mentally does, albeit with hesitation. The speaker traces his weaknesses, and his temptation to remain at the unconscious level of



his fears, but he also reacts against them, "contre l'armoire", against the forces of the closet, by being aware of, and opening, a path towards fullness of life.

While in the preceding poem the idea of "death in life" is a figure of an imagined human state of mind, in the following poem a similar threat of death becomes a constant physical fact in the life of an animal living freely in nature. Such an animal, presumably a bird or a lizard, has already in its embryonic stage an innate vision of a full life, but one that is always exposed to the danger of physical death once born.

Comme on pense dans l'oeuf,  
A vivre du soleil  
Dans la campagne ouverte,

Lorsque le temps plus tard  
Sera venu de naître

Et de risquer la mort  
En parcourant les graines. (T, 55)

This poem takes up the inescapable fact of death as an ever-present component of not just human life, but of all existence on earth. The poet represents here the desire to live fully and freely as an integral element of the biological, erotic drive of all life. This desire is, according to the poet, a metaphysical element of existence, as it is present before the full physical existence of the animal commences, while still in the embryonic stage of being, "dans l'oeuf". The animal which is the subject of the poem dreams of full life as one which is lived from the warmth and energy of the sun, "A vivre du soleil" and lived freely, "Dans la campagne ouverte".

To be born and to live under a threat of death is for the animal a kind of ordeal by life and the poet evokes the existence of this threat of a possible sudden death, of life that may turn into an emptiness, by subjecting his discourse to what could be called an ordeal by syntax. The first line is rather elliptical and makes full sense only when the meaning of "Comme" is amplified

by something like "*Peu importe* comme on pense dans l'oeuf", *No matter* how one thinks in the egg. The fourth and fifth lines, beginning with "Lorsque le temps", belong to a subordinate clause of time containing, in the fifth line, the future perfect (*futur antérieur*) "Sera venu", which refers to action anterior to some point in the future that would be expressed by the main clause of the sentence, containing a verb in simple future tense. This main clause is missing and the fifth line instead contains a syntactic void, or gap, in the *blanc codé* between "venu" and "de naître", which has to be completed by the reader to make sense of the fourth, fifth and sixth lines. The missing clause, inserted in italics, could, for example, read, "Lorsque le temps plus tard/Sera venu, *ce sera le temps de naître/Et de risquer la mort*". The missing main clause could be also added at the end of the poem: "En parcourant les graines, *Qu'est-ce que tu feras?*" or "*Auras-tu le courage de sortir de l'oeuf?*" No matter which clause completes the sentence, the original, elliptic syntax is a result of linguistic violation that represents the possible violation of the animal's life. The syntax becomes semantic as its elliptic emptiness is crying out the void of death. This syntactical deformation is a typical and frequent feature of Guillevic's minor language: "Se servir de la syntaxe pour crier, donner au cri une syntaxe" (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 48).

Presumably, a feeling of alienation or the fear of death is not a factor that would trouble the imagination nor inhibit the erotic drive of a small animal. However, a conflict between life and death arises for the animal on a physical level upon its birth, because it runs the risk of being killed while running about looking for its food, the seeds, "En parcourant les graines". These are the animal's "bread" of the *armoire* poem, both literally as food and figuratively as sex, neither of which it can refuse to accept. Neither can it stay in the egg to avoid being born and risking death, that is, metaphorically, not to open the *armoire*. The animal has no choice in the matter and it is only the poet/observer who has the choice in the *armoire* poem. He is born into the same biological framework of a cycle of life and death, but has a choice of accepting it fully or withdrawing to some degree from the erotic component and thus deluding

himself that he is avoiding death. Such an action reduces his life to a half-life, or a living death, while he has no control over the actual death anyway.

## Rejection

The following poem belongs to those that use the name *mère* explicitly and the mother's rejection is not restricted here to the son as a particular male person, but to masculinity itself in her son as a child, then as a man, and in her husband.

Mère aux larmes brûlantes, l'homme fut chassé de vous -

De vos tendres ténèbres,  
De votre chambre de muqueuses. (T, 45)

The complex imagery of the poem figures a flawed family relationship, in which the mother has rejected the son as a child and as a grown man because of his masculinity. By implication she has rejected not only her son, but also her husband, the son's father, both of whom have been emotionally castrated by being denied the mother's affection and close physical presence. On a more general level her rejection is that of masculinity and sex, which she perceives as shameful. The speaker is the son, who is now an adult man, who is reproachfully addressing his mother, not in the expected familiar register of *tutoiement*, but by a formal "vous". Such an address distances him from a narrow personal involvement and introduces a more general level of masculinity, which includes his father. The characterization of the mother as shedding "larmes brûlantes" suggests, on the one hand, that her tears are the product of some inner, negative state of mind of shame, bitterness, frustration and hatred that is turned against herself and which "burns" her. On the other hand, the formal character of the past historic passive tense of "fut chassé" gives further emphasis to the general validity of the mother's rejection as that of masculinity itself, while it also introduces the biblical rhetoric of expulsion

from paradise and therefore the mother's view of sex as sin. In conjunction with the burning tears "fut chassé" has a stronger emotional charge than a mere Oedipal separation in its meaning of hunted out or driven out, that is rejected in anger or revenge, because the speaker feels that the tears are turned against him and other men whom they burn.

The speaker, as the son, believes that he was rejected as a child and that his juvenile erotic desire of the mother has not been satisfied. He feels that the rejection has turned his mother's body into a hostile instrument of anger and revenge, which follows him into adulthood, with its "ténèbres" and "chambres" closed to him as figures of rejection. At the same time the rejection does not extinguish his desire, but rather intensifies it, as is evident from the dominant tone of the poem of regret for the loss of, and longing for, the imagined paradise of the mother's body of which he was once a part. The adult son keeps yearning, against the reality of the mother's coldness, for the former, and now lost, tender darkness of the "ténèbres" and the warm comfort of the "chambre de muqueuses", which is his mother's womb, as well as her breasts and mouth. The adult "homme" feels insecure and looks back at the security provided by the mother's body *in utero* and in early childhood before her rejection of him, as more desirable than his present situation. But this is a desire of something in the past, something that is now dead and void. Embracing mentally such a permanent move back to mother would mean a retreat into a neurotic fantasy of becoming an asexual infant trapped in the "chambre de muqueuses", and in the prelingual "ténèbres" no matter how "tendres". It is a way to death of his individual self and he may wish it only in the moments of his darkest despair.

The formality of the past historic passive tense of "fut chassé" makes the painful experience of rejection fit into the frame of a past event that is being transformed into a construct of poetic representation, which now makes the rejection less personal and therefore easier to live with. However, such a transformation does not come easily because the word "chassé" touches a raw nerve of the old pain of rejection and the image of the "chambre de muqueuses", which is both threatening and desirable, reveals the ambiguity of

the speaker's desire. He is not quite ready for emotional independence from the mother because he regrets having been driven out of the womb, which he still considers the only place of emotional warmth and security that he ever had and one that he still yearns for. It is not that he wants to become a child again and to withdraw permanently into the refuge of the "tendres ténèbres", that is that he regrets being born at all. Since a womb is an organ of a temporary mechanism of birth, a part of the birth canal, not a place of permanent stay, the speaker is indulging in an wishful private fantasy of a return to the womb to be born again into a situation of acceptance by the mother.

The poem clearly establishes a relationship between the mother and son, but by implication a family situation is made complete only by the addition of the father whose presence can be read in the other meaning of "homme". The burning pain, shame and anger of the mother's tears can hardly be explained only by her relationship with her child as this is unlikely to have provoked such an emotional state in her. It could therefore have only been the relationship with her husband, which brought on the tears and resulted in his being "chassé", a relationship that was fundamentally flawed and extended to the child. To follow through the imagery of the poem, the husband was rejected by being "chassé" from the erotic "ténèbres" and "muqueuses" of her body. The mother's enmity towards the husband was irrationally extended to the son because he was also male. Further, since it is very difficult to hate one's own child, the mother's neurotic frame of mind must also be directed to other males who are more easily a target of her hostility than her child, that is to masculinity as such. This generalization of her disturbed feelings is supported by the formality of the "vous" and "fut chassé" of the discourse.

So much can be read in the poem itself and in an interview published in 1982 Guillevic corroborated the basis of this interpretation in explicit statements, revealing that such an estrangement took place in his family:

Mon père qui n'était jamais à la maison. [*sic*] Il courait toujours dehors parce qu'il ne s'entendait pas avec ma mère. (CP, 21)

Or je ressemblais terriblement à mon père, [...] et comme entre eux ça n'allait pas, elle reportait son ressentiment sur moi. (CP, 23)

The poet's childhood experience of emotional rejection by his mother provides both the painful, unconscious source of much of Guillevic's poetry as well as a challenge to transform poetically and deterritorialize that experience. Such traumatic experience, which for a long time remained unspoken because it was unspeakable, and whose consequences plagued the poet in his adult life, forms the basis of the following short poem of four lines. The poem reveals that the mother's treatment of her son may actually have gone further than emotional deprivation and moral bullying, reaching the level of incestuous sadism.

Peut-être que la tourbe est montée des marais,  
Pour venir lacerer, suinter dans le silence  
Et nous suivre partout  
Comme une mère incestueuse. (T, 39)

In this poem it is not elliptic syntax, but rather elliptic situation of the discourse that not only determines its interpretation, but is also a structural component of the discourse that helps create the dominant atmosphere of ambiguity and uncertainty, signalled by the first word of the poem, "Peut-être". The speaker is not able to state in full language what unspeakable ill torments him and the "nous", and is only able to express it by the figure of "la tourbe". What is certain amidst all the uncertainty is that his own emotions and the relationship between him and the other or others of the "nous" are flawed. The others could be his mother or other people, perhaps women, from whom he is alienated. He gropes for language to explain why he and they should feel as if they were entangled in an emotional embrace of dirty and sticky peat, "la tourbe", that set out to follow them everywhere. This loathsome, abhorrent imagery points not only to his helplessness, but also to the intensity of his experience that drives

him to find expression for it in language for those that have been emotionally associated with him, those of the "nous". The speaker can not, or dares not, find clear, full, concrete speech for the experience of his disturbing situation that was for a long time unspoken and became unspeakable. His trauma is figured not only by the image of his being trapped in the dirty peat, but also by the lack of clarity of the discourse itself, which is both the instrument of the trapping and is, like the speaker, itself trapped in the void of the past, unspeakable "silence". This silence is steeped in a *blanc codé* which speaks itself by revealing dark, opaque symbols of the other that begin to puncture the silence by moving between the doubt of the "[p]eut-être", the murky dirt of the "tourbe", the indeterminate time of the infinitives "venir", "lanciner", "suinter" and "suivre", and the final enigma of "une mère incestueuse".

Except for one, the verbs of the poem, which might have provided information about the speaker's time of utterance and the time of what occurs in the poem, are infinitives that give no indication of a definite time of the action occurring in the poem except that they follow in time the rise of the peat. The time indicated by the only finite verb, the compound past tense of "la tourbe est montée", which may indicate action completed in the past, or action begun in the past and continuing to the present. This ambiguity has to be accepted as part of the design of the poem, revealing a deep, personal ambivalence about the speaker's past. He signals that he thinks that he has both put the disturbing experience behind him and that he has not, or perhaps that he sometimes thinks so and sometimes does not. However, the action of the four infinitives, "venir", "lanciner", "suinter" and "suivre" is more revealing. They come to life after the peat has risen and being tenseless, they are open to continue to exert their influence into the future.

The situation and the time of the discourse of the poem may be marked by uncertainty, but its imaginative power is not. The compelling image of muddy peat which has oozed and risen from the swamps, adhering to those affected, the "nous" including the speaker, impeding their movement by following them everywhere and thus sullyng and degrading their relationships,

is the stuff of nightmares that rise from the poet's unconscious. It is also an image of fearful emotional impotence resulting from castration that far exceeded the usual Oedipal separation of a child from his mother. The word "la tourbe" comes from the Latin word *turba* that means not only peat, but also crowd and confusion. While the peat is an image of the dirt of emotional corruption that immobilizes and paralyzes, the notion of confusion points to moral ambiguity and pollution introduced into the relationship between the speaker and the "nous". The sticky "tourbe" of moral contamination is given a malevolent human character because it has risen from the swamps with an intention, "Pour venir lincer, suinter [...] / Et nous suivre partout". The four infinitives of these two lines, because they are tenseless, place the traumatizing experience in both the past, the present and the future, representing it as an impersonal, indefinite and painful disorder that has assumed its own life and momentum. The verb "lincer" has a whole range of negative and unpleasant meanings relating to a disease: to throb as if in a fever, pierce, obsess, trouble, haunt, plague and torment, while "suinter" qualifies the disease as an open, weeping and oozing wound, one that will not heal. They are words with repulsive, pathological connotations, figuring a diseased relationship which is, nevertheless, an inescapable part of the life of the speaker and the other(s) of the "nous".

It is only the last word of the poem, "incestueuse", which finally and explicitly specifies the amorphous, oppressive contamination and ambiguity that pervades the poem as being of sexual character. The invasion of the dirty, glutinous peat becomes thus clarified as a figure of castration and contamination of the poet's erotic instincts, which affected not only himself, but also his relationship to women who belong to the "nous". It therefore follows that the situation and the time of the discourse of the poem, and of its addressees, now become less ambiguous. The speaker is addressing the group labelled "nous", to which he himself belongs, in the present and although he knows what he is about to tell them, he has a need to symbolize his unspeakable experience in language. His main addressees in the group are the women of



relationships which ended in the past and are now only in his memory, and a woman of a relationship begun in the past and continuing in the present, to whom all he is at pains to explain why their relationships have been flawed and tainted. The compound past tense of "la tourbe est montée" covers both cases. The last line of the poem also reveals the source of the ambiguity and contamination as "une mère". This was the mother who is figured in the first line of the poem as "la tourbe". This line is the first segment of a simile, of which the last line is the other segment: "la tourbe" was like "une mère incestueuse". This mother was metaphorically "la tourbe" that invaded the speaker's emotional life so that the two metaphors make that life repeatedly follow an emotional vicious circle. The elliptic syntax of the last line could be rendered more fully as, "Comme une mère incestueuse *est montée dans notre vie*". Since somebody else's mother could not have wreaked on the speaker the trauma and desolation represented in the poem, he really meant "*ma* mère incestueuse". This is what she is made out to be, although this shocking allegation is not made explicit nor fully clarified in the poem. By making her "une mère", however, he transfers her into his memory, depersonalizes and renounces her, relegating her to a general category of particular mothers, and makes her less unique and more distant. This process attempts to deterritorialize his traumatic experience in order to transform it to a less painful one by reterritorializing it as a poetic construct.

The allegation made in the poem is indeed shocking, yet it actually represents accurately what took place in the poet's family. The poet's mother was incestuous to the extent that she was sadistic and derived sexual gratification from beating her son. In 1982 the poet in an interview corroborated the terrible accusation of the poem:

Elle [mother] était très dure, elle me faisait me tenir debout sur une table les jambes nues, pour me flageller avec un martinet, elle m'enfermait au grenier et m'attachait des nuits entières [...]. J'étais donc l'enfant martyr, l'enfant maudit. (CP, 23)

The word "maudit", literally *mal dit*, opens up a terrible irony when compared with Guillevic's first name, Eugène, which means *bien né*, (Gaubert 1987: 298) and which suggests something *bien dit* about his birth, presumably awaited with joyful expectations. It is little wonder that the poet discarded the use of his first name and insisted on being known and published exclusively under the family name of Guillevic.

In a poem in "Avec" (1966) the poet addresses his mother openly as "Mère" and in the familiar form of address "tu", which signals a change of his status to equality with her. He displays now a newly found independence and courage to confront her, as he accuses her of blighting his life, and he boasts about his new relationship and a happier way of life without her.

*A Aurora Cornu.*

A tous les horizons,  
Mère, tu m'attendais  
Pour demander des comptes.

Et je ne voulais pas.  
J'avais à faire.

D'autres m'appellent,  
Rêvent de joie.

La terre est lourde, me prendra.  
En attendant elle est en moi.

Et je la porte,  
Je la fais entrer dans nos fêtes.

Celle que j'aime  
Te le dira.

Vaste est le jour.

Je le dépasse  
A travers elle. (A, 66)

The first part of this speech of defiance to his mother contains a censure of her oppressive domination and persecution of him on the flimsy grounds of upholding her moral standards, and an expression of his inner opposition to it. The significance of the exceptional, direct and intimate address of the mother, "Mère, tu", emerges from the lines of the poem as a gesture of defiance and rebellion against her influence. The first five lines of the poem express the accumulated feeling of resentment of the speaker at having been subjected to his mother's expectations that he live by her rules. He was constantly judged by her expectations to account for, and justify, all his actions so that he became an object of her moral inquisition and judgement that was pervasive and inescapable. This was not how he really wanted to live, wishing instead to pursue his own interests: "J'avais à faire." Not only that; he tells her that he is breaking away from her domination because he now knows people who are motivated by a joy of life, and he shares this new view of life with a woman whom he loves.

He is now self-confident enough, at least for the moment, to confront the mother directly to tell her frankly that he is drawn to other people, "D'autres m'appellent". These unspecified others dream of the joy of life, with the implication that this pursuit of happiness is more valid and important to him than her pursuit of narrow, punitive morality. Against that joyless conception of life, in four lines in the middle of the poem, he defiantly sets out his philosophy of life - that of living in materiality and making it part of a celebration of life. The line "La terre est lourde, me prendra" contains ambiguity as "lourde" means being heavy with both life and death and therefore a sort of 'pregnancy' that offers both the joy of life now, but will eventually 'deliver' him to the elemental minerals. The earth will become his true mother replacing his dysfunctional one. Further images of pregnancy, "En attendant elle est en moi" and "Et je la porte", all figure the earth as an unborn child that he carries, suggesting a reversal of the perverted maternity that he experienced and that separated him from the material world. He will, in a sense, give birth to a world that will mother him - giving birth, paradoxically, to his own "true" mother. He

is well aware that materiality drives his life towards death, but he can accept or even reverse this process, at least temporarily. While waiting for the earth to seize him in death, "En attendant", he is able to embrace the material, erotic forces of the earth to engage them in a celebration of life: "dans nos fêtes." "En attendant" has then connotations of being pregnant with both life and death whose life-enhancing aspect, however, includes joy of life even if that inevitably ends in death. Further, "En attendant" contrasts with "tu m'attendais", the object of which was a joyless life being driven to emotional death anyway.

The speaker reveals that he is not alone in his new life adventure as "D'autres m'appellent" suggests a community or a collective, which shares his new approach to life. Moreover, among these "autres" is "elle" who shares his vision and with whom he is in love. She will be able to tell the mother so, "Celle que j'aime/Te le dira", in which the "le" stands both for his love and the new way of life. This important revelation indicates that, in this poem at least, the poet has been able to transform by language his erotic alienation and longing for his mother. He feels confident that he has dismissed and replaced her by another woman and he finds the courage to confront the mother. Having left behind him the world which dominated him because its horizons were set for him by his mother, the poet now faces the challenge of a vast new world of life in materiality: "Vaste est le jour". He feels that he now has the strength to move beyond this new world, "Je le dépasse", to contain or encompass it, as he has already suggested about the earth - "elle est en moi". The world is now within him, no longer dominating him, so that he can now grasp it by language to exert his creative force over it and in this new conception of life and creativity he is sustained by the erotic energy of his lover, "A travers elle".

A feeling of bitterness towards his mother remained raw in the poet's memory, reappearing over a long period of time. In *Paroi* (1970) the simmering resentment towards the mother comes to the surface in several poems. In both of them she is explicitly named as "mère" and compared to a *paroi*.

Elle serait un peu mère,  
La paroi.

Mère ou marâtre,  
N'insistons pas. (P, 123)

"La paroi" is for Guillevic an ambiguous concept of both negative and positive character. In "Paroi" it is represented, on the one hand, as a negative barrier, a frontier, a limit, which separates, encloses and hems in, and against which one struggles. On the other hand, it can be a stronghold, one can play with the paroi, daydream beside it, caress it and be caressed in turn. It can be a barrier that impedes the poet's progress, but also save him from falling into the void of nothingness. Defining it as "un peu mère", the poet brings out both its aspects. In the negative sense the wall, being "un peu mère", is *peu mère*, that is less of a proper mother and therefore a "marâtre" by imposing restrictions and limits on his life. The subtext of this definition is that this is what, in one sense, was Guillevic's mother for him: a persecuting "marâtre" who desolated his emotions and impeded his personal growth as a child. In the positive sense, "un peu mère" means that the "paroi" can technically play the role of a "marâtre", something of a mother that provides protection as a railing against the monsters of the void. The subtext here is that Guillevic's mother, although often behaving as not a proper mother, but rather as a callous "marâtre", was at least "un peu mère" in a positive sense by providing basic care when he was a child. When he began writing poetry, she became for him an object of his memory that concentrated his mind and stimulated much creative energy. Having explored the ramifications of these connotations of the expression "un peu mère", the poet has not achieved much satisfaction. In the final analysis, whether the "paroi" is a "mère" who is "peu mère" or a "marâtre" who is "un peu mère", with the implication that his mother was both, seems to be equally depressing for him as by "Mère ou marâtre, N'insistons pas" he signals unwillingness to dwell further on the matter, which still appears to be largely unspeakable for him.

Two pages further on the poet takes up again the question of how far the two dimensions of the *paroi* represent for him two aspects of the mother, who is explicitly named and continues to exert influence on his life.

Le monde sans la mère.  
Le monde avec la mère.

Avec la marâtre.  
Sans.

L'étendue  
Et la verticale.

Avec ça,  
On n'a pas fini

D'en voir,  
D'en baver,  
D'en guérir. (P, 125)

The *paroi* referred to in the poem on page 123 is not explicitly named in this poem, but it is implicitly represented by its two dimensions of horizontal width and vertical height: "L'étendue/Et la verticale". The *paroi*, whose shape is determined by these two dimensions, becomes a figure of the duality of the speaker's emotional world, whose dominant figure, his biological mother, has become in his experience divided into two components: "la mère" and "la marâtre". Both of these aspects of Guillevic's real mother are present, "avec", and absent, "sans", in the poet's emotional experience. In his poetry the experience of the horizontal dimension is generally one of fear, while that of the vertical invokes confidence. In this poem the two dimensions lose their contrasting qualities becoming ambiguous. Understanding the argument of this discourse can be helped by the phrase "un peu mère" of the previous poem, which is implied as an antecedent of this poem.

The mother is a *paroi* made up of both the horizontal and the vertical of which one seems to sometimes predominate. She is therefore not a proper caring mother, being "un peu mère" in the negative sense. Neither is she a true cruel stepmother because she has a little of a mother in her, "un peu mère" in the positive sense. The poet thus finds himself in a strange emotional vacuum by being both motherless and stepmotherless and the condensed, elliptic syntax and hesitant argument of the poem cry out his anguish. It is a traumatic experience to be in, and in the latter part of the poem he represents the situation as one that he has not managed to overcome. He has not finished with having a hard or rough time, as both "en voir" and "en baver" mean that, and the consequences of his childhood traumas still plague him. The impersonal form of "On n'a pas fini", suggests that the situation and its causes are outside of himself and beyond his control, a situation of desolation one has not finished with and neither has one finished with its healing, "D'en guérir". Indeed, the healing process will never be completed because the perfect tense of "On n'a pas fini" runs into the present and further into the future as the three infinitives have by definition no inherent time limit. For further emphasis of his plight the repeated "D'en" provides a sound effect of an irresistible march forward in time pointing to a continuation of the speaker's disturbed self.

#### The agency of the mother

In the following poem, which reveals that one of the sources of anxiety for Guillevic was his physical appearance, he breaks the silence that covered this very painful experience. The poem comes from a section called "Les Rocs".

#### IV

Ils n'ont pas à porter leur face  
Comme un supplice.

Ils n'ont pas à porter de face  
Où tout se lit. (T, 78)

The rocks are referred to as "ils" in several poems of this section as the speaker compares their appearance to his own. The present tense of the poem indicates that the speaker's perceived ugliness afflicts him as mental torture and shame still at the time of writing. The image of the ancient and unchanging appearance of the rocks as a medium of comparison points to his condition as long lasting. Its origin is then in speaker's childhood and points to the domination of his mother, who is thus implicated as an agent of his feeling of insecurity and shame about his appearance. She is not explicitly referred to and her being cloaked by silence reveals her as belonging to those of the poet's memories that are unspeakable. Her lexical absence points to her hidden, but unspeakable presence. The speaker of the poem feels that he is excluded from the company of both objects of nature and people by his appearance and is unable to detach himself from the experience. He plainly envies the ability of the rocks to wear their appearance with confidence and composure, while for him this possibility has been destroyed and turned into mental torture.

The personal dimension of the speaker is implied in a disjunctive clause hidden in the void of the *blanc codé* that follows each couplet: *Comme moi je porte la mienne* and *Comme moi je porte une face* "Où tout se lit". The first couplet and its implication reveal the speaker's feeling of shame, insecurity and inadequacy in contrast to what he sees as the enduring natural beauty of the rocks. It is a beauty that cannot be diminished by a negative human opinion or comment, which was obviously made by someone close to him, by someone whose opinion was important for him in childhood and therefore hurt him deeply. That someone could only have been his mother and the speaker now carries the wound into adulthood as if he were a child in the man. The second couplet goes further, to the point of self-hatred, by suggesting that his external ugliness is a sort of transparent text through which can be read an internal ugliness, "Où tout se lit" that excludes him from the company of both objects of



nature and people. What the two couplets have in common is the silence of their implied extensions covering the void of the unspeakable experience that the poet cannot bring himself to speak out openly. They are the text of his physical shame that was unspeakable in the past, but could be read in his face. But now the silence has been broken by the text of this poem, even though indirectly in the same way as was done by the implied revelation of the role of the mother. The rocks are a symbol that has emerged from the poet's unconscious to be integrated into the conscious construct of the poem, which aims at transforming that silence by approaching the stage of full speech that would rewrite his imaginary shame.

Many years later, in 1982, Guillevic was able to express this unspeakable experience of his childhood more freely in conventional prose, even though still with some emotional reluctance, and this time he names his mother openly, confirming the interpretation of the poem offered above:

J'ai toujours porté mon visage avec peine, avec douleur. Mais là il faut entrer dans un autre domaine dont je n'aime pas beaucoup parler, c'est celui des rapports avec ma mère. Ma mère était une mère bourreau, [...] Mais c'était surtout la torture morale, qu'elle pratiquait au nom de la religion, me maudissant, me disant que je serais toujours bon à rien, [...] et que je ne plairais jamais à une femme. C'est sans doute de là qu'est venu ce peu d'amour, qui a longtemps été le mien, pour mon physique, mon visage... Jusqu'au delà [*sic*] de cinquante ans, en tout cas. (CP, 23)

Another incident, which appears to have its origin in the relationship between Guillevic as a child and his mother, is depicted in the following lines that reveal a traumatic bewilderment of a child whose emotional balance has been disturbed by his being mistreated by his mother.

L'enfant qui se savait  
Torturé du démon  
Venait voir au miroir  
Si rien n'en paraissait. (T, 112)

This is, like poem IV of "Les Rocs", a very personal poem. The word "torturé" means sadistic abuse and "L'enfant" implies the existence of a mother who is responsible for protecting the child from such abuse. Since the abuse has not been stopped, a further implication points to the mother as the agent of that mistreatment. The child was tortured by being accused of being a demon or a devil - "Torturé du démon". His childish misdeeds might have been interpreted as evil by a bigotted mother and the poem "Mère aux larmes brûlantes" (T, 45) suggests that he was for her the devil's child, the devil being her husband. Guillevic claimed that she transferred her resentment of her husband on him because he resembled the father (CP, 21, 23). In such an environment the child took the accusation so seriously that he went to see if something of the devil in him would appear in a mirror.

The pronominal structure "se savait" refers to something that was done and known for some period of time, but for the child the experience was completely bewildering. He became convinced that he was possessed by some demon or devil because he could not accept that the devil was actually his mother, who should have been the source and protector of his life and welfare. Believing that the evil of the demon had become a part of himself and that its presence can be seen or read in his face, as in "se lit" in "Les rocs" poem, the child repeatedly came, "venait", to a mirror to see if anything of the demon would be reflected, "Si rien n'en paraissait". The child's coming in silence to the mirror and not confiding in the mother indicates that he felt guilty of harbouring the demon. The relationship between the mother and the child was dominated by silence and alienation, which lasted into adulthood. So strong became the estrangement that even after many years, when he wrote the poem, he was unable to represent the experience in a more personal register of the first person and employs the impersonal, distancing third person narrative in which the mother is never explicitly mentioned.

The poem "Naissance" goes a step further, representing a mother who has not only rejected a child emotionally, but actually turned monstrously against it and in so doing perverted the notion of motherhood as the source of

life. The role of the mother becomes corrupted and degraded so that she is no longer a positive, sustaining source of life, but becomes a malevolent force bent on causing injury so that her true role of giving life turns in effect into one of dealing out emotional death.

### NAISSANCE

A la source que pas plus d'ombre,  
 A la source où gai le sang,  
 Bouillie de provinces, de lits,  
 Plus oreiller que tous les seins, -  
 La source  
 Plus que géante pour le chaud.

- Matin de printemps. Sur la colline  
 Les choux étaient plus ventres que les ventres.  
 Car la source n'est plus la source,  
 Crachait des pierres, et dans la bouche  
 Un bout de sein vieux.  
 La tête  
 Voulait mouiller de son sang l'herbe douce  
 Et dormir.

(T, 43)

The speaker's representation is set in three different periods of time. The central statement of the poem, "Car la source n'est plus la source", is the only one in the present tense, but it is a historic present set in the past. This statement takes the speaker to two opposing experiences that he underwent before that point in time, experiences which he is now symbolizing in a poetic performance. Both of these experiences occurred at different periods of the past and belong to two different worlds. The statement sums up the speaker's realization that his mother ceased to be a proper mother, meaning an erotic source of life, and became an agent of denial, persecution and of a drive towards death.

The first six lines of the poem depict a scene and an experience of a joyful birth as the source of life figuring a mother, with the word "source" insisted on three times. The words "Bouillie de provinces" point indirectly to the poet's provincial origin, extending the notion of the source to the speaker's

mother. The richly erotic imagery of light, beds, pillows and breasts, reveals a contented baby's impressions of his surroundings rendered in a kind of baby thingspeak in which objects speak themselves as he observes them. As the baby's eyes wander round the objects of his world, these speak in a syntactically elliptic and disjointed baby language made up largely of nouns and adjectives, with verbs completely missing. The absence of verbs makes the recorded impressions stand out as a timeless joyful experience and an ideal that the speaker remembers and looks back to. It was an early time with his mother, "A la source", when he emerged from the darkness of her body into the light of the world - "pas plus d'ombre". This early life with the mother, "A la source" was vibrant with pleasure and vitality - "où gai le sang". He remembers the pleasure of eating baby's porridge, "Bouillie de provinces", connected with the pleasure of beds and their pillow-like softness that was softer than "les seins" of the mother. The breasts are joined syntactically by a dash to the following word, "La source", as the source of the baby's food. Both the breasts and the mother's body, which provided food and warmth for him, appeared to him, when he was a baby, to be more than giant-size, "Plus que géante".

Lines seven and eight are introduced by a dash, making the image of "Matin de printemps", on the one hand, an amplification, a summary, of the joyous erotic profusion of life of the first section. The tense of the verb "étaient" indicates events completed in the past, which the speaker refers to now, in the present time of speaking, with the implication that such a time of contentment is now gone. Both the words "Matin" and "printemps" signal a beginning of the day and the year respectively, and figure a beginning of the speaker's life after his birth. The image of the "pregnant" cabbages plays on the tale told to children that babies are born in a cabbage patch, thus linking this couplet to the baby point of view and thingspeak of the previous six lines. To a young child this cabbage image would mean that more babies may be coming to add to the reigning erotic profusion of life. On the other hand, these two lines also represent a departure, a break, from the joyous times following the birth and a turning towards death. This change of direction is signalled not only by

the past tense of "étaient", but also by the words "printemps" and "choux", which the speaker holds in his mind as occurring together in his past. The association of the two images introduces a flaw into the proceedings by containing a contradiction because cabbages grow large and mature in late autumn, not in spring. The image of the cabbages introduces them therefore as bellies of winter and death, which become more significant for the speaker - "plus ventres" - than the life-giving "ventres" because the "plus" makes them pregnant with death. This image of the cabbages of death represents a subversion of his former, brief experience of a happy childhood - his "printemps" - the short duration of which is suggested by the former imagery that has remained on the level of a baby's observation of the world, which lasts a short time.

A shift to the present tense isolates the line "Car la source n'est plus la source" as an agonizing revelation of the speaker's feelings at the time of trying to express them. The line is syntactically elliptic, consisting of a subordinate clause of reason, whose main, missing clause would complete the statement to read *I am devastated* because [my mother], the source of my life, is no longer the source. The implied estrangement with the mother becomes amplified in the last section of the poem as an active rejection of the child some time in the past, indicated by the imperfect of "Crachait" and "Voulait", after a short period of happy babyhood. Through the elliptic syntax of the last five lines the speaker darts, as if in shock, from one painful image to another, while the compressed and twisted syntax itself cries out his anguish.

The last part of the poem provides a brief, figurative elaboration of how the source of the speaker's life became corrupted to mean a source of emotional death. The word "source" as a metaphor for both birth and mother in his case has lost its meaning by degradation of the role of the mother, which is forcefully expressed by two images. One is of her becoming a source which, instead of providing life-supporting water, spat out stones, "Crachait des pierres," as missiles to cause injury or death. This image takes the idea of a dysfunctional mother so far as to make her positively malevolent, inflicting

physical pain and emotional injury. The other image is that of the speaker being offered emotional nourishment from an old breast, which figures a mother incapable of providing emotional support – *une mère en manque*. The final image of the bloodied head reaches back to a hopeful beginning at the time of the child's birth. But it becomes transformed to a figure of an older child driven to death by beating or by an attempted suicide, figuring the speaker's trauma and despair. Having been rejected and maltreated, he seeks to withdraw from his suffering and mingle his blood with a reassuring natural object, "l'herbe douce", an image representing a positive aspect of a true mother, the earth. He wants to sleep to regain strength in communion with the earth, or perhaps to withdraw from life altogether to fuse with the true mother by physical death.

The elliptic syntax and concrete imagery of the poem generate two contrasting worlds of the speaker. On the one hand, a blissful, erotic "printemps" of reaching towards life early in childhood and, on the other hand, a painful feeling of denial, rejection and punishment later, which was driving him towards death. Neither of the two is represented by speech that would give full information about the underlying experience that arouses so much passion and force, but which is largely unspeakable and covered by silence. The discourse of the poem draws on unconscious symbols that break the silence only enough to provide a glimpse of the nature of the experience, and the poet fashions his discourse by consciously managing such symbols together with other lexical, syntactic and prosodic elements of the poem. The syntax, which is elliptic and disjointed, becomes a semantic element of the discourse by reflecting a similar structure of the arrangement of the unconscious symbols that push and press to reveal themselves. The gaps in the syntax just allow appearance of incoherent images that struggle to break open the void and silence of the unspeakable to deterritorialize the past traumatic experience to one that may be more bearable.

The image of a hostile and malevolent mother that emerges from this poem may have had at its source an incident from Guillevic's life. Serge Gaubert records a conversation with Guillevic, in which the poet tells, at the

age of 80 and for the first time in his life, of a traumatic childhood experience which up to that time has remained unspoken:

Un jour, après qu'il [Guillevic] ait commis il ne sait plus quelle bêtise, elle [Mother] décide de sévir. Elle installe Eugène devant une feuille de papier et lui dicte une lettre. [...] Une lettre à Monsieur le Directeur de l'Assistance Publique. Elle sollicite son intervention; qu'il fasse le nécessaire pour qu'on vienne chercher ce garçon si mal né, malgré son prénom, qu'on ne peut plus le garder à la maison. [...] Eugène doit aller jusqu'au bout, écrire l'adresse, affranchir, cacheter et porter la lettre à la poste. L'expédier, puis attendre l'exécution. (Gaubert 1987: 298-299)

The letter did not reach its destination because Guillevic's mother had a friend at the Post Office with whom she arranged to have the letter intercepted. It was only meant to be a good lesson for Eugène who, unaware of the plan, awaited fearfully the execution.

### Forging the poetic discourse

*Terraqué* contains a section called "Art Poétique" consisting of five poems, each of which deals with some aspect of Guillevic's poetic language, indicating that he is aware of the importance of creating his own poetic discourse. The text of his poetry is often simultaneously metatextual, a self-commenting process exploring the relationship of the received, major language on which he draws, but which he transforms to create his poetic idiom. For Guillevic, the defining feature of a poet is that he creates his own poetic language. He states this qualification clearly in an interview with Anne-Marie Mitchell when discussing the popular view that Brassens is a *poète-chansonnier*:

J'aime beaucoup Brassens, mais quand on me dit que c'est un poète, je répond qu'il est plus versificateur que poète. Il a une sensibilité, mais il ne crée pas un langage. (GM, 23)

Two of these poems are linked to the *armoire* poem by the figure of a "menuisier", perhaps one, not coincidentally, who made the *armoire*. The poet seems to be in competition with him and views him with some professional jealousy because this craftsman makes "catafalques" (T, 185), and the implied coffins from inert wood with the greatest of ease, while he, the poet, has to struggle with living language and its obstinate words that resist becoming messengers of his poetic vision.

## I

Les mots, les mots  
Ne se laissent pas faire  
Comme des catafalques.  
Et toute langue  
Est étrangère. (T, 185)

This first poem of the section "Art poétique" reveals much about Guillevic's relationship to his poetic discourse, which is difficult to fashion from the language that surrounds him. The word "étrangère" suggests a certain alienation from all forms of language that he encounters and the foreignness of language strikes him specifically on two levels. On the one hand, he abhors facile, conventional discourse, which he finds foreign to himself and mortifying for his poetry - a language of death. On the other hand, the desired poetic discourse - "Les mots, les mots"/[*dont je veux me servir*] - does not come to him easily, ready-made. In such language, which he painstakingly constructs from silence, common objects would speak themselves as messengers of the mystery of life and death. The poet rejects the emptiness of the conventional language and wishes to use common words in a way that would transform the experience of silence of his individual experience. He shifts away from that silence but never completely fills it, weaving it often into the density of the elliptic lexical and syntactic structure of his poetry.

"Catafalques" carry coffins containing dead bodies and the poet could have used the word *cercueil*, which is also made by a carpenter. However, the



word "catafalques" offers a more precise representation of the conventional, mortifying discourse of death that he rejects. A catafalque is a structure on which a coffin with a dead body is easily placed, a structure, which literally supports death and which lets itself be easily made for that purpose, *se laisse faire*. Figuratively then, a catafalque represents a poetic discourse easily made, and one that supports a mortifying or dead language. Further, a catafalque is not a plain structure, but a decorated one, presumably the work of the carpenter. An extension of its meaning is "Décoration funèbre au-dessus du cercueil" (*Le Petit Robert*), which points to the trade of the undertaker, who heaps pompous and vain embellishments on the coffin, and to the French ritual of the *chapelle ardente*, both of which employ decoration to hide the ugly reality of death. In the final analysis, this poem, through the word "catafalques", which speaks itself on several levels without being a metaphor, rejects the notion of poetry as a decorative artifact. The poet's rejection of the empty language that the catafalques figure, makes a metatextual comment that the idea and the language of poetic decoration are anathema to him.

Guillevic is afraid of death, but he tries to face it and to transform his fear without hiding its existence behind poetic decoration. The frequent return to the images of death in his poetry forms a link to the "cercueil-armoire" in the "blanc code" of the *armoire* poem and represents the constant threat and temptation of death to him both as physical death and as a form of death: life not fully lived. Guillevic's rejection in this poem of the temptation of the conventional, mortifying discourse, one that would lead to the death of his poetry, points to his resolve to deterritorialize his fear of death by a language leading to plateaux of more harmonious life and to their constant remaking through that language (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 20-21).

Another poem in "Art poétique" takes up the subject of searching for and struggling with language some time in the poet's past.

Les mots qu'on arrachait,

Les mots qu'il fallait dire,  
 Tombaient comme des jours. (T, 188)

Only the poet can be the speaker of this poem because the repetition of the word "les mots" indicates the continuing preoccupation with his poetic discourse in the section "Art Poétique". However, the impersonal pronoun "on" creates the impression that his "je" is to some degree detached from the act of writing, suggesting that he views it as both a conscious and an unconscious process. The imperfect tense expresses here the poet's habitual manner of writing in the past that is not clearly specified. The definite article of "Les mots" signals that the speaker distinguishes between two kinds of language: a mass of conventional language, which is outside "Les mots" on the one hand, and on the other hand, the words that he was in need of but lacked: *les mots qui lui manquent*. That is one of the meanings of  *falloir*  in the line "Les mots qu'il fallait dire", which also means that he would feel impelled to say something new and individual in exactly the right words that he had to have for the purpose. It would have been easy to use the ready-made language which stands outside "les mots", language that he would not need to tear out, (*arracher*), but such writing would be copying or repeating, *le calque*, of existing experience, not its transformation, *la carte*. What he had to say could be done only in his own poetic idiom, which he felt he had to create and the action of doing so is *arracher*, which means pulling up common words by their roots and pulling them away from their conventional associations.

Created in this manner, his new words would fall, "Tombaient comme des jours", where "jours" figure light and life in opposition to the implied "nuit". These desired words would become a live and expressive poetry of a discourse of transformation. Here the word *tomber* draws on the meaning of "Tomber à point, à propos, à pic" (Le Petit Robert), to constitute the creative activity, the "days" of the speaker. This new discourse would work very well because it would flow, or fall, irresistibly as the days go, *tomber comme les jours tombent*. Each of these days would rise - *le jour se lève* - and after running

its course would metaphorically set - *le jour tombe* - to continue the progression the following day. The expression *le jour tombe* is not as common to describe sunset as *la nuit tombe* but it does exist: "*Tombée de la nuit, du jour, moment où la nuit tombe où le jour tombe*" (Le Petit Robert). The expression *le jour tombe* would be chosen by Guillevic precisely because it is unusual and as an oxymoron it not only subverts and violates the reader's expectations, but also works on a metatextual level. The violence represents the poet's action of pulling out common words like weeds from the ground, that is deterritorializing them, and then planting them, reterritorializing them, in a new context in his minor language.

The discourse of the last poem of *Terraqué* and of "Art poétique" counters the poet's fears of materiality and challenges death by language that works towards transformation of death into a renewal of life.

Si les orages ouvrent des bouches  
Et si la nuit perce en plein jour,

Si la rivière est un roi nègre  
Assassiné, pris dans les mouches,

Si le vignoble a des tendresses  
Et des caresses pour déjà morts,

- Il s'est agi depuis toujours  
De prendre pied,

De s'en tirer  
Mieux que la main du menuisier  
Avec le bois. (T, 189)

The three images of the first part of the poem figure the ambiguity of materiality in that each contains within itself both life and death. The storms, the river and the vineyard represent the material cycle of existence, which begins with life that ends in death, and which then is followed by a renewal of life. The storms are destructive to life, introducing the idea of death that arrives

like the night piercing the fullness of day that figures life. Death destroys organic matter, which during the second stage forms a black rotting river of mud - "un roi nègre" - transforming the dead matter by decomposition into inorganic minerals - "the king is dead". These minerals become a foundation of new organic life in the image of the vineyard, which is linked to death by the dead wood of its stakes, but also by the solid wood stocks, *les pieds*, of the vine that look dead in winter after pruning, both recalling the dead wood of the *armoire* and the catafalques. However this image represents a transformation to life again as in spring the stocks are given new life by sprouting new shoots and being caressed by tendrils of new growth, by which even the dead stakes assume an appearance of life, - "long live the king". The expression "déjà morts" means 'already dead' for the stakes, but 'dead before', that is looking dead before they come to life again, for the stocks. Death is therefore present in life and vice versa, depending on the point of the cycle at which one begins to observe. The four material objects - the storms, the night, the river and the vineyard - are, however, not only elements of material transformation in nature, but they also speak themselves as figures of a parallel discourse of transformation by language. The first three of them deterritorialize the speaker's fears while, after he flees from them, the figure of the vineyard reterritorializes him in a newly-found, safer position. In this way this last poem of *Terraqué*, which is set in the present, takes up the dilemma of the fear of both death and life contained in the *armoire* poem, offering a way out through language.

The images containing a threat of death have the syntactic form of impersonal, conditional "si" clauses in the present tense, in which the hypothetical "si" conjunction has the meaning of if, when or while. These three subordinate clauses raise the question of what is to be done under such a threat of death and the answer is given in the impersonal main clause, which takes up the rest of the poem and which makes two recommendations. The main clause begins with "- Il s'est agi depuis toujours", meaning that the speaker has always really known how to counter the threat of death, but was not able to do it. The compound past tense corresponds here to the English present perfect, making

the suggested action relevant from the past into the present, that is valid still. The first part of the answer is, "De prendre pied", meaning to get or gain a foothold or to get a grip on, and the poet sees it as an obvious, commonsense solution to an eternal problem, not just his, but everybody's because everyone is threatened by death. Since the threat and fear of death greatly occupies the speaker's disturbed mind and imagination, the foothold for him is to be established in material reality as the first step towards embracing it altogether. This is the way towards ending the separation of the "dead" and the "bread" in the *armoire* and towards integrating them into a fuller life that includes both death and the erotic.

The impersonal verbal structure conceals the speaker's "je", distancing him from this process which may be too painful for him because it is also an expression of intention to escape from being "traqué" by the memory of his mother. She is metaphorically present in the wood and the female shape of the closed *armoire*, made by a "menuisier", as the agent of rejection, culpability, fear of death and sex, and of the speaker's nightmares of sado-masochistic character. Gaining a foothold in a life comprising both death and sex is the first step on the path away from destructive drives to death, and turning towards some sort of erotic, emotional sanity or normality. In this respect much of Guillevic's poetry may be regarded as a form of continuing self-psychotherapy.

