

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Guillevic, *Écrits intimes. Carnet, cahier, feuillets 1929-1938* (édition établie et présentée par Michaël Brophy)**  
(Strasbourg: *L'Atelier contemporain* (coll. *Littérature*), 2019) 139 pp.

Accounts of the artistic trajectory of the poet Guillevic (1907-1997) tend to focus on two key sites. That of his earliest recognised work, beginning with *Terraqué* published by Gallimard in 1942 – a work already situating the guillevician poetic subject in a quasi-cosmic entre-deux between land and sea; and the poetry published subsequent to a creative and personal crisis linked to his difficulties in marrying aesthetic and political engagements in the 