The last couplet of the poem contains the second piece of advice and reveals how the healing process is to be achieved after the action of "prendre pied", which now retrospectively acquires its other meaning of getting hold of, or grip on, language. For a poet the way out of the threat of death and alienation from life is through the material discourse, the thingspeak, of his poetry and this solution is expressed by the poet's usual elliptic understatement. He wants to drag himself out of the threat of death, "De s'en tirer/Mieux que la main du menuisier/Avec le bois." The pronoun "en" stands for a drive towards death, that is from exclusion and alienation from materiality and fullness of life. In an interview Guillevic confirms that he strives to transform his alienation, which is for him like being sunk in mud, through writing his kind of poetry: "j'écris pour

sortir de la mare, de l'enlissement, et je n'ai que le langage pour cela" (CP, 74). The final allusion of the poem to "the", not "a" carpenter refers back to the *armoire*, which was made by the same kind of tradesman, and to the poem on page 185, in which this phantom craftsman makes "catafalques", implements of death, more easily than the poet fashions poetry. The implied message here is that it is easy to drift towards death and one has to do better, "mieux", struggle harder, to embrace life.<sup>1</sup>

Guillevic believed that material objects, friendly or hostile, possess some sort of life and spirit, and even language. His poetry indicates that objects are capable of expressing their energy, pain and anger by material sign language of gesture, gaze, shape, movement, sound and texture, and Guillevic apparently listened to their speech: "Le silex, le paysage, l'écume lui parlaient, à voix basse" (Bosquet 1971: 85). Animals and household objects should be added to this list and their language is their contribution to the poet's thingspeak. He listened not only to material objects, but also to others who were similarly marginalized and oppressed by humanity, and saw himself as their spokesman. He formulated this role once as "[...] c'était moi qui parlait à travers eux" (CP, 81) and another time as "parler au nom de" (CP, 112). He illustrates the second instance by the following anecdote:

Un jour, Frénaud me taquinait sur *Carnac*, il me disait: j'en ai marre de tes on et de tes ça, tu parles comme une vieille bonne femme, comme une vieille bretonne! Puis, aussitôt, me regardant dans les yeux il a ajouté: Mais, c'est peut-être ce que je dis, c'est peut-être que tu parles

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<sup>1</sup> Guillevic is rather ambiguous towards the carpenter's manual work. On the one hand, he considers himself to be a manual worker like the carpenter by writing his poetry by hand: "C'est important pour moi d'écrire matériellement le poème, [...] j'écris en effet à la main, [...] c'est un travail physique, c'est *faire* quelque chose..." (CP, 82). He also believes that, when finished, his poems should hold together as a piece of furniture does. "Je cro's voir que mes poèmes tiennent comme un ébéniste voit si son *armoire* tient" (VP, 98). On the other hand, he imposes a limit on the analogy by the line "Mieux que la main du menuisier". The carpenter's work repeats set patterns, while the poet re-creates his experience by constantly reinventing his discourse to deterritorialize that experience.

au nom de lignées de Bretons qui n'ont jamais parlé. Je lui ai dit: Tu me fais là le plus beau compliment qu'on puisse faire à un poète! En effet, je ne parle pas en mon nom, je parle *au nom de*. (CP, 112)

In both cases, *à travers* and *au nom de*, it is the poet who speaks, "je parle", in minor language taking up the cause of a culturally marginalized and dispossessed people and their history.

Another instance of the poet's speaking "au nom de" was that of his writing poetry in the service of socialist realism and communist propaganda in the early 1950s during his phase of political commitment to that cause. Suppressing his individuality, he was speaking in the name of a political movement, which he believed was going to improve the world. This kind of speaking *au nom de* was of a different order from the previous one. It was not conducted in minor language, but rather in major language that repeated ready-made ideas and language of others.

In the final analysis, in most of his poetry Guillevic speaks for himself because the experience the poetry draws on is highly personal. Its most personal source is his traumatic relationship to the mother, which has been largely repressed and is revealed by symbols of his unconscious that break into his concrete discourse. Such discourse keeps deterritorializing his experience by small metaphoric shifts away from that destructive experience in a similar way that a psychoanalytical therapy may do.

### **Erotic trauma**

The poet's traumatic childhood experiences have been repressed in his unconscious in the form of opaque symbols, which would reveal themselves in dreams or slips of the tongue, but are unspeakable in conscious speech. It is this territory of the unconscious and of the border region of "semi-conscient" (CP, 112), lacking in open, concrete language, which is an important source of his poetic discourse. Here he draws the repressed erotic forces of the *id* from the

unspoken/unspeaking discourse of the other of his fragmented self towards the speakable/spoken. This process does not necessarily achieve a complete transformation to full speech, but tends to shift the boundary from the unconscious/unspeaking towards conscious full speech while the poet in his work moves between the two across the border region that they have in common. He deterritorializes the unspeakable/speaking by shifting a boundary between them by working on language to allow it to happen. The minimal allusive nature of his discourse tends to draw on the concrete vocabulary, opacity, and elliptic syntax of the unconscious speech.

The effects of a painful personal experience, which the speaker originally kept and guarded as unspoken, are captured in a poem in which the symbolic representation of his bitterness first reveals his trauma as unspeakable in conscious language. However, the imagery of his compulsive and repeated mulling over the experience moves between the metaphoric and the literal, shifting the boundary from the unspeakable towards the the spoken, albeit minimally, and alluding indirectly to the nature and the agent of the injury.

Quelque part en toi  
Où nul oeil ne voit  
Tu rumines ta plaie  
Comme du verre pilé. (7, 122)

The pain is still felt in the present, but its origin lies in the past because it is buried so deep in the speaker. In the past the nature and the agent of the injury have been resolutely kept unspoken. When the speaker came to make the experience into a poetic construct, the past injury was so utterly unspeakable for him that the only image that figures it is that of ruminating "du verre pilé". This does not even hint at the nature or origin of the wound, but only represents the intensity of the pain the torment causes. Only a very indirect allusion breaks open the silence that covers the unspeakable experience as there is no image in the poem that would point beyond the symptoms to the causes of the trauma. This allusion comes in the line "Où nul oeil ne voit", which points to the depth



of a degradation that lies much deeper than the shame of ugliness in the rocks poem, and indicates a deep-seated nature of the experience coming from an old childhood wound. Further, a connection to a childhood experience implies some agency of the mother and the image of the eye alludes to her watchful presence. As revealed in a poem in "Avec", the poet's mother was in the habit of watching and scrutinizing his behaviour and his thoughts: "A tous les horizons,/Mère tu m'attendais" (A, 66). It was her eye that constantly watched him and it was she who wanted to know all about his thoughts and actions and it was therefore her who was the agent of his trauma. In her moral, religious zeal her eye had become the watchful eye of God as traditionally represented in Catholic iconography. The child resented her watchful domination and was therefore hiding his pain deep inside himself, keeping it unspoken, because bringing it into the open would have given the mother sadistic satisfaction. Addressing himself by the familiar "tu", as if he were speaking to another person, gives the impression that the speaker suffers from a fragmentation of his self, as if a more rational part of himself were observing his more emotional part, which is brooding compulsively on an emotional wound.

The rhetoric of the poem shapes and represents the experience, by working on the original repressed and unspoken by shifting it to the unconscious/metaphoric level that reveals its unspeakable nature. The discourse moves then to the territory of the semi-conscious/literal and to the alternation between the literal and the figurative level. "Tu rumines ta plaie", on the literal level, brings to mind both an animal licking its wound, "ta plaie", and eating in the constant, never ceasing manner of ruminant animals, which is an action that is involuntary, habitual and repetitive. It is also pleasant because, on the literal level, it is associated with satisfying hunger. On the metaphoric level, the idea of ruminating means brooding compulsively and enjoyably on a painful wound, therefore suggesting that the speaker is indulging in satisfying self-pity. The repeated action suggested by *ruminer* points to the repetitive nature of the speaker's neurotic obsession with being repressed and with the repeated return to the repressed experience in the same manner as ruminants return their food to

their mouths. The simile of the last line, "Comme du verre pilé", abruptly and horrifyingly literalizes the meaning of "ruminer" from brooding to a physical image of masticating and swallowing crushed glass. Such an unnatural action contradicts the natural physical reaction that would, on the literal level, be of spitting the glass out, while on the figurative level this startling image suddenly and forcibly reveals that what takes place is not just self-pity, but a masochistic drive to death. What occurs here is work on language that includes what was previously excluded, a deterritorialization which shifts the boundary of the unspoken/unspeakable a little towards the speakable/spoken.

In another, bitter and self-ironic poem the speaker represents the feeling of emotional desolation of his life as his "grisaille", a dull and grey condition of his existence originating in past traumatic experience.

- Tu pleurais donc sur l'étendue  
Où ta grisaille venait mourir.  
Et tu la colorais des feux  
Des métaux que tu devinas.  
Tu la faisais trembler d'une eau  
Distillée dans cent mille injures.  
Tu la chauffais d'un vieux secret

Que depuis la journée amère  
Tu partages avec l'arbre dur.  
Tu la faisais bouillir d'un rire  
Où ton supplice te riait.

(T, 125)

The dominant imperfect tense of the discourse designates here a repeated action in the past, and in Freudian terms it would mean a situation of traumatic neurosis that leads to a compulsion to repeat an unpleasant experience. In "Tu pleurais donc sur l'étendue/Où ta grisaille venait mourir", the expression "sur l'étendue" can be read both as the territory of his old and dying feeling of injury, and of his ceaseless crying over its impending end. He would cry to keep the "grisaille", the depressing grey emptiness of his life, alive during the time when it was about to die. He would amplify and colour it, make

it tremble in tears of a hundred thousand abuses or insults, warm it up by an old secret, and finally he would bring it to boil by a laugh in which his torture, or suffering, would laugh at him. "[C]ent mille injures", "un vieux secret", "la journée amère" and "ton supplice" suggest sufficiently the origin of the torture in the past, that is in the speaker's childhood and his childhood is unavoidably connected with the mother.

The traumatic "vieux secret" dates to a particular time, "la journée amère", an expression in which the "a" in "amère" can be read as the prefix of negation of the word *mère*, indicating a day when the mother became a non-mother, and his life one without mother. Another allusion to the mother comes in "l'arbre dur" with which he shares the secret during his childhood escapes into nature from her domination and persecution. The tree is a metonymy for nature which was for Guillevic a repository of good, while the tactile image of "l'arbre dur" indicates the action of touching or even embracing the tree that was literally "dur", but metaphorically soft inside, becoming for the child a substitute for the soft body of the mother. In a metaphoric shift in the discourse the real mother becomes, although soft outside, metaphorically "dur", meaning cruel, inside and her presence is implied in the unspoken/unspeakable language void of the *blanc codé* of the two lines, "Que depuis la journée amère/Tu partages avec l'arbre dur". "Tu partages", the only present tense of the poem, indicates that the speaker still shares the memory of the events of the "journée amère" with "l'arbre", a particular tree, and therefore also with one particular person. The pain and shame that drive the speaker's masochistic obsession with self-punishment go back to an old secret, some incident that occurred on "la journée amère", a secret which was unspoken and became unspeakable in front of people, and could be shared only with a tree. The frustration and impotence of not being able to deal with the situation provokes in the speaker hysterical laughter, in which the mocking of his own anguish would come back at him: "Où ton supplice te riait". The litany of repeated self-laceration and its increasing amplification and embellishment suggest a certain pleasure in engaging in those activities, revealing a strong element of masochism.

However, the placement of the experience in the past and the poet's fragmentation into two subjects, one of whom ironically mocks the other in the familiar register of "tu", shape the experience as an elaborate linguistic construct that distances the speaker from the originally painful events. As is the case in the previous poem, the nature or cause of the original traumatic experience is still unspeakable when the adult poet turns it into a language performance, in which it is only alluded to by unconscious symbols of his neurotic reactions. However, this work in and on language achieves a discursive shift, which could not have been done in the speaker's usual language. Consequently the poetic performance becomes more impersonal and effective in deterritorializing the original trauma by language, even if perhaps only marginally.

### **The *étang* poem**

The *étang* poem consists of two thematically antithetical sections: lines 1-18 and lines 19-28. The implied discourse of the first section represents, through the figure of the pond and the wind, a growing fear generated by repressed memories of experience of a destructive childhood relationship between the speaker and his mother. This experience has fragmented the speaking subject's self which speaks both as a man and a fearful child. The second section constitutes a denial of what is represented in the first part by an attempt by the speaker as man to heal a dislocation of his erotic instincts by joining a collective whose ideology promises such healing.

Ce soir encore l'étang  
 Ne s'est pas mis debout  
 Au passage du vent.  
 Les chambres sont glacées  
 Comme des carpes. La peur  
 Ne quitte plus les longs couloirs.

L'étang viendrait  
Devant les vitres,  
Devant des jones et des têtards.

Il y a quelqu'un  
Dans le vent.  
Sa main se venge  
Sur les murs et les arbres.

• Corps humains que l'on palpe,  
Corps qui suent;  
Rien que ces corps  
Devant la peur, devant le froid  
Et l'avenir.

Et si l'étang se lève, libidineux,  
Il n'aura pas raison  
De notre calme;  
Nos mains, qui caressent les femmes,  
Sauront l'atteindre et lui percer le ventre.

Nous construirons.  
Nous liquiderons la peur. De la nuit  
Nous ferons du jour plus tendre -

Et nous n'aurons besoin  
Que du toucher des peaux. (T, 71-72)

*The nightmare of the child in the man*

Guillevic acknowledges that the *étang*, one of the most important symbols of his poetry, figures the mother: "l'étang, c'est peut-être la mère, la matrice si tu veux, l'eau matricielle" (CP, 132). The metaphorical "étang" of the poem represents for the speaking subject embodied in language firstly his experience of emotional rejection and persecution in childhood by the mother. This experience was repressed and became unspeakable, but was relived through the symbols of his nightmares as he grew to adulthood. In these dreams the waters of a pond threaten to rise to engulf him and the wind on the shore that drives them threatens to obliterate him. The elements represent a threat of

emotional domination by the mother, a lure of her twisted sado-masochistic sexuality and the forces of the speaker's repressed and disturbed unconscious against his self.

The first reading of the first two lines of the poem – "Ce soir encore l'étang/Ne s'est pas mis debout" – , disregarding any context that follows, suggests two things. First, the voice of the speaking subject reveals certain relief that the pond yet again did not rise, or has yet again not risen, that night, because the rising implies some kind of threat. Second, in the speaker's mind the relief corresponds to closure of the threat of the pond's rising if the *passé composé* is read as an English preterite. But as a present perfect the *passé composé* brings temporary relief – the pond may yet rise. For a brief moment the speaker is a rational adult man for whom a repeating nightmare has not materialized. However, from his childhood he contains a presence within himself of a fearful child. The speaker's self already hesitant in the fluctuating interpretability of his words begins to fragment, now to speak in more than one voice revealing clearly in him the voice of a child who speaks against his voice of an adult. The child begins to fear that the pond may yet rise up or still rise again, "encore", and although its threat is not realized, the pond still provokes fear. Despite the relative calm of the pond, the voice of the child in the man shifts the discourse from possible closure towards openness of the threat. He re-opens the world of his nightmares by entering it through evoking or remembering a scene in the present tense, bringing with that evocation the metaphors of death: bedrooms as icy as carp, a metaphor that "brings the pond into" the inner space of the house, making it "rise up". Fear now haunts the long corridors of the house.

The four verses of the first half of the poem are dominated by escalating fear of the nightmare and realize the fear, which is denied in the first three lines, but opened up in the following three lines. Each of the four verses intensifies the experience of fear and in its last line or last two lines culminates in an image of fear, returning to it as to a kind of refrain, a haunting *ritournelle*. Further, the length of the lines in each verse varies in such a way as to suggest a

disruption of a regular rhythm of breathing through uncertainty and open fear or terror. While six syllable lines appear in the first verse, they are not maintained throughout. Broken patterns of syllabic length appear elsewhere. The distribution of syntactic units over lines is also irregular. In the first verse, for example, this order isolates the noun group "la peur".

Having re-entered the world of his childhood nightmare through the cold and death imagery of the pond, the child in the man's language manifests increasing childish fear in the second verse. The three lines of the verse have the breathing pattern of 4+4+8 syllables, suggesting an onset of panic through the images of the pond. The subject hypothesizes that the pond would come up and rise against the permeable barrier of the windows and feels that his inner core is threatened with engulfment by the as yet ambiguous outer forces of the pond. The image of the pond alive, "Bavant des joncs et des têtards", realizes that fear. Here the elliptic syntax withholds the conditional clause, *s'il se levait*, which is implied by "L'étang viendrait". Such syntactic ellipsis also indicates holding of breath instead of stating the feared possibility and contributes to creating a powerful minor language that cries unspeakable fear, confusion and panic. The unspeakable nature of the fear is figured by the wind, the water, the cold, but it is animate: it is some form of death by engulfment. In the poetic performance that represents the fear, the voice of the speaker draws on the terrors generated in his own nightmares as a child, nightmares that he has carried over into adulthood. The child in the man speaks in the voice of his childhood pleasurable experience of playing with tadpoles and reeds around a pond, but this is also a figure of being on the edge, in danger of falling in and drowning. The child's fear of the rising up of the pond is doubly irrational. It is such not only as a child's nightmarish fantasy, but also as a constant, obsessive fear that persists even though it remains unrealized. The expected menacing event not only does not happen, but it does not happen in spite of being repeatedly awaited: expected again, "encore", tonight as it was every night before that. Such obsessive fear infantilizes the speaker as the fearful child,

revealing at the same time his relationship to, and his captivity by, the main but explicitly unspoken agent of the poem, the mother.

The scene of the child in the man's nightmare is divided tenuously between two metaphoric locations. One location is in the outer, physical world. A place of the child's pleasure, the pond, becomes a threat to him. An object of desire becomes an object of horror. The other location represents the inner, intimate world of his self, which is figured by a house, which has walls and windows that are close to the edge of the pond. This dwelling also figures the human world of the child, the world of his family, where he seeks and finds relative shelter from the outer, although the inner, the family also poses a threat to him. However, the house is also the locus of the implied father and the symbolic order that he represents, and therefore of language that the speaker erects against the threat. Neither the water nor the wind actually breaks in because the house is a metaphor of language that keeps the human subject from engulfment and extinction.

The two worlds are not clearly separated because desire and fear of both the mother and the son move between the outer and the inner. If the pond is a figure of desire but also horror for the child in the man, the mother is situated in both the inner and the outer of the *étang*. She can be "sur les murs et les arbres" identified in the active agent of the hostile wind on the surface of the pond and outside. She is figured by the round, belly-like inside of the pond, its "eau matricielle", and the "chambres" and "couloirs" of the house all have connotations of the female, which occur elsewhere in the "chambre de muqueuses" (T, 45). These cavities that normally generate and sustain life are now ice cold and lifeless, while her "eau matricielle" has turned into *l'eau morte*.

The meeting point between the two worlds is the windows of the house, which are permeable to both seeing and being seen, both to threaten the speaker and of his desire to reach out to the lure of the mother. The windows are a fragile barrier between the relative safety of the house and the water of the pond, figure of the bad mother which the child in the man fears may rise up,



"debout", against him. The offer of the chambers and corridors, and of the "eau matricielle", contaminated by tadpoles and reeds, appearing in his nightmare, all come to lure him in or engulf him by breaking through the windows and taking the place of the inner bedrooms and corridors of safety. The child may be engulfed by the mother's sadistic domination over him, which is not just his fear but also his desire.

The child in the man's position towards the topography of the pond is even more ambiguous. He is inside the nightmare whose locus is the *étang* and its surroundings, and he shelters inside the house on the "real" edge of the dream pond and the metaphoric edge of his real and intimate worlds. He is surrounded by the outer, which he rejects, fears and struggles against through the language of the speaking subject, but he is also drawn to it and desires it. He knows he would be emotionally killed or mutilated by it, but would dwell in it. The pond is an ambiguous territory of the mother's domination and her perverted erotic attraction, both of which spell castration and death to the individuality of the speaker's self. The masochistic attraction of the child in the man to this outer world of death is engendered and kept alive by the erotic enticement present in the images of the "chambres" and "longs couloirs". These images are deeply ambiguous and reveal the ambiguity of the subject's desire. They are inside the *étang* and proper to the bad mother and yet part of his inner world, associated with the good mother of the family space. Submerged in the negation of icy cold water, they have become part of the hostile territory of the outer. In the inner they offer minimal retreat. In spite of being aware of the change, the subject still views them as a possible source of gratification of his childhood yearning for emotional acceptance, which was denied to him by mother's hostility and rejection because he was male. His feelings of rejection by the mother, and implied desire of her, are expressed in the poem already read:

"Mère aux larmes brûlantes, l'homme fut chassé de vous - "

De vos tendres ténèbres,

De votre chambre de muqueuses.

(7, 45)

The child, always present in the man, has yearned for the warmth and comfort of the mother's body denied to him in childhood, but now offered by the "chambres" and "couloirs" of the belly-like pond and the erotic profusion of tadpoles in the water raised up by the wind. However, the man remembers that as a child he was treated sadistically and he knows that this sexual experience must be denied to prevent its renewal and continuation.

This implied element of sado-masochism in the relationship between the mother and son is made more explicit in the second section of the poem in the line: "Et si l'étang se lève, libidineux". The notion of *libidineux* can be read in the erotic allusions of the offer to the child of the water of the pond as *l'eau matricielle* and of the "chambres" and "couloirs" in the second section of the poem. The first meaning of "libidineux", as the adjectival form of libido, is that of being charged with, or desiring, sexual pleasure. In the case of the speaker, it means that he perceives the movement of the "eau matricielle" of the pond as an erotic invitation on the part of the mother, and it reveals that he is still driven by an erotic desire of her. Not the mother as she actually was, but one that should have provided emotional gratification for him when he was a child. However, what calls to him now as the child in the man is the persistent lure of the mother's twisted libido, which has been pushed beyond its function of providing pleasure into the realm of sado-masochism. This is the aspect of the "eau matricielle" of the pond with which the son has been tainted, which he fears, but which also attracts him, and which is lodged in his unconscious. The sado-masochistic element pursues the poet into adulthood, finding expression in some of his poems, and this element is represented by the other sense of the word "libidineux", which is *vicieux*. This meaning is based on the traditional view that pursuit of sexual pleasure, which is the meaning of the Latin root of the word "libidineux", beyond the socially accepted moral norms, is sinful and destructive to individuals and society. Indeed, this is how it is found to be by the speaker's collective in the second section of the poem. They consider it a

vice. For the speaking subject, the mother's sadism was destructive, or vicious, both physically and psychologically, driving him towards emotional death. This meaning of "libidineux" as a compromised and depraved kind of the erotic is figured in the erotically ambiguous image of the line "Bavants des jones et des tétards". Here the word "[b]avant", whose meaning to dribble, slobber or drool, suggests something repulsive and dirty, passes onto the "jones" and the "tétards", subverting their role as signifiers of natural, healthy erotic reproduction and growth. Further evidence in support of this reading is the poet's view of the "étang", which often appears in Guillevie's poetry, as something deceitful and unpleasant: "le calme apparent, menteur, du paysage, qui cache quelque chose de grouillant" (*CP*, 132). The unpleasantness extends generally to tadpoles, which adults view as "grouillant", even though children do not share this view.

For the child in the man the fear in the nightmare reaches its highest intensity in the third verse. Unlike the rising of the water, this is no longer a potential, unrealized threat, but a real experience occurring in a dream in the present tense. Representing a common childhood experience, the four lines of this verse are convincing as the voice of a child for whom, during a stormy night, in a nightmare, the inanimate becomes animate as the wind lashes the walls and the trees. The tone of the child's voice betrays fear and in "Il y a quelqu'un/Dans le vent," there is a typical child's affirmation of the reality of the nightmare in the appeal for help to parental authority. The line "Sa main se venge" reveals that in the mind of the child the storm figures a human agency, which for him is the mother's vengeful action directed against him, all men and life itself. The syllabic pattern of the lines is 4+3+4+6 and the first three short lines point to the panting of a child crying out in his nightmare of irrational fear. The gradual escalation of the experience of childish anxiety in the child in the man reaches its climax and the final, longer line, which is an extended cry of terror at the approach of the punishing hand.

This scene of the fourth verse represents a culmination of the child's and the family's fear in the ongoing nightmare. The line "- Corps humains que

"On palpe" is no longer a child's language, but an observation by which the man dissociates himself from both the child and the family and the world of fear that they belong to. He first evokes the child running for protection to his parents' bed and being cold, finds their warm bodies sweating. The parents are not able to console him and he just becomes one of the "Corps [...] Devant la peur". The man's voice sets off a slippage from the world of a nightmare into a nightmare world that is real. For the man, who has now resumed his adult voice, the sweating bodies represent the wider, real world of a society of exploited and oppressed masses beset by uncertainty and anxiety, a society which has "[r]ien" to protect itself and him from the fear, "la peur", of death, "le froid", and nothing to offer for the future - "l'avenir". To the man, that society appears to have reached an impasse, but he does not plan to remain part of it. He will escape into the world of communist collectivism that, he believes, will protect him against the fear and the death, and will offer him a productive future. This new world is implied in the word "avenir" which, together with "Nous construirons" of the next section of the poem, are important words and notions in the communist political rhetoric, forming here a structural link between the two sections.

*The collectivist response and its failure*

In the second part of the poem, the speaking subject attempts to transform himself radically by breaking away from his family ties and his childhood memories. He leaves behind the fearful child of his self and finds himself in a group of people who take him in and will protect him against the potential threat of the pond. Becoming a member of a collective, he surrenders his individuality and merges his voice with the collective voice of "notre calme" and "Nos mains". The collective draws strength from its combined erotic forces - "Nos mains, qui caressent les femmes" - and his new membership marks a change in his thinking from individualism to collectivism. They take up his fight as their own, declaring that they will act decisively

against the "étang/mère" and her individualistic possessiveness if she rises to ensnare the speaker and the collective he has now joined: "Et si l'étang se lève, libidineux". They consider such attempt at individualistic domination as "libidineux", that is being tainted by possessiveness and sado-masochism, and contrary to relationships freely arrived at in their collective. The speaker now abandons his individuality for speaking in the collective "nous" and, backed by his comrades, takes a defiant stand against his past fears and status of the child in the man. His rhetoric claims that the collective he belongs to draws strength from the healing powers of the erotic life force of women's bodies - "Nos mains, qui caressent les femmes". With newly found confidence they will overcome and reject both the threat and the offer of the pond with the poet declaring that the pond/mother will not get the better of them: "Il n'aura pas raison/De notre calme". The newly found erotic strength will come simply "du toucher des peaux". By implication the collectivist "ventre" of its women, which is a source of life, is set in opposition to the explicitly stated libidinous "ventre" of the "étang", which is a source of death and would be pierced by collective action if it became a threat.

By joining the collective the speaker has suppressed his individual self, has given up his family ties and speaks in the plural "notre calme" and "nos mains" in the belief that the collective will solve both his problem of recurring anxiety and erotic alienation. If the pond rises against him again, "Et si l'étang se lève, libidineux", that is if his erotic trauma returns, the collective is ready to kill it by piercing its belly. "Nos mains [...] Sauront l'atteindre et lui percer le ventre", and to drain from it both the menace and the temptation it contains. The piercing is to be accomplished from the inside by the poet, who would figuratively be held captive there, and who wants to be born into full adult emotional independence from the pond/mother. The collective may be literally on the outside of the "ventre", but as human beings they are in a similar danger as the speaker of becoming "- Corps humains que l'on palpe". Therefore, they find themselves at the same time metaphorically inside with him, so that they would act from both sides. The symbolic gesture of piercing is a daring and

violent act, which Pierrot calls "un matricide symbolique et libérateur" (Pierrot 1984: 69). But it can also be seen as "libidineux" in the positive sense of the word, meaning sexually liberating by overcoming the latent oedipal desire of the mother by the speaker and his entering into the domain of adult sexuality.

"Sauront" implies that the collective will know how to act if the "étang" threatens because they are guided by their ideology. This ideology stresses the importance of the social collective, as opposed to individualism fostered in the family, for the welfare of both society and individuals. The rhetoric of collective construction work that will change the old death-driven society - "la nuit" - for a better one "du jour plus tendre" employs political clichés revealing that the ideology is Marxist. In addition to the proposed violent action against the *étang*/mother, another remedy is offered against unhealthy individual introspection. This is hard work to be done with the collective, on socially useful projects: "Nous construirons". Such work and an offer of a satisfying and "normal" erotic outlet, "Et nous n'aurons besoin/Que du toucher des peaux", will generate "le jour plus tendre" and overcome "la nuit", the forces of *thanatos* that haunt the speaker, by the forces of *eros*. The second part of the poem is evidence of Guillevic's nascent interest in applying Marxist ideology to poetry, which later grew to a commitment to the poetry of socialist realism.

From the point of view of this work it is not so important whether the proposed collectivist psychotherapy worked in practice for the speaker/poet, but rather that its poetic representation is not very convincing. The poem contains two different kinds of discourse. The first kind springs from a personal and individual experience that is represented in a minor language as integral part of that experience. The syntax and the thingspeak of the images of the unconscious cry the childhood fear and pain compellingly, breaking into the discourse and metaphorically shifting it away from that experience. On the other hand, the largely abstract discourse of the second part repeats dominant major language of particular ideological notions and statements. This language is weak in comparison with the powerful, concrete representation of the first part of the poem. Consequently, the major language of the second part leaves

unchallenged the more convincing representation of the speaker's real and deep erotic trauma and emotional dislocation in its first part because the ideological rhetoric and its proposed remedies are unconvincing as a discourse of transformation.

Moreover, the proposed remedies have other flaws that make them ambiguous and unacceptable. A simple and 'natural' approach to the sexual dimension of life is figured by images of "Nos mains qui caressent les femmes" and "Nous n'aurons besoin/Que du toucher des peaux". The complexity of the erotic desire and of the drives and constraints that are associated with it is simplified to the level of physical contact, represented by the metonymy of touching the skins, so that sex becomes a superstructure of the construction efforts of the collective. Ironically the "toucher des peaux" returns the child who remains in the man back to the sweating bodies "que l'on palpe", effectively renewing his fears and subverting the desired process. Further, the rhetoric of collectivism reveals a schizophrenic contradiction between the beneficial results that it aims to achieve and the violent means by which to achieve them. The voice of the collective affirms social good and advancement, calm, reason and emotional stability, and affirms it by violent action. Wiping out fear is expressed by "liquiderons", which introduces a Stalinist term for mass murder, and putting an end to the mother's domination, if it be necessary in the future, becomes "lui percer le ventre", which is a proposed killing of the speaker's mother by sadistic sexual penetration. Even though such language is metaphoric, its violent nature reveals the collective, which stands for creating a society "du jour plus tendre", caught in a logical and moral contradiction. Moreover, "killing" the mother is rather a vague metaphor, which suggests no concrete means for putting an end to her agency in the memory of the man. It can be argued that the poet's attempt failed because he turned away from language as a tool of healing and tried to heal the man, rather than the child in the man, who was the threatened and injured part of the man. He rushed to embrace the offer of a simplistic and vague collectivist remedy, leaving the child and his passionate symbolic speech of cryptic metaphors behind. This

speech, which is a key to his trauma and cries to be understood and transformed, is ignored in the collectivist solution and he is relegated to the silence of the unspeakable. Forty years after publishing *Terraqué* Guillevic admits that the memory of the childhood experience represented by the *étang* still affects him: "Et en un sens, l'étang me traque" (CP, 132). Finally, he reveals in 1985 that, as an attempt to heal personal emotional dislocation, fusing one's individuality with a collective does not work:

[...] c'est une erreur profonde de croire que pour se libérer de son angoisse personnelle la confondre avec l'angoisse collective suffirait. C'est toujours en vain. (TB2, 120)

### Horror and dereliction

At times the speaker perceives the material world as a place of ecological disorder, chaos and death generating nameless and faceless horror that finds resonance in the speaker's experience and challenges him to search for adequate symbolic expression. The following poem comes from the section "Art poétique", which is concerned with such challenges of poetic speech.

Le cri du chat-huant,  
Que l'horreur exigeait,

Est un cri difficile  
A former dans la gorge.

Mais il tombe ce cri,  
Couleur de sang qui coule,

Et résonne à merci  
Dans les bois qu'il angoisse. (T, 187)

The imperfect tense of "Que l'horreur exigeait," expresses a repeated occurrence in the material world of the shrill cry of the screech owl, which is a metaphor for struggle between the forces of life and death in the material



world, and for a corresponding struggle of forces within the speaker. The struggle is a component of ecological conflict and destruction in nature, but goes beyond it as a fundamental existential rupture of life, which is death in many forms. The shrill cry of the screech owl represents then horror of death immanent in materiality and protest against destruction of life. The extremity of the cry corresponds to the extremity of the violation of life and the nature of the horror is then elaborated by imagery that transforms the abstract notion of horror into a concrete experience. The cry was demanded as the only adequate articulation of the horror of death, which agonizes both the material world and the speaker's mind. In the last line "les bois" figure material world and in *Terraqué* the ever-present wood of the *armoire* that contains the same fear of death that prevented the speaker from fully embracing materiality and the cry is his silent cry. The fear has followed him from his traumatic past so relentlessly that he still feels its force and tries to put his experience into words in the present tense of the poem. He defends himself by trying to control the unspeakable horror by the regularity of its formal structure. Eight metrically identical lines of six syllables and the identical syntax of two sentences, each of which extends over four lines, whose regularity attempts to impose control and order on the threat and chaos they contain.

The attempt at control fails as the apparently contained disorder breaks through the orderly, rational, metric and syntactic casing of the poem by the power of its gothic imagery. The cry is figured as "Le cri du chat-huant" – an omen of death – "Et résonne à merci" – pitilessly, and above all by the lines "Mais il tombe ce cri,/Couleur de sang qui coule", which transforms the cry into freshly spilled blood as only such blood runs. These lines break language expectations by strikingly representing an auditory element, "Le cri", in visual terms, "Couleur de sang". The two disparate sensory elements are brought together by the verbs *tomber* and *couler*, which become synonymous as both the cry and the blood fall or run down. Further, the downward movement, *tomber*, means falling to die, while a synonymous meaning of *couler* is "to sink to the bottom". Imagery of these lines pushes language to the extreme of

suggesting death in three forms as a cry, running blood and a drowning. The syntax itself becomes elliptic here, breaking up its orderly progression, "Mais il tombe ce cri, / *Qui est Couleur de sang qui coule*". The syntactic ellipsis of the second line represents a sudden holding of breath in fright, accompanied by a silent, anguished cry of the fear of death. Guillevic is forging his discourse here from both unconscious elements of the imagery and those of the structural features of language, which are crafted more consciously. Both elements combine to represent the coming together of the experience of the struggle of life and death in the outer world and an inner, psychological experience of the poet.

The image of "les bois" would normally bring to mind tranquility and ecological balance, but this poem suggests that their serene appearance is deceptive because they share the horror of destruction and death with all living things. The poem becomes a metaphor for the threat of death, which underlies peaceful appearance of all life. The fear of death is so elemental and universal that it is unspeakable, that is difficult to express not only by human language, but any voicing organ, "difficile/A former dans la gorge". It reduces one to silence. The only human presence is that of the observer/poet whose anguished vision reveals fears of his own inescapable materiality that drags him towards death. The human absence indicates that nature on its own is not necessarily the lost paradise humankind dreams about, but a place of conflict and death.

Serge Gaubert suggests that the threat and horror depicted in the poem are metaphoric representation of personal, childhood experiences of unspeakable emotional injuries of the poet. He characterizes the emotional universe of the young Guillevic as one totally deprived of the presence of a fellow human being and quotes two expressions from the poem in support of his argument:

L'univers de Guillevic, celui de "Garçon" ou d' "Enfance" est un univers de choses privé de la présence d'autrui. Le monde hurle et le cri (du chat-huant, des chambres ou du silence) est un cri qui ne se connaît pas de destinataire et reste sans écho. "Le cri du sang qui coule"

(*Terraqué*, p. 139); un cri en pure perte, le cri de la déréliction.  
(Gaubert 1987: 300)

This cry of sheer loss and dereliction, as Gaubert puts it, experienced in childhood, persists into the poet's adulthood and much of the poetry of *Terraqué* can be read as an attempt to give it a voice that would open it to lines of flight towards new unstable equilibria.

### "Face"

On the literal, physical level the poem "Face" depicts a harrowing state of ecological imbalance, desolation and disharmony in nature, one which owes much to human intervention. On the metaphorical level of the poet's personal ecology the poem can be read as a bitter vision of the experience of emotional alienation from his mother and of her lack of womanhood. Ultimately, the poem is a language performance seeking to find speech for those unspeakable experiences.

#### FACE

Pays de rocaille, pays de broussaille - rocs  
Agacés de sécheresse.

Terre  
Comme une gorge irritée  
Demandant du lait,  
Femme sans mâle, colline  
Comme une fourmilière ébouillantée,  
Terre sans ventre, musique de cuivre:  
Face  
De juge.

(T, 28)

The whole poem consists structurally of short noun groups separated by punctuation and completely lacks finite verbs. This syntactic lack means elliptic syntax that has an effect of urgency, of sudden, passionate outpouring

by the speaker of images that are painful to him, images gushing out of his unconscious revealing painful, long-repressed, unspeakable feelings. Even more importantly the syntactic lack forms the semantic and the thematic backbone of the poem by drawing attention to the notion of lack and deficiency that dominates the whole poem. The word "sans" occurs twice to emphasize the point: "Femme sans mâle" and "Terre sans ventre", moreover lack is implied and imbedded in every noun group of the poem. This syntactic and semantic ellipsis indicates that every noun group, and the whole poem, is a representation of a lack of something, a deficiency, a *manque*. What is missing are features that are beneficial and life-supporting, such as fertile earth in "Pays de rocaille", moisture of sweet water in "- rocs/Agacés de sécheresse" and finally human kindness in "Face/De juge".

The word "face" is a structural element of the poem working on several levels, introducing first the external, physical face or surface of a particular part of a scrubby countryside that appears to be naturally dry and rocky: "Pays de rocaille, pays de broussaille - rocs". What follows then is a line by line litany of degradation and deprivation of the erotic forces of materiality through human intervention, both in the land itself and in the two human subjects of the poem, an infant and his mother whose "faces" in the poem reveal that they have suffered a kind of emotional castration. This negation of their erotic forces is represented through thingspeak of desiccation, harshness and death, reminiscent of the barren terrain and dying vegetation in *Requiem*, for example in "Pin", which points to the speaker's continuing preoccupation with his childhood traumas. The forces of this degradation are shown to be those of human intervention, exemplified by the image "Comme une fourmilière ébouillantée", also an echo of *Requiem*. These forces act against the implied ecological vision of harmonious symbiosis, or even a potential paradise, between humanity and nature, and among people themselves. The poem represents a lack, a *manque* of such a harmony, and of such a vision, as mankind becomes an agency of degradation and desolation of both nature and itself.

The consistently human character of the imagery of degradation, of erotic malfunction and the threat of death introduces other "faces", that is sides or aspects of the land, as figurative dimensions of the poem. In addition to its material side its face becomes a façade in the sense of a surface or a front part of an underlying figurative representation. This change occurs already in the second line of the poem with the word "Agacés", which attributes a human feeling to rocks that are part of a desiccated and scrubby piece of land. The rocks are the face of the materiality itself, materiality shared by the speaker, so that the annoyance felt by the rocks and the threat of death is thus raised from the literal to the figurative level inevitably bringing the speaker/poet, through his language, personally into the desolate scene as one of the protagonists in the representation. As Cézanne puts it, he becomes "l'homme concrétisé dans ce qu'il voit" (Doran 1978: 125). In the images of the irritating dryness of the land which is like his parched, sore throat, "Comme une gorge irritée", and by his need of mother's milk, "Demandant du lait", the desiccated land assumes his face of an infant deprived of maternal care and emotional nourishment. His childhood needs were not met and his desire for recognition was negated. His face as the harsh, dried up land is a façade figuring human interference by another person, which meant that his emotional growth was disturbed and twisted in infancy so that he is now dried up and stunted as a child in the man.

In the next image, "Femme sans mâle" and the image that follows later, "Terre sans ventre", the face of the earth becomes that of a woman/mother who is unfulfilled. The images of physical desiccation and lifelessness of the earth, as the mother of all life, figure the face of a woman who suffers from a similar reduction of vital functions of her life. She is deprived of sexual fulfilment, "sans mâle", as well as being *éventrée*, "sans ventre", which represents female castration and therefore lack of organs to be a mother. The terrible lack of being a proper earth/mother/woman is insisted on by the repetition of the preposition "sans" and it introduces the presence of the mother of the speaker for whom she did not provide the expected "milk" of emotional nourishment. It was by her actions, her treatment of the son, that he finds himself reduced to

sharing the terrible landscape of their life with her. It is a barren world created by the mother against the son, just as the anthill was destroyed physically by human agency by having boiling water poured into it: "colline/Comme une fourmilière ébouillante". The image of the "colline" would normally have feminine, sensual connotations, but it was reduced to erotic desolation, adding emphasis to the mother's lack of womanhood and her existence in an erotic void. The final result of such human intervention is summed up in the elliptic sound metaphor "musique de cuivre", the blaring of brass instruments, which is not a pleasant nor a soothing sound. The image of the brass band music reinforces the idea that everything that should have been soft and smooth was transformed to being hard and harsh. Moreover, the loud sound of brass instruments dominates and excludes all other sounds commanding attention to itself, and to the speaker it represents the character of the mother who, as his judge, exercised complete power over his life.

The final two-line punchline, "Face /De juge", suggests that the suffering depicted was part of a confrontation in which the "faces" of the poem were engaged in accusation and apportioning blame to one another. In the final analysis there is not just one *face de juge*, but four, that is one for each of the four participants. The first is the degraded materiality of the land itself whose face judges humanity as perpetrator of ecologically damaging actions like pouring boiling water into ant nests and by implication of other destruction. Without making an explicit ecological comment the poem weaves together deprivation of physical nature and human experience to demonstrate that they are interdependent because they both have materiality in common.

The second face of the judge is the face of the infant who demands from the mother milk of emotional nourishment and affection, "Demandant du lait". He judges her as being *une mère en manque* because his life has been, like that of the earth, devastated not only by neglect and withdrawal of affection, but also by her direct interference in his life. She has been for him just as harsh a *face de juge* as that of the land is because she used to suspect and judge all his actions. This image introduces then the world of the poet's mother and her

dominating presence because this is how he saw her in relation to himself as has been seen in the poem when she constantly called upon him to give account of his actions and to be judged by her.

A tous les horizons,  
Mère, tu m'attendais  
Pour demander des comptes.  
[...] (Avec, 66)

The third face of the judge is that of the speaker of the poem, who can be taken to be the infant grown up, but still carrying the unspeakable childhood experience within him while observing the mother with adult eyes - the child in the man. He judges the mother through images of erotic dysfunction and sterility not only as *une mère en manque*, but also as *une femme en manque*, as a woman lacking womanhood. The painful images of the speaker's discourse draw their bitterness and power from the repressed speech of accusation and judgement of the other of his fragmented self. Such unconscious speech breaks into the conscious poetic performance, which constitutes a metaphoric shift that deterritorializes the speaker's emotional dislocation and alienation.

Finally, the countryside bears the face of the woman/mother, that is of her outer features of physical desolation, which reflect the inner state of her erotic emptiness, of her ingrained guilt, so that this *face de juge* is both a form of defence, but also of self-judgement by which she condemns herself. She has therefore been judged and found guilty on many counts not only by others, but also by herself. It can be argued that the language, which makes her condemn herself, is so devastating in the display of her transgressions that it becomes a form of confession that transcends self-condemnation and asks for forgiveness and absolution. It is the language of the other of her son and it articulates an unspeakable experience that he shares with her so that to some degree this speech becomes hers and reaches beyond the judgment by her son. This language then accuses and judges someone or something that has mutilated and twisted her to become what she is. Her erotic needs were not assuaged and her

desire was twisted so that the words "Demandant du lait", which this time means the soothing milk of compassion, could apply to some degree to her.



## *TERRAQUÉ (II)*

### The poet in the world: alienation and ecology

#### Ecological instability and alienation

##### *Ecological conflict*

The following poem develops the idea of hostile opposition between human culture, represented by the urban environment, and of life in nature embodied in the image of an injured bird that tries to find refuge in a city after it has become separated from its native countryside.

Un oiseau coupé  
Saigne dans la nuit  
Sur la cathédrale  
Et bat des nuages.

"J'étais bien dans les grottes  
Aux montagnes du père  
Dans le sein de la fleur." (T, 47)

As a man-made structure, the cathedral represents the physical aspect of the city, but it is also a symbol of its culture with its religious foundation. Both of these are ecologically hostile to the bird, which strayed from its native mountains and became injured. In vain it seeks refuge on the cathedral, which is ironically a traditional place of refuge for humankind, but does not represent the religion of sacredness of nature. The bird has possibly injured itself on the cathedral and is going to bleed to death there beating with its wings "des nuages", which are more likely to be the smoke of pollution than clouds. There are two implied meanings which stem from the word *battre* at play in the line "Et bat des nuages". First, by beating the clouds the bird *bat des ailes*, that is

beats or flaps its wings, producing not flight, but only an illusion of it. This action is in contrast with the cathedral which appears to be taking flight as it soars upwards into the clouds, *envole*, without any batting of wings, and figuratively and spiritually it soars to heaven with its worshippers as a symbol of their faith. The bird is not one of the worshippers because it represents a different "religion". Its encounter with the cathedral does not make it soar, but *battre de l'aile*, which is the other implication of the above line, meaning to be in a poor physical health because the bird is injured and it is the symbol of human religion that is impairing its life.

This painful incident is related by a third person narrator in the present tense and it is far removed from, and contrasted by, the account and the imagery of the second half of the poem. This account is told in the first person through the thoughts of the bird itself and it nostalgically represents its past life as one of harmony and beauty. The imperfect tense of this part puts the bird's last thoughts irrevocably into a past that cannot be recaptured. The bird lived a healthy life, "J'étais bien dans les grottes", in the caves or shelters of its native mountains, "Aux montagnes du père/Dans le sein de la fleur", where the "père" symbolizes a divine principle that confers harmony on life in nature and gives meaning to the bird's life. Being in "le sein de la fleur" is an image for a way of life that is both beautiful, harmonious and erotically meaningful as life that sustains both the bird and natural environment. The expression "Aux montagnes du père" suggests a permanent ancestral home environment created by God the Father, who is in traditional Christian iconography represented in his form of Holy Ghost as a white dove. This implied image of a close relationship between the divine and the natural signifies that the dying bird belongs to an order of existence that makes its life and death meaningful.

In contrast to this natural environment, the Hebrew/Christian God, or rather the idea that the urban dwellers have of him, is represented by the religious artifice of the cathedral, in which the white dove of God the Father has lost its meaning, becoming only a part of decoration. This edifice stands in hostile opposition to the image and idea of earthly paradise and of the divinity

of nature that is invoked in the second part of the poem. The irony of the bird's fate is that he is the son of the Father, "crucified" on the edifice of the worshippers of the Father, his Son and the bird/dove of the Holy Spirit. The city religion has its own, opposite idea of paradise that is not of this world and while the people of the urban civilization are looking forward to embracing their heaven after death, they are destroying the earthly paradise that they could have or once could have had. The imperfect tense of the second part suggests that the destruction has already occurred, or is well under way, at least to the extent that the idea of mastery and exploitation of nature by man has been generally accepted. The image of the cathedral that supports a bleeding bird further adds a religious, biblical dimension. By the accepted interpretation of *Genesis* 1:26 domination of nature by mankind has been accepted as sanctioned by God. The poem implies that this biblical passage became interpreted as a right to destroy and exterminate, the consequences of which the poet deplors.

On a metaphoric level the poet himself is central; he is the injured bird caught between two visions of the world. On the one hand, he belongs to the world of culture, of the city, which enables him to exist materially and provides him with language for his vocation. Yet he feels alienated from that culture. He is "bleeding" there, injured by the cathedral, a symbol of the prevailing urban culture and of his mother's persecuting version of faith. He is suffering from a conflict with what has sustained him and at the same time injured him - that is his family past, his former religious beliefs and his education, all of which have fitted him into the culture of the city. On the other hand, to be able to continue living in this milieu, he sustains himself with a vision of a natural paradise, albeit a sanitized version in this poem, with death and decay excluded. In his poetry, Guillevic tries to transform the unpleasant reality of modern life into a vision of life in nature that could be beneficent and harmonious, one which might have once existed and perhaps could be restored.

The poem as a whole gives a rather melancholy impression that the world has reached an ecological impasse. On the one hand, there is urban culture and civilization, which is destroying nature, and on the other hand, there

is the ideal of a natural, earthly paradise, lodged in human imagination, rather remote and expressed in the past tense, and therefore in an inferior position. The passion of the bird, crucified on the cathedral, draws on the imagery of the underlying religious layer of the poet's psyche, adding an ironic and a spiritual dimension to the confrontation of these two visions of the world. The contrast is made, perhaps rather unfairly, between the destructive aspects of the practical implementation of urban civilization with its religious foundation on the one hand, and on the other hand, the ideal of a peaceful and beneficent, and ironically again "religious", vision of material nature, in which any destructive qualities are absent. It seems that when writing this poem, the poet saw that his ideal vision of the world of nature was endangered by mankind and felt that no accommodation between the two sides had been established. The concrete, minor language of the first part represents forcefully the reality of the ecological dislocation of the world, while the vision of the second part is rather dreamy and backward looking so that the overall outlook of the poem is bleak and pessimistic.

### *Greed*

In the preceding poem the bird is more symbolic than real and ecological issues are dealt with on a general and philosophical level. Other poems deal with more concrete ecological situations as well as having metaphoric implications. For example, the poem "Chanson" in the section "Conscience" condemns the callous and repugnant, but at the time common, practice of catching fledgling birds and selling them as pets.

### CHANSON

*à Colomba*

Aux portes de la ville où sont les oiseleurs,  
J'ai vu des oisillons refuser de mourir  
En demandant pardon -

A l'air,  
 A leur progéniture de l'avenir,  
 Au feuillage, à leur chant  
 Qui aurait bien voulu mourir.

J'ai vu des oisillons préférer au sommeil  
 Le soleil inexorable.

Aux portes de la ville où sont les oiseleurs,  
 Où sont les oisillons. (T, 62)

The dedication of the poem, à *Colomba*, is rather intriguing because it links this poem, coincidentally or by design, to the bird as the white dove of the Holy Spirit of the previous poem and continues to insist on the innocence and "divinity" of birds as the creatures of nature. The poem offers again a contrast between the urban culture, represented this time by the rapacious "oiseleurs", who carry on their trade for financial gain, and the remnants of natural paradise where their victims, the young "oisillons", come from. The difference between the two ways of life is that between a greedy, vicious, man-made civilization that lost faith in the sacredness of life, and such a life in nature, which the poet sees as a potential paradise in danger of being lost. The scene is set in the city, which is for Guillevic an ecologically hostile environment, to which the young birds, trapped in their natural home, were brought. They are to provide pathetic enjoyment for some city dweller who yearns to possess a live object of nature to brighten up his existence in a dismal urban desert.

The birds are at risk of a premature death, but in the meantime they are displaying a determined resistance to dying. They are doing it by not sleeping and by being active and actually singing in the full heat of the sun: "J'ai vu des oisillons préférer au sommeil/Le soleil inexorable." The fact of their singing is expressed obliquely in "En demandant pardon -/Au feuillage, à leur chant". The only way a bird can express anything is by its voice and the whole pathos of their fate is concentrated in their singing which people misinterpret as an expression of happiness. Actually, according to the poet, they sing to beg forgiveness of the elements of nature like the air and the foliage of trees for not

remaining with them, for apparently betraying them by living and singing in captivity and so representing the possibility of nature existing under cultural oppression. They ask forgiveness of their future progeny, which they betrayed by condemning them to live imprisoned for life by their remaining alive, or for not being begotten. They further ask forgiveness even of their singing, which itself would have preferred to die, "*Qui aurait bien voulu mourir*", rather than carry on in captivity, but while they remain alive, singing is an expression of their life force and their only means of communication.

Even in their suffering these creatures of nature are shown to be more selfless than the people who destroy their natural way of life. They do not feel sorry for themselves, but are concerned that the natural environment they come from, "*l'air*", "*le feuillage*", and their future progeny will be impoverished by their life in captivity. The minor language of the poem appears to anthropomorphize the birds, but it is only driven towards such an extreme to reveal that urban society, as represented by the birdcatchers and the implied buyers of birds, is callously selfish. The image of the "*oiseleurs*" and their "*oisillons*" that opens the poem cries out, by being repeated to close the poem, against the insensitivity of urban civilization. On a more abstract level this language exposes the underlying human motivation as greed and selfishness, based on the underlying arrogant human assumption of having power of life and death over nature and all life in it, no matter whether this assumed domination has its origin in religious belief or in rational philosophy.

Whether the poet intended it or not, it is possible to detect in the poem a metaphoric level of personal nature, in which he is a young bird deprived of his native emotional birthright of personal, ecological paradise from which he has been expelled by his mother. Having lost the emotional foundation of his life, he now has to live in an insensitive environment of urban culture and "sing", that is write poetry, which is an ambiguous activity for him. Poetic performance gives him a creative outlet and satisfaction, offers a chance to confront and transform in language his past emotional trauma, but it is often painful and he also feels that what he does is a rather stained and soiled public display of his

private life, providing entertainment for urban reading public. This is how he still views his poetic activity 50 years later: "Je me vois en piste,/Toujours" (*Mt*, 27). The "piste" is a circus ring redolent of dirt, sweat, horses, brass instruments and display of cheap excitement. It is a figure of the world in which the clown/poet has to live.

### *Sadism*

Destruction of nature and killing of its creatures, is not only done for gain, but its motive could be worse, such as senseless, sadistic slaughter of wildlife, which people call sport and which the poet calls crime.

C'était un pavillon de chasse  
Pour une idylle.

Mais le possédant  
N'y put que le crime. (T, 103)

The ecological content of this poem is unequivocal. The wealthy owner, "le possédant", and only wealthy people can possess hunting lodges, of an idyllically attractive hunting lodge used it as a base for killing forest animals and probably putting their stuffed heads on its walls. It is a poem written in a striking minor language, whose density of vocabulary and syntax is pushed into apparent ambiguities to achieve greater intensity of meaning and impact. The first couplet of the poem appears to contain a contradiction between the notions of "un pavillon de chasse" and "Pour une idylle", since the former is a centre for organized killing of animals and the latter means a small lyric love poem or a naive amorous adventure. The contradiction can be at first viewed as only an apparent one, because since recent times the expression "a hunting lodge" has often meant an attractive or idyllic country retreat. As this "pavillon de chasse" was made "Pour une idylle", the reader is offered the possibility that it was such a kind of attractive building set in a beautiful natural setting, and the

deceptively simple but actually dense, elliptic, semantic and syntactic structure leads to some reversals of expectation.

The expectation that has been first offered is of a romantic, amorous retreat which was perhaps meant for "chasse" as an amorous pursuit. However, the last word of the second couplet, and of the poem, "le crime", introduces a terrible ironic twist to the meaning of an idyllic "pavillon de chasse" by retrospectively giving literal meaning to the word "chasse" and subverting the idea of a lodge of pleasure into that of slaughterhouse. The crime then is literally hunting, the sport of kings, which is a romantic, upper-class word for satisfying human sadistic drives by killing innocent animals. The answer to the question as to how and why the transformation took place lies in the word "possédant" and in its common root both with "posséder" and with "possédé". The owner, as "possédant", had dominion, that is, absolute power, over his domain and over everything in it. The poet leads the reader back to the idea of dominion in the Genesis and to all its ramifications. The awareness of having this dominion, this power, inevitably went to his head and the "possédant" became "possédé", possessed by, or obsessed with, the idea of killing animals because the common way of displaying one's power over others is by oppressing, hurting or killing them.

The elliptical structure of the last line, "N'y put que le crime" is possibly borrowed from the colloquial expression "on n'y peut rien", and means that, being the "possédant", he could not do, or could not help doing, anything but the crime. The implication of the second couplet is that absolute dominion or power brings about dehumanization of the holder, the "possédant". In another ironic twist, in its conclusion the poem returns to the original meaning of the word idyll because on another level, for the sadistic owner of the lodge, the word idyllic does not contradict the practice of killing animals since for him it was an idyllic pursuit that gave him pleasure, and this is the essence of sadism.



### Demands of the creditors of humanity

The poem "Le Taureau" examines one of the examples of a baffling enmity of a creature of nature towards mankind which, in this case, has been, to all appearances, looking after the animal well. The bull's physical needs have been satisfied, but his desire has not, so that he remains a *créancier* of mankind and harbours resentment and aggressiveness towards human beings.

#### LE TAUREAU

Malgré l'enclos, les écuries,  
Malgré l'eau froide à l'abreuvoir,

Le taureau ne peut pas qu'il n'ait rencontré l'homme  
Et qu'il n'ait exploré son corps déshabillé,  
Sanglant sous la peau blanche.

- Non pour fermer l'espace où la folie lui vient,  
Ni pour goûter une autre chair, d'autres muqueuses,

Mais, comme il signifie,  
Pour une raison de dette, inscrite au noir des chairs.  
(T, 48)

The significance of the definite article of the title "Le Taureau" is that it points to two different experiences of the speaker which, however, have a common source in the erotic forces of materiality that drive the desire for recognition. The first experience is impersonal for the speaker and the definite article has the generic significance of referring to all bulls. In the second instance the definite article introduces a meaning that is specific, personal and narrowed to one man: the speaker's father, represented through the image of the bull.

On the generic level the poem examines the long-standing relationship between bulls and mankind, and the repeated word "[m]algré" introduces a note of offended human righteousness and resentment at being treated with ingratitude by the bull. The human perspective of the situation is that the long-standing domestication of the animal has been beneficial for both sides and has

created a seemingly satisfactory symbiosis between them. This view reveals a fundamental human misunderstanding of, and alienation from, materiality. People cannot conceive that the bull may have desires and, reducing desires to needs, they are convinced that all his needs have been well catered for. He is provided with protection in an enclosure and stables, "l'enclos, les écuries," as well as with cool water in the trough, "l'eau froide à l'abrevoir", which is a synecdoche for feeding. Yet despite mankind's meeting all the bull's physical needs, the animal harbours aggression towards mankind and is driven by a desire for recognition as an autonomous being. This desire for his own full life can be assuaged only by killing the man, or at least by spilling the man's blood by exploring the inside of his naked body by his horns. The bull thus pits his desire against that of the man, whose desire has dominated and negated that of the bull. Since the bull has no language, he can assert himself against the man only physically so that their contest becomes literally a true Hegelian life-and-death struggle (Hegel 1971: 232). The bull's violent response originates in a lack, "l'espace où la folie lui vient", which generates desire and he does not attack man to close and fill that emptiness, "Non pour fermer l'espace", because that emptiness, which can never be filled, is his life taken over and its fullness denied, and desire for it can never be satisfied. Nor does the bull have a sexual need to taste "une autre chair, d'autres muqueuses". Yet these images, as well as the image of exploring "son corps déshabillé", are metaphors for sexual experience and point to the erotic foundation of the desire for recognition: the aim of this desire is pleasurable satisfaction. His aim is to impose on man his desire, to dominate him, in order to exact payment for debt that is imbedded deep in the flesh of bodies: "Pour une raison de dette, inscrite au noir des chairs". This "dette" is here a figure of desire imbedded not only in the body of the bull but, as the plural "des chairs" indicates, in human and all other bodies, that is in all materiality. This is a desire for recognition and, for the bull, a deathly desire for blood, for life taken, so that goring a man is then a symbolic action of trying to make an outward, public sign of the existence of the debt, "comme il signifie", because the debt is only payable in blood. Since

the bull has no language, his desire to negate the debt can only be publicly demonstrated by being "written" in blood, even though this desire can never be satisfied.

The word "dette" is a signifier placing the poem explicitly into the section of "Créanciers" and points to a relationship of creditor and debtor between the two opposing sides. The bull obviously feels to be in the position of the creditor because mankind owes him his freedom and the debt is a figure of mutual desire to dominate each other, which is deeply imbedded, "inscribe au noir des chairs", in the unconscious of the flesh of both humanity and the bull. The claim to being a creditor of humanity raises the bull's status to being equal to it and confers on the animal a certain moral autonomy. He sees himself as a creature that has certain rights which ought to be respected. What humankind owes the animal is its freedom, if not some payment for centuries of denial of fullness of life, so that having to suffer the bull's aggression is a way of paying that debt. This is what the animal means and expresses by its behaviour, "comme il signifie", and it is a sort of settling of ecological debts, if not a revenge. At the least it is giving notice that, as the poetic discourse signifies, the existing ecological relationship of humanity to domestic animals is ecologically unfair and out of balance.

The other function of the definite article in the poem is to specify one particular person who had impact on the formation of the speaker's own desire and his sexual self-consciousness. This person is the speaker's father, represented by the bull, and representing masculine sexuality to the speaker. To him this representation is, on the one hand, appealing as the power of an irresistible, impulsive drive so strong that it may lead to violence and death: "Le taureau ne peut pas [...] qu'il n'ait exploré son corps déshabillé". However, on the other hand, this elemental drive is also frightening not only because of the possible violence, but because it takes over and negates rational control, opening way to chaos and disorder: "ne peut pas qu'il n'ait exploré". He cannot stop himself from goring the man. The speaker's ambiguity in the face of sexual drive inherent in materiality speaks in two voices: he is not only his

father's son, but also his mother's child and her castrating influence on his erotic imagination has been documented in several poems. "Le Taureau" can be read as being complementary to the untitled poem beginning with the line "Mère aux larmes brûlantes, l'homme fut chassé de vous –" (T. 45), in which the mother is depicted as rejecting the speaker as a child because he was male and by implication rejecting his father and maleness itself. The mother sees male sexuality, and possibly all sexuality, as a compulsion that is destructive to her idea of moral order and she attempts to deny and negate it in the child thus driving him towards emotional death. The speaker finds himself consequently between the two influences, both of which offer a path to death and his own position is equally deathly. He is attracted to the impulsive sexuality of his father but also afraid of it, as he was taught to be by his mother who stands for order and security, so that the conflicting desires of the parents left him emotionally empty and dead as a child in the man. It is only by representing his ambiguity through poetic discourse that he begins to deterritorialize his dilemma and advance towards transforming it.

*Desire of the creditors*

The idea that objects of materiality have not only physical needs, which can be satisfied, but also desires that are directed against the desires of human beings and cannot be satisfied, is taken up in another poem, where it is made to apply to virtually everything in the world including inanimate objects. Again, the poem is part of the section "Créanciers" and the things are seen as creditors of mankind against which they make unspecified demands.

Du bouton de la porte aux flots hargneux de l'océan,  
Du métal de l'horloge aux juments des prairies,  
Ils ont besoin.

Ils ne diront jamais de quoi,  
Mais ils demandent

Avec l'amour mauvais des pauvres qu'on assiste.

Il ne suffira pas de les mouiller de larmes  
Et de jurer qu'on est comme eux.

Il ne suffira pas  
De se presser contre eux avec des lèvres bonnes  
Et de sourire.

C'est davantage qu'ils veulent pour les mener à bien  
Où la vengeance est superflue. (T, 29)

To represent the materiality of the world, the speaker selects four objects which range from the trivial "bouton de la porte" to the powerful and elemental force of the "flots hargneux de l'océan," and from the inanimate product of human culture, "métal de l'horloge", to living untamed animals, "juments des prairies". There are three voices running through the poem, two implicit, of the objects and of the human population, and an explicit one of the speaker. The voice of the objects is of a silent kind, but people feel that the objects demand something from them: "Mais ils demandent". The opinion of the majority of the population, that is most of "us" who are engaged in dealing with material objects, expressed through the mediation of the speaker, is that objects have unspoken and unspecified needs, "Ils ont besoin", directed against "us". As the poem progresses, the speaker subverts this opinion of mankind by arguing that the demands of the objects are driven by desire and not by need. By the word "besoin" he exposes the inability of most people to think of anything else but needs when it comes to objects of materiality. In the lines beginning with "Il ne suffira pas" he clearly indicates his own opinion that what drives the objects is not need but desire to establish the ecological point that it is not only people who have desires, but that these are an essential component of all materiality. The desire of the objects can never be satisfied by some physical means or actions because it is a desire for recognition, which cannot be specified in physical terms. The words "Ils ont besoin" represent human incredulity that reduces the desire of things to a need, which is never specified, and that this

need should be directed against us because most people are convinced that they always treated inanimate objects well and met their needs. Such people cannot conceive that objects could have desires and reveals a chasm of alienation between humanity and materiality.

The surprise of most people that needs and demands of objects should be directed at them is suggested by "Ils ont besoin" and "Mais ils demandent" where the "Mais" reveals a certain astonishment as most people did not subject them to any specific mistreatment. On the contrary, the future tense of the repeated "Il ne suffira pas" indicates that in the past people lavished mushy sentimentality on the objects, but the implication of their persistent demands is that their relationship with mankind is not satisfactory. The objects are in the position of the human poor, of an underclass, because like them they make demands "Avec l'amour mauvais des pauvres qu'on assiste", that is with pretended meekness and gratitude of recipients of charity, whose real feelings are those of resentment for being patronized by the upper class, which in this case is by human beings. In the lines beginning with "Il ne suffira pas" the speaker begins to argue that something is wrong in human relationship to material objects, and that our past, sentimental approach, like crying over them, claiming that we were all equal, kissing them and smiling, did not work. The reason for this is that the objects were seen as others and their desire as needs and demands against humanity that were to be somehow paid at our cost. That their demands are a matter of desire and not of need is suggested by the speaker already in "Ils ne diront jamais de quoi" because desire is not directed at an object, but at another desire. It is not a desire for some thing, for compensation, but for recognition, which is contained in the "davantage qu'ils veulent".

However, they do not say what the "davantage" is simply because they have no language, and neither can they write their desire in blood like the bull, so that they remain waiting in silent and sullen antagonism. They wait for mankind to "say" to itself that its desire ought to correspond to that of the objects and neither ignore its existence nor negate it. Such correspondence will lead to a state in which objects become autonomous members of materiality

and would mean that the antagonism would be replaced by mutuality. Such a process can only be initiated by mankind as it has the language to say what the objects can not say. This obligation of *dire de quoi* falls therefore on people, and is taken up by the poet, who by so doing rises to ecological consciousness and awareness. What is to be done is "les mener à bien", which means to complete them, by offering them integrity as autonomous units of materiality through recognition of their desire. The notion of "bien" suggests living in mutuality and symbiosis, rather than antagonism and conflict, a sort of brotherhood of objects and humanity within common materiality. The last line of the poem claims that, in such a state, vengeance, which brings a possibility of conflict and violence, is superfluous. If it is not reached, vengeance and violence are implied by the word "dette" in "Le Taureau" and in the poem on pp. 35-36 by the phrase "Contre l'humain". The word "mener" means a continuing progression, not a sudden and finite change or state, but rather a process of negotiation between the two parties, something that the poet is engaged in, in his poetic discourse by operation in and on language. The word "mener" also means that mankind is responsible for conducting the process whose final aim is to change human attitude towards material objects by recognizing their desire. Such a change will include "us" in the ecological mutuality by including the others and it is the philosophical basis of Guillevic's ecological thought.

A relatively long poem, again in the section of "Créanciers", (pp 35-36), takes up an experience, similar to that of the previous poem, of common objects and things of nature having their own mind and desire which, if not recognized, will lead to enmity against humanity.

*A Audiberti.*

Ces meubles qui ne voulaient pas  
Se faire à notre chambre,

A nos journées de veille,

Qui boudaient notre puits  
 Descendant et montant  
 Comme la mouche-à-viande  
 Qui cherche et qui se cogne.

The speaker, who represents a couple or a family, opens the poem with a rather innocent and comical scene depicting some recalcitrant pieces of furniture. "Ces meubles qui ne voulaient pas/Se faire à notre chambre" and "Qui boudaient notre puits", not wanting let themselves be fitted into the speaker's "journées de veille". Such resistance to fit into the routine of daily life implies that there was something contrary to the goodness of daylight, something "nocturne", as the poem puts it later on, about these objects, that is something dark and hostile. They had to be pulled up and down the stairs, "Descendant et montant", knocking the sides like a blowfly in search of its food, "Comme la mouche-à-viande". Inanimate objects, "Ces meubles", are given here human and animal characteristics and energy to build up the impression of their resistance to people and of their unwillingness to serve them.

What then follows in the poem is a relationship of antagonism and hostility between a stray dog which appeared quite docile and playful on arrival, but changed into a strange and savage beast.

- Et le chien fauve et souple  
 Qui avalait si bien le lait  
 Quand il nous vint;  
 Qui l'acceptait de nous, qui paraissait  
 Jouer franc jeu avec nos mains.

Et qui se révéla bête des grands chemins  
 Et du hasard, bête à batailles,  
 Bête à mettre en lambeaux  
 Celui qui siffle gai et qui demande  
 Qu'on l'accompagne.

Le chien qui nous narguait,  
 Qui se savait plus fort,



En vertu d'une loi  
Dont bleuissaient ses yeux.

Qui aimait la volaille chaude  
Et tout détruire.

Having satisfied his hunger, the dog changed into an independent and wild beast which was driven by hostile and destructive forces to fight and to disobey. It threatened to tear to shreds a man who tried to take him for a walk and loved killing poultry for its warm flesh, and to destroy everything. Such behaviour conflicted with the expectations of his human hosts and with their notion of symbiosis with the material world, which should be friendly once the needs of the material objects are satisfied. What the people failed to realize is that they now faced not the need of the dog, but its desire. The independence and disobedience of the dog grew into arrogance as he became "Le chien qui nous narguait,/Qui se savait plus fort", scoffing at people and thinking himself stronger than they. He became an other who was trying to impose his desire on theirs. The atmosphere of the poem changes from that of a peaceful country scene to one of trouble and confusion and eventually to that of a nightmare as the dog, who represents the objects of materiality, progressed from cooperation to resistance and then to open enmity and violence. As in "Le Taureau", the dog has a "dette" engraved "au noir des chairs" and he writes his desire in blood of the poultry, threatening to write it in human blood, eventually running away from their company to join savage beasts that are enemies of humanity.

La bête au souffle chaud,  
Bête à dents et muqueuses,  
Le compagnon peut-être dans les champs  
Des guêpes terrifiantes qu'il allait joindre  
Ou commander.

Gardien d'on ne sait quoi  
De nocturne et du sang  
Contre l'humain. (T, 35-36)

The dog's violence can be read as a realization of vengeance against humanity, the possibility of which is suggested in the poem beginning with "Du bouton de la porte [...]". The enmity of the furniture and the dog is, on one level, turned "Contre l'humain", that is against humanity represented here by people who are rational and kind. They look after the needs of stray dogs, try to take them for a walk, but are unable to see that in accordance with a law of materiality, "En vertu d'une loi/Dont bleussaient ses yeux", objects have desire for recognition. The failure or denial of such a recognition of autonomy may unleash instinctive, irrational drives of animality inherent in materiality and shared by mankind, but glossed over by a veneer of rationality. To "nous", the people in the poem, of which the speaker makes himself one, the dog becomes "Gardien d'on ne sait quoi". This is because he cannot *dire de quoi* and they fail to see not only that they have to say it for him, but also that there is a *quoi* at all. These are the difficulties of ecological cooperation between the human debtors and the objects and animals, their creditors, obstacles that stand in the way of recognizing the desire of the latter and frustrate a possible harmonious cohabitation. By revealing this impasse in ecological relations between humanity and materiality, the speaker actually separates his "je" from the communal "nous" by standing apart and commenting by implication that humankind fails to understand the true nature of the desire and demands of material objects. By doing so he also suggests that the first step towards transforming the situation is up to people by changing their attitude through language. They must *dire de quoi* as he does in his poetry.

The speaker's comments, however, go further than pointing to the lack of understanding between the two parties. The underlying reason for this lack of understanding is revealed as the fear of the erotic forces of materiality that may bring chaos and death into the orderly life of the speaker and other people in the following images: "La bête au souffle chaud./Bête à dents et muqueuses", and "Gardien d'on ne sait de quoi/De nocturne et du sang". The dog becomes transformed into a symbolic beast, a representative of the instinctive, animal drives of sex and violence inherent in materiality, which are

feared by human beings who repress them into their unconscious. It is in these lines that "l'humain" acquires the specific meaning of the person of the speaker/poet as his "je" comes to the fore to draw on personal experience, even though still remaining linked to the generic "nous". The image of the open, moist mouth of the dog, "Bête à dents et muqueuses", is that of the female sex barred by teeth and combines sexual desire and threat of death. It is an image whose antecedent is the poet's lost, feared and yearned for "chambre de muqueuses" of "Mère aux larmes brûlantes" (T, 45). The speaker becomes here again his mother's child, taught to fear sex and emotionally rejected as a male sexual being, and consequently burdened by an unconscious tangle of desire and fear of his own materiality and its two inescapable constituents, sexuality and death. The common "nous", which is shared by the speaker and the other people he speaks for, joins them together as "l'humain" in the sense of a particular community that is threatened by sex and death through the images of hot breath, teeth, the mucous, the nocturnal and the blood of the dog, and because they fear sex and death, they did not embrace materiality in its full extent and meaning. The ecological implications of this poetic representation are that any hope of living in ecological symbiosis with objects of materiality cannot be achieved unless humankind transforms itself by fully accepting its own materiality, and consequently will be able to recognize the desire for respect and autonomy of material objects.

### **Desire and recognition**

Guillevic's sympathy for animals that are marginalized and killed becomes, in a series of three poems, a driving force of a more general ecological argument for understanding human relationship to the world of materiality. The human subject of the poems, who experiences short-lived pleasure by killing birds, figures people who suffer from emotional deprivation, which drives them to gain entry to the erotic pleasure of materiality by its

domination that tends to become destructive and sadistic. The poet himself suffered from a similar deprivation in his childhood and might have felt similar destructive urges<sup>1</sup> but his personal involvement in what occurs in the poems is only a minor one. The obliteration of the human subject in the first poem and its indefinite nature in the two following indicate that the subject and his actions do not stand for a particular person. They figure metonymically the whole mankind and its desire of gaining recognition of its self-consciousness by a struggle to possess and dominate objects of material nature. The main thrust of the metaphoric argument of the poems goes therefore beyond the speaker's personal dislocation by being fundamentally ecological on a wider level of Guillevic's ecological philosophy.

The first of these poems is about someone, identified in the second poem as "l'homme", who feels he has been excluded from the *jouissance* that is experienced in the world of materiality and which he yearns to take part in. He is trying to approach that experience by holding and touching the soft body of a dead bird that he has killed.

Manque d'autre fête et de répondant

Parmi toutes les choses  
Qu'éclaire et que voit  
Le soleil couchant,

C'est un geste encore qui sera tenté,  
Qu'un bâton lancé les deux yeux fermés  
Dans le pommier noir où sont les oiseaux  
Venus pour chanter.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierrot claims that the killing of birds in the poem draws on the poet's personal childhood experience: "[...] comme ces gestes de violence et de destruction apparemment gratuites auxquels le poète avoue s'être parfois livré dans la turbulence de son enfance [...]" (Pierrot 1984: 57). He does not give a reference for his claim of "le poète avoue" and contrary to it Guillevic himself claims that, as a boy, he never killed birds: "Certains chassaient les oiseaux aux lance-pierres ou à la fronde. Je ne l'ai jamais fait" (VP, 21). Pierrot seems then to be mistaken about that facts and his reading gives more weight to a literal, rather than to a more important figurative level.

- Avec le désir  
De pouvoir tenir et porter longtemps

Le corps doux de plumes  
Où silence est fait

De l'oiseau léger qui n'a pas voulu  
Venir de lui même apporter la fête. (T, 91)

The implied subject of this poem must have suffered some emotional deprivation by having been denied admission to the "fête", that is the *jouissance* of materiality that he observes taking place "parmi toutes les choses". He perceives this joy that he desires being figured by the singing of the birds in an apple tree, but he lacks the means, "de répondant", to obtain it because his desire has been frustrated. His exclusion from the *jouissance* means for him a denial of full human identity and the poem represents this denial by his being continuously and systematically obliterated by the language of the poem as a grammatical subject of the text. The syntax of the text lacks even an impersonal pronoun to refer to him as the agent of action and relies on impersonal future tense passive, "C'est un geste encore qui sera tenté", to indicate a human presence acting in the poem. The obliteration by language represents an attempt at denial and alienation of the subject's desire by an other and therefore a refusal to recognize him as an autonomous human being. Further, this experience of negated desire and exclusion parallels, as much of the poetry of *Terraqué* reveals, that of the speaker/poet himself, so that the syntactic obliteration of the subject of the poem applies to some degree to him. He relates what occurs, but is unable to speak fully and openly of his own experience because it is still largely repressed as unspeakable for him so that he represents it through that of the obliterated subject. For both of them the denial of their desire to be accorded full recognition as human subjects conflicts with their desire to be recognized as such. The resulting tension between the opposing libidinal forces of frustration and desire then generates violence of action and language in the poem.

The nature of the subject's exclusion is clearly indicated as being of erotic origin in the tactile imagery of the enjoyment derived from his holding and stroking the feminine softness of the body of the bird. This action does not reveal just desire of joy or happiness of some general kind, but points to an urgent need, or even a compulsion, to experience erotic *jouissance* by physical contact. Further, the repression of his erotic need has been so severe that the compensating drive to gain *jouissance* results in violence. Both the first and the second poem are dominated by the same image of a man driven by a twisted erotic desire to capture a bird and then stroke and squeeze it even at the cost of killing it.

An important notion that marks both the opening and closing of the poem is that of "la fête". The full meaning of this concept is, for Guillevic, something like a vision of human enjoyment of life, of living in *jouissance* of material existence in an ecological paradise. This notion is suggested in the contrast between what the birds in the tree, that is in nature, were enjoying and what the subject of the poem did not experience in his life. He envied the birds and wanted to be included in the celebration, but they would not come down to share it with him of their own volition. This image points to a flaw in his erotic make-up, which has been twisted and largely negated by his previous experience. Metaphorically, the softness of the birds has a feminine quality, and the verb *consentir* in the phrase "ne consentaient jamais" in the third poem, has a connotation of consenting to erotic relationship, revealing that the subject is thinking of a female figure and of women generally who have not consented to provide the desired erotic softness for him, nor have they recognized him worthy of it. A refusal of such a recognition that the speaker himself experienced in the past can be found in other poems of Guillevic, in some of which, for example the poem "Mère aux larmes brûlantes, [...]" (T, 45) and "A tous les horizons/Mère tu m'attendais" (A, 66), such a refusal points to the speaker's mother as the origin and agent of such experience in the past, and now the poet shares this experience with the subject of the poem. Having been refused the consent by the birds, which figure both the mother, women and the

joy of materiality, the emotional tension in the subject rises and turns to violence to obtain recognition from them by force and perhaps to revenge himself in the process.

The actions of the person, by whom the stick will be thrown into the tree in order to bring down a bird so that he can hold it, are referred to in the future passive tense and in indirect and impersonal terms, consistent with their possibly being imaginary. The partially obliterated speaker knows that "C'est un geste encore qui sera tenté", "encore" meaning only a gesture that will be attempted in a trance-like state, driven by a tension between the forces of life and death, forces which reduce the subject to a kind of automaton. Acting with closed eyes may suggest lack of intention to kill a bird, but the action comprising "un bâton lancé", "les deux yeux fermés", and "le pommier noir" is, at this stage, one of violence engaged in the service of mastering the material world and forcing it to include the subject in its erotic process. The obliteration of the implied agent of the poem by its syntax represents both a factual event of denial of his status as an autonomous human being, which he experienced in his life, and an expression of disapproval by the poet of not only the use of violence to gain mastery of the material world, but also of the very idea of mastery itself. Mastery of another implies some form of violence and the poet signals in these three poems that it does not produce positive results. The agent of the poem was originally subjected to an attempt to have his desire negated by others with the result that he became resentful and aggressive, and tried to impose his mastery on others in his turn. The poet denies him success in that effort indicating that mastery does not work. It seems that already in *Terraqué* Guillevic became aware that mastery by language kills his own desired rapport with materiality without yet being able to offer an alternative. He developed another approach only later in *Du Domaine* and *Maintenant*, where he gave up attempts to dominate, letting material objects speak themselves to include him in their world. The message of this poem, and of the two that follow, is that transforming the subject's frustration and tension by the language of force and violence does not work.

The experience arrived at by mastery and violence becomes a substitute for, and an approximation to, taking part in the festival of pleasure by attaining a momentary feeling of erotic wellbeing which has, however, been twisted into a perversion of a sadistic character. There is a strong possibility that the action of throwing the stick gives a sadistic satisfaction to the man because it might have also been intended as a punishment of the birds who would not come down to him. The gratification obtained from killing the bird is not only sadistic, but also masochistic. The person who will throw the stick shuts his eyes, "les deux yeux fermés", pretending to himself that he is not the offender because the action hurts him, and with his eyes shut it becomes an impersonal, enjoyable game that lessens his own pain, but also increases its enjoyment. Ambiguity is introduced by the syntactically elliptic and obscure line "- Avec le désir", which is separated by a full stop and a dash from the preceding sentence so that it does not connect directly to the intention of throwing the stick, but to a wider desire of holding the bird and experiencing the "fête". But throwing the stick involves the risk of killing the bird so that "désir" points to volition to take the risk, which contradicts throwing the stick with "les deux yeux fermés" that tries to avoid that responsibility. This inconsistency adds to the ambiguity of the subject's engagement with the forces of life and death that is inherent in the ambiguity of desire, which contains both the forces of life and of death, both *eros* and *thanatos*. As the man becomes frustrated by his failure to have his desire recognized, the tension between the two forces rises to a point where it can be discharged only by a violent, sadistic action that, for the subject, becomes a pleasurable, but short-lived introduction into the world of the desired *jouissance*.

Each of the three poems forms a link in the overall development of the ecological argument of the series. In practical ecological terms this poem represents actions of people who, for example, kill animals and have them stuffed to be displayed as trophies. The ecological lesson that the subject learns in this poem is that he cannot have lasting pleasure from the bird by killing it.



Sado-masochistic killing of birds and the ecological argument of the poems go a step further in the second poem. The agent of the poem is now identified as a man, the same as in the previous poem, and his action of catching and killing a bird is committed with intent.

Les mêmes doigts de l'homme aux yeux marqués de perte  
Serrent, bien plus longtemps qu'il n'en faut pour si peu,  
Le cou miraculeux du pigeon qui venait  
Pour manger près de là sur un mur qui s'écaille.

- Jusqu'à ne plus sentir  
Que le dur des vertèbres

Et ne plus rien savoir  
Que la tendresse. (T, 92)

In this poem the grammatical subject is no longer obliterated, but named as the "doigts de l'homme", which is a metonymy for the man who feels the hardness of the vertebrae and experiences the tenderness. By the third person narrative form, the poet excludes himself physically from what occurs, but not necessarily from the emotional experience. The pigeon killer is a man suffering from some emotional loss and trauma, "aux yeux marqués de perte", who has been excluded from the erotic dimension of materiality and so denied recognition as a fully human person. He has a desperate need of the experience of the *jouissance* of the material world by establishing physical contact with the erotic warmth of life, represented by the pigeon, in order to gain that recognition. The urgency of his need has made him tense and the tension is built up by crowding language in what is for Guillevic an unusually long syllabic line structure of the first four lines, 12+12+12+12. Absence of punctuation makes them move at a fast speed suggesting both the speaker's anxiety of alienation from life and his desperate compulsion to grasp that life. His action of squeezing the most vulnerable part of the pigeon's anatomy suggests both a need to come closer to the pulse of life flowing through this delicate and fragile part of the pigeon's body and a need to release the built up

tension in a pleasurable act of aggression. The effort required to break the neck or to choke the bird is only "si peu", but driven by the tension generated by his repression, the man loses control over his action and squeezes the neck longer than necessary because it gives him a sadistic satisfaction and release to feel the erotic life force of the animal pass and ebb through the neck. The neck is "miraculeux" for the man by its sensuous softness, which is feminine and erotic, representing for him a possibility of *jouissance* to be provided by women, which was for so long desired by him but denied to him, so that its coming would now be like a miracle. In the context with the previous poem the continuing exclusion has generated tension which turns for its release to a violent, sadistic action of killing the bird. By this action the man attempts to force his way into the experience denied to him and so destroys the symbol of his alienation in a similarly vicious way in which, in the *étang* poem, the speaker and the collective he has joined think of piercing the belly of the pond, which threatens him with a similar exclusion.

The subsequent, gradual release of tension is marked in the following couplet by reduction of the syllabic length of the lines to 6+7 and by the man's feeling of only the hardness of the bird's vertebrae. The length of the lines of the last couplet, "Et ne plus rien savoir/Que la tendresse", becomes still shorter, 6+4, signalling that he is overwhelmed by tenderness of a sadistic erotic gratification as his tension is released. The man was denied participation in non-violent erotic processes of life and finds a temporary relief from his anxiety by a displaced, sadistic sexual gratification. Arguably, the gratification is also masochistic because it is directed against his erotic plaything, the pigeon, on which he lavishes his tenderness and which becomes part of himself by representing his underlying desire of the fullness of life. The killing is therefore also an action against himself, an action that hurts him, but which also makes him feel nothing but tenderness, "rien savoir/Que la tendresse". His sado-masochistic satisfaction gives him an illusion that his desire has been recognized by the world outside of himself as an autonomous human being. In fact, the touching and killing of the pigeon becomes only a momentary

pleasurable substitute for his exclusion from participation in the "fête" of materiality figuring the fullness of life. The nature of sado-masochistic drives, like those of the person in the two poems, was defined by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

[...] sadism [is] a death instinct which, under the influence of the narcissistic libido, has been forced away from the ego. Masochism [is] sadism that has been turned round upon the subject's own ego. (Freud 1961: 48)

Sadism is then, an expression of the death instinct and in *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud claims that there is a close connection between the life and the death instinct:

[...] the two kinds of instinct seldom - perhaps never - appear in isolation from each other, but are alloyed with each other in varying and very different proportions and so become unrecognizable to our judgement. (Freud 1989: 78)

In the final analysis then the action of the subject of the poem is only a perverted sexual gratification in the service of the death instinct and the poet's representation of it as an attempt to transform emotional alienation by mastering materiality by physical action or by language of such an action is consequently shown by him as not being permanently effective.

In practical ecological terms, catching the bird alive in this poem, points to the practice of gaining pleasure from caging wild birds and animals, an action that in the end destroys them. The ecological lesson of the poem is that one cannot have the bird/pleasure by holding or possessing the bird to destruction.

In the third poem of this series Guillevic develops further the main idea of the previous two poems of a human subject being engaged with metaphoric birds in a struggle for recognition of his desire and his humanity. The birds, as

the messengers of the *jouissance* of materiality, never recognized him as equal and trustworthy of participating in their "fête".

L'oiseau qu'il suppliait  
Ne consentait jamais

A venir dans sa main  
Pour être son témoin. (T, 98)

This poem is an extension of the poems on pages 91 and 92. Although catching and killing the bird gave the human agent of the poems some momentary, sadistic pleasure and a glimpse of the tenderness of the *jouissance* that he was seeking, it did not provide real participation. Neither was his change of tactic by becoming a humble suppliant, "il suppliait", of the forces representing the *jouissance* of materiality, more successful. These forces are figured by the implied singing of a bird which, in the past, would not come down into his hand even when begged. The desire of the subject aims at becoming recognized as worthy of the "fête" and its *jouissance*, but the significance of this gesture of recognition goes well beyond mere participation in pleasure. Being recognized by a "témoin" means being accorded identity, a subjectivity, and therefore self-consciousness of full human status. It is Hegel who formulated the dialectic of the process of establishing such a recognition between human beings in his "Phenomenology of Mind" in a passage on "Lordship and Bondage", or "Master and Slave", a relationship which may be useful for closer understanding of the three poems.

According to Hegel "self-consciousness is *Desire*" (Hegel 1971: 225) and the subject of the poems desires the birds and the pleasure they figure. They become object of his desire because they represent a loss, an absence that he wishes to fill. Their loss figures his desire of women in general and of the mother in particular, or more accurately his desire of their desire. Gaining their desire would mean recognition of his self-consciousness and identity, but in this effort he failed. He must have been in the past repeatedly subjected to attempts

to have his desire appropriated and negated by others - the mother and women - for the purpose of having their own desire and identity recognized. Their attempts were largely successful so that he has been denied recognition of his own self-consciousness, that is, of his subjectivity and humanity (Hegel *ibid.* 231-233). This confrontation of desires was part of what Hegel calls "life and death struggle" (Hegel *ibid.* 232), which takes place in a process of establishing a real or a metaphoric master-slave relationship between desires of human beings. As much of Guillevic's poetry both explicitly and implicitly indicates, a similar struggle occurred during the poet's childhood between him and his mother. She was trying to dominate his desire, while he was struggling to find a place for himself in hers, fighting back for recognition of his desire and his self-consciousness. The mother's attempts partially succeeded in subjugating his desire, but his repeated attempts to liberate it failed as the bird never agreed to come into his hand: his emotional alienation from the mother and the *jouissance* of materiality persisted. The mother and the women reduced the subject/speaker of these three poems emotionally close to the status of the Hegelian slave and thereby obtained their recognition of mastery over him, but this was a hollow victory because they were not recognized by an equal, another master, but only by a "slave". This slave failed to gain his desired recognition by the use of force and pleading because he expected it to come from the outside and not from his own resources. The imperfect tense of the line "Ne consentait jamais" means that a protracted struggle for recognition between the speaker/subject and the birds, figuring the mother, the women and the material world of *jouissance* was taking place in the past. The result was that he was never accorded recognition, but the imperfect tense does not denote finite action so that a way for attaining recognition was left open for other action in the present. The way to achieve the recognition is not to force or beg the bird to be his *témoin*, but to become one himself. This approach is suggested by implication in two words: [*l*]oiseau with its implied song and *consentir* which, in its positive sense of "con" as 'with', and "sentir" as 'to feel', mean that the speaker should feel and sing with them, or as they do. Singing, as a metaphor

for poetry, will free him from alienation by his own work in and on language and restore his self-consciousness. This work will also give strength to recognize the self-consciousness of others, both people and objects of materiality, and to accept their undisturbed identity and autonomy. They will learn from him to act in the same way towards him so that the Hegelian life and death struggle may be turned into a constructive compromise before it reaches its fateful end. A similar course of action should be adopted by humankind, for which the subject stands metonymically. They will draw emotional satisfaction, and forge their self-consciousness, from their everyday work instead of from dominating and destroying material nature, which will give them pleasure when undisturbed. Both the speaker/poet and others will in this way, like the Hegelian slave, attain self-consciousness and autonomy as human beings:

[...] in fashioning the thing, self-existence comes to be felt explicitly as his own proper being and he attains the consciousness that he [the slave] himself exists in its own right and on its own account (*an und für sich*). (Hegel 1971: 239)

The imperfect tense of the third poem indicates that the poet's feelings of frustration and aggression occurred repeatedly in the past, but that now there is occurring through language which he begins to articulate a positive shift, a deterritorialization, away from his unspeakable experience of exclusion. The speaker learns to listen to, and enjoy, the singing of the bird without wanting to possess it by holding it in his closed hand. The final ecological lesson that he learns is that he can only have the bird by not having it.

The image of the closed hand that kills a bird in the first two poems, and of its opposite, the open hand which in another poem releases a rabbit caught in a trap (*T*, 111), becomes an important symbol of Guillevic's ecological philosophy and representation. On a wider level, they are a key paradigm of much of his poetry, signifying rejection of closure from, and desire of opening oneself to, the world of materiality.

### A vision of ecological harmony

In *Terraqué*, the speaking subject sometimes turns to the power of the erotic to negate fear and despair through images of women, who figure the life-creating and sustaining force of the erotic. In the following poem this force continues to provide life energy in the world even though other sources of creative energy became exhausted.

Il suffit d'une pierre  
Pour y penser -

Que c'est si vieux,  
Que l'eau croupit contre la vase,  
Que le feu s'époumone  
A bouillir le métal.

Le temps, le temps  
A pu faire d'une flamme  
Une pierre qui dort debout.

- Mais ton sein pointe dru  
Contre le jour qui traîne. (T, 13)

In the physical world, "Une pierre qui dort debout" is a product of the energy of a volcanic fire that exhausts itself by boiling, or melting, minerals into forms of rocks, "[...] le feu s'époumone/A bouillir le métal". The human life-supporting, creative organ, "sein", is linked to the stone by what they have in common between them. The stone and the breast are similar in shape and density. The stone is dense with the remainders of the exhausted force of volcanic fire, which formed the quanta of vibrating energy in its past. In "- Mais ton sein pointe dru/Contre le jour qui traîne" the disjunctive conjunction "mais" indicates an underlying difference between the two, which is that of time. It is "Le temps, le temps" that could in the past make from fire a stone, but its time *ne s'écoule plus*, it only drags, "[...] le jour qui traîne", so that the stone is no longer fully alive, but only sleeps, "qui dort debout". Contrary to it, the woman's breast speaks itself as an image of life whose time continues running. The breast is dense, "dru", like the stone, but biologically alive with inner life

and points by contrast, "Contre", that its time *s'écoule*, which is etched in the *blanc codé* of the poem.

In contrast to the death-driven human life in an urban setting, the following poem presents a picture of an ecologically idyllic existence lived in the open country in harmony with materiality.

#### XIV

Au dehors l'arbre est là et c'est bon qu'il soit là,  
 Signe constant des choses qui plongent dans l'argile.

Il est vert, il est grand, il a des bras puissants.

Ses feuilles comme des mains d'enfant qui dort  
 S'émeuvent et clignent. (T, 132)

The elliptic expression "Au dehors" points to the implied division in the speaker's mind between his experience of the inside, *au dedans*, the closed, oppressive world of the city civilization that lives on a diet of bitumen, and its opposite, the "dehors" as a possibility of opening to a full life in an unspoiled countryside. For the speaker personally the inner means the traumatic and inhibiting experience of his childhood, while the outer is his desire to overcome the inhibition by fully embracing materiality. Both a tree and a sleeping baby are manifestations of the erotic unfolding of life in materiality, of living things that tap into the mineral and biological sources of material life. The tree is given more prominence in the poem as an enduring symbol, "Signe constante", of vegetation, whose roots literally penetrate deep into the ground, "qui plongent dans l'argile", to find nourishing layers of soil. The choice of the word "l'argile" moves the discourse to a metaphoric level by providing a symbolic allusion to the miracle of life in its divine creation.

The tree is depicted in simple, concrete statements as "Il est vert, il est grand, il a des bras puissants" in one line that is graphically separate to form the



centre and the core of the poem. The repeated punctuation and repetition of "il est" imparts power and conviction to the thingspeak that makes the tree speak itself as a self-confident representative of materiality. The statement works on an obvious literal level, but it also moves to a figurative level by the word "bras" instead of *branches*, which make the tree alive in a human sense and make possible an analogy between the tree and a child. In some ways the tree is unlike the child. It is "grand" and old while the child is small and young, but its leaves, like the hands of a sleeping child, not only move, "s'émeuvent", but in their movement also repeatedly let through and block light so that they appear to open and close like the eyes of a person who winks. The comparison between the leaves and the hands is thus made more complex by drawing on a further, implied metaphor of the leaves and hands figuring eyes that open and close, a metaphor introduced by the word "clignent". The eyes let in light which, on a further metaphoric level, figures clear vision and understanding of everything that promotes and perpetuates life. By way of implied contrast, light is restricted in a city.

Both the image of the tree, whose leaves intermittently let through light, and of the sleeping baby, whose hands open and close like eyes, figure a vision of erotic unfolding of life in materiality. For the speaker the child then figures a possibility of growth towards becoming as strong as the tree, which is for him a model to follow: "c'est bon qu'il soit là", to be able to fully accept materiality containing both life and death. On a more general level, for mankind this is a beneficent vision of a possible ecological paradise that is situated outside the city civilization, in the material world of nature.

An accommodation between material aspects of nature and humanity is represented as being desired by everybody in the following poem, but its conclusion suggests that it may take a long time to come about.

Oui, fleuves - oui, maisons,

Et vous , brouillards - et toi,  
Coccinelle incroyable,

Chêne creux du talus,  
Ouvert comme un gros boeuf,

Qui ne vous entendrait  
Criant comme des graines  
Sur le point de mûrir?

- Patience, quelques siècles  
Et nous pourrons peut-être  
Nous faire ensemble une raison. (T, 70)

Natural objects like "fleuves", "maisons", "brouillards", "Coccinelle incroyable," and "Chêne creux de talus," are actually crying for symbiosis with humanity so obviously that everyone must hear them. The ripening of the grains is the culmination of their erotic cycle of reproduction that will renew and continue their existence. All the other material objects seem to be, like them, ripe and ready for a change in the relationship between themselves and humankind so that the opposition between them and us is removed and all become "nous". They are therefore crying to mankind to come closer to them and to join fully in their celebration of life. Such a coming together would be a great ecological advance for everybody, a sort of ecological *fête*. The speaker, who poses the rhetorical question, "Qui ne vous entendrait", is in the end rather ambivalent about its possible early realization. The language and tone of the opening lines reveals both that he can hear the longing of the objects and gives his own approval of such a desired *fête*, "Oui, fleuves - oui, maisons". However, in the last stanza of the poem he adopts a more hesitant attitude, "- Patience," and "peut-être", to the pleas of the objects, suggesting a wait of some centuries. It can be argued that the speaker's hesitation is due not only to his doubt about humanity's readiness for the *fête*, but also to his fear of embracing materiality.

Universal ecological paradise on earth may be still far away, but the speaker's "je" identifies him with the desire of opening human hands towards materiality.

Prière qu'il s'entendit faire  
Au lapin des garennes  
Attaché du collet.

"Tu vas pouvoir partir  
Où je ne serai pas,  
Car mes mains ne sont pas formées  
Pour contenir.

Mais au lieu d'égayer ta frayeur dans la course,  
Reste et regardons-nous  
Comme ignorant les choses." (T, 111)

The poem is a plea to the rabbit caught in a trap, "Prière qu'il s'entendit faire/Au lapin", promising to release it because the speaker's ecological conviction is that wild creatures should be left free. "Car mes mains ne sont pas formées/Pour contenir" implies that some people were brought up or trained to approach materiality by holding and dominating it, "contenir", but the speaker insists that he is not one of them. This insistence on "ne sont pas formées" is a step forward in human ecological thinking from the poems in which the subjects kill birds to be able to hold them in order to come closer to the material world (T, 91, 92). "[C]ontenir" means not only holding, but possessing, dominating and destroying what should be left free. the man obviously intends to release the rabbit, but before he does so, he engages with it in a moment of ecological contemplation.

The man pauses to speak to the rabbit before releasing it, creating a brief moment of solemn ecological magic: "Reste et regardons-nous/Comme ignorant les choses". The man and the rabbit are now to look at each other as equals, one representing humankind, the other creatures of nature and the natural world itself. The brief scene is only a wishful illusion, a symbol of the ideal of ecological brotherhood of mankind and the natural world. Reality, "les

choses", is different and the two actors know it. They, mainly the speaker, pretend that they can suspend their knowledge of it for the moment. What the poem therefore offers is a glimpse of a possibility of ecological harmony. Yet there is a final, perhaps unintended, irony at work in this mummery. The rabbit still has its paw in the snare and is therefore a captive participant in what appears to be an ecological gift of a kindhearted man, who knows that "choses" favour people whose hands are formed to grasp and dominate and that general ecological awareness is lacking. However, the man is more than kindhearted. For a moment he and the rabbit look at each other as equals who recognize each other's desire and autonomy. The rabbit is not aware of it, but this is recognition of it by the man as an autonomous being of materiality and such recognition is the only way in which to change the existing "choses". As things are human hands are formed to catch and kill rabbits and other animals, but this man opens his hands and lets the rabbit go in a gesture of changing the existing, destructive attitude. The gesture of the open hands in Guillevic's poetry is a paradigm of ecological awareness, but it also signifies the ideal of living in openness to life's possibilities and rejecting their closure.

The poem "Été" in "Brasier" argues that a chance of establishing ecological paradise was offered to mankind in the past, but people were unable to accept it.

### ÉTÉ

Ce n'était pas une paume ouverte avec ses lignes,  
La plaine offerte à qui voudrait la prendre.

Nous, nous ne pouvions pas accepter la gageure  
D'enfermer dans nos mains le peu d'air qui passait  
Sur la roche avancée,

Et d'aller pour l'offrir, craintifs, à pas légers,  
Aux oiseaux diurnes des sous-bois,  
Aux trous d'eau froide au fond des grottes. (T, 151)

The negative statement, "Nous ne pouvions pas", dominates this whole poem of lost ecological chances. The speaker's *je* is subsumed in the collective "nous" of humankind and his discourse is directed against the attitude of that *nous*. He speaks against it, not for it, because ecological awareness of most people has not really changed since the time in which the poem is set. Humanity was unable to accept the challenge of looking after the world without harming it. The elliptic syntax of the first two lines reads "Ce n'était pas *juste* une paume ouverte avec ses lignes, / Mais [l]a plaine offerte à qui voudrait la prendre", in which "La plaine" figures the whole world. Semantically the first line appears to be negative, but the lines in the skin of the hand and the lines of rivers running through the plain make them similar so that each of the two images figures the other. Consequently, the similarity converts the negation of the first line to being positive: the offered plain **was** an open hand offered in friendship. The image of an open hand is a paradigm of crucial significance in Guillevic's representation of possible ecological symbiosis. This symbol is employed four times in *Terraqué* before this poem and finally, in *Du Domaine* the poet restates the notion of the open hand as an ecological principle: ecological harmony will not be achieved as long as wild birds refuse to sit in the palm of an open human hand (*D*, 99).

In this poem the open hand plays a crucial role twice. First, the whole world was once an open hand that was inviting humankind to act in an open manner. The offer made to mankind became "la gageure" for "nous" to make an ecological commitment. This was the commitment: "enfermer dans nos mains le peu d'air qui passait / Sur la roche avancée," and offer it to birds and holes filled with cold water by opening those hands. The air that passes on the rock is the element that preserves our humanity and by offering it to material objects and sharing it with them we would have recognized their self-consciousness and desire for autonomous existence. And we should have offered the air with humility, "craintifs, à pas légers," not arrogantly as lords of the creation as we actually behaved. Unfortunately we, the representation of humanity, were unable to accept this challenge by taking part in this positive and friendly ritual

of opening hands with air to birds and holes of water. By implication, the world is today in a state of ecological disorder. One can detect a note of sadness of the speaker over our missing a chance once when we were offered not just a hand, but the whole material world that was new and innocent, yet we were unable to become a part of that world. The imperfect tense indicates that this situation, or state of mind, existed in the past and that introduces a possibility of hope that now we know better and may have learnt what to do.

Finally, still in the section of "Brasier" can be found a simple, charming short poem, addressed possibly to a lover, or a child, to whom the poet speaks in the intimate register of "tes yeux".and "ta joie".

L'alouette oubliée dans les livres d'école  
 A fait famille ici pour siffler par dizaines,  
 Pour monter sur la lande et les chaumes brûlants -  
 Et c'est profit pour nous, pour tes yeux, pour ta joie. (*T*, 152)

The poem opens with a reference, presumably to textbooks of teaching the alphabet - "les livres d'école" - in which the letter "A" is represented by the word "Alouette", which the children may know from the familiar song, "L'alouette, gentille alouette". The skylark of the school is forgotten, "oubliée", when put away with school books, but it is very much alive as a real one which lives "ici", in the open countryside. where the speaker finds himself. The thingspeak of the second line, "A fait famille ici pour siffler par dizaines", makes the larks speak themselves as autonomous members of materiality because their desire has been recognized and they now contribute towards natural harmony in the world. The speaker's observation of the larks producing families to sing by the dozen and to soar above the moors and burning stubble introduces a magic moment not only of joyous erotic celebration of life by the birds, but also of acceptance of the material world by the speaker. His and his addressee's reward for, and "profit" from, the recognizing the larks' desire, is their joy of experiencing a moment of ecological harmony in the world and

within themselves. The poem is one of not many in *Terraqué* in which a relationship between the poet and material world is represented as generating unqualified pleasure for him without any trace of fear or alienation.

### Repression and sadism

"Monstres", the first poem in the section "Créanciers", examines a rather Freudian notion of continuous conflict, within a human subject, between the drives of the unconscious, the *id*, and the conscious forces of the ego that see them as destabilizing. Both of these forces are creditors of humanity in the sense that they demand that their desire be satisfied. The speaker of the poem represents the conflict as a cyclical and natural process, in which the repeated confrontation of the forces does not become destructive, but forms a kind of unstable equilibrium and continuing accommodation between them.

#### MONSTRES

Il y a des monstres qui sont très bons,  
Qui s'assoient contre vous les yeux clos de tendresse  
Et sur votre poignet  
Posent leur patte velue.

Un soir -  
Où tout sera pourpre dans l'univers,  
Où les roches reprendront leurs trajectoires de folles,

Ils se réveilleront. (T, 27)

This poem invites a reading as a representation of the struggle within a human subject between the drives of the unconscious and the forces of the ego, which exercise conscious control over them. The monsters are the drives and desires of materiality, contained in the unconscious, desires which to the human subject appear to be, and really are, "très bons" because they not only offer pleasure, but also are a natural and necessary part of the human psyche.

During the day these monsters are meant to be asleep, tranquilized by the human consciousness, which considers them destabilizing and disruptive to the order erected by the ego, and therefore not good at all. The forces of ego are not explicitly represented, being implied in the *blanc codé* of the poem as something that the desire acts against. The denial of them by the ego during the day is, however, not completely effective. They are not fully asleep, sneak in under the ego's defences and, charged with erotic seductiveness, they sit down "contre vous les yeux clos de tendresse", and put their hairy paw on your wrist to lead you away from the straight and narrow path of the ego into the jungle of sensual delights. To the forces of the unconscious the image of "leur patte velue" means softness and instinctive, elemental eroticism while to the ego it means brutish, disorderly and dislocating force. The address of the reader as "vous" and "votre" implies both mankind in general and the "je" of the speaker, all of whom think that the monsters of materiality are not monstrous at all, but are really "très bons" and they enjoy being tempted by them.

"Un soir" the "monsters" will become fully awake: "Ils se réveilleront". It will be neither every evening nor one evening only because "reprendront" and "se réveilleront" suggest that it has happened before. It will be a special evening when the conditions will be right for the awakening and the conditions are specified in lines 6 and 7 as the moment, "Où tout sera pourpre dans l'univers,/Où les roches reprendront leurs trajectoires de folles". It is important that the good monsters will be released in the evening when the vigilance of the ego is diminished or suspended. The darkness of the night is the proper setting, a metaphor, for what the consciousness would regard as chaos and madness, but what is really the work of desire breaking down its constraints. Further, "pourpre" is the colour of blood and passion by which the human subject will now be fired in the magic moment of the negation of the existing restraints. In the subject's imagination, this moment will be figured by the mad flight of rocks that will defy the laws of physics. The rocks still contain the primeval volcanic fire of their origin, "La danse est en eux,/La flamme est en eux" (T, 79), which represents desire inherent in materiality. They figure intrusion and



reign of the desire of the Other, which breaks out in a night of darkness as chaos, madness and breakdown of order in the consciousness. The flight is an orgasmic dance that the rocks will take up again, "reprendront", meaning that it happened before and will be repeated, though neither perhaps regularly nor all the time. The consciousness and its ego will see to it that the old order is restored again next morning. In this poem the *créanciers* are the instinctive drives of the unconscious of the human subject, which are repeatedly being repressed, while the debtors and repressors are the ego forces of the consciousness that fear the former as a threat of instability and chaos.

The personal "je" of the speaker, implied in the more general "vous", suggests his involvement in the process that he represents, which reveals his ambiguity towards the forces that he confronts. He is sympathetic to, and tempted by, the promise of *jouissance* offered by the monsters, but he also fears the emotional demands that would be made on him and by the chaos and disorder that threatens his life. On the other hand, the rigid order imposed by the ego is a form of joyless way towards death. However, the two forces are inseparable constituents of life, just as they are in the *armoire* poem, except that now they are in the open to be faced by the speaker, not shut in a closet. The confrontation of them by the speaker represents a metaphoric move away from the stifling closure of the *armoire* towards accepting them as essential elements of life. The poetic discourse of the poem can be viewed as a dialectical process in which neither component is negated and which has no definite synthesis, but whose implied repetition constitutes a progression by constant breaking down and renewing "l'état d'équilibre instable" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 87).

A breakdown of such an unstable equilibrium may lead to sado-masochistic tendencies, which the speaker explores in the next poem. A man who is afraid of dying is driven by an obsessive desire to hurt his lover in order to allay his fears of death, but at the same time his sadistic craving conflicts with, and hurts, his innate goodness.

Il n'a pas voulu - la bonté le tue -  
 Ouvrir sur tes joues l'eau de tes yeux pâles  
 Où la mer montait menacer du feu.

Il n'a pas voulu mettre à vif ta chair,  
 Ta chair au secret pour sa soif de sable.

Il aurait voulu boire à même ta chair  
 L'humus, le gravier, la lave et le sel  
 Dont tu fis le sang qui pointe à tes lèvres.  
 Il aurait voulu - la bonté le tue -  
 Crier dans ta chair que la mort ne vienne. (T, 33)

The speaking subject addresses the woman in the intimate register assuming the voice of the rational part of the fragmented self of the man, while speaking of his sadistic other as "il". This other is driven by a sadistic obsession to gain renewal of his life energies by an imaginary biological need to absorb vital life elements from his lover's body to save himself from death, which really means killing her. However, he struggles between his innate goodness and sadism – "la bonté le tue" – trying to reject his sadistic drive, but in the context of his biological need and fear of death "la bonté le tue" means to him that by not killing her he is killing himself. His goodness persuades him not to want to hurt her - "Il n'a pas voulu" – but overcome by his destructive death drive, he began to engage in sadistic actions against her. First he made her cry by hurting her in some way so that tears flowed on her cheeks from her eyes in which tears rose like the sea to threaten fire, "Où la mer montait menacer du feu." This threat by her eyes indicates her resistance and a reproach to his goodness, which probably generated masochistic pleasure in him. He did not want to, but continued by laying bare her body, "mettre à vif ta chair", and did it by constraining her by some form of duress "au secret". The first two parts of the poem are followed by a *blanc codé* in which her resistance, "menacer du feu" appears to have stopped the man from further violence by making him turn the sadistic action into a sado-masochistic dream.

This bizarre dream represents a shift to the unrealized potential action of the past conditional tense "Il aurait voulu". He would have wanted, revealing that the man, in spite of his deep-seated desire and intention, did not persist with his sadistic actions. The desire is expressed by the metaphor of "soif" in the previous section and is continued by "boire" in the following. He thirsts for the "sable", which figures the life-creating minerals of the woman's flesh, and wants to drink them "à même ta chair", that is straight from her flesh as if from a bottle. Further, "L'humus, le gravier, la lave et le sel", are the components of her blood, all variants of the "sable", "Dont tu fis le sang", so that what he really would have wanted to drink was her blood in a act of sadistic vampirism. At the same time his goodness was killing him so that even here he experienced the double, sado-masochistic pleasure of hurting both her and himself, albeit in his imagination. Knowing that when he dies the minerals of his body will form the basis for new life does not lessen his fear of death, because death means loss of his individual self and his twisted imagination tells him that drinking his lover's minerals would prevent that.

The rhetoric of the poem draws on physical images of drinking flesh, minerals and blood of the female lover, which are absurd on the physical level. These images are metaphoric of the irrationality of the man's defence against the threat of death on a metaphysical level, and point back to a fragmentation of self and irrationality on the level of his physical existence. This irrationality is evidence that the man's normal balance between the life instincts and the death instincts, which are both components of sexuality (Freud 1989: 78), has been seriously disturbed and consequently he has been driven to sado-masochism. It is only in the last line that the reason for his sado-masochistic impulses is revealed as an obsessive fear of death: "Crier dans ta chair que la mort ne vienne." Either the man was in great danger of death, or was just terrified of it, and for a person like that the terror of death may be relieved by the exercise of the power of life and death over others. Absorbing his lover's body minerals may mean, on the one hand, drawing strength and energy from them without thinking of the consequences for her or, on the other hand, knowingly killing

her and fusing with her dead body and becoming dead oneself. Metaphorically these actions represent the desire of the "dying" man of the discourse, who belongs to the "dead", to draw life from another's body that he is killing by an act of erotic vampirism. He may also feel resentment towards his healthy lover and a desire to punish her for not sharing his suffering. What then drives this tangle of bizarre emotions seems to be conflicting erotic urges to preserve one's life, and at the same time a death wish to join the materiality in the form of minerals. It is arguable that the preoccupation of the poet with such extremity of erotic dysfunction reveals that the balance of the erotic forces of his own intimate world may be disturbed. In the material world, the forces of death and life are balanced. The forces of death exert an ever-present pull to annihilate living bodies by reducing them to their constituent minerals, while the forces of *eros* renew life by drawing material and energy from the same minerals.

### **Fear of alienation**

In spite of writing about and against death the speaker does not become less afraid of its threat, which confronts him personally and through the objects and animals of nature. In the poem "Boeuf écorché" the speaker traces the miracle of life by touching and contemplating the cadaver of a newly slaughtered ox. He draws strength from this encounter to continue writing against the fear of death to achieve a gradual shift through language against that fear.

### **BOEUF ÉCORCHÉ**

*A René Méjean.*

C'est de la viande où passait le sang, de la viande  
Où tremblait la miraculeuse,  
L'incornpréhensible chaleur des corps.

Il y a encore  
 Quelque chose de la lueur du fond de l'oeil.  
 On pourrait encore caresser ce flanc,  
 On pourrait encore y poser la tête  
 Et chanter contre la peur. (T, 15)

For a materialist poet the mystery of organic life, the "chaleur des corps", is both "miraculeuse" and "incompréhensible" and life itself is precarious. Life is so tenuous that it only seems to quiver, or tremble, "tremblait", in its material base. The two abstract adjectives, unusual for Guillevic, clearly point to something beyond the purely material nature of "viande" that a dead animal, or a human being for that matter, becomes immediately after death. This poem is concerned with a transitional stage, a fresh cadaver, "écorché", which, according to Stella Harvey, may be called an "corps-déchet" (Harvey 1997: 51). It is a state between life and the final decomposition and breakdown of the body into constituent minerals. The repeated word "viande" links the dead ox to human beings for whom it will become food so that it will not actually decompose directly, but live on in them for some time. In the domain of the sacred, according to Guillevic, all life functions, like eating the meat of the ox, would be a kind of communion. In many ancient cultures killing of an animal for food was accompanied by a ritual of asking its forgiveness and of culpating oneself from the act. The ritual slaughter of animals by Jews and Moslems, still practised today, is a reminder of these ancient beliefs that disapproved of spilling blood and of eating it (Genesis, 9:4), because in those times blood was a sacred, bonding element shared by the tribe, its god and its domestic animals. It is not surprising then that Guillevic, a materialist who believes in the ecological unity and sacredness of all life on earth, caresses the side of the ox and touches it with his head in a ritual gesture of asking forgiveness for what humanity has done to it. It is a gesture by which he expresses his ecological kinship with the ox and with materiality.

In the domain of the sacred, in which Guillevic draws his inspiration, the notions of "food" and "blood" have, according to Stella Harvey, an important and ambiguous significance:

The twofold connotation of 'la viande': food, ritual celebration/slaughter, imminent putrefaction, manifest the precarious distinction between *nourriture* and *pourriture* that exemplifies the ambiguity of the sacred. The pure/impure paradox is likewise signified by 'le sang', a metonymy of both the life force and violent death. Its ambivalence is most acute in the sacrificial scenario, where the violence it symbolises can only be contained by the shedding of the sacrificial victim's blood, which thus becomes an agent of purification. (Harvey 1997: 52)

The ox has been an object of much violence inflicted on it by people. It was once a bull which was considered wild, violent and therefore a threat to established order. It was therefore castrated and later slaughtered and skinned. The sacrificial, ritual aspect of these actions may today be generally forgotten, but it forms a subtext in this poem. The act of castration and that of being "écorché" is metaphorically also relevant to the speaker's own emotions. He feels that he has been castrated and skinned alive. The erotic base of his emotions was twisted by his mother whose emotional rejection of him went beyond Oedipal separation to castration by her refusal to him of *jouissance*. He was sadistically punished by her so that he had developed excessive sensitivity, as if he were skinless, the consequences of which contributed to his experience of alienation.

Skinning the ox makes it look naked and obscene and therefore more similar to a dead human body than when it was alive, and the similarity exposes the underlying vulnerability of all life, including the speaker's life. Life is totally defenceless against death, which is its inevitable final outcome, and which the speaker is both afraid of, and attracted to. The blood and the warmth of the living body are almost still there and there is still a glint of life at the back of the eye, "la lueur du fond de l'oeil". The speaker is able to draw some strength from touching the carcass to make a stand against the fear of death and

at the same time receive a masochistic thrill from the threat of death. The imagery of the scene is not ugly or repulsive, which suggests that he is also attracted to it because it seems to give him satisfaction to be close to an image of his own suffering and death. All he can do against his fear of death is "chantonner contre la peur", which appears to be rather ambiguous and ineffective because "chantonner" means a childlike and playful way of singing. The other meaning is humming, crooning or lulling to allay one's fears, like someone who hums or whistles to himself while walking through a dark forest, both dreading and enjoying the experience. However, "chantonner" may also be taken to mean singing in the sense of writing poetry, which is a play with words, work in and on language, against death. Language cannot prevent real death, but can allay the fear of it. Michael Brophy states in his comments on Guillevic's *Art Poétique* (1989): "Le poème n'offre qu'une continuelle approche, inachevée, incertaine, mais [...] il efface dans son mouvement la menace de la mort" (Brophy 1993: 73). And Malcolm Bowie makes a similar observation in his work on Lacan: "[...] the only opportunity for saying no to mortality lies, fragilely in speech itself and in the action that it may provoke" (Bowie 1991: 202).

The following poem from the section "Créanciers", points to the ambiguity of human bodies as belonging to the realm of both life and death. That they are potential cadavers disguised as living bodies haunts the poet even in the moments when his imagination is touched by the idea of the erotic warmth of a woman's body.

Dessous la chair des femmes qu'il fait si bon toucher,  
Il y a un squelette -

Un squelette égaré que la tièdure étonne  
Et que le sel appelle  
En ses cavernes grises. (T, 42)

The emphasis of the poem is on the solid part of both a living and a dead body, which is the word "squelette". The generally accepted idea that the flesh of

women, "la chair des femmes", provokes an erotic response in men, "qu'il fait si bon toucher," is subverted by insistence that the skeleton that supports the flesh belongs to both the world of the living and the world of the dead. The skeleton itself is bewildered, "égaré", by the conflicting demands of life and death on it. On the one hand, it is astonished by the fact that it serves as a base of the warmth of the erotic forces of the body: "que la tièdèur étonne", and on the other hand, it is called by the mineral salt within itself, "le sel", to join the minerals, that reside in its grey caves of death, "En ses cavernes grises", that is in the dead deposits of inorganic minerals. This call of death, unlike that of the *eros*, does not seem to astonish it, which suggests that it accepts belonging more to death than to life. This implied observation is factually accurate because the skeleton is a part of the living body that transcends decomposition by death of other tissue by hundreds or even thousands of years.

The metaphorical implications of this gruesome little poem for the speaker's personal ecology are that his erotic drives are still largely committed to death because his life instincts are blocked by the fear of death and therefore in a state of erotic paralysis and lack of balance. His erotic imagination has been castrated and he imagines that the skeleton under the enticing flesh of women, "Dessous la chair des femmes", is probably that of his mother. It represents not only her moral coldness, rigidity and her single-minded dedication to the forces of *thanatos*. Like the skeleton she is "égaré[e]" by the warmth of the erotic demands on her by her son, which conflict with the coldness of her moralistic vindictiveness. The imaginary skeleton is also one of those in Guillevic's cupboard, in the *armoire* of his mind, and its enduring solidity signals, in 1942, that it is going to stay there for a long time. The bull of the previous poem, which was castrated to become the "boeuf", casts a long shadow and it is possible to understand even better why the poet feels such an affinity with it. The discourse of the thingspeak of the bones speaks the fears and confusion of his divided self.



The creditors in the section called "Créanciers", who in the following poem are cadavers, demand that their debts be paid. And the payment is death, represented in this poem as night.

Les cadavres non plus ne me demandent rien  
Que ma nuit -

La nuit de glu, de crime, de boucherie,  
La nuit des pleurs et du remords. (T, 38)

The speaker identifies himself with the subject of the poem by "me" and "ma" so that he speaks about his own feelings. The poem is driven by the fear of death and reveals that sometimes the poet cannot progress beyond the stage of the *armoire* poem, in which he was unable to take a gamble to embrace full human existence comprising both life and death. Here again the speaker does not see his death as a harmonious event within the natural cycle of death and rebirth, but rather as a criminal act of pitiless slaughter, for the purpose of which he is going to be first trapped like a bird in birdlime, "glu". It means death which he is not willing to embrace, a death of tears and remorse, suggesting unwillingness to die because life is very short and enjoyable and the inorganic state eternal and not very exciting. The cadavers, with other images, like "La nuit de glu, de crime, de boucherie" figure death and represent dead creditors by demanding with ecological logic the minerals which the living have borrowed from them. However, the speaker's fearful imagination sees these demands as terrifying, unnatural and criminal because for him their demand means death as an autonomous and individual human being - "La nuit des pleurs et du remords". It is death that he fears, but also one elevated to the notion of ritual slaughter as suggested by the word "boucherie" which, on the one hand, means senseless and brutal killing. However, on the other hand, in its allusion to the poem "Boeuf Ecorché" (T, 15) extends the idea of death beyond that of mere killing or ecological logic into the realm of ritual sacrifice in the service of preserving life. The expression "du remords" expresses the speaker's realization that he participated in killing animals by eating meat, which was

provided by butchers whose ancient trade dates to the dawn of civilization when it was governed by ritual laws. Among the cadavers that demand his death may then be some of his victims who were castrated and killed and now they call for the same fate for him by his ritual killing. Such a prospect overwhelms him by fear and remorse, but he is still able to stage protest against his fate by the bitter and violent language of the other of his fragmented self. This language puts his unspeakable fears of death, no matter how terrifying they are, into words of poetry, which initiates a metaphoric shift out of his fears towards a more balanced perspective of the natural process of human existence. To borrow a phrase from the poem "Boeuf Ecorché", it means "chantonner contre la peur". This is what he does here more clearly than in the former poem in which he only thinks that "On pourrait [...] chanter contre la peur."

In the following poem the speaker's obsessive fear that objects of materiality are actively pursuing him to kill him and turn him into humus, becomes hysterical:

Des milliers d'yeux jaunes luisent dans la forêt,  
 Me réclament le sang.  
 Que je ferme un instant les yeux,  
 Ils s'abattront sur moi,  
 Ils me dissoudront dans l'humus  
 Où depuis toujours  
 Je sens mon odeur. (T, 30)

The speaker's unspeakable fear of death turns to a hysterical conviction that the "créanciers" of nature demand urgently and directly his blood, "Me réclament le sang". In the first four lines, two long lines are drawn out by the speaker's incredulity that nature figured by wild animals with yellow eyes conspires against his life. Each of the long lines is followed by a short line whose syntax is squeezed and driven by a breathless rush of fear and panic. The syntax cries fear and rushes away from it. The animals lie in wait in the forest of his mind, ready to fall upon him the moment he drops his guard even for an instant, "Que

je ferme un instant les yeux". Four out of seven lines begin with personal pronouns, which forcefully set the scene as him against them - "Me" and "Je" against repeated "Ils". "Ils s'abattrent sur moi," reveals the intensity of the speaker's fear, the violence of the imagined attack and his reluctance to become a victim of natural process of dying. Spilling and implied eating of his body and drinking of his blood introduce the notion of ritual sacrifice by which the beasts would turn them into constituent minerals and humus. Such sacrifice would restore order and equilibrium of inorganic nature, which was disturbed by organic objects that took from the common pool minerals needed for their life.

What the speaker fears most is not just being killed by the metaphoric wild beasts representing life-destroying forces of nature, but being dissolved into featureless and characterless humus. Yet, he also knows that he is fighting a losing battle against an inevitable end because he rationally knows that he belongs to materiality and its humus. What he dreads about his fate on a deeper, emotional level is the inevitable obliteration of his individual self, which is brought to him by irrefutable olfactory perception: "Où depuis toujours/Je sens mon odeur". The smell of humus gives the speaker notice of the terrible difference between a living body and a dead, decomposed one, which has turned into formless minerals and means obliteration as an individual human being. This poem takes up then the unresolved dilemma of the materialist speaker/poet already faced in *Requiem*, where he is uneasy about the death of plants, insects and animals. The materialist in him would like to join them, to be like them, but his self cries out in anguish against the loss of his individual self in physical death and decay: "Ce sera une chose horrible" ("Vache" R, 3).

### From exclusion to inclusion

#### *Rage and revolt*

Guillevic was seven years old when the First World War started and the poems of the section "Garçon" draw on the poet's childhood experiences of that time. These experiences comprise not only childhood games, but also real feelings of resentment and rage against the world of the adults who dominate and oppress children's lives. One thing the poet remembers is that it was a time when newspapers were censored:

C'était en un temps  
Où le journal était un carré blanc  
Tenu par la mère au-dessus du seuil  
Où jouait l'enfant. (T, 167)

The boys of the village play at war in the fields while the real war rages in the East of France and of Europe:

Quand la guerre est au loin sur les chantiers de l'est,  
Les garçons du bourg  
S'acharnent aux champs.

[...] (T, 173)

The boys make sorties into the fields and they know how to make themselves childish weapons: "Et toujours ils savent/Y tailler un arc" (*ibid.*). Their imagination carries them from war games, "Mieux valait faire la petite guerre dans les champs" (T, 170) to fighting with imaginary wolves, "S'il est question de loups, ce n'est que pour se battre" (T, 172).

So far the poems have revealed a world of childhood games and adventures in open countryside, containing some degree of often imaginary aggression. However, underlying these rustic games is, for the implied narrator, another more serious layer of perception of himself and of the life he lives and

wants to live. Above all, he is self-confident about an inner force within himself:

[...]

Et en soi une force  
Plus forte que le vent,  
Pour plus tard et pour maintenant,  
Contre tout ce qu'il faudrait,  
Certainement. (T, 167)

This feeling of an inner force leads to the speaker's self-assertion and confidence that he is able to live his life in his own way, both now and in the future, against everything that he would have to, "Contre tout ce qu'il faudrait".

However, this strength and self-confidence also fuel both a tendency to real violence and a deeply felt resentment of, and rage against, the world and the authority of adults, and for the poet specifically, against his family. These feelings find expression in the two following adjacent texts which are thematically connected:

Mieux valait faire la petite guerre dans les champs  
Que s'angoisser au soleil couchant,  
A cause de son sourire peut-être, à elle,  
Ou à cause de tout.

Mieux valait se faire des bâtons avec le houx  
Pour la gueule des chiens,  
Mieux valait se battre dans les genêts,  
Rendre coup pour coup et deux coups pour un -

Que venir encore aux étranges flaques d'eau,  
Plein de reptiles, de vase, de racines,  
Attendre d'y voir le soleil couchant  
Verser comme du sang. (T, 170)

Plus pour chercher la carrière des fées,  
La dormeuse dans le bois aux merles d'or,  
La caresse peureuse de la bête câline

Qui sort vers la nuit de la terre des champs,  
 Les loups de l'hiver pour leur faire tout dire  
 Des graines de vipère, du palais des guêpes. (T, 171)

The first text contains the discourse of a child's desire and a declaration of independence against family constraints. He fights against them metaphorically by escaping into open countryside and staging rough fights against friends and imaginary dangers. At times these fights exceeded childish games - "Rendre coup pour coup et deux coups pour un -", growing to real violence. However, in the view of the child in the speaker, the escapades and fighting were better worth engaging in - "Mieux valait" is emphatically repeated three times - than returning home "au soleil couchant". Returning is introduced by a repeated "Que" that opens up agonizing, "s'angoisser", over the loss of freedom and facing the mother: "A cause de son sourire peut-être, à elle". The child resents the mother's smile, which must have been ironic and dismissive, and the whole family situation, "Ou à cause de tout."

However, the boys' imagination also transcends the restricted reality of their lives in its longing for emotional satisfaction. The discourse of the text of six lines on page 171 becomes a minor language extended into the magic realm of childhood imagination through the voice of the child in the man. He feels there is more to seek in life, "Plus pour chercher", than fighting and resentment against parents. It is a quest of a richer, freer life fuelled by imagination, and the discourse of this poetic performance accomplishes a major metaphoric shift from the children's emotional exclusion towards imaginative inclusion. The poem is composed of three pairs of lines, each pair revealing a different aspect of the desire of an imaginative child who searches and yearns for, beauty, affection and knowledge. Beauty is sought first in the rocky hideout of fairies, the Sleeping Beauty and the golden blackbirds, revealing a mind, which is able to see mystery and beauty in the world enriched by folklore. The second pair draws on folklore again introducing an unmistakable erotic dimension of desire

for affection. It is a representation of a mysterious, cuddlesome beast that in the evening rises from the earth offering itself as an object to be fondled and caressed timidly by a child deprived of affection. In the third pair the search is for wolves, which know about everything in the woods, to make them reveal secrets of natural history about "Des graines", here meaning the eggs, of adders and nest of wasps. Wasps are, for a country child, not just insects, but fierce, noble and dangerous warriors that would not live in a nest, but reside in a "palais". And this word is one of several that are pushed to their semantic limit to acquire a unique emotive and evocative power. This power attains in this poem great intensity in revealing a mind of innocence and imagination driven by a desire to unlock, and take part in, the secrets, mysteries and *jouissance* of the world.

The following poem reveals a child's unwillingness to being subjected to family routine and discipline and escaping from such constraints by daydreaming:

On fait semblant d'être à la table  
Et d'écouter.

Mais on a glissé  
Parmi les feuilles mortes,  
Et l'on couve la terre.

On peut se sourire  
Et y colérer.  
On caresse les feuilles  
Et on les déchire.

A la voix qui gronde  
On en sort mouillé,  
Pour obéir. (T, 169)

The poem represents a whole gamut of the speaker's childhood attitudes and feelings. He pretends to be an obedient child in a family situation, "On fait semblant d'être à la table", but in his mind he has slipped out, "glissé", into the

open and plays with dry leaves lying on the ground. His mood alternates between smiling and anger, and tenderness and inner rage as he alternately caresses and tears up the leaves. Again, this experience brings into the discourse the voice of the child in the man. In the end, when he is called by a grumbling voice, the child comes out of the leaves wet and submits sullenly to parental authority - "Pour obéir". To obey is the sticking point and he resents having to do it.

The child's tendency towards resentment and aggression indicates that his erotic energies have been twisted, either in reality or in his imagination, towards alienation and death rather than enjoyment of life. The anger of the poems set in natural surroundings is directed against the adults who dominate the child's life, rather than against nature itself, which is for the boys a refuge and a stage on which to act out their fantasies and exercise their imagination. These poems reveal Guillevic's incipient alienation from the world of his mother and other adults and the resentment of having to pretend that he was a willing part of that world. The resentment, which the other boys of the town shared with the speaker, grew into rage that dominated their mind. They know how to make themselves a bow, but not how to rid themselves of that rage:

[...]

Et toujours ils savent  
Y tailler un arc.

Mais ils ne savent pas  
S'arracher cette rage. (T, 173)

In *Vivre en poésie*, when asked about his childhood attitude to the world of adults, Guillevic reveals that he consciously played a role of a good, obedient child, while he boiled inside with rage. For him it is: "Cette rage de vivre mieux, de vivre plus fort, de se débarrasser de toute contrainte, de tout esclavage. La révolte contre les parents, contre l'école..." The rage of the poem



is then not just rage of anger, but rather a desire fuelled by anger and tinged with potential violence. The interviewer then quotes the last couplet of the above poem and asks Guillevic: "Toi, cette rage, es-tu parvenu à te l'arracher?", to which the poet gives the following answer: "Jamais. Je ne l'ai pas encore assouvie. Je ne me suis pas encore assagi" (*VP*, 71). The word "encore" in Guillevic's reply is significant because it reveals that the process of transformation by language of his childhood experience of frustration, still continues in 1980 when the poet is 73 years old.

### Shadow of the mother

Much of Guillevic's poetry, especially that of *Terraqué*, draws on the emotional experience of the poet's relationship with his mother who appears both as a figure of threat and loathing and an object of desire and longing. The mother appears in disguise, usually as *mer/mère*, and brings ambiguity to relationships of the speaker with real or imagined lovers. The mother enters into such a relationship as a third party, forming a *ménage à trois*, in which the poet expects from his lover to provide the affection denied to him by his mother. Some of the poems represent yearning to find in the lovers the mother's body, to which he desires to return to be then reborn into her full emotional acceptance.

The following poem claims that an important lesson of life is physical contact with a woman:

Vivre, c'est pour apprendre  
A bien poser la tête  
Sur un ventre de femme.     (*T*, 89)

"Vivre" suggests that to live fully and can be learnt through contact with a woman's belly, which is the erotic source of life. The implication is that the

speaker's spirit, figured by his head, is troubled. In its extreme logical extension, it is a gesture of the child in the man, which suggests that he would like to go back into the mother's womb to be born again to heal his malaise. The "ventre", as the symbol of motherhood, also indicates that what the speaker is longing for is a woman, who would help him be reborn emotionally by becoming a substitute for the lost mother.

The speaker's desire to assuage yearning for his mother's affection takes him to look for a lover through erotic imagery of material objects of the natural countryside. In spite of his creating an enticing representation of an imagined lover in the following poem, its final line introduces a note of ambiguity to the passionately fashioned portrait.

Un merle quelquepart parle de ton visage  
 Posé lune brûlante au fond du bruit  
 Que fait le dur travail des insectes vieillots.  
 Et la brique, oubliée dans l'herbe pour durer,  
 Se réchauffe à ta peau tremblant sur les prairies,  
 Sur les ombelles consumées  
 Par leur frêle tendresse dans l'effroi  
 De ta beauté de mer sereine sur le monde. (T, 147)

The first impression of this poem is that of an erotic idyll that evokes a vision of, and longing for, the speaker's lover whom he sees as being in a harmonious fusion with the summer countryside. The opening of the poem is almost mock romantic as the love symbol of the romantic poetry, the nightingale, is subverted by a blackbird, a more earthy bird that for his living scratches the ground in search of grubs. Concrete imagery anchors the visual perspective to the ground level as the woman's face is placed below the level of the activity and noise made by insects. The speaker's passion transforms the woman by diffusing and spreading her face and the skin of her body over the countryside by an image that is material, but rises to spirituality. By her touch she becomes part of the countryside conferring by her beauty special intensity and meaning to commonplace activities and objects like the singing of a blackbird, buzzing

of insects, and a brick, which warms up at the touch of the woman's trembling skin. Her skin stretches over meadows and flowers to become the surface of a serene sea in an erotic merging of her presence with the objects in nature. She not only charges them with a new and heightened energy and grace, but also makes them reflect back this beauty onto her own ethereal image so that this interplay increases the impact she has on everything around her. The climax of the poem indirectly evokes the beauty of the woman through the image of her skin stretching over umbels, which become consumed, that is absorbed or burnt, by their own fragile tenderness, in the fright of the woman's beauty. The beauty is then defined as that of a calm and clear sea over the world, "*de mer sereine sur le monde*", into which was transformed her stretched and shimmering skin.

The dream-like imagery and atmosphere of the poem indicate that it does not evoke a real woman, but the woman, an idealized version that the poet dreams of. However, some imagery suggests that this ideal lover is related to the speaker's mother. One image is that of the moon, "*lune brûlante*", which in Guillevic's poetry tends to be associated with the poet's mother. The idea of burning is supported by the inclusion of the poem in the section "*Brasier*". The oxymoron of a burning moon represents the burning oedipal passion, which the speaker projects onto her as he approaches the lover/mother, who is now, in his imagination, at last gratifying his childhood erotic desire. Her beauty exists only in the imagination of the child in the speaker and fuelled by his burning erotic desire it is a fierce, burning beauty, which has a touch of death in it because it burns, in the guise of the sea, the beauty of the umbels. The image of the sea and its homophone, *mer/mère* confirm the mother's presence. The sea may look "serene" outwardly, but it is also ambivalent, containing within itself death and destruction in the experience of rejection and persecution of the poet by the mother.

The mother is therefore present in the poem right from the beginning in the image of the moon, then in the image of her skin, "*tremblant sur les prairies*", destroying umbels, and finally transforming herself into the sea, "*mer sereine*". The serenity may be that of her final victory and satisfaction. She had

won the battle against her son, even though it had warped both of them, because he cannot live without the affection denied to him and has to keep returning to seek it from her all his life. The significance of the unusual image of "le dur travail des insectes vieillots." depends on the meaning of "vieillots", which is "old" or "prematurely old looking" because they do not change in appearance between birth and death. The insects are born with their death mask on and all through their short life they are rushing towards death. They are driven to their hard work and death by instinctual compulsion, and by implication the speaker's compulsive desire of the mother drives his erotic passion from life towards death.

Another poem, set in a dying autumn countryside, draws again on the speaker's memory of his mother's traumatic emotional rejection from which he is trying to free himself. His desire of the mother is redirected onto a dream woman and the speaker tries to convince himself that her erotic presence has healed his emotional malaise.

Autrefois quand l'automne  
Était sève pesante et comme un corps coupé  
Dont le sang lentement partait par les sous-bois,  
Quand les corbeaux criaient sur les terres labourées,

Pressentant une fête étrange à l'horizon,  
Oh! je t'ai appelée, suscitée dans les airs.

Et la fête est venue  
Plus tard et de très loin  
Avec ton corps.

(T, 153)

"Autrefois" places the time of the first experience of the poem into a distant past of bygone days of the speaker's childhood while the metaphoric language of the lines evokes dying. The poet felt at the time that his life was akin to vegetable existence of trees in autumn when their sap is withdrawn from the leaves and makes the trunk, that is his body, heavy with it, "sève pesante". It was a state of chronic depression, of alienation from the sources of life, of

drifting towards death. The next stage of the hibernation of trees is withdrawal of the sap into roots, but the language employed to represent this natural and peaceful step is violent: "comme un corps coupé/Dont le sang lentement partait". The violence and the images of a body and blood reveal an emotional reaction and involvement of the speaker. The imagery indicates that in his youth his erotic life energy was prevented from finding an outlet and was forced back into him. It was as if a vital part of his being was amputated, "comme un corps coupé", so that his vitality and lust for life were draining away. The agent of this destruction of the poet's emotional life core was, as is repeatedly implied in this poem, his mother who was responsible for his emotional wellbeing. She is indirectly figured in "Quand les corbeaux criaient sur les terres labourées", because she came from a country background and once laboured on the land. The rural image of the fields ploughed, cut and scarified, reinforces that of the "corps coupé" as his body and links it to the actions of the mother. Her "work" included inflicting corporal punishment on him so that she became for Guillevic "corbeau", a bird of death. But the word "corbeau" contains, when inverted, *beau corps*, which suggests that she was also the object of his desire. As a child he longed for the comforting warmth of her body and for her affection. She was the centre of his emotional world, which she indelibly marked not with her full presence, but with her absence, with a void. The poet never stopped yearning for the presence denied to him so that the desire of his mother became a stimulus for his erotic dreams of other women to whom he turned in vain to provide the missed emotional satisfaction.

This erotic dreaming is taken up in the following two lines of the poem, which trace the attempted emotional escape from his mother: "Pressentant une fête étrange à l'horizon,/Oh! je t'ai appelée, suscitée dans les airs". His erotic yearning made him imagine coming of a strange fête or festival, "une fête étrange", which was coming to him from far away to satisfy his longing. The nature of the festival was foreign to his experience, "étrange", but he knew that the essential feature of it was a woman whom he not only called, but whom he actually created in his imagination. He gave life to her, "suscitée", in the void

of the atmosphere around him. She was a dream-like substitute for, or a supplement to, his mother, who was the original object of his desire. The last three lines of the poem are set further forward in time in his adulthood and from that perspective he looks back at the time when the fête actually, physically did take place. It came later and from very far, "de très loin", which excludes mother, and it came "Avec ton corps". The words "fête" and "corps" are crucial for the interpretation of the poem.

The word "fête" contains an inherent ambiguity, which it imparts to the outcome of the speaker's desire. One meaning of "fête" is that of a religious or national festival and it has a spiritual, permanent dimension, celebrating a lasting state of holiness or wholeness. The other meaning is that of a sensuous physical feast of eating and drinking, which may be satisfying, but is only of temporary duration. It is an irregular event, which is followed by a return to the preceding state of things. The fête did come, "Et la fête est venue", but which one? The strangeness of the "fête" and its conjuring in the atmospheric regions suggest that the speaker accepted its eventual consummation through an erotic experience, "Avec ton corps", as having a spiritual dimension. He expected this fête to be was an experience of full emotional presence and permanent bliss, of escaping from the mother to erotic normality and personal wholeness. The speaker wants to convince himself that this is what has happened because this is what he says has happened. However, close reading of the text of the poem actually subverts his desired experience.

The speaker specifies that the fête came with the lover's body, "ton corps", which is for him a "beau corps" and which became the centre of his emotional satisfaction for the duration of the fête. The emphasis on the body, "ton corps", and not the lover's whole personality begins to deconstruct the fabric of the intended meaning. The physical substance of the body leads to the physical notion of the "fête" subverting its intended spiritual dimension to its own physical level. "Corps" does not offer a full emotional presence and cannot therefore replace the desired full emotional presence of the mother, remaining only a temporary supplement to it. Moreover, it is only a supplement to an

emotional void because the mother's emotional presence never existed, being only yearned for, so that this supplement takes from the absence the quality of emptiness and death. The "beau corps" of the lover therefore becomes inverted into another "corbeau", a symbol of emotional scavenging and death. The speaker's progress is a flight from one absence to another. His desire for the full emotional presence remains, and will remain, divided between his lover and his mother, that is between the two "beau corps", which also means between the two "corbeaux", so that his desire is marked not only by absence, but also by a drift towards emotional death.

In another poem, the speaker directs his desire towards a woman, who is represented by images of objects of the countryside and the sea, with which her body fuses. An erotic relationship with her initiates a metaphoric move away from his alienation and erotic exclusion as a step in the process of their deterritorialization. However, the image of a shelter in the sea, the *mer/mère*, inevitably introduces an element of ambiguity.

## XII

Dans la paume des chemins, dans l'éclatement de  
l'herbe,  
Ton visage tout défait d'aimer.  
Tes mains au soleil couchant  
Pétrissant l'argile, caressant les cous des chiens  
Mouillés de la boue des pâturages.

Écoute: le pollen des rochers,  
L'abri au fond de la mer.

C'est ta paume qui s'épanouit,  
C'est la peau de tes seins  
Tendue comme une voile au soleil couchant.

Écoute encore: ton pollen au pollen des rochers  
Se mélange sur mer,  
Ton ventre amène et retire les marées,  
Ton sexe occupe les sables chauds des profondeurs.

(T, 129-130)

The poem opens as an idyllic love scene in the country at the intimate time of sunset, "au soleil couchant". The first five lines are charged with an erotic force that the lovers draw from, and share with, erotic powers of the material countryside. Intimacy is further emphasized by the familiar register of *tutoiement* addressed by the speaker to his lover, and the nature of their relationship is indicated by the image of the lover's face distorted or animated by erotic passion, "défait d'aimer". "Pétrissant l'argile" and "la boue des pâturages" associate the woman with the idea of her creative, god-like role of kneading the biblical clay of creation of life. The vitality of the dogs that are wet with the mud stresses its life-enhancing aspect, and the woman's caressing the dogs shares the life force of nature with them.

So far, the idyllic scene is one of fulfilling erotic relationship, represented by the thingspeak of material features of nature as being in harmony with material world. However, ambiguity is introduced by two lines beginning with the word "Écoute:", which is an appeal of the speaker to his lover to listen to something that is at the bottom of the sea calling them because it is part of them. It is the fertile element of life, "le pollen des rochers", the minerals and fertility of life, which is also "[l']abri", the unique source and shelter of life contained in the homophone *mer/mère*. The speaker now draws his lover's attention to the mother whom they are going to join in an erotic *ménage à trois* because the mother has been out of his reach and he wants to reach her through her lover. Parts of the body of the lover, her "paume" and "la peau de tes seins", spread out to become the source and the shelter of their life while the skin of the breasts stretches into a sail, "comme une voile", that propels a boat on the sea where the mother figuratively lives. The nautical images of the sail and the implied boat now take the lovers on a journey from the firm land to the unsteady sea and the mother.

To make certain that the lover understands what he wants to happen, the speaker arrests the flow of his speech for the second time and repeats, with added emphasis, "Écoute encore:". He then impresses on his lover that in his eyes she is being fused with the idealized image of his mother: "ton pollen au



pollen des rochers/Se mélange sur mer". The speaker makes her his sea/lover and sea/mother on an elemental scale as the erotic sea imagery suggests. The woman's reproductive cells, her "pollen", mix with the sea, her belly, which contains the reproductive organs, governs the tides. Her "sexe" itself becomes part of this mixing of organic and inorganic components of the erotic forces of life by being placed in "les sables chauds des profondeurs", reminiscent of the warm "chambre de muqueuses" (T, 45). For their relationship the ambiguous "sables chauds" will become quicksand in which it will suffocate.

The emphasis on the imagery of fertility means that the speaker's mind is dominated by a vision of a woman as mother, and not just mother, but his mother idealized. He offers this role to his lover, but in the drive to make her a replacement of his mother, his emphasis on her biological functions makes her into a mere impersonal instrument of fertility. This role diminishes her individuality as a real person who was once at sunset an individual and fully alive person when carressing the necks of dogs wet with mud of pastures. The repeated "écoute" draws her attention to his insistent desire to make her his *amant/mère* because his real mother is an emotional absence. However, the emptiness of the past, into which the lover is to step in, can never be filled so that she herself becomes part of it. The speaker's desire will not be satisfied because by embracing her, he will embrace a void.

### Love and war

So far Guillevic's erotic poetry has been marked by the frustrating domination of his fear and desire of the mother. However, in a comparatively long love poem he was able to shake off that domination through a massive metaphoric shift that concentrates the speaker's attention on the changing nature of a love relationship in which the mother does not figure. After an idyllic beginning the relationship is threatened by the events of the Second World War and later by the lovers' quest for "ideal" love, but eventually

finding its anchor in materiality. Pierrot has such a high opinion of the poem that he calls it "[...] ce qui peut apparaître comme l'un des plus beaux poèmes d'amour de la littérature française" (Pierrot, 1984: 64). The love story passes through five different locations and periods. The first eight lines evoke a peaceful countryside and a time not menaced by war or a threat of it.

Quand le merle sifflait dans l'herbe et que le vent  
Rongeait d'éternité les pierres de nos gros murs,  
C'était pour nous la fête et tout s'accomplissait.

Nous connaissions le temps,  
Pour avoir attendu avec l'eau sous la terre  
Et nous savions  
Le façonner autour de nous comme le temple  
Et qu'il résonne de notre cri.

The imperfect tense of these lines relates a continuing and repeated experience in the past. The lovers, identified as "nous", lived in harmony with natural surroundings like the blackbird that sang in the grass and the wind that was from eternity wearing away stones of the thick walls of their house. The speaker looks back at this idyllic episode nostalgically as the time of their "fête" of complete fulfilment. This erotic fulfilment had a quality of timelessness also because the lovers were in harmony with the elements of air, "le vent", and "l'eau sous la terre". They felt they had the knowledge and mastery of time, knowing how to make of time - "Le façonner" - a temple of love and make it resound with the orgasmic cry of their happiness. They had self-confidence in their knowledge, "Nous connaissions", and in their skill, "Et nous savions", in mastering the elements and time, which are eternal. This made them feel that their relationship had acquired a quality of the eternal.

The second part of the poem is set in the city at a time of reversal of their fortune.

Plus tard le cours des jours et la terrible absence  
Et te porter encore,  
Pesant de tout le poids  
Des lieux vacants de toi.

Te porter plaie brûlante ouverte sur la ville  
Et craindre.

The lovers' pride in their skill of managing and fashioning time proved to be hubris. Time, became now the time of external course of events, that came to dominate them. The "cours des jours", which followed that of the first part, is syntactically, and therefore semantically, connected by the conjunction "et" to the remainder of the sentence which evokes a time of "la terrible absence" of the speaker's lover. This was a time of anxiety and danger clearly indicated by the last line of the passage: "Et craindre", and it could only mean the time of the war and the German occupation. Although "le cours des jours" means passing of time of the days, for the lovers time had stopped or became suspended and this suspension is represented syntactically by absence of finite verbs in the poem. The only verbs are three infinitives so that the speaker found himself in a timeless emotional void. The absence of the missing lover was "terrible", which points to a forced separation by the occupation, and it is represented by two images introduced by "Et te porter" and "Te porter" meaning *having to* bear or feel *you being absent*. The speaker first felt it as the weight of places, which she frequented, but which were now empty of her: "Des lieux vacants de toi". Then, as if she were torn out of his body, as a burning wound open onto the city: "Te porter plaie brûlante ouverte sur la ville". By contrast with the idyllic first section set in the countryside, the anguish of the terrible absence occurs in the city, "la ville", which is for Guillevic a noxious place at any time. The atmosphere of fear in "Et craindre" is, according to Guillevic, what he actually experienced during the war:

Durant la guerre, nous avons vécu dans une atmosphère constante d'horreur et de terreur. [...] j'aimais une femme qui était juive, qui se cachait et dont je ne savais jamais si elle était vivante. (VP, 126)

The third section of the poem depicts a joyous reunion of the lovers in their room. The rhetoric of the poem returns to the idea of the first section of the poem, that is of the lovers' erotic fulfilment when time has undergone a

complete change, compared with the period of separation. As in the first section of the poem, time is now again "autour de nous", becoming a positive support of their lovemaking.

Mais maintenant le temps  
S'incurve autour de nous  
Et toi présente.  
Les vagues de la joie, le chant  
Comme des pierres délivrées.  
Le sourire  
Ou plutôt l'obole des visages.  
Et l'aventure  
De tant s'aimer.

The reunited lovers' joy is experienced directly, in the present tense, "maintenant", and although the situation of their being together is similar to that of the first section, the intensity of their lovemaking - "De tant s'aimer" - has increased. They no longer leisurely fashion their time, which now curves obligingly round them, advancing with them in their passionate progress. It is accompanied by their orgasmic waves of joy and "le chant", which are love cries that recreate their original "fête" and its cries. The comparison of their "chant" with chanting of vibrating, liberated stones introduces the idea of the lovers' full participation in the "fête" of materiality while their faces become "l'obole", a payment of entry into their erotic paradise that was found again. But "le chant" not only means poetry of love for them, but beyond that also a religious or mystical hymn or chant, whose metaphysical character this singing acquires, becoming an introduction to a new conception of their love in the next section of the poem.

The imagery of the "chant" will then turn into the "cris" that dominate the following, fourth part of the poem. It is not just the singular "cri" of the first section of the poem, but one that is magnified and intensified by being transformed into the plural of the "cris" of the two lovers that were being joyously produced during the "fête" of their sexual union. Beside that, there is a sudden shift of perspective from the present tense of the previous section,

representing actual experience taking place, to a past tense. This change is from an experience lived in the present to an unfinished action in an indeterminate moment of the past, experience revealed in a sort of flashback.

Toute fête a ses cris et nous avions les nôtres.

Puisqu'ils pouvaient enfin  
Avoir passage dans la gorge  
Et trouver l'air, emplir  
Un coin de chambre, un pli de drap,  
Ce n'était pas pour dire ou appeler,  
C'étaient nos corps pressés d'aller plus loin encore,  
D'arriver quelque part où plus rien ne se crie.

The erotic cries of the lovers were important for them since they were at last free to make them until they filled the little intimate coin of their room. The cries were not made to say, call or communicate anything, but were rather material thingspeak, expressing the glory of their "fête", that is, their orgasmic reunion. They were driven by a compelling desire for physical satisfaction which, however, became insufficient for them so that their desire impelled them towards attaining a meta-erotic or metaphysical level of union. The compelling nature of their erotic drive is expressed by the word "pressés" in three senses of the word. First, their bodies were literally physically pressed against each other, second, they have a pressing or urgent need to go further, beyond the mere satisfaction of physical desire, and third, they are in a hurry to get there. The place where the bodies were aiming to go is soundless, "où plus rien ne se crie", because it is non-material. It is a metaphysical construct of an escape from the constraints and dangers of material world into transcendental, timeless, meta-erotic, spiritual self-sufficiency of the lovers. Such an escape offers a *jouissance* of fusion that obliterates individual self and can only be attained through obliteration of one's materiality through death. The imperfect tense of the verbs of this passage recreates the repeated attempt at reaching towards such experience, but an attempt that was an action incompleated and unrealized in the past and therefore a kind of dream.

The progression from material cries of physical love to their desired dissolution in a spiritual void of absolute love is a logical development of the feelings of the two lovers. Their relationship became so endangered in the past that now, when it is renewed with increased intensity, they wish that it become absolute and eternal. From desiring each other as a love object, they passed to the stage of desiring the desire itself. The imperfect tense of the mystical excess of the bedroom scene reveals that this dreamt-of attempt at an escape from the dangers of erotic materiality into an erotic absolute was abandoned as the lovers now wake up to return to the earth.

The last section of the poem returns to the rural setting of the first section, but the tense changes into the narrative present, by which the poet creates a distance between it and the imperfect tense of the previous part of the poem. The experiences of the past therefore become stages of apprenticeship leading towards a more mature conception of love that accepts the materiality of the world as its proper home.

Mais non! la terre... la terre où tout se joue,  
La terre chargée de nous.

Dehors le merle et sa chanson  
Sont avec nous.  
L'effort des céréales et l'eau des frondaisons,  
L'offre impudique des chemins  
Et tant de bois. (T, 158-159)

At the moment of losing themselves in a "rien", which is really death, the lovers remember the importance of the earth where all life and its material life activity take place. They wake up from their delusion with a sudden jolt represented by the elliptic syntax: "Mais non! la terre ..." This is a realization that their love, like all manifestations of life, depends on the materiality of the earth. Materiality, however, is ambivalent. It contains both "des morts" and "du pain" that have to be accepted as one package, and all the life activity that it offers is not necessarily going to be joyful. The travellers from the land "où plus rien ne se crie" now realize that what the earth offers can be both

dangerous and joyful. Life on earth, "la terre où tout se joue", is a game of chance, a gamble imposed on mankind, with "tout" comprising both life and death that have to be accepted together, without knowing which of them comes up. It is a game of "tout" or "rien" and this is what the lovers choose, unlike the speaker in the *armoire* poem, who was too afraid to accept such a choice. The earth is the stage where the game of life is played out, and the impersonal voice of "tout se joue", points out that the rules of the game have been laid down by impersonal forces, which are largely beyond human control. However, death on earth is something enriched by an experience of the *jouissance* of life that preceded it, not death as a substitute for that experience.

The call of the earth is then revealed as being ambiguous. It is not only a call of both life and death, but the emphasis is on death as the final aim of life. The earth, which is calling the lovers back, is "chargée de nous", first in the sense of being in charge of the lovers' fate as a powerful authority from which there is no escape. Then, the earth is physically charged, or laden, by the corpses of generations of humanity, which have preceded the lovers for millenia. It means that these countless cadavers are inviting them to come and eventually join them. Finally, the earth is charged by an erotic life force as the source of life-giving elements and minerals that keep the lovers alive and enable them to actually be lovers. It all means that they have to accept earth's ambiguity if they wish to live on it and enjoy the physical aspects of their love. The alternative is a disembodied place, "où plus rien ne se crie", which is really a speechless and lifeless void of death.

The course of the poem runs in a circular movement from the initial natural setting of ecological harmony, in which the lovers participate, symbolized by a blackbird whistling in the grass, to a stage of destruction of that personal harmony in an urban setting. It moves then to the lovers' room after their reunion to show them not only renewing their relationship, but trying to make it escape the constraints of the material world by a flight to a metaerotic paradise. As this proves impossible, the movement completes a circle to come back in its conclusion to the image of the blackbird and its song.

as the symbol of the erotic life force in nature. This circular movement represents a sentimental journey of the lovers who finished where they started, but also that they have changed by gaining insight into the nature of their relationship. They have learnt that their proper place is among natural objects and their life cycle. This life cycle contains death, but its threat is during their lifetime neutralized by the erotic joys offered by the earth. The joys are represented by the growing of "des céréales", the life-giving water of "des frondaisons", the shameless offer of roads, "L'offre impudique des chemins" as they spread out naked, bare of vegetation, through the countryside, and "tant de bois". This last image may mean so many woods full of life, or it may mean so much wood of the trees, which is a product of their erotic activity of growing. All of these erotic material features, "Sont avec nous" and not against the lovers as some forces in their society and within themselves were. The "bois", which grows from the cadavers buried in the earth, represents the presence of life in death. However, as the material from which are made the "catafalques" and the "armoire", wood signals that death is also present in life as its outcome. By their return to the earth the lovers have shown that they have accepted the two basic forces of human existence as inseparable.

*Terraqué* gives the impression of the opening up of a vast volume and multiplicity of poetry charged with great passion and energy. It can be argued that the place and significance of *Terraqué* for Guillevic's poetry is so fundamental that all or most of his work to follow is an extension and elaboration of themes, topics and preoccupations or territories, lines of flight, zones of reterritorialization drawn and opened up in *Terraqué*. The poetry moves through and between two broad themes, one of which is the poet's intimate world of the relationship between him and the mother, and the world of women. The other is his being in the world of the material, which incites his interest in the problems of life and death, time, openness and closure, and ecology. These two worlds are connected and driven by the experience of alienation and *Terraqué* is the foundation of a pursuit of transformation of the



alienation, which is a key constituent of the historical progression of Guillevic's poetry. The transformation is to be achieved by language and the poet's interest in language is evident in poems devoted to metalanguage. This poetic speech privileges statement and avoids metaphor, but the concrete words of his statements are often charged with figurative power that shifts the poetry beyond mere static representation towards plateaux of new insights and understanding. *Terraqué* thus establishes a poetic procedure that constitutes the underlying framework of Guillevic's poetry and its historical progression.

## CARNAC

### Death and life

For Guillevic, Carnac, the surrounding countryside and the sea represent Brittany, its physical form, spirit and distinct way of life, and the roots of his own being. Brittany, in turn, is a land of rocks, moors, menhirs, fertile soil and the sea, a land dominated by ambiguous natural elements which, like the vast savage sea, both yield life and mete out death. It is also a countryside of the poet's memory of his family, his childhood, the relationship with his mother, and of the impact on him of the mythical past of the pre-Celtic builders of the menhirs and their close relationship to nature. Interplay of these factors contributes to the poet's wider ecological experience, which is represented in *Carnac* as a conflict between natural forces, and of these against humankind. His fear of dangers inherent in the land has been largely neutralized by a broad metaphoric shift towards a positive view of the land, but his erotic alienation and yearning continue to be represented through the image of the *mer/mère*. Nevertheless, even that conflict has lost some of its bitterness by being gradually deterritorialized through frequent language engagement with the sea.

In the poetry of *Carnac* there may then be discerned a historical shift that has occurred in the twenty years between the metaphoric representation of the land and the sea in *Terraqué*, exemplified by the poem "Carnac" (*T*, 50) and quanta on the same subject in *Carnac* (1961). The poem "Carnac" can be taken as the starting point, depicting the sea and the land of coastal Brittany as elements of ambiguity, horror, death and unremitting threat to its inhabitants and to the poet himself. This representation is characteristic of the mostly sombre character of *Terraqué* as *terreau/terreur*, in which the sea, as *mer/mère*, figures for the poet the ambivalence of his mother whose affection he desired, but whose domination he feared.

## CARNAC

*A René Massat.*

Les menhirs la nuit vont et viennent  
Et se grignotent.

Les forêts le soir font du bruit en mangeant.

La mer met son goémon autour du cou - et serre.  
Les bateaux froids poussent l'homme sur les rochers  
Et serrent. (T, 50)

Carnac, a place of menhirs, forests, rocks and the sea with its kelp and boats, represents not only the world of Brittany, steeped in ancient mythology, in which its non-human constituent struggles against humankind, but also the agony of the poet's struggle in his own private world. The dominant atmosphere of terror of *Terraqué*, from which this poem comes, pervades the representation conjuring up an awesome scene of a hostile countryside, which seems to come alive at night. It is a scene of pagan mythology, in which fixed, inhuman material objects of nature become mobile, animated by a spirit shared by all matter. Menhirs appear to be moving about in the shadows of the night gnawing at one another, while the forests feed loudly on something that has sustained them for millenia and which is hidden in the *blanc codé* between the lines. The land of the moving menhirs and the eating forests represents a threat of the inhuman to the human whose space it invades and which it is bent on displacing, consuming and reducing to its level. The objects speak themselves in a terrifying thingspeak of moving, gnawing and loudly eating, which asserts their desire for mobility and recognition of their chaotic world against the orderly world of humanity. Their night time threat of mobility against the human may only be imaginary, but it is terrifying to the fearful imagination of the speaker.

The threatening nature of this breakdown between the fixed inhuman and the mobile human becomes apparent in the image of the sea, which is represented as openly hostile and merciless towards humanity. The floating kelp

becomes the instrument of the sea's deathly power when wrapped around the neck of a drowning person whom it chokes, "serre", and drags down. The very boats that protect and preserve humankind from the sea, allowing humans to navigate and negotiate it, become objects of death joining the inhuman against the human. Cold and crushing, "Les bateaux froids", in the service of the death-dealing sea, are transformed into floating coffins that push their occupants on the rocks to crush and drown them.

The world of the poem is one of uncertainty and danger, but it is equally the poet's private world of life and death struggle. The speaker embodied in language can be read as the poet who reveals an intense personal experience in which the seaweed becomes more than a signifier of strangling: "La mer met son goémon autour du cou - et serre". In this image the seaweed figures an umbilical cord connecting him with his mother as the source of life and death in a constellation of ambiguity: *mer/mère/marâtre*. Stella Harvey points to the significance of the seaweed as the image of the umbilical cord that becomes the instrument of death, but surprisingly she does not associate its action of strangling with that of the sea acting as a mother and by implication as the poet's mother. She reads the action more generally by stressing the closeness of the experience of birth and death: "In the last verse the metaphor of strangulation by the umbilical cord is symptomatic of the association of birth with primordial terror" (Harvey 1997: 72). It can be argued that the image of the seaweed becoming an umbilical cord that strangles, rises from the poet's unconscious to signify that he was emotionally a stillborn child strangled by the umbilical cord of a dominating and hostile mother. Although this poem, with its preoccupation with maternal hostility, typical of much of the poetry of *Requiem* and *Terraqué*, is not part of *Carnac*, its preoccupation carries over to *Carnac* and to later poetry. However, a considerable shift can be found in the 1961 volume from such malevolent conception of the sea. If the nightmarish images of the *mer/mère* come from the unconscious as the Deleuzian *calque*, their entry into concrete poetic discourse begins to transform them through this discourse

as a *carte*, which deterritorializes the poet's anguish to reterritorialize it as part of an ongoing poetic construct.<sup>1</sup>

The representation of the land in *Carnac*, as distinct from the sea, reveals a massive metaphoric shift in Guillevic's discourse away from the imagery of wandering and gnawing menhirs, sinister forests feeding on unspeakable fodder, and rocks waiting to have boats smashed against them. The shift is towards celebration of the material features of the land that constitute it as a strong, safe and unambiguous structure that contributes to the uniqueness of Brittany.

A Carnac, l'odeur de la terre  
A quelque chose de pas reconnaissable.

C'est une odeur de terre  
Peut-être, mais passée  
A l'échelon de la géométrie

Où le vent, le soleil, le sel,  
L'iode, les ossements, l'eau douce des fontaines.

Les coquillages morts, les herbes, le purin,  
La saxifrage, la pierre chauffée, le détrit,us,  
Le linge encore mouillé, le goudron des barques,  
Les étables, la chaux des murs, les figuiers,  
Les vieux vêtements des gens, leurs paroles,  
Et toujours le vent, le soleil, le sel,  
L'humus un peu honteux, le goémon séché,

Tous ensemble et séparément luttent  
Avec l'époque des menhirs

<sup>1</sup> For Breton nationalists and separatists the strangling mother of Breton culture and consciousness figured by the sea is Mother France. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "Le second caractère des littératures mineures, c'est que tout y est politique" (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 30). Such a political reading of Guillevic's *Carnac*, whether intended by the poet or not, may be supported by an actual incident. According to Spence, in 1911 "a large statue symbolizing Brittany kneeling at the feet of France, in allusion to the union of the two countries in 1532" (Spence 1978: 78), was erected in the central niche of the *Hôtel de Ville*. The separatists called it *Monument de la Honte Nationale*. "[In] 1932, the secret society *Gwenn ha Du* (White and Black, the colours of the Breton flag) blew up the statue, and it has never been replaced" (Spence 1978: 79).

Pour être dimension.

(C, 140)

This quantum pictures Carnac, which the poet perceives as the heart of Brittany, represented through its rich, sensuous, natural and human constituents, which are summed up by the repeated figure "l'odeur de la terre". The smell, which figures the unique character of Brittany, is generated by many concrete objects, elements and features of the inhabitants and rises to a level, "échelon de la géometrie". The solidity and sensuous diversity of the objects combine to shape a fixed formal space and structure of the country and this shaping is the essence of the metaphoric shift effected by the poet. This is a human space of multiplicity and difference no longer threatened by the invasion of the inhuman menhirs and forests as it was in "Carnac" of *Terraqué*. The constituents that have become dominant are the earth itself, its stones and vegetation, the wind, the sun and "l'eau douce des fontaines", which stands in opposition to sea water. Here the sound of "l'odeur de la terre" is repeated in "l'eau douce des fontaines" and in "L'iode". The danger of the sea is denied by its being represented only by innocuous reminders, harmless without its water: "Les coquillages morts", le sel", and "le goémon séché". This land is inhabited by present-day Bretons, farmers and fishermen wearing old-fashioned clothes and speaking a dialect, "Les vieux vêtements des gens, leurs paroles".

The discourse of the poem effectively creates the impression of harmony between its people, who preserve their individual identity, and their land, which retains its diversity and uniqueness. The poetic discourse has achieved this result largely through the language of its thingspeak that operates in a concrete layer of reality and makes physical objects speak themselves by their shape, texture, smell and appearance, thus creating them as being unique and significant for the material and cultural result that unfolds. Although the discourse is conducted in the third person, the poet's "je" is clearly present at times in his comments like "odeur [...] passée/A l'échelon de la géometrie" or "Tous [...] luttent /Avec l'époque des menhirs", which could not be made by the

objects themselves. It is not difficult to feel the pleasure, the *jouissance*, with which Guillevic builds up the visual, tactile and olfactory material image of his Carnac world. This creative enjoyment, in turn, points to a certain feeling of contentment with, and harmony in, this world he constructs. Guillevic is, quite rightly, rather proud of this poem. For him "Ce poème est un des plus terraqués que j'ai pu écrire" (*VP*, 167). The poem is a triumph of Guillevic's lapidary language, which fashions its sensuous, concrete, earthy, erotic quality by transforming ordinary, even conventionally "dirty" things into messengers of an ecological vision. The fresh, life-giving water, "l'eau douce des fontaines" is the beneficent manifestation of the element and in this nostalgic *tableau* of the poet's imagination both the land and the sweet water stand together against the hostile sea, which is lying in wait beyond the shore.

Of the three constituents of Brittany, the land, the sea and the menhirs, in the poet's present conception the land has become a diverse, life-supporting human space, in contrast to his grim vision of it in *Terraqué* as hostile to humankind. This space of a new "géometrie" of multiplicity, which its elements form freely "ensemble et séparément", struggles in the same manner for becoming an enduring human space of Breton reality and identity – "Pour être dimension". The menhirs, which formerly threatened and invaded the human space, have now been transformed from material objects into an abstraction – "l'époque des menhirs" – with which the land has formed an alliance: "Avec". The alliance has completed the formation of a new Breton world, which is special by being founded on the notion of existing "ensemble et séparément". Its diverse elements form an ecological equilibrium which, however, is not rigid and has to be constantly renewed because its components "luttent" both to assert their individuality and to belong to the whole. However, they also struggle in the same way against the third component of the Breton world, the inhuman sea, which is denied by being unnamed. It is only alluded to by the evidence of its attempted intrusion: "le sel", "Les coquillages morts", "le goémon séché", which have been made innocuous by the land. The threat and danger of the sea lies in its being one uniform element aiming to dominate and representing a

space in which difference is suppressed and nothing acts "ensemble et séparément". In the intimate world of the speaker/poet, the drive of the sea to suppress and dominate represents the danger of suppression and domination by the maternal in the threat of the *mer/mère*.

The land has become for the poet a symbol of an unambiguous source of strength and he finds in the common herbs of the land the resilience of the land and the strength he seeks for himself. Since both the Bretons and Guillevic think of the sea as being feminine and the land masculine, the land may represent to the poet his father. The father's resilience was tested in the dangers of his career as a sailor and later a gendarme, and for the young Guillevic the adventures of the father, whom he resembled, would have assumed epic status.

Les herbes de Carnac  
Sur les bords du chemin  
Sont herbes d'épopée  
Que le repos ne réduit pas. (C. 49)

The common wildflowers and weeds of country lanes of Brittany are given the epic status of immortality as "herbes d'épopée" because they witnessed the Breton epic heroes of legendary times, while their own history of struggle for survival and victory, which goes back for millennia, is itself heroic. Their rest from the struggle, or sleep in winter, "le repos", does not reduce or diminish their will to live as they come up again in spring. Their resilience and survival represent the continuing ecological vitality of both the material countryside and the Breton people and culture. For the poet their ordinariness, resilience and their belonging to the earth are an essential feature that mark both them, Brittany and his poetry whose aim is to confer on ordinary things an enduring significance and to enjoy doing it. He states so himself in *Vivre en Poésie*. After quoting the above text, he comments:

Vivre en poésie, faire qu'un objet quotidien aussi modeste soit-il,  
l'herbe, devienne l'équivalent de l'océan ou d'un menhir. Vivre un



certain degré d'exaltation dans la communion avec les choses de tous les jours, le brin de bruyère comme l'océan. (*VP*, 168)

The skill of poetry, according to Guillevic, is then to represent an object like grass, a weed or a wildflower in such a way that it becomes poetically equally significant as a more striking and bigger object. In this poem, it means to be equal in strength, resilience and other good qualities to menhirs, which in *Carnac* are no longer aggressive, and to the ocean that is no longer malevolent.

### Threat of the sea

The sea is a powerful presence in *Carnac* and the intimate world of the poet, who represents it more as a threat and a potential destroyer rather than a life giver and sustainer. The sea appears to struggle for mastery of the world against the land, the sun, the wind and humanity<sup>1</sup>. The poet's difficulty is expressed as this: "garder sa raison/Des assauts de la mer" (*C*, 86) as the sea noisily attacks the land and even later, in 1980, he still feels "Stupeur, fascination devant ce vague, cette puissance énorme, ce noir qu'on ne peut pas régir" (*VP*, 165). Guillevic's metaphoric shift between *Terraqué* and *Carnac* has favoured land more than the sea, which he still finds incomprehensible, threatening and difficult to contain by language, even if not as malevolently homicidal as before. The homophone *mer/mère* reveals the sea as an ambiguous metaphor, figuring it not only as the source of all life on earth and his mother, but also his own roots and his alienation from his mother and materiality. The impact of the sea on him is well expressed by the word "Stupeur" and equally his mother's impact on him in childhood can well be described as emotionally stupefying.

<sup>1</sup> The poet seems to share the Breton dislike of the sea. Guillevic claims that Breton houses on the seaboard have windows facing the land, not the sea: "[...] elles [les maisons] donnent en général du côté terre. L'homme est de la terre, la mer est là, mais à la fois en tant que nourricière et épouvantail-épouvante. 'La garce', c'est sûr!" (*VP*, 165). Here again the sea is the ambiguous feminine, *mère/marâtre/'garce'*.

According to the poet, one of the dangers inherent in the sea is that it is obsessed by the idea of resuming its ancient supremacy over the world.

On comprend bien  
Que ça t'obsède

D'être un jour dressée  
A la verticale  
Au-dessus des terres. (C, 91)

The speaker feels that the sea is an ecologically disruptive element that is bent on dominating the world by re-establishing its mastery over it by rising above the land and covering it as it did during one of the ancient geological phases in the history of the earth. For the poet even the water of a pond in the *étang* poem is driven by a similar desire to rise up to dominate and engulf a fearful observer. (T, 71-72)

In a small way the attack by the sea on the land occurs already in places where the sea can penetrate low-lying ground, but the land has effective means of defending itself.

D'abord presque pareille  
A celle du grand large,

De bassin en bassin  
Ton eau devient épaisse

Et finit par nourrir  
Des espèces de vert

Comme font nos fontaines. (C, 15)

To begin with the pools of salt water formed by the invasion of the sea, resemble the ocean. The water in them is "D'abord presque pareille" to that of the sea. However, a process of weakening the penetration of the sea takes place by converting its salty water, gradually from one pool to another, into thick

liquid of fresh water that grows and supports some forms of algae and moss in the same way as do sweet water springs, "nos fontaines". The hostile sea is subjected here to a process of deterritorialization by language that transforms it gradually through ecological integration to accept symbiosis with the land.

For the poet, the origin of the threat inherent in the the sea goes back to the beginning of time of our planet when matter came into being in the midst of nothingness, "le néant", the primordial death by which the sea has been marked.

Mer au bord du néant,  
Qui se mêle au néant,

Pour mieux savoir le ciel,  
Les plages, les rochers,

Pour mieux les recevoir. (C, 7)

The sea is an element that, unlike the earth, has not undergone many changes and has not only come from, but also has remained at, the edge of nothingness, "au bord du néant". It is therefore tainted as a suspected signifier of death through association with nothingness: "Qui se mêle au néant". The sea as the signifier of primordial void, cosmic death, *néant*, *vide* or *creux*, desires to know and receive everything it touches, craving to fill its emptiness. The words "savoir" and "recevoir" acquire here a destructive and an erotically ambiguous character. They reveal the sea, the *mer/mère*, as a voracious female entity, a monstrous mother, representing both sex and death, who both generates life and devours it. This first poem of *Carnac* is a good introduction to two aspects of Guillevic's ecological experience. One is that of an ecological conflict of natural forces, figured here by the destructive force of the sea against the land, and even against the sky by swallowing its colour. The conflict is a metaphor of the primordial struggle of cosmic dimensions between life, figured by the land, and death by the *néant* of the sea. The speaker himself is involved in the conflict through the desire of his mother, the *mer/mère*, by whom he wishes to be

received/loved in spite of her association with the sea and death. Her ambiguity as a source of both life and death means that he cannot have one without the other, which constitutes his alienation from the fullness of life. However, by his firm grip on the language of the poem, by which he not only represents his dilemma, but also reveals the duplicity of the *mer/mère*, he detaches himself and shifts away from being engulfed in and destroyed by her sadistic desire.

In the war between the land and the sea, the poet's sympathies are by implication on the side of the land, but in one quantum he openly and repeatedly brings out his "je" against the sea. He subjects the sea to a ceremony of mock baptism in which he mockingly offers to it qualities of sensuous richness and variety of the objects of the land, which the sea lacks.

Je te baptise  
Du goût de la pierre de Carnac,  
Du goût de la bruyère et de la coquille d'escargot,  
Du goût de l'humus un peu mouillé.

Je te baptise  
Du goût de la bougie qui brûle,  
Du goût du lait cru,  
Du goût différent de plusieurs jeunes filles,  
Du goût de la pomme verte et de la pomme très mûre.

Je te baptise  
Du goût du fer qui commence à rouiller,  
Du goût d'une bouche et d'une langue avides,  
Du goût de la peau que tu n'as pas salée,  
Du goût des bourgeons, des jeunes giroles.

- C'est sans effet sur toi, oui.  
C'était pour moi. (C, 106)

The relative clause "que tu n'as pas salée" indicates that this extravagant poetic performance and its elaborate subversion of the holy ritual of baptism addresses the sea. The repetition of "Je te baptise", and "Du goût" impart to the language a performative character of repeated ritual gestures. On one level, this ritual blatantly mocks the sea by its absurdity for lacking qualities that make other

objects of materiality interesting, vital and beautiful. This protracted mock baptism of the sea subverts the traditional elements of baptism because it seems absurd to baptise an inanimate object like the sea at all. It appears even more absurd to baptise water by water, that is seawater by holy water. However, this apparent absurdity points to what the poem is about. The poet has a desire, or even an obsession, to baptise the sea, that is to give it a name or names, because it is for him a nameless and threatening lack. He finds it difficult to symbolize by language its singularity and formless emptiness in order to contain it. Since the sea water is unfit for baptism because it is salty and poisonous, that is unholy, and the holy water of baptism is itself suspect by having its origin in the sea, the poet substitutes for it various objects of the Breton countryside, which are "sacred" to him. Further, Guillevic in his role of a priest of materiality adapts the ritual formula of baptism, "I baptise thee in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", to be performed not in the name of a transcendental deity, because his religion does not recognise one, but in the name of deity inherent in the materiality of Brittany, choosing the sense of taste as its defining feature. Since tasting is a metonymy of eating, it figures here for the poet eating the god present in matter so that the procedure brings in the sacrament of communion as well. Such combination of two rituals becomes a new one of materialist consecration that is mocking when directed at the sea, but serious in relation to the land as a celebration of the glory of its materiality. However, the profuseness of the mockery also reveals the poet's deep personal insecurity and unease in the face of the sea and his need to counteract its threat.

The sensuous "goût" becomes sensual in images of "jeunes filles", "une bouche", "une langue" and "la peau que tu n'as pas salée". The impact of the material objects, that are called forth for the baptism is greatly magnified by the insistence on the sense of taste in comparison with, let us say, the sense of touch. There is little doubt that the taste of rusty iron, or soggy humus, or "plusieurs jeunes filles", would leave one with indelible taste impression. There is also a certain logic in the choice of the sense of taste since the salty sea can offer only one taste. The significance of the tasting ritual lies in contrasting the

richness and multiplicity of the diverse and the different, which constitute the land, against the elemental sameness and sensuous destitution of the sea. The exercise also reveals the speaker's obsession with opposing and humiliating the sea. The accumulation of the sensuous properties of the land and the boastful display of them to the sea is an act of calculated mockery, which is to demonstrate to the sea the superiority and richness of the land of Carnac, and of land in general, even though this ritual can neither enrich the sea nor change it, "C'est sans effet sur toi, oui". The poet did it, of course, for himself: "C'était pour moi". One of the things that the performance does for the poet is to provide a sado-masochistic satisfaction from humiliating and hurting the sea/mother, but since he also desires her, the action also hurts him so that he derives pleasure from hurting both her and himself.

The last line of the quantum, "C'était pour moi", may be read as referring to the function of the poem as a profession of the poet's materialist faith in ecological harmony. The discourse of the quasi religious ritual is by implication directed also at baptising the land, whose locus is in Carnac, into his faith of sensuous, erotic materialism, which is, for the poet, most compellingly expressed by the fifteen chosen objects, both of human and of natural variety. They speak themselves in a powerful concrete thingspeak that equals that of the quantum, which begins with the line "A Carnac, l'odeur de la terre" (C, 140), of which Guillevic is so proud. The choice of the sense of taste to represent these features by, is very effective in that it evokes the most personal and intimate of human perceptions. The human examples, like the taste of young girls and the taste of a mouth and an eager tongue, and even some of the natural ones, like apples and buds, have pleasurable erotic connotations. Others, like stone, heather, snail, humus and the fungus chanterelle are essential features of Breton countryside, while a candle, milk, apples and rusting iron bring in the Breton peasant way of life. The candle points to a pre-modern form of society, which in turn suggests a nostalgic view of a continuation of a past, harmonious way of life.

The rhetoric of the mock baptism represents an attempt to canonize such a vision of a fullness of life by naming and embracing the diversity of tastes of the ordinary objects of the land. Their plurality stands in sharp opposition to the singularity of the sea that has only one taste and very limited form and appearance. All the attributes of the objects of the land by which the speaker baptises the sea in the end expose it as a lack and a nameless emptiness. The dislocating influence of the sea/mother is excluded from taking part in the scene by the line "Du goût de la peau que tu n'as pas salée", that is nothing that she made *salée/salie*, salted/dirtied, has been admitted. The sea is thus rejected and found unresponsive to being baptised and named, "- C'est sans effet sur toi, oui". But since the sea also represents the poet's mother and the source of his anxiety, the failure of the baptism points to the speaker's apparent failure to symbolize by language the unspeakable experience of alienation from the mother. The failure is, however, not the speaker's, but of the sea/mother as it has been defined by language of negation as lacking the many attributes of the land, and possessing as its distinguishing feature only the salty taste. As in the quantum "A Carnac, l'odeur de la terre" (C, 140), the rhetoric of this poem constitutes a fundamental metaphoric shift of the speaker's conception of the sea in *Terraqué*. Even if this speech does not completely unlock the speaker's alienation, it formulates his understanding of the mother as *une femme* and *une mère en manque*. Its speech radically deterritorializes his previous experience and reterritorializes it a long way from traumatic silence and unconscious symbolism towards conscious language creating a space, a geometry, the dimension of living.

Finally, on the level of the poet's personal ecology, "Je te baptise" refers to himself. The poem is directed against his experience of personal alienation, becoming an incantation by which he is renaming himself in the name of the material, the mythical and the erotic forces of the land of Carnac to help him withstand the threat of the *mer/mère*, who is *salée/salie*. The combination of baptism and of communion, implied in the naming, tasting and eating of the god-like substance of the land, should lead to the poet's fusing with its erotic

powers and heal him of his mother angst, his fear and desire of her. However, being a *régisser* of this poetic performance makes him also stand apart from the ritual and tends to diminish his direct participation in it. It is not a total exclusion and the directing and writing of the ritual goes some way towards transformation and diminution of his unspeakable experience. The poem is written "pour moi", and even if it does not heal his alienation, it constitutes a metaphoric shift, a line of flight that finds a direction in a territory of another self in another world. He will have to go back to face the sea/mother again and keep writing against the same old fears, but every time now it will be easier.

#### The woman and the sea

The sea, in the form of the primordial soup, is regarded as the erotic source of all life on earth and still teems with life today, so that it is also one of the potent symbols of fertility. Guillevic sees it at times, as having a positive and beneficent generative role in the world and in this respect it can be regarded as being feminine: "On a dit aussi que dans *Carnac* la terre était l'homme, et la mer, la femme. Je veux bien, mais ce n'est pas intentionnel!" (VP, 165). There are several poems in *Carnac* in which women draw from the sea positive, erotic powers to benefit humanity. Such representation is further evidence of the speaker's shift in attitude towards the sea.

In the following quantum the speaker argues that the woman shares with the sea some of its powers, which can be destructive but also creative and erotically nurturing, and which makes her strong so that she can be the source of shaping men's lives.

Femme vêtue de peau  
Qui façonne nos mains,  
  
Sans la mer dans tes yeux,



Sans ce goût de la mer que nous prenons en toi,

Tu n'excédera pas  
Le volume des chambres. (C, 8)

This piece of writing is addressed to a quintessential woman who figures the nature of all women. Like the sea, she is dressed only in her skin, that is in the timeless garment of her beautiful nudity. She has the sea in her eyes - "la mer dans tes yeux" - the mysterious depth and colour of the sea, but her tears and body also have the taste of the sea: "ce goût de la mer que nous prenons en toi". The nudity of the woman and the taste of the sea that we experience in her, indicates that "nous", standing in opposition to "Femme", figures men. The most important aspect of the conception of this sea woman is that she possesses, like the sea, erotic qualities of generating and shaping life, "Qui façonne nos mains". This is a kind of reversal of the idea of God's creation of mankind by imparting life to inanimate matter. A woman's body, when touched by human hands, moulds them into true instruments of humanity and by metonymic extension men and humankind could not become truly human without such erotic gesture. The emphasis is not on the woman's role as a mother creating new life, but rather on her creative emotional role of turning the human male and humankind into sensitive human beings. The woman contains the sea in her eyes and her body in two senses of the word. First, she possesses the erotic powers and energy of the vast chambers of the sea without which she would not be able to have beneficial power and influence on men. Second, she is able to contain, that is hold in check and use that power for the benefit of humanity. If she didn't do that, she would become destructive as the sea is sometimes. The negative conditional "Tu n'excédera pas" indicates that she does exceed the limitations of both kinds of the chambers. She exceeds, or goes beyond, being held by the chambers of the sea by going into the world of men and domesticity. Once in that world, she is able to contain and use those erotic powers to exceed the limitations of her domesticity because men do find and take in her those

powers: "[...] nous prenons en toi [...] la mer dans tes yeux" [and] "ce goût de la mer".

In the following quantum, the speaker attempts to transform the desolation of his relationship with the mother by reworking it through language that channels his desire towards an imaginary young woman.

La fille qui viendrait  
Serait la mer aussi,  
La mer parmi la terre.

Le jour serait bonté,  
L'espace et nous complices.  
Nous apprendrions  
A ne pas toujours partir. (C, 34)

The representation of this text contains two separate discourses that have to be read together to reveal the full content of the text. One discourse is an implicit subtext, which does not appear on the printed page, but is embedded in the *blanc codé* of the poem. This hidden discourse performs the role of the Deleuzian *calque* by simply expressing the feeling of alienation and emptiness lodged in the unconscious of the speaking subject without attempting to transform them. It is "[...] l'exploration d'un inconscient déjà là, tapi dans les recoins obscurs de la mémoire et du langage" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980:20). The grammatical tense of this speech is the present indicative because this is how things are for the speaker: he does not have a young woman who is like the sea, his days are not filled with goodness, space is not on his side and his present relationship keeps breaking up. Some of the symbols of this discourse are shared with the explicit text in which, however, their meaning is changed or is the opposite.

The other, explicit discourse, introduces the realm of the potential by means of the repeated present conditional of the verbs. It is the realm of desire in which the speaker longs for the coming to him of a young woman, "La fille qui viendrait", to share with him a serene, fulfilling and lasting emotional

relationship, which he is lacking in his life: "Le jour serait bonté". The constituents of their happiness would be first, a conscious awareness of its goodness, openly during daytime, implying that the reality of the speaker's life is such that he only dreams of it at night. Further, the young woman who would come, would be "la mer aussi", which indicates that the first, the implied discourse, asserts that he already has a woman who is, however, not a "fille", but she is also associated with the sea. As the homophone *mer/mère* suggests she is his mother, who has both the life-giving but also the destructive attributes of the open sea. It is not only the open sea that the speaker finds threatening, but also the vast space above it, both of which he views as associated with nothingness: "Mer au bord du néant,/Qui se mêle au néant" (C, 7). To nullify the threat the speaker therefore transforms the sea and the space of the first discourse by the language of the other discourse. The young woman would not just be a sea, but "[l]a mer parmi la terre", a benign sea because it will be contained and embraced by the land. Consequently the threatening emptiness of space will also be tamed to become friendly: "L'espace et nous complices". Equally the couple would learn "[à] ne pas toujours partir" because they would find a destination, by which would be transformed the repeated acts of separation marking the relationship between the mother and the son.

The constant separating between the speaker and the mother in the implied discourse of real life indicates a relationship of domination, opposition, estrangement and hostility. The speaker believes that a similar relationship has existed between the sea and the land since the beginning of time because Guillevic's other poetry suggests that the sea intends to reconquer and dominate the land again (C, 91). By implication a similar opposition has existed between the sea/mother and the speaker/son from the time of his childhood, but it had to be endured by him because one can never completely separate from a mother. In the explicit discourse the speaker is attempting to rework that relationship through language that, in Deleuzian terms, forms lines of flight away from the "calque" of the existing alienation. This language constructs a map, "la carte": "La carte ne reproduit pas un inconscient fermé sur lui-même, elle le construit"

(Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 20). The mapping effects a shift of the speaker's self out of his alienation towards plateaux of unstable equilibria (*ibid.* 32, 87), even if not offering a permanent escape.

The last two lines of the poem reveal that the couple hopes to establish personal happiness and harmony, but such hopes will face some obstacles. The speaker's self has been marked by conflict with the mother and repeated acts of separation from her. The line "Serait la mer aussi" reveals ambiguity of his desire and therefore fragmentation of his self. The *filles/mer* would therefore be desired not only as a young erotic bride, but also as a substitute for the old *mer/mère*, making her an unpromising Oedipal composite of *filles/mer/mère*. She would bring with her the ambivalent attributes of the sea and would not be able to erase the emotional void left by the mother. The speaker's attempted solution of this problem by transferring the sea to the land is a fantasy that only confirms the fragmentation of his self. He feels that he would have more control over a smaller "sea" enclosed on all sides, but it would inevitably turn into a kind of *étang*, complete with the mother. This is what happens in the *étang* poem in *Terraqué* and in *Du Domaine*, because for Guillevic all water is related and the mother haunts both the salty and the fresh/stagnant variety. It is really the terrible void of the past, the persisting lack of the *mère en manque*, that his desire drives him to fill in vain. It is ambiguously not just a woman that he has in his mind, but a fantasy figure of the mother that he yearns for in the "filles".

#### **Threat of the *mer/mère***

From being a symbol of emotional alienation and desolation the mother present in the sea is often viewed as a threat to the speaker embodied in the discourse. The imagery, which links her to the sea, suggests ambivalence and even hostility towards him.

Elle avait un visage

Comme sont les visages  
Ouverts et refermés  
Sur le calme du monde.

Dans ses yeux j'assistais  
Aux profondeurs de l'océan, à ses efforts  
Vers la lumière supportable.

Elle avait un sourire égal au goéland.  
Il m'englobait. (C, 37)

The pronoun "Elle" indicates that the poem is about someone whom the speaker knows well and whom he prefers to call by the impersonal pronoun, rather than by her name, which would help to "baptise" her. That such a person may be his mother is further supported by the imperfect tense, which refers to events taking place over some time in the past, in his childhood. This woman is not just the mother, but any woman who always contains or is contained by 'the threatening feminine' the mother symbolizes. The apparent contradiction of the face of the woman being both open on the world and closed to it, "Ouverts et refermés", can be read as meaning that on a personal level he might have felt at the time that her face was open to others in the world, but closed to him. In terms of his childhood emotions, her openness meant that she attracted his desire of her while her being closed meant that she repulsed it so that she shared with the sea its basic ambivalence of supporting life and being destructive at the same time. Open and closed also suggests someone who accepts the world and is familiar with it, but is at the same time closed to some aspects that she disapproves of because of some strongly held convictions.

There was another similarity to the sea about her. The poet could witness, in her eyes the depths of the ocean and its efforts to rise to the light. For Guillevic the depths of the ocean are dark and contain death. They are devoid of any life-sustaining support so that what the poet saw in her mother's eyes was an effort to rise to some light that would make her life bearable. The light she valued was her narrow, fiercely held religious belief, but they were of a joyless, prohibitive and punitive kind, which drove her towards death rather

than life. They held her down in the depths of the ocean so that her association with that realm of death would tend to bring the threat of death, of emotional death, to those close to her.

In the three lines beginning with "Dans ses yeux j'assistais" may be detected some sympathy by the speaker, who witnesses his mother's spiritual struggle. However, in the last two lines he turns against her by claiming that she had a smile like that of a seagull: "Elle avait un sourire égal au goéland". A seagull is a voracious scavenger and the conformation of its head gives its mouth the appearance of a wide smile. In this context the climax of the poem, "Il m'englobait", acquires a sadistic undertone. *Englober* means to take in or annex, that is figuratively "to swallow", but a word of similar sound, *gobber*, whose literal meaning is to swallow voraciously or gobble up, can be read into it. The smile of the gull's voracious mouth, becomes a figure of the devouring possessiveness of the mother, who enjoyed swallowing his childhood by gobbling it up like a piece of refuse.

A quantum written in the present tense in the form of a silent dialogue between the speaker and the sea asks questions about the meaning of a recent death of a woman or woman/mother intimately connected both to the sea and the speaker. He looks back examining the impact of her death on their triangular relationship and its difficulties, which did not end with her death.

Ce qui fait que la morte est morte  
Et moi vivant,

Ce qui fait que la morte  
Se tient plus loin qu'auparavant,

Océan, tu te poses  
Des questions de ce genre. (C, 39)

There are three subjects of an emotional triangle in this text: the speaker, who speaks the last two lines, the sea or the ocean, which asks the two questions, and the dead woman who is spoken about. The three are all part of the intimate

world of the speaker/poet so that the dialogue is internal to him. The language of the questions is terse, condensed, emotionless and charged with disbelief and wonderment. The questions are asked by the ocean of itself, not of the speaker. He reports them back to the ocean, as if formulating for it its own wonderment and sharing in that wonderment. The questions register the death of the woman and the survival of the questioner, *distancing* the dead woman from the questioner's life beyond her death, but also wonder how the death, the survival and the distance can be real. The question implied in the elliptic indirect structures of the quantum – How can this be so? – implies that the ocean is almost incredulous before the facts of the death, the survival and the distance. But those facts are contained in the definition of the ocean as “ocean”, that is as not *mer* and not *mère*: the death of the mother and her distancing from the space she once dominated. That space – the space of an ocean that is now just a *mer* – is the possible space of *mère*, the life of the sea as simple object or element and of the speaker of the poem. “Océan” and speaker are almost but not quite one in this text and it is as if Guillevic addresses his almost unbelieving self in the newfound space of a world in which the figure of the mother is distanced, thereby distancing death.

The image of seaweed as an instrument of death, first introduced in the poem “Carnac” (*T*, 50), reappears in *Carnac* to figure the dangers, which the speaker still feels are inherent in the sea.

Ne te fie pas au goémon: la mer  
Y a cherché refuge contre soi,  
Consistance et figure.

Pourrait s'y dérouler  
Ce qu'enroula la mer. (C, 12)

The sea, being amorphous, has sought in the seaweed a refuge against its own formlessness, “contre soi”, hoping to acquire some countenance or appearance, “figure”, that would have more consistency or body than the ever changing fluidity of its waves. It rolled up into the seaweed much of what is nasty and

dangerous in itself and once there, these dangers could become unwound and released, "Pourrait s'y dérouler". The underlying verb, "rouler" has a colloquial meaning to dupe, con or take for a ride so that the verbs "enrouler" and "dérouler" signify not only physical danger, but also underhand scheming and deceit. The sea "contains" what is deceptive and could unleash it. The idea of danger is implied in the warning of the first line, "Ne te fie pas au goémon", in which the "te" is addressed by the speaker both to himself and to humankind in general. This quantum illustrates the limitation of the metaphoric shift that has occurred in favour of the sea in *Carnac* by a representation of the sea as being largely committed to disorder and chaos that threaten both harmonious life on land and the poet's personal ecological search for the integrity of his mind.

The idea of being deceived by the sea is taken up again in the following quantum, in which *enrouler* is present in *enrôler* as is the *rouler* of deception. The speaker believes that his erotic anxieties, in which he relives the memory of the *mer/mère/marâtre*, can be healed by his finding a woman who would be unlike the mother.

Femme, femme, au secours  
Contre le souvenir  
Enrôleur de la mer.

Mets près de moi  
Ton corps qui donne. (C, 141)

This text contains a call for help, "au secours", to a woman who would be unlike his mother, to save him from the memory of the *mer/mère* by providing the emotional support that he needs. Such an appeal to the healing properties of a woman's body was made before, but to women who were like the sea. The speaker now tries to break away from the memory of the twisted sexuality of the *mer/mère* and needs help "Contre le souvenir". The memory is that of his domineering mother and his unhappy childhood because it was her who induced in him feelings of guilt and sado-masochism. The frantic appeal for help is to a



woman unlike his mother, to save him by her body that would offer him sexuality that is not flawed. What he needs to be saved from is the "souvenir", the memory of the sado-masochistic relationship with his mother and his oedipal desire of her, which have never ceased to haunt him, and both of which repel and attract him.

The key words in the poem that point to flawed sexuality and death, and their pull on the poet, are "la mer" which evokes its homophone, *la mère*, and its extension, *la marâtre*, and "enrôleur", which has four important meanings. It is unusual that the poet uses this word at all because it is not a word in modern usage and it was therefore chosen with care. The word is derived from the medieval Latin word *rotulus*, meaning rolled up parchment of a medieval legal document, which has become *le rôle*, as in regimental roll. The adjective "enrôleur" is an archaism, meaning rolling up a scroll or something like that. In modern French, the verb for that action is *enrouler*, but there is no adjective *enrouleur*, which is one reason why Guillevic uses the archaism. *Enrouler*, in relation to the sea, indicates the rolling action of the waves as they roll up flotsam, seaweed, or a dead body - the sea is represented here as a *corps qui prend*. Therefore "souvenir/Enrôleur de la mer" indicates the speaker's unpleasant memory of being treated by his domineering and hostile *mer/mère* like an object in a similar manner.

The second meaning also comes from the word *le rôle*, meaning this time a regimental roll or list of recruits in which their *enrôlement* in the army is recorded. Since in the past such army or navy recruitment was often conducted by deception or violence, the word "enrôleur", in this context, introduces the ideas of deceit, doubt and danger that bring out the essential ambivalence of the sea as dealer in both life and death. The shadow of this equivocal nature of the sea and of its figurative significance for the poet's mother, extends over a greater part of *Carnac* and the poet spends much time exploring it. On the one hand, the sea had been the source of life on earth and as a figure of his mother, of his own life. On the other hand, he fears the destructive force in the obsession

of the sea to possess and dominate all that is close, which the sea and the mother have in common.

The third meaning of "enrôleur" conceals, but also draws attention to, its modern equivalent that is hidden in it. This is the word *racoleur*, with *racoler* meaning touting or soliciting by dishonest or fraudulent means, and specially soliciting by a prostitute so that these meanings give a taint of erotic pollution to the poet's childhood experience. The latter meaning of sexual soliciting indicates sex that has been compromised and degraded, and it points indirectly, but clearly, to the poet's compromised, childhood sado-masochistic experience. The sea that wants to roll him up in such a manner and draw him to itself becomes a metaphor for the sadistic treatment of the son by the mother.

In its fourth meaning "enrôleur" is a signifier of death and represents a threat of death both to the speaker in particular and to humanity in general. Humankind is connected to the sea by an atavistic relationship from the time when life began in the form of a primitive organism in the sea, which is "enrôleur" in the sense that the sea claims life as its own. The speaker feels that the sea is attempting to make him join it again, to repossess him either literally by catching and drowning him, or somehow by enlisting him on the side of death. This quantum again illustrates the limitation of the metaphoric shift that has occurred in favour of the sea/mother in *Carnac* by representing the speaker's view of the sea as being largely committed to disorder, chaos and death. This existential chaos has a hold on him because a part of him is immersed in it through his erotic yearning for his mother's affection. Yet he also wants to free himself from this agonizing experience, to move towards emotional independence, by attempting to construct a poetic shift to a womanhood which would be other than that of the mother. Such desired woman would therefore be like a mother the poet did not have, but yearned for. However, the desired woman and the ideal mother represent different aspects of the erotic drive and are therefore incompatible in one person. The ambiguity inherent in the speaker's search is one of the defining features of Guillevic's erotic alienation and his poetic passion.

### Discourse of recrimination and desire

The largest group of the quanta in *Carnac* is addressed to the sea and its content is largely critical, reproachful, even petulant, revealing an obsessive desire of the speaker to find faults and weaknesses of the sea. However, his language reveals some shift of attitude away from the view of the sea in *Terraqué* as an element of destruction and death. The speaker engages in a sort of domestic argument with the sea/mother over who is to blame for their flawed relationship and he searches the sea for reasons of the emotional dislocation between them.

In one quantum, the speaker faces the *mer/mère*, trying to comprehend the nature and the causes of the rupture between them.

Il me semble parfois  
Qu'entre nous il y a  
Le souvenir confus  
De crimes en commun.

Nous voici projetés face à face  
Pour comprendre. (C, 152)

The speaker is trying to be very objective and unemotional in these lines by speaking to the sea, that is to his mother, without blaming or accusing her and with the stated intention to understand, "Pour comprendre". He is aware that the relationship between him and the sea/mother is based on a difference, on a disagreement and hostile confrontation, which drive them to be set "face à face". However, sometimes, in a rare moment, "parfois", of rational awareness he is trying to come together, "face à face" calmly to understand the causes of their confrontation. Just how difficult this attempt is can be seen from the vagueness of what he sees as the causes of the differences: "Le souvenir confus/De crimes en commun". What then stands between them, but also draws them together, is a confused recollection of some acts of emotional violence,

exaggerated as "crimes", shared by the two and committed together against the only other person in their family world who is the father. These acts have generated oedipal guilt and the speaker concedes that he and the mother share responsibility. This is a rare moment of introspection that indicates a possibility of "comprendre" and not recrimination between them, but one not followed, as *Carnac* as a whole reveals, by reconciliation.

The frustrating experience of the speaker of exclusion from intimacy with, and acceptance by, the sea/mother, and inability to advance closer towards understanding with her, is represented by the metaphor of "être à la porte". This figure means not only being close, at the door, but also being locked out, and being locked into frustrating silence and emptiness, the *non dit* of a neurotic speaker.

En somme, avec toi,  
 Qu'on soit sur tes bords,  
 Qu'on te voie de loin  
  
 Ou qu'on soit entré  
 Te faire une cour  
 Que la courbe impose  
 Où sont le soleil, le ciel et le sol,  
  
 N'importe où qu'on soit,  
 On est à la porte. (C, 87)

The pronoun "toi" refers to the sea and to the speaker's mother. Whether contemplating the sea from close proximity, or from a distance, or acting as a suitor, no matter where the speaker is or what he does in relation to the sea/mother, he is always not just at the door, but locked out outside without being able to enter. The implication of this frustrating position is that behind the door is locked in a silent part of him, a whole unspeakable dimension of his identity, which is dominated by the mother, but he is unable to transform the threatening silence into speech. On the one hand, there is locked in a memory of twisted sexuality that has been a threat to him and, on the other hand, of

unfulfilled erotic longing for her affection that was denied him as a child. The metaphor of the lockout signals the existence of a flawed relationship, but also hides its nature as opaque symbols of the unconscious. The speaker would like to bring them into conscious speech to be consciously recognized so that they may be able to be forgotten.

The masculine word "océan" in the following text indicates that the speaker sometimes perceives the sea as figuring the paternal as a model for his identity, a model that both attracts and troubles him:

A la porte de l'océan  
Et parlant, parlant.

Le difficile,  
C'est d'être lui

Et si tu l'étais  
C'est de rester toi,

Assez pour savoir  
Que tu es les deux

Et pour en crier. (C, 89)

The masculine gender of the "océan" and the pronoun "lui" suggest that the sea is not exclusively the domain of the *mer/mère*, but figures the parental, and in this text specifically its paternal component. The speaker is again locked out of the familial intimacy, this time of the father, but for different reasons than those that alienate him from the mother. "Le difficile/C'est d'être lui" suggests that he would like to be him, or like him, that is to model his identity on him. The difficulty is to retain his individuality if he becomes like his father – "Et si tu l'étais/C'est de rester toi". Accepting the desire of the ocean/father would mean accepting him on his terms, "C'est d'être lui", and losing an important rational aspect of his identity, "rester toi", which would mean staying silent, *rester coi*. If he succeeded in overcoming the difficulty and remained sufficiently himself,

he would know that he is both, "Que tu est les deux", but such a result does not give the speaker any satisfaction only driving him to despair: "Et pour en crier". He becomes aware that the self of his identity is fragmented into a "toi", which he imagines is his rational, conscious self and an unconscious desire of "lui", who is the paternal Other.

There is yet another component of the parental "ocean" and the speaker's fragmentation, a sea within the sea, which is the *mer/mère*, whom he also desires. She is the source of his past twisted erotic experience, which has remained unresolved, condemning him to remain a child in the man. The desire to embrace the father's identity is an attempt to heal the fragmentation, an attempt that seems to be unsuccessful, but which he continues to engage in through language: "Et parlant, parlant". This speaking is a positive step towards deterritorialization of the confusion about his identity by remaking it through language. Another positive element of this piece of poetry is the insight that his self is divided and not easily manageable; not a monolithic rational structure, but one that must be accepted as containing conflict and contradiction, "Que tu es les deux".

The image of the movement of the waters of the sea figures for the speaker the mother's emotional persecution and the resulting state of his anguish and confusion.

Je parle mal de toi.

Il me faudrait parler  
Aussi vague et confus  
Que rabâchent tes eaux.

Et des éclats  
Pour ta colère,

Tes idées fixes  
Sous le soleil.

(C, 145)

The discourse of the poem is a thinly veiled complaint against the mother, addressed in the intimate register of the pronoun "toi" and the adjective "tes", which ostensibly address the sea. The syntax of this poem is rather condensed and elliptic. Paraphrased, the first half of the poem may be put as follows: "I speak with difficulty about you, [but to be able to speak at all], I would have to speak with equal vagueness and confusion as do your waters, by going over and over the same old thing, (or harping on the same old theme)". What the speaker claims he is driven to do is *rabâcher*, a verb expressing both the irregular and monotonous movement of the sea and, in human terms, harping on an old complaint. For the speaker, *rabâcher* means both his awkward halting speech because what he wants to say is still largely unspeakable for him and *rabâcher* also contains a complaint against the mother's voice that kept harping against him. Further, he accuses her of being irascible, comparing the mother's outbursts of anger to "des éclats" of her waters against the rocks, which figure her "colère". Finally, he complains about mother's inflexible and dogmatic religion - "Tes idées fixes", which are suggested by the unchanging nature of the sea.

At times the speaker searches for eyes of a woman in the sea, but when he finds her, her eyes return him to the sea and the mother again.

Tu regardes la mer  
Et lui cherches des yeux.

Tu regardes des yeux  
Et tu y vois la mer. (C, 20)

The speaker of the poem addresses this time himself as "Tu" and searching for eyes in the sea, reveals a deep-seated conviction of the sea being an element endowed with such a degree of life that it should have some eyes, "des yeux" of a woman he is looking for. The implication is that she would not be like his mother because this is what he tries to escape from. The sea in its vastness figures the whole world, or at least the speaker's world, so that he does find a

woman as the second couplet implies by his looking into her eyes. However, having found her, he is sent back to the sea through her eyes because they are those of the sea and the mother. The poem has the form of a *ritournelle*, in which the poet is driven obsessively to go from the image of eyes in the sea to that of the sea in the eyes and then round and round again. This imagery is a metaphor of his being trapped and mesmerized by the eyes by which the sea/mother has a hold on him and in a neurotic repetition of his behaviour. He is unable to break out because he desires both the woman of the sea and the mother at the same time. The repetition points to his situation of frustration and helplessness, in which the sea figures deceit and death, and the circular movement goes round an unspeakable emotional void for which he is unable to find speech. The eyes and the sea are symbols of the unconscious, both representing one aspect of his desire, but not offering a way out of the dilemma in their continuous repetition.

Finally, the following text reveals both anxiety and erotic yearning.

Pas besoin de rire aussi fort,  
De te moquer si fort  
De moi contre le roc.

De toi je parle à peine,  
Je parle autour de toi,

Pour t'épouser quand même  
En traversant les mots. (C, 44)

The metaphoric content of this poem is centred on the image of the Promethean figure of "moi contre le roc", the figure of the poet himself being punished, laughed and mocked at by the mother represented by the sea. His anxiety is such that he hardly dares to speak about her at all and when he does so, it is only indirectly, "Je parle autour de toi", through images of the sea. He does it by crossing words or, in his anxiety, running across words, to attain the yearned-for state of erotic satisfaction, which is one that every true Oedipal boy dreams of,



"Pour t'épouser", to marry his mother. And he wants to do it in spite of everything, "quand même", that she had done to him. The love between the poet and the mother was never consummated, leaving an emotional void, which he is trying to put into words by speaking indirectly "autour de toi" and "En traversant les mots" because the experience is unspeakable at the time of writing.

### *Menhirs*

Menhirs themselves have been integrated into the land of Brittany and of its resistance against the sea, but their significance goes well beyond that. They come from Guillevic's mythical time when everything in nature and life was sacred and existed in a state of ecological equilibrium, and they point to a possibility of its happening again. In this particular poem they hold out defiantly against the sea and the wind that blows from the sea against the land.

Il y a des milliers d'années  
Que les menhirs te tiennent tête  
Et à ce vent que tu leur jettes. (C, 126)

The poet has already qualified the wind that blows "De la mer aux menhirs," (C, 26) as being "Plein du meurtre" (*ibid.*), that is charged with destructive hostility against humankind and its culture. The stand of the menhirs against the sea for thousands of years makes them now defenders of the land and life against the hostile sea. Their new role indicates a considerable metaphoric shift of the poet's discourse from the position in the poem "Carnac" (T, 50) in which they and the land were pictured as hostile to all life.

The ancient inhabitants of the land of Carnac were apparently like the menhirs in that they were rather wary of the sea, "Ils n'allaient pas regarder la mer, / Ils écoutaient" (C, 25). They presumably listened to its voice threatening dangers. A similar idea is developed in another poem in which the poet wonders

what the attraction of the place of Carnac was to become an ancient settlement at all.

Beaucoup d'hommes sont venus,  
Sont restés. Terre d'ossements,  
Poussière d'ossements.

Il y avait donc  
L'appel de Carnac.

Comment chantaient-ils,  
Ceux des menhirs?

Peut-être est-ce là  
Qu'ils avaient moins peur.

Centre du ciel et de la mer,  
De la terre aussi,  
La lumière le dit.

Chantant, eux,  
Pas loin de la mer,  
Pour être admis par la lumière.

Regardant la mer,  
Lui tournant le dos,  
Implorant la terre. (C, 93)

The appeal of Carnac, according to the poet, goes beyond the idea of mere attraction by the beauty or fertility of the place. The insistence, by repetition, on the words "lumière" and "chanter" introduces an element of the spiritual or the sacred to the choice of the inhabitants. The fears of the ancient people of the dark and death were allayed at this place by the quality of its light, which was most radiant close to the sea because the open sky over the sea let more in, "Pas loin de la mer,/Pour être admis par la lumière". The light was for them a cosmic symbol of life to the fullness of which they yearned to be admitted and "La lumière le dit", helps establish the special character of the place as "Centre du ciel et de la mer,/De la terre aussi". It was the centre of their universe, a place of ecological equilibrium and they expressed its sacredness by their worship, by

their singing or chanting, which was a celebration of living in the light and full life. "Chantant" was also a wellspring of culture as singing, poetry and drama. The sea played an ambiguous role for these people. On the one hand, the sea intensified the light, which fuelled their desire of spiritual fulfilment, but on the other hand, they turned their back on it, rejecting it, and turned towards the land, which was the source of their livelihood. They looked for inspiration to the light coming from above the sea, but their fate was to be played out on the land, which they had to beseech, "implorant", for granting of their survival. The sea played a positive, albeit only a secondary role. The key element in this human and cosmic drama is the sun and its light, both literally and figuratively. They promote growth of vegetation and are symbols of spiritual wellbeing. The sea, by its uncluttered emptiness, allowed the light to spread and shine more intensely.

Guillevic is proud to be a materialist poet whose vision and language in *Carnac* draw their strength from ordinary, concrete physical objects like rocks, humus, rusty iron and a stalk of grass. However, his poetry also reveals him as a dreamer and a mystic for whom the ordinary is endowed with sacred significance, which he imparts to his vision of Carnac.

Nulle part comme à Carnac,  
Le ciel n'est à la terre,  
Ne fait monde avec elle

Pour former comme un lieu  
Plutôt lointain de tout  
Qui s'avance au-dessous du temps. (C, 46)

The negative statements of the first stanza are governed by "Nulle" which converts them to positive claims that what happens at Carnac is unique. "Nulle part comme à Carnac", nowhere does the sky belong to the land, "Le ciel n'est à la terre", as in Carnac, and nowhere does the sky make together with the land a world, "Ne fait monde avec elle" as in Carnac. This fusion of land and sky

occurs to form something like a place of a new dimension. "Pour former comme un lieu", which is quite removed from everything else, "Plutôt lointain de tout". It is a place out of this world, a spiritual, mystical reality which is timeless, "Qui s'avance au-dessous du temps". This new mystical dimension moves independently of time, literally below time, because it is anchored to the land of Carnac so that time flows over it without affecting it. It is the timeless, sacred essence of Brittany. The sea is not mentioned here, but it is implied in the notion of Carnac itself and other quanta picture the sea as providing an unobstructed space and backdrop for the union of sky and earth. This union of the earth and the sky is a vision of harmony and equilibrium in the world and it is unique to Brittany. "Nulle part" also has the meaning (*en*) *aucun lieu*, a place nowhere which, as Stella Harvey points out, signifies the notion of "utopia", a word derived from the Greek noun *outopos*, meaning nowhere (Harvey 1997: 71). Guillevic's vision of universal harmony on earth, located at Carnac, is a metaphor of an ideal ecological state of mankind not yet achieved anywhere. Perhaps it is a fantasy, but the speaker feels it is one that is desirable to pursue.

Compared with the multiplicity of poetic subjects of *Terraqué, Carnac* attains greater simplicity and coherence by concentrating on two: the land and the sea of Brittany. The threat and horror of the land have been deterritorialized by a radical shift of the concrete discourse, which has reterritorialized the speaker's vision in metaphors of celebration of the benign and sensuous characteristics of the diversity of material objects that constitute the land. The view of humus, for example, changes from horror, "Dans l'horreur de l'humus et de la déperdition" (*T*, 114), to the affectionate irony of "L'humus un peu honteux" (*C*, 140). From being objects of the inanimate, which can become alive and malevolent monsters in the poet's vision (*T*, 50), the menhirs have become defenders of the land against the sea (*C*, 126). The poet succeeds in creating on the land a vision tending towards harmonious existence, a world of

unity in multiplicity, in which the sea becomes an unwilling and alien participant.<sup>1</sup>

The ambiguity of the sea remains although it has undergone a limited metaphoric shift away from its being openly destructive and murderous towards being hostile to the land and unapproachable for the speaker, who finds it perplexing and unmanageable. The obsession of the speaker with the danger of the sea remains, as of the total of 157 quanta of the poem, well over 100 represent the sea as a threat to the land, and the relationship of the speaker with the *mer/mère* as flawed. In the last quantum of the poem he expresses disappointment that he and the sea/mother, however much he tries to rewrite her, transforming "mer" to simple material "ocean" and distancing the "mere" as "morte", could not achieve a balanced relationship:

Toi, ce creux  
Et définitif.

Moi qui rêvais  
De faire équilibre. (C, 164)

There is, however some hope left because in spite of being locked out, "A la porte", of acceptance by, and intimacy with both the *mer/mère*, and the *océan/père*, all of them, continue talking: "A la porte de l'océan/Et parlant, parlant" (C, 89). Engagement in language is the only means to move away from confrontation towards equilibrium, even if it is only a temporary and an unstable one. The material objects, including the sea, are generally made to speak themselves through what they are, through their thingspeak, by which they contribute to a shift away from the general experience of alienation in which things are firstly signifiers of that alienation. This limited but continuous movement towards greater harmony is an essential feature of the historical progress of Guillevic's work as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Guillevic stresses the unity of *Carnac* by not considering it to be an anthology, but a single poem (GM, 14).

## *DU DOMAINE*

### **The dream and the territory**

*Du Domaine* is one long poem of 406 very short quanta, which represent a vision of a harmonious ecological interaction in nature, in which human domination is replaced by a more cooperative approach that recognizes the desires of the objects of materiality and allows them to exercise a degree of independence. What occurs in the domain is also metaphoric of the speaker's personal desires and anxieties, represented by the frequent, enigmatic and threatening appearance of the *étang*, whose *eau matriciel* figures the speaker's mother and their flawed relationship. The *domaine* is an imaginary place, a convergence of thought, emotion and dream, not a slice of physically real countryside, even though it contains common material objects. The traditional legal concept of a domain is that of territory subject to *dominium*, that is absolute ownership by its owner. However, for Guillevic this term becomes a paradox by which he transforms the *domaine* into its opposite: a poetic construct that rejects the ecological relationship based on closure that the *dominium* imposes, in favour of an open relationship between humanity and material objects. The poet forges this new relationship through language of recognition of the desire and autonomy of material objects and by assuming a new role of *régisseeur* of the domain. This is a role of non-ownership, of being manager/usufructuary, not an unfettered proprietor. In this role he attempts not to dominate that relationship, or the language which transforms the existing lack of balance and harmony between humankind and nature, an imbalance and disharmony that is not only external, but also internal as the figure of his own psyche. When asked for a definition of the *domaine*, Guillevic prefers to leave it imprecise and indefinite:

J'ai renoncé à le définir. C'est une atmosphère, une tonalité à base de souvenirs d'enfance que l'adulte passe au crible de sa tendresse et de sa critique. On va dire que c'est encore et de toute façon du Guillevic. Je n'y peux rien. (VP, 218-219)

In *Choses Parlées* he describes *Du Domaine* as "une sorte de bréviaire" and further as "une longue rêverie, une rêverie dans un espace" (CP, 130). In the text, the domain is defined once, with the reservation of a *peut-être*, as a dream "Qui a trouvé/Son territoire" (D, 26). These definitions do capture its essence of a poetic dream placed in a tract of imaginary physical terrain with animals, plants and other objects of nature, which the poet lets speak about themselves while he sometimes speaks about himself. As in *Terraqué* and *Carnac* the physical aspects of the domain draw on the memories of the poet's Breton childhood, while the role this territory plays in his ecological thinking indicates a further development of the idea, already introduced in *Terraqué*, of recognition of the desire and autonomy of material objects. What Guillevic may have in mind is to represent a version of natural paradise, which he imagines existed in prehistory before mankind began dominating and exploiting the natural environment: "Je suis un homme de la préhistoire. [...] Je vis intérieurement, au fond de moi, dans la préhistoire, dans l'élémentaire" (CP, 139). In one quantum he reiterates this confession of faith.

Le lierre  
Est, comme toi,  
De la préhistoire. (D, 109)

Guillevic believes that "préhistoire" was a desirable time of the "sacré", in which materiality and spirituality were joined in a beneficial union, and by implication he may dream that such an ideal should guide mankind in making plans or arrangements for establishing a harmonious, symbiotic partnership between humanity and the material world. However, *Du Domaine* also reveals that the dream confronts certain forces of the poet's unconscious, which act in opposition to the ecological dream both in the material world and against the poet's own peace of mind.

The poem and the territory are generated by "une rêverie dans un espace" (CP. 130) lacking form and shape, which are gradually provided by the speaker's poetic discourse as he moves through and round the imagined territory that he creates, proceeding roughly in a circular fashion from one object to another and meeting many of them repeatedly. The dream becomes language, poem, domain and life. Moreover, this rhetorical perambulation engenders an ecological community of material objects of diverse character and sometimes conflicting interests, objects which, nevertheless, share a desire for recognition of their self-consciousness and for existence in symbiotic harmony. Jean-Marie Gleize describes this community as "un *circulus* d'échanges et de rencontres, une forte tension vers la rencontre" (Gleize 1983: 217).

Dans le domaine  
Il n'y a rien

Qui ne cherche  
A se rencontrer. (D, 12)

The Latin word *circulus* means both a circle and a social group and the word "rencontre" implies harmonious ecological relationship even though Gleize does not mention the word ecology. The poet's ecological intent is, however, consistently expressed in the fabric of the poem as a whole and it is clearly symbolized in the image of an open hand offered to, and refused by, a wild bird.

Tant que l'oiseau des champs  
Refuse le creux de la main,

On est loin de compte. (D, 99)

The refusal turns this "creux" into a lack; acceptance, to be worked towards, would create a "balance".

Most of the fundamental structural and thematic elements and signifiers of the poem are introduced on the first three pages of the poem. They are, in the order of appearance, the wind, which is a messenger of the language of the



domain, then water, represented mainly by the most frequently mentioned object of the domain, the *étang*, which is expressly referred to twenty eight times. The third element is the trees, which are here assigned the role of sentries "Le rôle de sentinelle/Est confié aux arbres" (D, 7), but they also metonymically stand for all material objects that grow and live in the domain. The fourth is the signifiers of the concept of openness as opposed to closure, "Les allées ne sont pas/ Fatalement tracées" (D, 8) and "Le cadastre/Est oublié" (D, 9), whose early introduction on page two and three points to the importance of this idea for the poet's work.

### Wind

The role of the wind must be of some importance for the domain because it is introduced already in the first quantum of the poem: "Dans le domaine que je régis./On ne parle pas du vent" (D, 7). The wind is not spoken of because it speaks itself. Literally, the wind speaks because it can produce a sound. Figuratively, *parler du vent* means talk hot air, that is language without any substance and this statement may be applied to the wind literally, too, because unlike other objects in the domain, it has no solid substance being made of air. However, *parler du vent* also means to speak about the wind and the inhabitants of the domain may be apprehensive of the wind because it penetrates everywhere and knows everything about them. In this sense, as it goes round the domain, the wind is an important structural factor that helps create the domain by gathering information about the territory. There is nothing in the domain "Qui ne cherche/A se rencontrer" (D, 12) except for the wind, "Ah oui! le vent" (*ibid.*) whose ellipsis stands for "Ah oui! *il y a quelque chose, le vent*", which does not seek to join the others.

The detachment of the wind from the community of the domain is further insisted on when the verb "chercher" is taken up again to say that the wind goes round the domain in search of messengers to speak for it, "Le vent se

cherche/Des porte-parole." (D, 14). The role of the wind is then in creating language from the information it has gathered, which will create the domain, but which, the speaker knows, has to be encoded into speech by "Des porte-parole". The wind does find them, or at least one, because beside the wind itself there is somebody else who also writes wind: "Il n'y a pas que le vent/A écrire le vent" (*ibid.*). This "porte-parole" of the wind is the speaker because as *régisseur* and poet his role is to "écrire le vent", to encode the "speech" of the wind, as well as to record in his own poetic discourse his impressions of this experiment that is the domain.

Several quanta later in the poem add further significance to the role of the wind as the speaker's discourse. The first image, "Toujours le vent/Trouve à redire" (D, 91), points to the constant need to "redire", that is to repeatedly state and restate, define and redefine, the ever changing aspect and essence of the domain which is being created and exists only through this language of *dire* and *redire*. The language is addressed "A lui même/Surtout" (*ibid.*), emphasizing the role of the "porte-parole"/speaker who is creating his vision of the domain both as having some concrete body and as being an abstract concept, while his discourse is a product of opposition and tension between the two. The wind/language become breathless by their creative efforts of blowing against existing obstacles like walls and trees, "Le vent s'essouffle/Contre les murs/[...] Contre les arbres" (*ibid.*). This means that its balancing act is difficult as the objects of the domain assert their individuality against something they may consider as manipulation, while the speaker exhausts himself by trying to preserve his non-interfering role of *régisseur* and usufructuary. Finally, apparent peace and quiet reign where the wind does not blow, "Où le vent ne parle pas,/Le temps s'écoute" (*ibid.*), but this is necessarily only a temporary lull because the play of the language of the opposing forces is the very life of the domain and if the language activity stopped, there would be left only a silence of non-creation, of death. As Jean-Marie Gleize puts it, "[...] le domaine ne saurait être défini, il est en droit infini, in(dé)finissable: cesserait alors la parole, ce serait la mort" (Gleize 1983: 210).

The extreme form of wind is a storm which sometimes rages in the domain, but its barking and snarling, "L'aboïement" (D, 99) is "Inutile." (*ibid.*). On the other hand there is also a recognition of the ambiguity of the storm and the wind. They are not a threat from the outside, but are recognized as actually coming from the domain, of belonging there:

L'orage  
Se prépare ici.

Revient parfois revoir  
Le pays natal. (D, 24)

And:

Passe un vent  
Qu'on n'attendait pas.

D'où viendrait-il  
Sinon d'ici? (D, 122)

In the final analysis, the disturbing elements that tend to threaten the domain are actually part of it. They belong to the diversity of forces that struggle in the domain for self-assertion and for change from their previous experience of closure towards an ideal, perhaps infinitely unattainable, of opening, harmony and brotherhood. When such ideas are conceived, it is the wind, which expresses them as language and carries them all over the domain. Those who renounce the domain, which is an act going beyond acceptable diversity, are not admitted to remain and the wind is considered useful to sweep the renegades out by a joint action with his *porte-parole*, the *régisseur*, "Pour une fois le vent/Sert à quelque chose" (D, 37). Having restored calm by ejecting those who opposed the domain, the wind addresses his *porte-parole*, the poet, offering close relationship and cooperation with all the community of the domain.

Assieds-toi, dira-t-il.

Nous avons tout le temps  
D'apprendre à nous entendre

Rêver chacun pour l'autre. (D, 37)

## Water

The most disturbing manifestation of the forces of water is the dark, accusing, alluring and silent *étang*, but there are other waters that figure danger and even death: "Les crimes que recrachent/Les eaux nocturnes" (D, 53). The word "nocturnes" implies death and "Les eaux" has a connection to the sea, which is present in all water: "L'eau que tu bois/A connu la mer" (D, 103). Thirty five years after *Terraqué* the speaker's mind remains dominated by the conception of the sea as a hostile and threatening *mer/mère*, and there is no escape from the danger because the sea is everywhere.

Parfois tu crois  
Oublier la mer,

Mais l'océan  
Se vit partout. (D, 109)

In this poem water generally appears standing apart from the community of the domain and egotistically "Ne pense qu'à soi" (D, 60), and presuming that the others suspect it of some wrongdoing asks resentfully "Qu'est-ce qu'on me veut?" (D, 80). However, some forms of water such as rain, springs, streams and dew tend to be beneficent. To quench his thirst the speaker imagines that he would like to drink "Toute la rosée/De la clairière" (D, 76).

The speaker's ambiguous relationship to water is reflected in his view that water, which is under the ground, is good, but once on the surface it seems to change its character so that only some of the goodness remains.

L'eau  
Dans la terre  
Est indulgente.

A la surface  
Il lui en reste quelque chose. (D, 135)

The indulgence of the underground water is likely to be due to its being under strict control of the earth, whose containment and channelling transform it into a part of itself, into "l'eau douce des fontaines" (C, 140). However, on the surface, when water is able to spread and engulf the ground, its other, plundering qualities, predominate. Above all it is the obsession to raise itself "Au-dessus des terres" (C, 91) to dominate them. On the ground then water is already acquiring some characteristics of the sea, which it will eventually join. Water seems to be, generally, contesting the arrangements of the domain and is therefore ecologically on the side of those elements that do not accept complete stability and work towards subversion. Such water is found in the "l'étang", which constitutes an emotionally disturbing presence for the speaker, who tries to contain it by language. Jean-Marie Gleize claims that the pond represents fear and that one of the functions of the poem is to exorcise that fear: "Plus loin, annonçant l'obsession de *Du Domaine*, tout un poème est consacré à la peur, autour de l'étang" (Gleize 1983:205).

The word and the notion of the "étang" irrupts dramatically into the poem in the second quantum of the first page by a line consisting of just one word, "L'étang" (D, 7). The elliptic, blunt break-in of the pond into the domain has an element of a shock and mystery that works on three levels. First, the dramatic, early entry of the "étang" shows it to be a force that will not be denied access and an independent role in the domain, contesting the powers of the *régisseur*. Second, the intertextual credentials of the pond are that of a possible threat as it was in the *étang* poem where the water of the pond threatened to rise up - *éclater* - against the fearful speaker. Third, although the *régisseur* is now no longer the fearful child in the man of the *étang* poem, and has increased self-confidence, he has not yet transformed his unspeakable childhood traumas into full speech, and he will never succeed in doing so completely. The pond means

closure of his disturbed personal ecological balance, which he wants to open and transform by language.

Engaging the *étang* in speech is, however, difficult because it is inarticulate and its voice is paradoxically a silent cry, or at best a cry – the inarticulate “voiced”. “Un silence/Couleur de l’*étang*” (*D*, 52), but a cry nevertheless, “L’eau/Matrice du cri” (*D*, 81), the two images expressing a mystery that will be gradually probed, but never fully revealed. The pond’s ambiguity begins with its being contained by banks of earth, while its water spreads over and contains land like a miniature sea. It is closed upon itself, seems to contain secrets and its borders cannot be removed or “oubliés” so that it stands for closure, the opposite of the openness of the domain. For Guillevic the pond represents memory that he cannot forget because it is for him the memory of the mother, and this meaning, whether of the pond or of other imagery, offers itself clearly and repeatedly in his poetry. The poet’s own admission in an interview of the pond’s figuring the mother and his fears is only a later, supplementary evidence of what the poetry reveals itself:

[...], l’*étang*, c’est peut-être la mère, la matrice si tu veux, l’eau matricielle – j’ai dit: *L’eau matrice du cri* –, c’est le mystère de la naissance, de l’origine, mais c’est aussi le calme apparent, menteur, du paysage, qui cache quelque chose de grouillant... [...] Et en un sens, l’*étang* me traque [...]. (*CP*, 132)

The *étang* is then a matrix of the cry of birth, but also of fear of death, and it is also matrix, the womb, that is the mother. The nature of their relationship is largely unspeakable, but the symbols of the unconscious that enter into his poetic discourse suggest that Guillevic is both attracted to her as the erotic source of his life, but also fears and dislikes her as the source of his anxiety, and of dislocation of his erotic instincts. The mother is like the pond containing sweet water, which in its essence is life-giving, but which is stagnant and swarming with unsavoury insects, representing her as being deceitful and soiled. The ambivalence of this conception then becomes a framework within which the poet develops the imagery of the *étang* into a mythology, which the

pond speaks itself, "Fait lui-même/Sa mythologie" (D. 23). The pond not only contains water that is of ambiguous quality, but this water is "Veuve/De l'océan" (D. 61), which is the sterile and menacing element of the *mer/mère* of *Carnac*.

The speaker draws attention to the pond's inscrutability that cannot be penetrated and understood and which is so engrained that it endures in the form of a shadow even in the light of the sun, which is for Guillevic a beneficent element. "Se rappeler" is the speaker's warning to himself to be wary of the pond's opacity that may contain menace. The pond is never simply itself, transparent, and is always a signifier of shadowy forces of destruction.

Se rappeler:

L'ombre dans l'étang  
Malgré le soleil. (D, 67)

At the same time "l'étang" is not the enemy of the sun and "Ils s'espionnent rarement" (D, 33). This statement acknowledges that they spy on each other sometimes. There is another example of spying further in the poem: "Nous n'espionnons pas,/Se murmurent les nuages (D, 127). Such a possibility seems to be rather worrying for the poet because he always resented the mother watching him, which he considered "spying", and disliked the moon, a symbol of the mother, which he thought was spying on him. The underhand activity of spying then meant lack of trust and if it were practised in the domain, it would have worked against the idea of symbiosis and equilibrium in the domain and in his own mind.

*L'étang* is sometimes represented as an ambiguous and disloyal presence with an inclination to listen to and perhaps favour the schemes of disruptive forces in the domain.

Bien sûr

Qu'il y a des complots.

L'étang les écoute. (D, 126)

However, the pond is smart enough not to be caught out plotting itself. Its water is "Jamais surprise/En flagrant délit" (D, 51), the implication of which is that the pond is involved in plots. In the domain there is "Un silence/Couleur de l'étang" (D, 52), that is a silence of ambiguity, of passive resistance towards the poet himself and his dream of the domain as a place of ecological harmony. These are silent forces, inform objects like water, manifesting a desire of separateness from, and perhaps even domination of, the domain. Their silence is not quite mute because it runs silently like the grey colour of the pond: *Le silence coule comme la couleur de l'étang* and this grey silence without outward sound is that of impurity, intrigue and threat. It is the mother's dreams of domination, which she shares with the sea and water generally, silently lying in wait for her chance in the "étang". And there are others in the domain who have similar dreams of domination, "Certains rêvent/Les rêves de l'étang" (D, 54). This silent threat is registered by the speaker/*régisseur* who, as usufructuary, has a duty of protecting the domain from damage and harm, a duty that makes him a kind of overseer and protector of his interests and the domain.

The poet's personal anxiety connected with the *étang*, which comes to the surface in several quanta, implies a desire to become healed. In the following, "Auprès de l'étang,/Ta main" (D, 116), the elliptic syntax reveals the speaker's ambiguity of fear and attraction that the pond represents for him. "Ta main" is syntactically isolated as if he were holding his breath in expectation of either the mother's punishing hand or a possibility of caresses by the same hand. "Ta main" is also semantically ambiguous meaning either his hand or the mother's hand, or both, indicating that the anxious speaker is at the pond seeking the mother's hand with his hand offering reconciliation and peace. The absence of grammatical tense in these lines reveals that the ambiguity of fear



and attraction of the pond is a constant state of the speaker's mind. The desired reconciliation means bringing peace to his mind through a process of forgetting the traumatic experience by first remembering it through repeated speech that will replace the unspeakable silence of the mother - son relationship. The attempt at reaching towards this aim finds representation in two following quanta, in which the speaker plans to be healed of the neurotic anxiety whose source is the *étang/mère*.

These texts reveal his hope that he may be able to alleviate or transform his anxiety through speech. The first quantum takes up the idea of the speaker's thinking about going this time to the pond to engage in speech with the forces of the "étang", which he feels frustrate and oppose him, without antagonizing them.

Aller  
 Jusqu'à l'étang.  
  
 Essayer, cette fois,  
 De ne pas  
 L'interroger.            (D, 77)

The speaker has not yet made a decision to go to the pond and is only vaguely toying with the idea. The indefinite and vague state of his mind is suggested by the three infinitives, "Aller", "Essayer" and "L'interroger" whose meaning is equally unformed and indefinite. It seems that to make such a decision requires much courage and the use of the infinitives expresses his fear of openly admitting to himself a need for the action because the infinitives hide his grammatical person and the tense of his action. However, the only person interested in visiting the pond is the speaker, and the "tense" – a future of the hypothetical. is revealed in "cette fois". The reluctance to make the decision and the difficulty of going "Jusqu'à l'étang", represent both the existence and the weight of the repression he suffers from, and their unspeakable nature. The poet's reluctance indicates his resistance to remembering the painful memories of his childhood repressed in his unconscious. However, remembering them

and bringing them to his conscious mind as full speech is the goal of the treatment that he wishes to undergo, "Aller/Jusqu'à l'étang", because it is the only way to the final step of forgetting them. What he does not want to do "cette fois", is to interrogate the pond as he did in the past. "L'interroger" means confronting the terrifying symbols of his unconscious through which the pond "speaks" by questions like "Why do you hate me?" and "Why don't you love me?", to which there was no response, and which reduced him to a "child in the man" as happened in the "étang poem" of *Terraqué*. The voice of the speaker now is not of the *régisser* speaking against the pond, but rather a part of his fragmented self, the child that has grown up and wishes to put a stop to the old fears. Interrogating would only lead back to them and to continuing silence. This means that he wants to give up brooding silently over the old painful memories and rather speak for both himself and the mother about his repressed experiences, transforming them into full speech.

In the following quantum, which can be read as an extension of the preceding one, the speaker progresses to the point of making a decision to be figuratively taken to the pond to speak for himself.

Emmène moi  
Jusqu'à l'étang,

Je parlerai. (D, 85)

"Je parlerai" means speaking in the future, implying that so far the speaker has not been speaking, that is not speaking in a full speech relevant to his traumatic experience, but only in empty speech that was covering up the unspeakable silence. "Emmène moi" is addressed to a familiar, single person, who can only be himself, or more precisely in Lacan's terms, the other of his divided self, who speaks in an opaque, metaphoric language, "le discours de l'autre dans le secret de son chiffre" (Lacan 1966: 281). The function of this discourse in secret symbols is both to reveal to the conscious mind what it repressed in the

unconscious, and at the same time to hide it by the opacity. However, the opacity of the ciphers is of various degrees so that Guillevic's notion of the existence of the "semi-conscient" (*CP*, 112) can be useful for their interpretation. He is half-aware of what many of the secret symbols mean, and through "Je parlerai" he will introduce such metaphors into his poetic discourse, which will mean revealing the repressed to the conscious self and engaging in self-psychotherapy.<sup>1</sup> The kind of speaking he thinks of is rather similar to what Freud proposes as the means of discovering the causes of neurosis of his patients to heal their disorder. It is Freud's "talking cure", as one of his patients called it (Freud 1962: 35), by means of which repressed material is brought from the unconscious to the conscious mind to be faced and dismissed. The speaker is also aware that he needs the cooperation of the other of his divided self and asks for it, "Emmène moi/Jusqu'à l'étang" (*D*, 85), because the distance to the pond seems too great for only one part of himself. The implication of his reluctance to go on his own is that he is offering resistance to the therapy even though he knows that it will be the only means of breaking the unspeakable silence of his relationship with the mother. What these two poems represent is a brief insight into the speaker's mental process of the desire to heal a neurotic condition, the cause of which is probably an existing repression of an unpleasant experience. The "treatment" begins by an attempt to bring the repressed to the attention of the conscious mind by speech, and is followed by an effort to overcome the resistance of the ego so that a cure can be effected (Freud 1962: 50-53). Rather than simply interrogating the pond as signifier – getting it to speak (through him), the speaker is seeking his own speech, not the repetition of empty discourse, but the fullness of his own discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> At this point it may be helpful to emphasize that this thesis does not attempt to psychoanalyse Guillevic, but that it cannot avoid interpreting some of his poetry, as for example these quanta, as the poet's attempts at self-psychotherapy by changing his experience through language.

The speaker suggests that it may be possible to eliminate the threat of the ambiguity and the metaphoric dimension of the *étang* by disregarding it: "On n'est jamais forcé/De regarder l'étang" (D, 31). "Regarder" implies intensive engagement with the pond, which one is not physically forced to do. Emotionally it is possible to keep denying the metaphor of the memory of the unspeakable experience by repressing it into one's unconscious. However, the poet's discourse shows that he cannot help "regarder" because he is driven by desire both to accept the mother's destructive influence and to free himself from it by constructive work on language to transform that experience. One can nullify the threat and the lure of the mother, which the pond represents, by bringing the unspeakable memories that the pond holds to one's conscious memory. By remembering them the speaker would be able to forget them so that the pond would cease to be only a metaphor and would also become a simple material object. This second alternative means a containment and transformation of the *étang*, which is what the speaker has been attempting to do all along by the discourse of his poetry. He has been partly successful in this effort by being able to perceive the pond as having lost its destructive aspect and becoming innocuous water by losing its connection to the sea: "Comme l'étang/Oublie sa source!" (D, 97) or seeing the pond in the eyes of an innocent animal: "Il y a de l'étang/Dans les yeux du cerf" (D, 140). The speaker's partial success with transformation is summed up in the following quantum:

Ce n'est rien  
C'est l'étang

Qui, cette fois,  
Dort pour de bon. (D, 61)

In these lines the poet's transformation of the threat of the pond appears to have been successful. The former dominant and fear inspiring element of the domain has now become an inoffensive "rien" and just a material thing – the "thing" etymologically is "rien" – called "étang", and it sleeps peacefully. However, the expression "cette fois" reveals that this positive result has only just occurred

after many previous unsuccessful attempts, and that the poet may have to keep returning to repeat the performance however much he affirms its sleeping for good.

### Discourse of joy and self-assertion

*Jouissance* is erotic pleasure associated with the life instincts but with something beyond pleasure too. As a legal term, *jouissance* is a component of usufruct, with which it combines to impart to the poet's ecological discourse an element of pleasure on two levels. First, *Du Domaine* gives a strong impression that its writing was a joyful activity for the poet, who seems to have been driven by creative *jouissance* following his own injunction, "Tout/Dit: pénétrer" (*D*, 85), which was echoed by the ravens, "'Loin./Loin./Loin'" (*ibid.*). The word "pénétrer" has a meaning of discovery and understanding, but its sexual connotation is also unmistakable. *Du Domaine* then supports Guillevic's claim that to write poetry is "Une façon de faire l'amour en somme..." (*CP*, 74). This means channelling his erotic energies into the language that creates and explores the domain. Even though the human erotic is mentioned only once, "Ton corps de femme/Plonge plus que les puits" (*D*, 89), the underlying layer of the erotic in Guillevic's discourse brings into the discourse of the ecology an emotional element of life-giving energy.

The second level of *jouissance* belongs to the material objects themselves and is revealed by the speaker/*régisseur* who guides their efforts to assert their desire to autonomous existence. They assert their right to be part of the enterprise of the domain by their insistence on their individuality, their actions, their shape size and colour. This is their demand for recognition and it is for them a satisfying, joyful activity that aims at acquiring a particular character and achieving a certain degree of autonomy. This does not mean having human qualities, but rather displaying some traits that distinguish and

define them and their role in the domain. Everyone seeks to define himself and find his place in the domain.

Dans le domaine,  
Chacun

Est à la recherche  
De ses coordonnées. (D, 66)

Trees may look, for example, like sentries of the domain, standing guard and watching: "Le rôle de sentinelle/Est confié aux arbres" (D, 7). The speaker provides the word "sentinelle", but tall, straight trees speak themselves by looking like sentries standing guard. They are also the target of the wind which exhausts itself, becomes winded, "s'essouffle", against these sentries (D, 91) and the thingspeak of the image speaks the essential qualities of both the strength and resistance of the trees and the aggressiveness and defeat of the wind. Trees also speak their pride.

L'orgueil  
Des arbres.

Mais les chênes. (D, 84)

The generic qualities and appearance of trees can be symbolized by their appearance, but the word "orgueil" is inadequate for the massive spread, height, strength and individuality of oak trees. The only way they speak it, and the way by which they can be accorded recognition of their desire and autonomy, is by the awesome silence of the ellipsis that follows "Mais les chênes". While this ellipsis seems to take speech away, suggesting that human language is inadequate to represent the thingspeak of their might, it effectively suggests that their satisfaction and pride is even greater than that of other trees. The oaks are not compared to anything. Their absolute pride is stated in the void of the ellipsis, which suggests that language lacks vocabulary to express it, but is also the very expression itself.

An intrinsic part of the poet's enjoyment, or *jouissance*, of writing *Du Domaine* is his good-natured, playful humour, which he himself calls mischievous, and which often points to some absurdity of life outside and inside the domain. Human aesthetic preconceptions are mocked when the speaker presents as singing both the call of a nightingale and a frog: "Le rossignol/Au seuil de son chant" (D, 107) and the frog "Se souvient/Qu'elle doit chanter" (D, 142). The reptiles "Sont mal à l'aise" (D, 21) because the domain is a sort of paradise and they fear that they might again be demonized as happened to them in the Old Testament. Their suspicion is never allayed as in the last quantum of the poem they complain "On nous oublie, [...] //Veillons" (D, 143). Blackberries, "Privées d'ennemis" (D, 128) appear to themselves rather ridiculous' armed with all their rebarbative defences' and wonder bemused "Pourquoi ces épines" (D, 141). A truly comic figure is the owl which speaks at great length about the domain: "Le hibou en dit long/Sur le domaine" (D, 103), while its relative, the screech owl, has anachronistic political ambitions, "Le chat-huant se veut/Conseiller du roi" (D, 20). A king is out of place in an egalitarian and presumably republican domain. The ecological contribution of the earthworm is not specified, but is accepted cheerfully: "Le ver de terre aussi/T'a donné quelque chose" (D, 126). The speaker himself accepts becoming eventually an ecological contribution himself when he loses his humanity and joins the slugs: "Je me suis respecté/Jusque dans les limaces" (D, 131) and when he descends into the earth one day and there fuses with materiality.

Il faut s'y confondre  
Avec les lombrics  
Et les radicules. (D, 132)

Among the material objects of the domain there is much enjoyment of their existence. One never sees in the domain two smiles tear each other to pieces, "Deux sourires/S'entre-déchirer" (D, 56). "Le coquelicot" perhaps knows "La joie qu'il annonce" (D, 102) and "L'ombellifère/Accepte" its place

in the domain (*D*, 98). This is more than the speaker is able to say convincingly about himself: "On n'en finit pas/De s'habituer" (*D*, 104). It seems that he has difficulty with his role of *régisser*: "Régir le domaine?" (*D*, 114). His doubts may come from his troubled past, which he tries to leave behind him by looking in front of him.

Pas besoin  
De regarder en arrière.

Les jonquilles  
Sont devant toi. (*D*, 36)

The speaker allays his doubts by reassuring himself that the domain of his dream is not a complete poetic invention, but that it has a solid material basis.

Tu n'as pas inventé  
Les chevreuil  
Ni les papillons.

Avant toi les eaux  
Ont dormi longtemps. (*D*, 136)

Plants and animals of nature are no different in the domain from those outside and have always been there to take part in the constant struggle of establishing an ecological balance by their beauty and passion for life. There is no play acting or pretence in their existence. Roses do not think "A être des roses" (*D*, 13) and "Jamais vu l'épervier/Jouer à l'épervier" (*D*, 111). Most of them are satisfied with their life and place in the domain. Trees, especially oak trees, and their leaves offer to share the erotic pleasure of the caress with humanity.

Caresse le tronc du chêne  
Avec ses feuilles,  
Celles des branches basses. (*D*, 123)



The speaker/*régisseur* not only creates the domain, but also makes it into a poetic *représentation* that gives life to a dream, by means of his material poetic discourse. That means generally a complete withdrawal of his speaking *je* to let the material objects speak themselves, but occasionally his direct or indirect presence may be felt. The poet's direct involvement, his *je*, is present and asserting itself when he declares himself to be the *régisseur* of the domain. The same involvement becomes noticeable when, in spite of a certain vagueness of the domain, the poet reveals firm, personal ideological convictions that underpin the ecological arrangements of his poetic real estate. One of them is freedom. There is nothing in the domain "Pour se croire esclave" (*D*, 18). There is also rejection of private ownership of parts of the domain in the lines "Le cadastre/Est oublié" (*D*, 9) because "le cadastre" is the official register of private ownership of land which has no place in the domain. What is also rejected is commercial exploitation. The beauty of the domain is not for making profit: "La beauté/N'est pas payante" (*D*, 40). These brave ideological declarations are imposed on the domain by the speaker who is here speaking on its behalf, *au nom de*, convinced that this is what the objects desire.

### Harmony, diversity and discord

The domain may represent a step towards the ideal of ecological harmony, but this is not meant to be an absolute and static state. Beside contentment and erotic enjoyment of their existence, the inhabitants of the domain face some competing and disturbing elements, like storms, the pond and the moon. There are suggestions of fear, cries, horror and death, but the feeling is that they are not seriously destructive because they belong to the natural life cycle of life and death, within which diverse forces struggle for survival, recognition and assertion of their differences and their individuality. The choice of belonging to the domain is theirs as there is an opening through which they can enter and leave.

L'ouverture:

Avec toi,  
 Sans toi,  
 Contre toi? (D, 44)

The word "L'ouverture", separated for emphasis from the rest of the quantum, suggests not only a place of entry into the domaine, but also an offer of a life of openness as opposed to closure. The pronoun "toi" addresses metonymically three possible groups of all humanity and their reaction to the offer of opening. "Avec toi" addresses all those those who embrace the life and ecological values of the domain, which will mean opening of their life. "Sans toi" refers to those who are ignorant of, or indifferent to, such values and lead a closed life at the moment, but may join the domain later. "Contre toi" is finally directed against those who actively oppose the values of openness of the domain, which will be a constant reminder that they live a life of closure and diminution. If they live in the domain, they are liable to be ejected by the wind as suggested by the quantum stating that such people are not admitted and adding "Pour une fois le vent/Sert à quelque chose" (D, 37).

The domain is depicted in physical terms as a community of solid natural objects, but the boundaries of its territory are not clearly defined. This allows for freedom of access and movement, and suggests that the physical features figure states of mind.

Les frontières

Ne sont pas assez marquées  
 Pour qu'elles soient franchies  
 Impunément. (D, 15)

This arrangement appears to give a freedom of access and exit, but the lines are rather paradoxical in that although the frontiers are not sufficiently marked, crossing them incurs punishment. The implication of the word "assez" is that

the borders are marked, but only enough to be seen as an obstacle to be got over by the enemies of the domain who come to disrupt its realization of an ecological dream. Such people will face some penalty, probably to be ejected by the wind. On the other hand, for those who accept the values of the domain the boundaries are not marked as obstacles at all and do not have to be crossed. These people are already there and do not have to enter the domain, "C'est lui/Qui vient" (*D*, 27) because they have opened themselves to its dream.

To the speaker the domain appears to be a possible realization of a dream, an ideal.

Le domaine  
Est peut-être un rêve

Qui a trouvé  
Son territoire. (*D*, 26)

This dream, however, has found expression in a territory of material objects and together they contain an ecological force that is indestructible.

Dans le domaine  
Quelque chose  
Est indestructible.

Le domaine  
Le porte. (*D*, 27)

On the other hand the following texts suggest that the domain is more a state of mind than a physical reality.

On n'entre pas  
Dans le domaine.

C'est lui  
Qui vient. (*D*, 27)

and "On ne quitte pas le domaine/Sans l'emporter" (*ibid.*). At the same time the concept of "régir" itself and its practice seem undefined and perhaps unnecessary to the speaker because the domain has a life of its own that does not seem to need his administration: "Régir le domaine?" (*D*, 114), but he questions the idea and his doubts because questioning is part of the "régir".

Dans le domaine  
Que je régis,  
J'enquête. (D, 22)

Leaves apparently will want to become symbols and banners of the movement towards ecological harmony: "Toutes les feuilles/Voudront être vos oriflammes" (*D*, 50). A bank of violets is self-assured about its contribution to the domain in its aloofness, "Dans son quant-à-soi" (*D*, 130) and stones contribute not only by their solidity, but also by the internal energy which they contain.

Rien ne caracole  
Dans le domaine,  
  
Sauf peut-être  
Au plus grenu des pierres. (D, 11)

The force that prances in them is in their very grain or granular structure.

Of all the animals the most frequently mentioned is the turtledove, "la tourterelle", which at first only thought that she was at home in the domain (*D*, 13), and later decided that she really was because of the pond, *l'étang*, (*D*, 23). She is associated with it again when the image of her eye is juxtaposed with the water of the pond (*D*, 64) and this makes her an ambivalent and a disturbing presence in the landscape because the pond links her to the mother. Her main rôle is to be the accountant of the domain, which further strengthens her link to the mother, who kept an account of the poet's activities to be able to judge and dominate him.

Les comptes,

C'est à la tourterelle  
Qu'il faudra les rendre. (D, 24)

"Les comptes" is an account of the state of things, that is a balance sheet of the ecological condition of the domain, which includes a judgement on the efforts and success of the *régisseur* who is in charge. This office is entrusted by the speaker to the "tourterelle" whose feminine gender, her closeness to the pond, her keeping of accounts and demanding them, are reminiscent of the mother. He remembers that "Mère tu m'attendais/Pour demander des comptes" (*Avec*, 66), and that the bird judged him again as his mother did in "Face/De juge" (*T*, 28), which all makes of the "tourterelle" a metaphoric accomplice of the domineering and feared mother. He tries to dismiss his fears by a claim that the accounting of the turtledove is not to be trusted because she cannot count.

Tu sais qu'au moins  
Tes comptes seront justes.

Même si la tourterelle  
Ne sait pas compter. (D, 125)

In this quantum the speaker reveals concern about the final balance of accounts of the domain, that is about his success as poetic creator and *régisseur* of this imaginary territory representing a possibility of ecological symbiosis in and with nature. He speaks to himself as "Tu" with confidence that his accounting and judgement of the final result of his efforts will balance and be right: "Tes comptes seront justes". However, "au moins" reveals that he is aware of another "accounting" that he has been in the past subjected to, that of his mother. In the domain the role of accountant is assigned to the "tourterelle" and he tries to dismiss her accounting flippantly by claiming that she is an accountant who cannot count. He does this because the call of the turtledove that sounds like counting reminds him of his mother's keeping account of, and judging, all his actions when he was young, which still seem to make him

uneasy. Unlike the dove, the mother could and did count, but her counting was biased against the son so that he feels that his "compte" would never be "bon" in her eyes.

That everything in the domain is not running harmoniously is suggested by quite an astonishing revelation: "Il y a des crimes/Sans definition" (D, 40), which indicates that the domain is not quite Arcadia, although it may aspire to such an ideal. The reason for this ambiguity of the domain is that the speaker's position is itself ambiguous on two levels. First, as the creator and director of the domain he holds, and is guided by, a certain vision of ecological harmony, but he faces stubborn facts of materiality, like selfishness, enmity, aggression, suffering and death which, hyperbolically are called "crimes" against that ideal. He does not wish to suppress or censor such contrary factors because that would contradict his role as a director/*régisseeur*, the essential feature of which is to allow development of diversity and individuality even if it means struggle and competition. Second, it can be argued that whatever happens in the domain is a metaphoric projection of the working of his mind and therefore of all his past painful emotional experiences, which he may perceive as "crimes" against himself.

Torture is encountered early in the poem - "Si l'on torture,/C'est plutôt soi-même" (D, 28), indicating that such sado-masochistic activity is his own against himself. Although openness is a goal to be achieved, the three dimensions of the domain seem to produce horror in the speaker at times.

Horreur parfois  
Des trois dimensions

S'il n'y avait les miennes  
Pour les conjuguer. (D, 116)

The desired *jouissance* of the domain relies on the speaker and the inhabitants of the domain opening their lives, but sometimes they are afflicted by fear of

the oppressive vastness of the three-dimensional space that threatens them with closure, the opposite of opening, which his own "dimensions" assure, transforming fixed dimensions through the dimension of language.

The speaker brings with him into the domain his obsessive fear of horizontal spaces, which becomes another disturbing element of the desired peace and harmony.

Les couloirs te cherchent.  
Laisse-les.

Préfère les draps,  
Leur caverne. (D, 94)

"Les couloirs", the horizontal corridors, which appear as a threatening presence in many of Guillevic's poems, are imaginary horizontal cavities in the depth of the sea or other large volumes of water like ponds. Such cavities are for the poet a manifestation of the mother's body and its birth canal, and therefore of his birth, which he considers ushered him into childhood of anxiety and suffering.<sup>1</sup> These corridors fill the poet with dread of the rejecting and persecuting *mer/mère* and haunt his imagination from childhood to adulthood. They find their most terrifying expression in the ice cold "chambres" and "couloirs" in the *étang* poem (T, 71-72), figuring the mother's cold emotional rejection of the speaker as a child. Now, thirty five years later, they still pursue him, "Les couloirs te cherchent", renewing his anxieties. He counters their threat by transforming them, "Laisse-les", and by allowing himself to escape to an erotic refuge of the horizontal sheets formed into a vertical cavern inhabited by him and his lover.

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<sup>1</sup> Guillevic's first name is Eugène, which means *bien né*. The poet rejected this name because he considered himself *mal né* and consequently most of his poetic works bear simply his family name.

The moon is one of the objects that the poet has learnt to dislike and distrust because he fears that it is spying on him as his mother used to, and when it appears, his response is to have it banished from the domain.

La lune,  
Soit!

Qu'elle apparaisse  
Pour être éconduite. (D, 11)

The moon seems to appear suddenly, in one word, and its existence is acknowledged only grudgingly: "Soit", which is here a rather dismissive "very well". Then, the speaker insists that the whole point of its appearance is to be dismissed. Guillevic views the moon with deep, childish suspicion: "En plus, la lune pour moi est toujours un peu maléfique: qu'elle ne vienne pas nous gêner, nous épier!" (CP, 132). Both the connection of the moon with female sexuality and the idea of bothering him and spying on him lead to the mother, revealing that what he finds objectionable in this celestial body is its metaphoric representation of the maternal. But here he can acknowledge and dismiss rather than deny or repress.

Hypothetical instances of pain and suffering, which do not seem to be serving any purpose and defy any reasonable explanation, may also occur in the domain.

Savoir  
Si le domaine

Saigne en cachette  
Parfois. (D, 92)

No matter how vague the infinitive of "savoir" and the adverb "parfois" are, someone sometimes may know if the domain secretly bleeds. It is these four lines more than any other in the poem that point to the poet's mind, never entirely free from worry over his creation.



### Closure and opening

In the first quantum of the poem the poet defines his relationship to the natural world as being different from, and opposed to the traditionally accepted idea of absolute ownership of dominion by using the word *régir* which becomes an often repeated key word of the poem. The notion of ownership by dominion means closure by the exclusion of the rights of others, whether they are people or objects of materiality. *Régir* signals a move away from closure towards openness.

Dans le domaine que je régis,  
On ne parle pas du vent. (D, 7).

The expression "que je régis" means acting as a steward or agent of somebody's property or business. On the level of state government *régir* means a more limited form of control than to rule or govern, implying administering a province in the name of a higher authority, a king, for example, as in the phrase *in nomine regis*, to whom the person in charge was responsible. When asked in an interview what "régir" and "pouvoir" were about, Guillevic does not give a straight answer, pointing to another quantum:

Dans le domaine,  
Le pouvoir  
Est indiscernable. (D, 19)

He then goes on to say: "C'est comme dans les rêves, les choses passent, le mystère est là et personne n'a le pouvoir" (CP, 131). "Dans le domaine que je régis" (D, 7) introduces the notion of *régir*, which means such absence of real power. According to the *Petit Robert* the modern word *régir* comes from the Latin *regere*, meaning govern or administer, and it is synonymous with the word *gérer*, from the Latin *gerere*. The notion of a *régisseur* is first relevant to the ecology of *Du Domaine* because he is a steward who administers, *gère*,

another person's property that he does not own. He must take care not to cause any damage or allow any deterioration of the property to occur. The position of a *régisseur* is similar to that of an *usufruitier* and the concept of usufruct is a desirable basis for ecological relationship between mankind and nature. This is because usufruct allows a person to harvest the produce of the land for himself without damaging its substance. Although such a relationship is clearly favoured in *Du Domaine*, the term usufruct is not employed by Guillevic until 1993 in *Maintenant*:

Qui suis-je?

Je suis l'usufruitier

Du domaine.

[...]

(*Mr*, 121)

Usufruct is the "Right of enjoying the use and advantages of another's property short of destruction or waste of its substance" (*COD*). The *Petit Robert* defines it as "Droit réel de jouissance sur une chose appartenant à autrui ... qui s'éteint nécessairement à la mort de l'usufruitier." "Enjoying" and "jouissance" are first of all, legal terms meaning undisturbed use, but the French word is also a common expression for sexual pleasure so that these expressions have erotic connotations relevant to the act of writing poetry and the ecological inquiry. The second element of the definition is that the use should not be damaging or destructive to the substance of the object to be used. This requirement has obvious ecological ramifications and emphasizes the important shift from the idea of domination of nature to that of tending it in a more limited way as a *régisseur* and a usufructuary. The third point of the definition is that usufruct becomes extinct on the death of its holder and has to be renegotiated with a successor. The poet is well aware of this condition and refers to it twice when speaking of dew as a beneficent form of water.

Après ton départ

La rosée encore

Fera son office. (*D*, 110)

And again: "La rosée/Me succédera" (*D*, 115). The dew was always a part of materiality and still will be after his death. "La rosée encore/Fera son office" figures all materiality opening itself to be of benefit to anyone who would be prepared to recognize its desire of undisturbed existence.

The concepts of the *régisseur* and *usufruitier* have implications not only for the ecological argument of the poet, but also for the poet's wider vision of life as a desire of constantly opening oneself against that of closing. The two notions clearly move the discourse towards opening by eliminating the absolute domination that an owner would exercise by closing his property against others. Openness is further supported by the speaker's position on the question of power generally, which is dealt with by two statements: "Le pouvoir//Est indiscernable" (*D*, 19), which indicates that the power to restrict and oppress the lives of the inhabitants of the domain has been reduced to virtually nothing. "Le cadastre/Est oublié" (*D*, 40), similarly removes legally sanctioned restriction of landholding in favour of some and its closure against others. "Les allées ne sont pas/Fatalement tracées" (*D*, 8) may mean that the inhabitants' paths through the domain, and through life, are not rigidly pre-set for them to become *fatal*, that is their inescapable fate that would enclose their life. However, they are "tracées" to some degree to prevent disorientation. Similarly "Tous les chemins/Ne sont pas lisibles" (*D*, 90) opens up the territory to free movement and expression, but some roads remain readable for the sake of safety for those afraid of too much opening. And again, "Les frontières//Ne sont pas assez marquées" (*D*, 15) shows a desire for a compromise because the borders are marked, even though not enough, "assez", to offer both the freedom of opening and the security of partial closure. There are hedges, "Des haies" (*D*, 11), but the speaker suggests that they serve as a useful fixed point for the eye to rest on, "Que fait un regard/Que rien n'arrête?" (*ibid.*).<sup>1</sup> The speaker

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marie Gleize feels that there is danger in taking the opening too far: "Et il faut s'arrêter sur la question que pose Guillevic: l'oubli du cadastre, l'horreur des deux ou trois dimensions

therefore does not embrace the idea of complete negation of all limits to opening, but only their reduction. There is one object in the domain that is enclosed and contained for the good of the domain and the speaker. It is the *étang* which threatened to rise against the speaker and generated much fear in the *étang* poem. This time the fear is contained by language: "L'étang/N'écartera pas" (*D*, 69).

In ecological terms openness would mean opening oneself to the world of materiality and the poet asks himself how far mankind has progressed towards such an ideal of harmonious symbiosis with nature. The following quantum offers an answer to the question.

Tant que l'oiseau des champs  
Refuse le creux de la main,

On est loin de compte. (D, 99)

Ecological harmony would mean that wild creatures of nature, like birds, could trust mankind enough to sit on a man's open hand. The answer to an implied question whether humanity has arrived at, or is even approaching, such a moment is that the *comptes*, the balance sheet of ecological symbiosis may be right in the speaker's fictional *Domaine*, "Tu sais qu'au moins/Tes comptes seront justes" (*D*, 125). However, in the real world the "comptes" are far from being "justes" and humankind is a long way short of the target. The image of the open "creux de la main" is the fourth time that the paradigm of the open hand is found in Guillevic's poetry in the work of this thesis and again it signifies the paradox of the ecological symbiosis between mankind and the remainder of the material world. The man, who wanted to have the bird and the joy it stood for, killed the bird by closing his hand over it, so that he found that

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pourrait trouver une solution illusoire: le fantasme d'illimitation, le désir d'éclatement de l'espace, de sa disparition-dissolution" (Gleize 1983: 215). However, he recognizes that Guillevic does not go so far by retaining objects that mark limits or provide points of focus for

the only way to have the bird was by not having it (T. 91, 92). In a poem about a rabbit caught in a snare the animal is freed by a man who lets it go by opening his hands, which are not made "pour contenir" (T. 111). In another poem humanity failed to open its hands containing air and to offer it to the birds, thus missing a chance of symbiosis with the material world (T. 151). Finally, in *Du Domaine* the human hand, even when open, is still feared by wild birds, which have good reasons for not trusting people. The image of the open and closed hand, signifying openness against closure, is of fundamental importance in *Du Domaine*, and in Guillevic's work leading up to that poem, for his conception of harmonious ecological and human relations.

The dream-like, ideal ecological community of *Du Domaine* is brought to life by the language through which its constituent objects speak themselves. The poet is not the author of their "language", but a *porte-parole* who encodes into poetic discourse their "speech" and their actions and who becomes a *régisseur* of a script that he turns into the final poetic *représentation*. The word *régisseur* has a meaning here of a theatre stage manager, or assistant director in cinema and television. As *régisseur* Guillevic recognizes the desire and individual autonomy of the material objects of the domain, and without dominating, encourages them to assert and speak themselves. The essence of such an approach is a withdrawal from the discourse of the speaking subject, represented by *je*, *toi*, or implied, except on the rare occasions when the topic of the discourse is the speaker's own experience of alienation., or his ideology.

The forging of thingspeak, of letting objects of materiality speak themselves, has always been an element of Guillevic's poetic discourse, but in *Du Domaine* it is the main means of representation of the poet's vision of ecological harmony. This vision, as in *Carnac*, is situated on the land while the water of the *étang*, which is related to the sea, remains a recalcitrant element that poses a threat more to the speaker's psychological equilibrium than to that

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eyes: "Les haies, limites, frontières sont donc nécessaires à la constitution du domaine" (*ibid.*:216).

of the Domain. The speaker's ecological vision is reformulated in *Du Domaine* by an increased emphasis on the role of the land, on the discourse of the material objects and by a small abating of his fear of the *mer/mère*. In the historical progression of Guillevic's poetry these developments constitute a major metaphoric shift away from the experience of alienation which is an alienation of language: a fixity in terrifying metaphor of a single meaning; an impossibility of signifying otherwise.

## MAINTENANT

### Time, death and alienation

*Maintenant*, which was written when Guillevic was over 80 years old, is an introspective summing up and bringing to completion of his poetic work in the face of approaching death. The theme of alienation, so powerful in *Terraqué* and founded in the relationship with the mother, is still at work here in the relationship between the poet, addressing himself as another, as "tu", and the world. However, the poetic performance, the transformation of alienation into an *adhésion*, being with and in the world, is more powerful still. Guillevic transforms his fear of death by forging a vision of his poetry as transcending time to acquire a quality of immortality. In *Carnac* and *Du Domaine* the poet had transformed his fear of materiality and death to some degree, but the fear of obliteration of his individual self in death remained. In the *quanta*, that constitute this poem he opens himself to materiality and death and formulates a final vision of death and immortality. This vision is that opening himself to physical death is an essential part of living fully, of a lived life, which gives meaning to death, and that his individual self will not be obliterated, but will become immortalized in his poetry. The term "maintenant" appears four times in the course of the poem, changing from an adverb with disturbing connotations of imminent death to a final noun which figures a vision of integration of life and death into a meaningful unity. Its antecedent is introduced in *Du Domaine* as a magic moment of eternity in a present moment: "C'est maintenant, / L'éternité" (*D*, 96), which for Guillevic means an experience of ecological harmony and fullness of life without the fear of death. He illustrates such an attitude of fearless acceptance of death by an anecdote about his meeting an old peasant, le père Vacher, who serenely lived a full life in *maintenant*:

Cet homme était une joie pour lui et pour les autres. Il devait sentir que la gloire pour un homme c'est de pouvoir se dire, non par désespoir ni par forfanterie, mais vraiment au plus fort de son être: maintenant la mort peut venir, je ne regrette rien. (*VP*, 196)

This readiness to open oneself to death, of acceptance of it as a positive part of full life, is what *Maintenant* works towards achieving.

*Maintenant* is formally divided into three parts. In Part I the attention of the speaker is largely focused on time, eternity, and his continuing alienation from materiality. He feels closed onto himself, unable to open himself to materiality – that of the outside world as well as his own – because it contains death and sex that he fears, and yet desires to embrace. He finds the nature of time and eternity difficult to grasp and attempts to symbolize them by a metaphoric construct.

Un jour,  
Devant l'océan

Tu as vu le temps  
S'avaler lui-même,

Devenir azur. (*Mt*, 42)

The speaker constructs in this quantum magic moment of timelessness that has the appearance of eternity. At that moment, time, which is represented by the ocean, stopped running by swallowing itself, but it was an experience that occurred to the speaker only once, "Un jour". At other times, time is the agent of death that swallows everything and everyone on earth, and the sea is closely associated with time. To some degree, the sea is a metaphor for time because of its vastness, its antiquity, the regular movements of its tides and its being an agent of death and destruction. By sometimes assuming the blue colour of the sky the sea may give the impression of acquiring its eternity, but the sea remains for Guillevic an ambiguous element of the material world. Compared to the sea, the sky, "azur", is immaterial and its eternity is absolute, not



depending on human perception of "Tu as vu". On such a literal level the sea remains subject to time and the speaker's perception that it attained momentarily the eternity of the sky. "Devenir azur", is an illusion. However, on a figurative level, the vision of eternity is a poetic construct, which is perceived and accepted as metaphorically valid by an audience, a witness - "Tu as vu". It is a metaphoric vision of a possibility of life on earth opening itself to eternity and immortality. The two levels of perception constitute a paradox inherent in the historical evolution of Guillevic's poetry. He is afraid of death, but spiritual transcendence is unacceptable to him, yet he also desires some form of immortality for his individual self. The argument of this poem hinges on human perception, "Tu as vu", and it foreshadows the concluding argument of *Maintenant* that the speaker's immortality has been achieved by recognition of the permanent value of his poetic work by his reading public, his audience, because they have perceived it as such: *Ils ont vu*.

The speaker finds that he shares the horror of death with animals, like the cock of the following text, but that he cannot express it as powerfully as does the raucous crowing of the cock. He refuses to accept that the bird has access to any sources, sinister or benign, which he himself would not have yet he has to accept that it somehow has that access.

L'oeil du coq n'a pourtant pas  
Pénétré là où tu n'as pas accès,

Pour ainsi crier  
A déchirer la nuit.

Alors, d'où vient ce cri,  
Ce pouvoir, cet autre langage?

Avec rien le coq ne fait amitié,  
Au fond d'aucun abîme il ne descend,

Aucun noir opaque  
Ne lui a délégué ses pouvoirs,

Ni le soleil que toutes les nuits  
Il provoque. (Mt, 50)

The speaker finds it impossible to symbolize death, "la nuit" and "noir opaque", and his horror of it, at least not as powerfully as does a cock, which crows against the night. The text repeatedly denies the cock any possibility of a human or an extra-human source of knowledge and the possibility of such power "Pour ainsi crier/A déchirer la nuit". Yet, "pourtant", the existence of such power and the cock's possession of it, are accepted by the speaker of the text. The cry has a strident quality that seems to tear open the quiet of the night, while figuratively the cry tears open the unspeakable fear of the closed dimension of horror in which death operates. The speaker is mystified about the source of the cock's language and astounded that the cock has found it at all, "Alors, d'où vient ce cri,/Ce pouvoir, cet autre langage?", which he himself cannot find in himself to produce. He is stunned by the otherness of the screech that comes from the domain of death and is driven both by the fear of death, a refusal of it, and a challenge to it in the bird's cry that tears open the night/death to a new day and to life.

The speaker's stupefaction by the cock's superhuman grasp of the horror of death is suggested by his addressing himself as another person, "tu", who might be able to provide an answer. His incredulity is represented through seven negative statements that repeatedly deny the possibility of the animal's understanding or having access to a source that he poet would not have himself been able to draw on: "L'oeil du coq n'a pourtant pas/Pénétré là où tu n'as pas accès". Four possible sources of the cock's access to otherness that animates his cry are rejected by syntactic negation. Three of these denials are figures of death: the bird is not familiar or friendly with "rien", nothingness itself, it does not descend to the bottom of any abyss of secret, hidden knowledge and no impenetrable, "opaque", sinister blackness of death has passed onto it its powers. Nor was the cock granted such powers by their opposite, the sun, the symbol of life, which the cock provokes to make it rise by stridently tearing the

blackness of the night with its cry for opening towards life and against closure by death. The answer to the question where "ce cri,/Ce pouvoir, cet autre langage" come from, is implied in the poem as a whole. With the four possible sources eliminated, this cry of passionate protest against closure and death can only come from the knowledge imbedded in the materiality of the animal itself. The cry rises from the depths in which the life instinct is etched "au noir des chairs" (*T.* 48), rejecting total obliteration by death and demanding some form of immortality.

### Exclusion and performance

The speaker of the following quantum has a feeling of not being fully part of the material world, which he observes and represents in his poetic performance. He admires the erotic force that drives the world of materiality, but feels excluded from its operation and condemned to a life of observer and poetic performer.

Je ne sais rien  
Mais je vois et j'entends.

J'entends l'arbuste  
Clamer sa volonté de grandir,

J'entends la grenouille  
Dire sa joie de batifoler  
Au bord d'une mare bienveillante,

Je vois la cuillère  
Attendre que l'on s'en serve,

Je vois la goéland  
Se refuser la plaine,

J'entends le chien  
Se réjouir du jour.

Je me vois en piste.  
Toujours. (Mt. 27)

This text is structured on the opposition of two notions of knowing – *savoir vivre* and *savoir faire*. The speaker observes and records the enjoyment of animals and objects driven by the erotic force of materiality to engage in their natural functions. He knows by reasoning what they do and why, but he does not experience anything of that erotic force that drives them and does not know how to open himself to materiality like them. In that sense he can say “Je ne sais rien”. On the other hand, the metaphor of the “piste” points to his poetic performance, his skill and his knowing of writing poetry, which are in a way a refuge from the ignorance of the erotic knowing. The repeated “Je” of the text is his self, which is dissociated from both the erotic knowing and his performance, and comments on them. This self is clearly on the side of the erotic knowing because it represents them as pleasurable natural activities enjoyed by the objects of materiality. The frog expresses “sa joie de batifoler” and this lovely word comes from the Italian word *battifolle*, “boulevard où les jeunes gens s’amusaient” (*Petit Robert*) by frolicking and flirting. What the dog does, is “Se réjouir du jour” and there is joy implied in the activities of the bush, the seagull and the spoon. The tenseless character of the infinitives renders their joy and contentment a permanent state of their existence. They are open to the *jouissance* of the material world and live in harmony with it.

The speaker’s “Je ne sais rien”, literally means “I know no thing[s]”<sup>1</sup>. The objects of materiality are closed to him because he knows nothing about the erotic mainsprings of their opening to materiality and its joys. His depiction of the joys of materiality betrays a desire to participate in them as the objects do, but this involves him in a paradox. So far he could write his poetry of desire to know and to participate only by not participating and remaining closed to the erotic force of his own life. Now he is attempting to transform

<sup>1</sup> According to the *Petit Robert* the word *rien* was still used in 16th century to mean *chose*.

that closure through repeated poetic performance that gradually deterritorializes it towards opening.

The performance is indicated by the line "Je me vois en piste," while "Toujours" has two meanings. The speaker still does it now after years of writing poetry and he performs all the time. Wanting to participate fully in the life of materiality, but not knowing how, he is driven by the desire of the other of his divided self, passing through temporary plateaux of partial insights into the transformation process, but never achieving the transformation itself. The word "piste" and the implied homophonic infinitives "(ne) savoir" to "se voir", which underlie and link the beginning and the end from "Je ne sais" to "Je me vois", both indicate that his language performance moves in a circular path. The repeated "Je" and the alternating "voir" and "entendre" serve as signposts of the circular movement. The "piste" is suggestive of a circus ring or a dance floor and represents a form of constraint or closure, though not a complete one. Going round a "piste" limits his freedom to a certain degree as he is driven by his desire for transformation which makes him *dire et redire*. The constraining and repetitive routine of the circular progression imparts a certain obsessive quality to his poetic performance and its search for transformation. The circularity of the ring indicates that the performance has to be repeated with each new sensory impression of the outside world. This activity may be perceived as a ritual by which the poet attempts to renew his membership of the material world. As the membership is never permanent, the ritual has to be constantly repeated.

The notion of the "piste" as a circus ring has a disagreeable side of tawdry, repetitive routine of the performance, of audience seeking cheap sadistic thrills and of the experience of sweat and dirt of performers and animals. The atmosphere of dirt may figure the poet's past, sullied by the rejection and sadistic treatment of him in childhood by the mother. The "piste" also evokes the partly homophonous word *pitre*, a traditional performer in the circus ring. A *pitre sur la piste* is an awkward figure with a sad face, gaudy costume and make-up, who by slapstick humour of his apparent clumsiness

draws attention to his misfortunes. Similarly, the speaker draws attention to himself by the apparent clumsiness of the syntax of the poem, whose monotonous repetition of "Je vois" and "J'entends" on a semantic level, comes to represent ignorance and inadequacy. Both the clown and the poet are out of place in the so-called "normal" world, both being on the edge of life, which dominates them. The clown is a figure of archaic disorder and chaos underlying the "normal" world of the spectators, whose life often has insecure foundations. Both he and the poet communicate to their audience the existence of the chaotic domain, which the spectators have repressed within them, but which never ceases its struggle to repossess their lives. The clown becomes an implied symbol of their alienation whose origins are in past acts of repression, which were unspoken and have become unspeakable. The poet's bond with the audience and the challenging work in and on language tend to shift him gradually away from alienation and chaos, and provide some satisfaction to his work on the *piste*. He progresses from his feeling of inadequacy in "Je ne sais rien" to "Je me vois en piste", which is still to some degree a closure because he has not yet fully opened himself to materiality. However, he has gained a more positive view of himself as a poet/performer who fashions his performance to deterritorialize that closure further towards possibilities of opening.

In the following quantum the speaker declares that he wants to become one with the objects of materiality, but is disappointed that in spite of his poetic effort of fifty years there still remains a "hiatus" between them.

Choses de la terre,  
Du ciel, de l'océan,

Je veux vivre avec vous,  
Je veux être vous

Tout en me centrant  
Sur ce que je crois être moi.

Ainsi, nous allons  
A travers l'espace et le temps,

Mais attaqués  
Par cette espèce de hiatus

Qui toujours est là  
Pour nous séparer

Comme si c'était mal  
Ce qu'avec vous je fais -

Avec toi, montagne,  
Avec toi, fourmi. (Mt, 28)

The speaker's desire of becoming part of the material world, is stated here in transparent and unambiguous terms: "Je veux vivre avec vous,/Je veux être vous". This is a temptation of fusing with materiality and embracing its multiplicity of experiences, a temptation that he rejects immediately after formulating it because such a fusion means death and obliteration of his individual self. The rejection is in the insistence on his preserving and retaining as the centre of his life his individual self: "Tout en me centrant/Sur ce que je crois être moi". Consequently, he and the objects advance, "Ainsi, nous allons", but remain separate because there is a barrier, a "hiatus", between them, "Mais attaqués/Par cette espèce de hiatus". The gap comes from the insistence on "moi", which assigns "vous" the role of the other, thus creating an opposition between the self and the material world, which the objects constitute. The speaker feels responsible for this failure and guilty of betraying materiality, including his own, by repressing it, "Comme si c'était mal/Ce qu'avec vous je fais -". He is caught in a fundamental opposition between his desire of the multiplicity of materiality and of the rational and individual self as the subject of language. His self has a centre developing in a tree-like linearity while material objects exist in multiplicity and grow in a rhizomic fashion in all directions: "Les multiplicités sont rhizomatiques, et dénoncent les pseudo-multiplicités arborescentes" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 14). The speaker's experience of this opposition is also fundamental to the main argument of the

poetry of *Maintenant*. At this stage of the argument the contradiction between embracing materiality and preserving individual self remains unresolved, but the four texts discussed so far foreshadow a resolution through language. The speaker will recognize the autonomy of the objects and will let them speak themselves. He will open himself to them, share their experience, and by representing them in his poetic discourse, in which he will, by speaking himself, preserve and immortalize the essential features of his individual self.

### Memory of the mother

Time is an essential dimension of *Maintenant* and time begins to run in the speaker's childhood. In a quantum that hints at erotic violence the speaker attempts to find a way to make the time that has passed since his childhood break the silence that dominates that period of his life.

On s'enfonce.

On s'enfonce dans ce

Qui n'a pas de corps,

Ne laisse pas remonter  
Celui qu'il englobe.

On s'enfonce dans ce  
Qui n'a pas de paroi,  
Ni de fond.

On s'enfonce dans le temps. (*Mt*, 14)

The impersonal pronominal structure "On s'enfonce", may point to the speaker's experience as *Je m'enfonce*, or to a collective experience of *nous nous enfonce*, which includes the speaker, who hides unease or shame to come openly forward. *S'enfoncer* may imply agency – deliberate penetration – and absence thereof – sinking in, being engulfed by. If the speaker here tries to



penetrate time, he is engulfed by it. The immaterial attributes of time are represented throughout the poem by negation as lack, as something that is difficult to symbolize: it has no body, walls or bottom, and it is named only in the last line. "On s'enforce" not only implies agency, it also has connotations of sexual penetration, which suggests that the speaker attempts to possess time, to penetrate it, going back to the past and moving forward to the future. But the secrets of the past are what takes agency from the speaker, what engulfs and overcomes him. The word "englobe" was used in *Carnac* to represent the action of the poet's mother who was figured as a seagull that took over, or swallowed, or gobbled up, his childhood (C, 37). In this poem it points to a state of erotic entrapment of the speaker, both as a child and an adult, from which there is no release. This emotional desolation is represented by an image of nightmarish erotic emptiness defined as a formless void: "Qui n'a pas de paroi, / Ni de fond". The time of his childhood was that of emotional rejection by his mother, an experience too painful for him to bring to the conscious mind, so that he finds himself now, as an adult, emotionally trapped in time as a meaningless, silent void, unable to go forward.

In the previous quantum and in the last three quanta of Part I, the speaker draws on, and recapitulates, the bitterness of his childhood alienation from the mother. They represent the persistence of his remaining a child in the man, which is a condition that he now struggles to transform. In the following quantum his bitterness drives him as far as rejection of the natural world:

Il y a des jours  
Où l'on a envie  
De griffer le monde -

Et tant pis pour le soleil!  
Tant pis pour l'océan!

Crie cet enfant  
Toujours en toi.

(Mt, 61)

What suddenly wells out here is a terrible resentment and hatred of the world, spoken by the speaker in his old age in the present tense, "Il y a des jours/Où l'on a envie". Such an outpouring of pent-up negative emotion is totally contrary to his ecological and erotic conception of life and its source is given in lines: "Crie cet enfant/Toujours en toi." The emotional hurt suffered in childhood still and always - "Toujours" - keeps its hold on the adult. Who speaks here is "the child that is in man" (Freud 1962: 63), whose painful experience still agitates the adult speaker who shouts defiance at the world in a moment of frustration and spite.

The following text is simply a continuation and an emphatic confirmation of the preceding one:

L'enfance,  
Oui,

Celle qui t'accompagne.  
L'enfance que tu es. (Mt, 62)

Here is a recognition that the traumatic experiences of the speaker's childhood have never been forgotten and accompany him into adulthood. But the last line goes further by claiming that the experiences define him by making him what he is now. This reconstruction of himself as a product of his childhood is explicit here and the condensed, lapidary power of this poem is compelling evidence of the persistence of the past trauma. The present can be reduced to the past.

The notion of "maintenant" appears for the first time in the last poem of Part I, suggesting that the present can still be dominated by unpleasant memories of the past.

Encore maintenant  
Tu vois la lune  
Te regarder comme si

Elle enviait ton oeuf  
 Dans ton coquetier. (Mt. 63)

The moon belongs to the domain of dead, inorganic cosmic forces and is not only barren and dead, but it is also a symbol of female sexuality and therefore represents his mother to the speaker. He feels that the moon watches him and spies on him as his mother did, "Tu vois la lune/Te regarder, and that it is still happening now, "Encore maintenant". The cold, unblinking stare of the dead moon brings back and magnifies, now in his old age, her rejection of him as a male child, still posing a threat to his masculinity and to his emotional life. This spectre of the past still haunts him "maintenant" as the symbol of castration and death.

The cold stare of the barren moon, and of the emotionally barren mother, looks at him "[...] comme si/Elle enviait ton oeuf/Dans ton coquetier", that is as if it envied him his masculinity and his erotic, poetic fertility, and thereby was threatening him with castration and death. An egg in an eggcup may be food, but to the speaker it is an image of castration: it is decapitated to be eaten. He fears that castration which is symbolic: loss of the fertility of his poetic imagination and his language, which for him will eventually be the means by which he will be able to come to terms with his physical death. This quantum recalls the mother figure of previous texts such as "Mère aux larmes brûlantes, l'homme fut chassé de vous - "(T, 45), the mother as a hater of men and even her own man child, the mother Guillevic recalls in his interviews: "Ma mère était une mère bourreau, castratrice comme on dit aujourd'hui, [...]" (CP, 23). The expression "comme si/Elle enviait" is a significant extension of the "Mère aux larmes brûlantes" poem, by the introduction of the notion of penis envy as the mother's motive for hating him and men.

Some of the preceding quanta revive bitter memories and resentments of childhood and the speaker clearly states that his childhood experience is still alive in him. These texts demonstrate that the historical progress of Guillevic's

poetry did not follow a straight and smooth path forward, but was marked by setbacks and reversals almost to the end.

### From closure towards opening

The first poem of Part II contains the speaker's growing awareness of his secluded existence and limited participation in the infinite, open world that lies outside his experience.

Peux-tu jurer  
Que toujours

Tu préfères  
Le fini à l'infini?

L'infini  
C'est toi dans tout  
Ce que tu n'es pas. (Mt, 67)

Underlying this poem is the notion of knowing, *savoir*, which has for the speaker two different meanings. First, it means knowledge of his personal life in the urban world of culture, his "chambre en ville" (Mt, 69), life which he knows and is content with. It is a world which is "Le fini", that is limited, closed off from the vastness and multiplicity of materiality that lies outside the speaker, which is "L'infini", but which extends into his own materiality. He admits in another poem that about this other, infinite material world he knows nothing, "Je ne sais rien" (Mt, 27), except that it contains sex and death. But he now begins to have doubts about his old preference for the closed world of the "fini" because the infinite and the multiple are really him as a wider and richer self in everything that at this time his closed self is not.

The argument of the previous quantum is taken up and advanced by the speaker in the following text, in which he feels that his closed and finite urban existence is in opposition to the open world of nature. However, he also discovers that the tangible world of the objects of nature has entered him and drives him towards opening himself to them.

Dans cette chambre en ville

Rien  
Ne rappelle quelque nature  
Que ce soit.

- Mais si, mais si:  
Il y a toi.

Qu'est-ce que tu es,  
Sinon nature?

Plein comme elle  
De courants dans tous les sens. (*Mt*, 69)

In his room in the city, an image that stands for closure, the speaker finds that nothing there whatever reminds him of any trace of nature. His life there is one of urban culture, which is unlike participation in nature, so that he is not "Plein comme elle". However, he is invaded by the awareness of unknown, concrete objects of nature that have entered him and are breaking up his isolation from the outside material world. This makes him arrive with a start at a surprising realization, " - Mais si, mais si", that he himself actually is nature. He really belongs to those objects of nature, which means that up to then he has been alienated from materiality. This realization generates a desire to abandon life of closure and embrace or open himself to the "courants", which he finds running not only in nature, but also in himself. What the currents represent is the opening and multiplicity, "dans tous les sens", of endless possibilities for him of a fuller life in harmony with materiality. However, such life in materiality will also come to mean opening himself to death.

The main argument of *Maintenant*, which aims at opening oneself to death contained in materiality and gain immortality through poetry, advances gradually. The following quantum is a step towards the main aim, which reveals the awareness of the speaker of an opposition within him of forces against and for opening.

Tu as un corps  
Qui se veut fermé sur lui-même

Et toi  
Tu ne demandes qu'à t'ouvrir. (Mt, 78)

The terms of closure and opening are in this quantum stated explicitly as "fermé" and "ouvrir", not only indirectly as "fini" and "infini". The desire of the speaker to open his conscious self, his "toi", to life in materiality, which contains death, is stated unambiguously: "Et toi /Tu ne demande qu'à t'ouvrir". This desire is opposed by his body, "Tu as un corps", which opposes the opening, "Qui se veut fermé sur lui même" because it fears death. The fear is quite justified because the living "corps" contains already another *corps*, a corpse that cannot share the desired immortality.

In the following quantum the stability of the speaker's world is that of closure and its trembling and shaking, in which he has begun to participate, mean that he has begun to reject closure in favour of the openness and multiplicity of materiality.

Tu vis dans un monde  
Où règne

Dans ses profondeurs  
La stabilité,

Mais tu le sens menacé  
De basculer

Dans un ensemble  
Dont quelque chose en toi

Fait déjà partie -  
Et dont tu ne sais rien

Que ce qui ressemble  
A du tremblement. (Mt, 88)

The speaker's world, which has been created by his poetic discourse, is a place and a state of mind of "stabilité", that is of closure. Moreover the stability "règne", meaning that it dominates the world, that it is enforced and does not come spontaneously. It further means that it has been achieved at the cost of exclusion of other possibilities of the wider world of materiality and of exclusion of the speaker himself from that material world. Domination also means closing off of the person who reigns, in this case of the speaker as speaking subject, from multiple poetic sources of expression. The speaker's closed world and his poetry has been stable, but now – *maintenant* is implied here - he senses that the outside, open world of materiality both threatens and promises to irrupt into that closed world by an act of "effraction" (*Mt*, 184) and threatens to topple it over, "Mais tu le sens menacé/De basculer". But it is not only the outside forces of materiality that are a threat. They operate "Dans un ensemble", to which belongs even something of himself, "quelque chose en toi", which is attracted to the multiplicity of the objects of materiality outside the gates and their offer of infinitely opening experience. He claims that this erotic experience has been closed to him, "Et dont tu ne sais rien", even though he knows that it exists in materiality, and that his creative drive that demolishes and rebuilds needs to be enriched by such opening. His desire of this experience is then the "quelque chose en toi" that has already joined, "Fait déjà partie", the "ensemble" of the forces causing something "qui ressemble/A du tremblement", which is destroying his closed world and is opening it up.

This quantum reveals a certain anxiety caused by the "tremblement", and while its negative sense of shaking the foundations may be a threat, there are two other, more positive meanings. One is shivering with erotic excitement and the other is trembling with awe before some phenomenon of grave importance. Both of these meanings are relevant to the poet's expectation of the coming of *maintenant*, which is viewed both as a threat and a promise and forces the speaker to review his life and his work with some kind of finality because he has to do it in the face of death. By this new approach he will accept relations with materiality on equal terms, but he has to work it out through his

poetry as a new personal, ecological accommodation that will include reconciliation with the mother, acceptance of death and a complete recognition of materiality through thingspeak.

The fears and excitement caused by the "tremblement" are communicated to the world around the speaker. When he sees the trembling of a leaf of a hazel tree, he wonders whether it is a result "De son tremblement intérieur," or whether it is not the poet's own trembling that seizes the leaf: "Ton tremblement/Qui la saisit" (*Mt*, 89). The new and final relation to materiality will be made to hold together, that is, *tenir* or *maintenir*, as against "basculer" and "trembler". *Maintenir* signifies here one of the meanings of *maintenant* and leads to its Latin origin of *manu tenere*, which in turn is a reminder that Guillevic wrote his poetry by hand. He believed that his poetry was a "thing", a physical product of his mind, and that, as a finished product, it should hold together, *tenir*, as well as a piece of furniture crafted by a cabinet maker.

The word *maintenant* does not appear in Part II, but the notion of death as darkness does. There are references to "le noir" (*Mt*, 73), "les ténèbres" (*Mt*, 111), "nocturne", "la nuit", "la lune" (*Mt*, 123, 124). A very long quantum depicts a blackbird which, being itself black, defies the moon and the night by singing.

Alors le merle éclate  
Et la lune apparaît.

Elle s'étonne et voudrait  
Taïre sa nocturne lumière  
Sur l'étendue des prés,

[...]

C'est donc pour la défier  
Qu'il vient,



[...]

(Mt, 123)

The blackbird's blackness dazzles or overwhelms the dead, dark planet, the moon, "L'éclabousse", and the moon would like to cover and silence the expanse of meadows by the silence of its borrowed light, "Taire sa nocturne lumière/Sur l'étendue des prés". The meadows represent erotic growth and life and the bird sings at an unusual time to defy the moon, which is the messenger of closure and death, to show that he is master of light and life both at night and during the day. Like the cock in Part I (Mt, 50) the blackbird tears open the darkness of the night, albeit more gently than the cock, as a gesture against closure and death and in favour of opening and life. In the final analysis, the singing of both birds figures the poet's writing, his work in and on language, which contests closure and strives for opening life to the "infini" of its possibilities.

### Language

The joy of creation by language is not only the essential means by which to liberate material objects from human oppression, but it is also the *jouissance* through which the poet can attain and preserve his poetic and human identity in the world of nature, of appearances, and above all in the domain of poetry.

Je ne suis pas là  
Où vous croyez me voir,  
Pas là où vous me cherchez.

Ailleurs - mais où?

Je me cherche moi-même  
Dans le domaine ouvert et fermé

Du mot qui conviendrait,

Du mot juste, du juste mot.

(*Mt*, 91)

These lines are the poet's profession of the importance of language for him. His physical self is not his real identity, and people who think so are deceived. He is always elsewhere because he does not fully exist in the sense that he is not complete and closed, not "fermé", because through language he keeps creating, changing and opening himself with every word he writes. Writing poetry and finding the right words for it constitutes his identity, which is not fixed and complete because he continues searching for the elusive "moi-même" in his poetic domain, the domain of language, which is for him both "ouvert et fermé". The domain is closed for him when it offers him words that repeat language, stale words of a "major language" which he does not want. But the same domain and the same words are also open if they are made serve him exactly for his purpose, and only the one word that is right, "Du mot juste", and no other. Such a word must also be "juste", a concise expression that concentrates meaning. It is on such language that Guillevic puts his personal stamp, by which he opens himself to build up his identity, "Je me cherche moi-même", and establishes his speech as *la langue mineure*. The process of opening himself through language constitutes and transforms his self so that it could finally accept death and transcend it through a poetic construct. Indeed the present self must always make way to a self beyond in language, a language appropriated but also handed on to other selves.

The idea of the speaker's poetic world of holding, "tenir", is made quite explicit in the following poem, in which the poet reveals how he goes about searching for the "mot juste" to achieve that aim.

Chaque mot a ses falaises  
C'est avec leur parois  
Que j'ai d'abord à faire.

Je découvre leurs entrailles  
Ou bien je les pénètre

Avec la complicité d'autres mots.

Quand je suis dedans,  
Le mot et moi, nous conversons.

Il m'aide, lui, à ressentir  
Comment tient le monde. (Mt, 94)

To find such a word is not easy and the poem is a *mode d'emploi*, a guide suggesting how to go about it. It is expressed in physical and erotic terms of "falaises", "parois" "entrailles" and penetration, which figure what is basically a linguistic search devoted to finding the right words, clarifying their meaning and engaging them in a meaningful way to serve the poet to construct his world and to stabilize it. The words have cliffs, "falaises", which have to be scaled to get down to them and their meaning, but they are hemmed in by "parois", walls built up by centuries of usage and distortion. These walls have to be dealt with first by uncovering their "entrailles" which, according to the *Petit Robert*, is "La partie la plus profonde, intime, essentielle". The walls have to be penetrated in an erotic action of joyful discovery by etymology and analogy - "Avec la complicité d'autres mots". When eventually the poet is on the other side of the walls, face to face with the word that is now clean and exact, the word speaks itself to him and he speaks himself to it: "nous conversons". This is not a social chat, but a dialogue in thingspeak, which helps the poet feel how the world that he is opening by his poetry holds together, "tient". The result is one of union, accord and satisfaction, all of them not far removed from the idea of erotic *jouissance*. Consequently the whole process of forming the discourse acquires a pleasantly erotic quality culminating in the idea of penetration: "Ou bien je les pénètre". This is not surprising because Guillevic claims that for him writing poetry is "Une façon de faire l'amour en somme [...]" (CP, 74), but the idea of the erotic nature of the poet's language goes further. The language is .. forged as an erotic instrument of life that takes away fear from death and becomes a messenger of immortality.

The speaker's desire to open himself to objects of materiality is brought about by his recognition of their autonomy and freedom from his control and intrusion as *régisser* and creator. The main step towards their freedom is letting them speak themselves in their own language, their thingspeak.

Tu parles toujours  
Au nom de l'arbre ou du merle.

Tu n'es  
Ni l'arbre, ni le merle.

Et si c'était eux  
Qui t'avaient fait à leur image?

Si c'était eux  
Qui étaient toi?

Alors écoute-toi  
Dans ce qu'ils disent,

Au monde,  
A toi. (Mt, 137)

This quantum reveals the speaker's humility that insists on his equality with material objects. The biblical phrase "fait à leur image?" implicitly admits that as poet and even *régisser* he has been dominating their creation and he now accepts the possibility that he himself might have been created by them to their image. It is a step to total equality with, or even superiority of, the material world. He has preached it, but did not practise it because he believed, with patronizing good intentions, that he must speak in their name: "Au nom de l'arbre ou du merle". There was too much of himself in his material discourse when he spoke for objects of nature. In the new relationship the speaker finds that he should listen to them because by doing so he would listen to himself in what they say.

The formation of the material language, the thingspeak, has progressed through three stages. First, the poet spoke on behalf of things, "au nom de",

then he spoke them or through them and finally, having recognized their autonomous existence, he withdraws from the discourse as much as possible and lets them speak themselves:

Lorsque l'on réussit  
Avec les mots,

Le jour lui-même  
Se parle. (Mt, 95)

This quantum depicts a state of harmony and quiet joy, which are a result of letting an object speak itself. The speaker acts as a dictionary that offers words suitable for the particular situation in which the object finds itself. The reflexive pronoun "[s]e" is here a direct object of "parle". The day itself speaks itself, in the sense of revealing itself in all its beauty.

Attaining the ideal state of fullness of life in ecological understanding and harmony is represented in the following poem as requiring some undefinable more than laborious work in and on language.

S'il n'y avait  
Qu'à creuser dans le noir,

S'il n'y avait  
Qu'à perforer

Pour arriver  
Où tout peut se lire,

Où la lumière elle-même  
Se raconte,

Parle  
De son avenir,

An avenir auquel  
Nous serions associés. (Mt, 73]

The two conditional phrases that open the text ask an implied question that becomes a statement - "What if it were only a matter of digging and drilling". "Creuser" and "perforer" suggest not only material work, but imply that strong obstacles and resistance have to be broken through by writing. Writing becomes a working through, a negative operation of breaking up of standing discourse - "effraction" - to reach another discourse of revelation. The obstacles are *parois* erected by discourse, but also the speaker's fear of death and of his erotic anxiety that separate him from the fullness of life, to which he aspires as he declared previously, "Et toi/Tu ne demandes qu'à t'ouvrir" (*Mt*, 78). "Creuser" and "perforer" are acts of "hollowing out" and "building up" of speech, less an erection of a known construct to be arrived at than a "discovery" of the unknown where light is not told but "Se raconte". "Se raconte" has the same structure as "Se parle" in the previous quantum. The light figures both opening and openness, understanding and wholeness of life in the future, "Un avenir auquel/Nous serions associés", that is one with which the speaker would become associated if, or when, he "fashions" (negatively) his language effectively to transcend the fact of death contained in *maintenant*.

### Reconciliation

In Part III of *Maintenant* many quanta give the impression that the speaker is saying farewell to what has been his world for over 50 years in preparation for the coming of *maintenant* and the physical death it contains. He is opening himself to the world of materiality on the basis of equality and provides them with as language by which they can speak themselves to him and to the world. Their thingspeak helps them establish their identity, which will free the speaker to attain personal integrity and sustain peace of mind in the face of the coming of death. Finally, healing the old emotional rupture with the mother changes their relationship to one of wholeness and harmony. The changes the poet undergoes are accompanied by a feeling of *jouissance* that

seems to put to rest the former anxieties of the poet's erotic drives and his fear of death, which he no longer conceives as permanent obliteration.

In his farewell to the material the poet expresses his ecological affinity with, and continuing affection for, his beloved plants, animals and minerals.

Petite fleur des champs -  
Mais pourquoi petite?

Nous avons les mêmes dimensions,  
Toi et moi,

Dans cette univers  
Qui nous écrase et nous exalte,

L'espace dont on ne sait  
S'il finit quelque part. (Mt, 145)

In his eyes a small field flower has the same stature in the universe as himself. Both he and the small flower appear to be in danger of being crushed by the enormity of the universe, but the same universe is infinite so that it allows them to open themselves to all the possibilities of growth.

The speaker now looks at the turtledove more positively than in *Du Domaine*, accepting her closeness to the "étang": "C'est pour être/Plus près des sources" (Mt, 155). Observing a bowl, he wonders, "Ce bol devant toi/Qu'est-ce qu'il veut?" and decides to express his affection to it with naive simplicity by declaring "Qu'il est ton compagnon,/Ton petit frère" (Mt, 144). He addresses a flower, "Cette fleur/Dont je caresse les pétales" (Mt, 164), which is not actually real because the poet admits to inventing it in his imagination. When it comes to stones, the poet just manages to restrain his desire to stroke them with tenderness.

..  
Tout ce que j'ai mis  
Comme tendresse

A ne pas vous caresser,

Pierres des chemins. (Mt, 167)

A new, serene mood of reconciliation imbues the latter part of *Maintenant* by the speaker's insistence on joy and his new attitude to material objects and language. A part of this benign vision is putting to rest the painful legacy of the mother-to-son destructive relationship of the past. He takes this step in three quanta in which the mother is represented in a peaceful and affectionate way through the symbol of the moon.

La lune  
Sort timidement  
De son bain diurne,

S'extasie de son accord  
Avec la cantique  
Interstellaire. (Mt, 170)

This rather beautiful poem is crafted with great precision and conciseness, which leave much unsaid, yet implied in the *blancs codés*. The moon used to be a rather noxious symbol of death and of the persecuting mother that was spying on the poet. The transformation of the moon in the speaker's mind occurs through three oxymorons. The first represents the moon as having a bath during the day and rising in the evening: "De son bain diurne". When it rises at dusk and begins to shine, it does so "timidly" as it slowly changes colour from pale, ethereal white to its full silver brilliance. Being in a bath means being naked, but the moon's nudity is invisible because it is covered by the light of the day. This striking oxymoron then allows the poet to lead to the implied idea that the moon then appears at night in the full blaze of its silver nudity, which he, however, does not explicitly say. This is Guillevic, and his thingspeak, at its best. Similarly the oxymoron of the last two lines of the quantum, "la cantique/Interstellaire", figures a religious hymn of absolute silence of the interstellar space. It extends the already cosmic setting of the moon further into



the infinite dimension of heavenly eternity. The religious element of heaven and eternity is suggested by the notion of the music of heavenly spheres in the word "cantique", which is a word from Guillevic's Catholic past, taking the discourse back to his childhood and to the mother. The moon/mother "S'extasie de son accord". She comes out, "ex", of her "[ac]cord/corps" and is ecstatic over being accepted in heaven as an equal, in "accord", with those already there chanting a heavenly "cantique" of welcome. That is something she always believed in and hoped would happen to her, and her son, whom she wronged so much, now forgives her and, without any trace of irony, quite sincerely, places her there. What the poem metaphorically achieves is to effect a reconciliation between mother and son by renewing between them the erotic link of affection, which had been broken in the past. By doing so the poet overcomes the closure that dominated his relationship to the mother and this opening of his disturbed mind brings it peace and balance. In the poetic discourse of this quantum, abstract words like "diurne", "cantique" and "Interstellaire" magically lift the language from its concrete level into a cosmic and spiritual dimension. At the same time the three oxymorons, which constitute the quantum, are evidence that the speaker's restored emotional and spiritual balance has been achieved over deep-seated divisions between opposing and contradictory drives and forces.

That it is a balance of mind that the poet is thinking about, is expressly stated in the second quantum which consists of only two lines: "La lenteur de la lune/Equilibre le monde" (*Mt*, 171). The majestic slowness of the movement of the moon provides a contrast to the implied agitation of conflicts that dominated the poet's psyche in the past, and embodies the idea of equilibrium which the moon/mother now offers to the world and to her son.

The third quantum looks at this new situation from the moon/mother's point of view by trying to represent her feelings.

Ce soir  
La lune est fière

Comme un tournesol  
Qui vient de s'ouvrir

Et s'étonne. (Mt, 173)

The moon/mother is proud of her new role and astonished at the change. An important point is made in the image likening her to a sunflower in the line "Qui vient de s'ouvrir". Her life was dominated by closure brought about by her narrow-mindedness, her resentments and inhibitions and it is only now (*maintenant*) that her son makes her do posthumously and figuratively what she should have done herself, that is open herself to life. Concluding peace with the mother is an important advance by the poet on his way to personal ecological integration so that he can face more confidently the last challenge, which is physical death.

### Facing "maintenant"

In the first quantum of Part III the poet gives notice of his readiness to face the coming of "maintenant" alone, "Seuls affrontent le jour", like a heroic legendary figure, "Ceux qui vivent/Leur légende" (Mt, 133). He considers himself one of those who live their life by forging it, by language in his case, as a legend and now, *maintenant*, faces the day in which life, fate, the world, and death, come together. The word "légende" implies that such heroes have been kept immortal by being maintained, *maintenus*, by language as oral tradition.

The second quantum is even more explicit and more personal as the poet addresses himself as "tu":

A ton réveil

Tu découvres  
Que le jour existe,

Qu'il va falloir  
Que tu retrouves tes dimensions.

Que tu les dépasses. (Mt, 134)

"Réveil" literally means that the great day is a reality, not just a dream, but it is also a metaphor for one of the meanings of "maintenant", which is the moment of awakening to the speaker's heroic destiny in which he has to surpass his dimensions of an ordinary man. This awakening carries with it a series of challenges to be accepted and acted on, which are made emphatic by the four repetitions of the conjunction "que", providing a powerful sound and syntactic backing that hammers out the poet's resolve. There is a syntactic shift in the poem from the first two nominal clauses, "Que le jour existe" and "Qu'il va falloir" which are statements of a fact, to the following two clauses in which the same conjunction introduces emphatic commands/obligations. The repetition of the conjunction establishes a rising intensity of the imperatives, whose climax is then grammatically reached by the formal force of the subjunctives in the last two clauses. The metaphoric structure of the quantum begins with "réveil" which links it with the idea of "le jour" of the preceding quantum and of this one. Here "le jour" acquires the meaning of a departure, for which the human resources and limitations of the speaker, "tes dimensions", have to be mustered. "Qu'il va falloir" insists that it must be done in the near future and that the dimensions have to be exceeded when death comes.

The speaker has now reached the imaginary state of being close to death in which he sees the death as bringing him one of two possibilities; on the one hand, a kind of transcendence of death and, on the other hand, a complete obliteration without a trace.

Maintenant vient  
La nuit, mais laquelle?

L'intérieur d'un fruit  
Ou le vide infini? (Mt, 161)

The first question of the second couplet introduces an intriguing, erotic image of "L'intérieur d'un fruit" signifying some form of transcendence, that is of continuing existence after death. Fruit, which is an outcome of sexual reproduction, represents life. It is a metaphorical antithesis of infinite emptiness, and its interior is poetically dense and rich as a signifier. First, "L'intérieur" is a form of metonymy (metalepsis) and stands for what it contains, which is darkness, that is another "nuit", containing the kernel or seed of the fruit. In this context "la nuit" no longer signifies death but the erotic darkness of the womb from which the seed will produce new life in the form a flower, which is a sexual organ of a plant, and in turn new fruit. The implied kernel, a symbol of fertility, is then another metonymy, this time for the implied fruit it will generate. This new fruit, still only imaginary, becomes in turn an erotic metaphor for the opening of new life in general and for continuous opening of the speaker's poetry. His poetry is something that will endure beyond his physical lifespan and bestow on him a kind of spiritual transcendence of death, or even immortality, which he has wrested from the forces of death so that his individuality and identity will be preserved and his total obliteration will be avoided.

The second question of the couplet asks if the speaker's fate is going to be total obliteration, "le vide infini", for him as a mere component of the material world. The question has already been answered before he even formulated it. In the phrase "le vide infini?" the word "infini" is an adjective that would make his obliteration, the "vide", absolute, which he rejects. What he really wants is *l'infini* itself, that is opening himself to the infiniteness of the world, which will be achieved through the image of the interior of a flower that will perpetually keep on producing fruit and flowers that will be opening

themselves to the world. The questions are addressed more to mankind in general, to people who are not poets, but whose lives may remain open after death through recognition of their achievements by others, or through the life of their children, who are their "L'intérieur d'un fruit". As a poet who is about to die the speaker has then figured his death as an experience which is no longer frightening, makes his life meaningful and one in which his poetry plays an important role.

### *Maintenant*

"Maintenant" was originally an adverb of time associated with rather menacing symbols like "la lune" and "la nuit". Eventually the word has acquired the syntactic ambiguity of being able to be read both as an adverb and a noun, which imparts it greater density and gravity. It happens for the first time in a quantum about the "tourterelle".

Tourterelle,  
Je crois comprendre  
Ce que tu dis.

Tu dis: dans le temps  
Maintenant  
C'est la présence. (Mt, 156)

The call of the dove is transposed into human speech as "[D]ans le temps/Maintenant/C'est la présence". The lines suggest that in the span of running time, "maintenant" is becoming a presence in the speaker's life and is not to be feared. This playful sequence has a light tone and repeated rhythmic pattern of the call of the dove, and can be read backwards and with its parts interchanged, like a magic incantation, without any effect on its sense. This possibility of dissolving syntactic constraints indicates the coming of

*maintenant* to the speaker as an altered awareness of time in which the past, the present and the future will irrupt into one moment of consciousness.

In the last two quanta "*maintenant*" appears clearly as a noun and its meaning has all those suggested above as well as some new ones.

Joie!

Maintenant est ici,  
Mais le saisir?

Pour le posséder,  
Échapper à la durée -

Plonger dans cette lueur  
Au plus profond du temps,

Dans cela qui paraît  
Être la racine du temps. (Mt, 183)

This quantum examines the relation of the presence of "*maintenant*", which is greeted with joy, to time itself, which is experienced as an unbearable "*durée*". The joyous, expected moment of insight has been reached, but its enormity is such that some doubts arise about seizing it, "*Mais le saisir?*" Three meanings of "*saisir*" can be distinguished here. One is that of understanding or recognizing it when it arrives, the second is the problem of grasping it and the third one is "*le posséder*", to hold on to it, *main tenir*, *manu tenere*. The aim of taking hold of the "*maintenant*" is for a purpose expressed by the preposition of purpose "*Pour*" and three infinitives that it introduces, two of them by implication: "*Pour le posséder*" "[pour] échapper" from the hard tyranny of time, "*la durée*", and "[pour] plonger" into the glow at the lowest level of time which appears to be its root. The word "*posséder*" suggests uninterrupted experience in time, rather than domination and *régner*, which would mean restriction and closure while the speaker desires that "*maintenant*" should lead to opening.

The notions of "*Joie!*", "*posséder*", and "*plonger*" are charged with erotic *jouissance* and energy that are going to deliver the speaker from the

position of closure of the "durée" that results in total obliteration. To plunge into "la racine du temps" means stopping time by eradicating it, and figuratively it means conquering time by an activity the effects of which are recognized as going beyond a person's death. For the speaker this is writing poetry which creates life that is timeless, that is beyond the domination of time. Timelessness opens a possibility of *l'infini*, the opposite of closure, which becomes a component of "maintenant". To attain this state of opening the speaker's syntax passes through five infinitives, "saisir", "posséder", "échapper", "plonger" and "être", whose lack of grammatical constraints means that they are eminently suited to represent what their name suggests: the openness of infinity. Being free of so many grammatical limitations, the infinitives metaphorically remove constraints and limitations from that fateful event of death inherent in "maintenant", and consequently help the poet represent it as an opening to the world.

In the last quantum of *Maintenant* nothing more is added to the notion of "maintenant", which is coming because the poet has attained a balanced frame of mind and is ready for the supreme encounter in which "maintenant" does not just come, but will implode into him.

- Qu'est-ce que tu attends  
A la fenêtre,  
Tout tendu on dirait,  
Vers quoi?

- Je n'attend rien.  
Je n'observe rien.  
Je vois sans regarder.

- Mais si tu attends,  
Tu attends quelque chose,  
Tu attends l'effraction en toi  
De maintenant. (Mt, 184)

This last quantum of the poem is in the form of a dialogue that the speaker holds with his other. First he asks himself what it is that he is straining towards

at the window, something he expects to come from the outside. The window is an opening on the world, symbolic of his opening himself to the world that contains life and death. The window signifies a hole in, or demolition of, the *paroi*, which was a wall in his mind that separated him from the fullness of the world and of life. The open, or transparent, window is the opposite of the *armoire* that was opaque and not open, and it signifies the end of the long journey leading from the *armoire* to the window. The speaker now knows that he has transformed his old pains and fears into poetry which will endure. To a question what it is that he is waiting for, he replies that he has emptied his mind of any conscious mental activity, that he does not wait, observe or look, but then his other insists that he does wait for something: "Mais si tu attends". The "si" either means "yes", you are waiting, because the speaker announced the coming of "maintenant" in preceding texts, or it means "if" you are waiting and the conditional sentence to follow assumes his waiting. The other refuses to consider to accept the possibility of his not waiting, but the speaker/subject has emptied his mind from conscious waiting for the "maintenant" because waiting, by desiring it, would pre-form it as object of desire. His waiting is not "anticipating", as it is in the conventional sense of the other, because he knows that he can wait for the "maintenant" only by not waiting for it. The "maintenant" will enter him by "l'effraction", which means by forced entry and breaking in, with connotations of rape, or imploding into a prepared emptiness with nothing to impede it and nothing to struggle against. The poet imagines that this is going to be his final experience, to be embraced by him at the hour of his death, experience which may resemble the euphoric mixture of *jouissance*, pain, insight and fulfilment reputedly experienced by mystics. Whatever it is going to be, it is his acceptance of the fullness of life that contains death.

*Maintenant* brings together the essential thematic threads of Guillevic's preceding poetic work, which draw on his experience both in the world and in his intimate world. The two orders of experience come now together in the poet's preoccupation with poetic forging of death not as complete obliteration



of individual consciousness, but rather as an entry into its permanent continuation, figured by the term *maintenant*. To prepare himself for this new order of being, the speaking subject must first put his fragmented self in order. He examines the role of language in representing death and eternity, and in his nagging desire to end his being closed to the material world and to open himself to it. He sets out ways to achieve such opening by creating a fresh poetic language and embracing materiality as an equal by letting material objects speak themselves in their own thingspeak, instead of imposing his speech on them. At a most intimate level, the bitterness of the emotional dereliction by the mother still invades the poem in Part I, but he cleanses and renews their relationship affectionately by a poetic *tour de force* in Part III. Finally, he defines his concept of immortality as a continued existence of his life's work and musters his strength and courage to escape the tyranny of time by setting the fullness of his life and poetry against the threatening closure of death.

## CONCLUSION

Guillevic's poetry is the site of a compelling struggle of the poet to re-create in his discourse a new vision of a world subjected to forces of alienation and dislocation. That world - both the material and the social world he lived in and his own intimate world that constituted him as an individual human being - is driven towards death. The beginning of Guillevic's poetic path in *Requiem* is marked by an obsession with the decay and death of plants and animals, which live a full life to die and be reborn again as a species. The poet cannot accept this cycle of life and death for himself because it would mean obliteration of his individual self, yet he cannot accept the alternative of the religious notion of transcendence of death either. Added to this impasse is his ambiguity about the erotic, which he observes with sympathy in the material world, but fears in himself. The subtext of his poetic performance reveals that he would like to take part in the erotic of the material world, but embracing materiality would mean accepting death.

His discourse reveals not only a material world driven by sex and death, both of which the speaking subject fears, but also his intimate world behind a façade of objective observation. His is an ambiguous world of the fear of death and the fear and desire of sex. It is also a world of a flawed relationship between the poet and his mother, whose emotional rejection of him in childhood he will struggle to overcome his whole life. The bleakness of the vision of the speaking subject appears to be unrelieved, but the implied metaphoric level of desire points towards life and marks a modest beginning of a shift towards the subject's re-creation of himself.

*Requiem* and *Terraqué* lay the foundation material of Guillevic's most intensive preoccupation with the experience of both the general and the personal alienation, with *Terraqué* far exceeding the former in pain, bitterness and despair while adding an element of sado-masochism. The speaking subject feels himself being rejected not only by the mother, but also being attacked by

the forces of material nature that demand his blood and death. The dominant bleak atmosphere of the two collections extends to the domain of ecology where much of such representation is arguably close to being a Deleuzian *calque*. Some texts, however, begin to construct a *carte* that initiates deterritorialization of the flawed experience towards other plateaux, different configurations or territorializations of both external and intimate worlds. The best example of such a poetic move is the poet's ecological argument figured by the imagery of the closed and open hand, which constitutes a major metaphoric shift in the poet's ecological vision.

The symbolism of the closed hand, for closure and death, and of the open hand, for opening of life and freedom, is one of the most important metaphors in *Terraqué* that signal the opening of the path out of despair and death towards life. Such images are among those that establish the path of the historical progression of Guillevic's poetry. It is a path forged in and on language, which is cleansed and renewed by the poet to be made meaningful, but it also contains repressed symbols of the unconscious that break into that speech and move it further towards full speech and transformation of repressed experience. The experience, which looms large in *Terraqué*, is the destructive mother to son relationship. The metaphoric representation of the pain and bitterness, which the emotional alienation between them generates, may provide some relief, but it does not result in a major shift towards reconciliation at this stage. The bitterness lingers right into *Maintenant*.

In *Carnac*, the poet's vision of himself in the world has undergone a substantial change. He no longer sees materiality embodied in the land as threatening and in a major metaphoric shift celebrates the multiplicity and diversity of its sensuous and sensual richness. The sea, nevertheless, remains an ambiguous and potentially hostile element, both literally in the reality of Breton life, and as a metaphoric representation of the mother as *mer/mère/marâtre*. In the intimate world of the speaking subject, this image continues to mar their relationship by accusation and recrimination, even though some shift away from the intensity of past hatred and bitterness has occurred. In the end a

limited beneficial aspect of the sea is grudgingly acknowledged by recognizing its wide openness that allows more light to penetrate to the darkness of the land (C. 93). The speaker finds himself locked out from understanding with the sea – “A la porte de l’océan” (C. 89) – but they keep talking – “Et parlant, parlant” (*ibid.*). That suggests a positive, albeit limited, movement towards reconciliation and integration of the whole material world.

The interaction of objects and natural forces in *Du Domaine* is marked by a relative absence of hostility and conflict indicating another step in the historical progression of Guillevic’s poetry towards a possibility of ecological symbiosis in the world and towards peace of his mind. The poet abandons authorial domination of the territory he has created by becoming an usufructuary and *régisseur*, granting the member objects of nature autonomy. They are free to act by themselves and speak themselves – *ils se parlent* – through their thingspeak to achieve ecological harmony. The poet becomes their *porte-parole* except when he takes up his *je* to confront the *étang* and the memory of the mother it represents for him. Even this still water – *l’eau morte* – reminds him of the remote sea and the threat it figures for his intimate world. This intrusion of menace from the past is a reminder of the persistence of his past experience but, on the whole, *Du Domaine* constitutes a positive metaphoric shift from ecological alienation towards cooperation and from closure to opening.

In *Maintenant* the speaking subject takes up again the struggle against closure and the fear of death, determined to achieve survival of his individual poetic consciousness after death. He is intrigued by time and eternity and draws on both his intimate world and on being in the world to try to open himself to materiality. The concepts of closure and opening are now figured as his feeling of belonging to the finite but wanting to join the infinite of the world. He approaches material objects as his equals encouraging them to speak themselves in their thingspeak. The bitterness of the alienation from the mother still frustrates his desire of openness in Part I of the poem, but he transforms it later by a metaphoric shift of his discourse from pain and dislocation to affection and

harmony. Finally, the speaker figuratively fashions his concept of immortality as a continued recognition of his poetic work after his death and becomes ready to open himself to death in the fullness of his life. He is able to wait for death with equanimity and without fear of total obliteration, and bring to conclusion both his autobiography, through which he has re-created himself, and the historical movement of his poetry from alienation and chaos to adhesion, contentment and order.

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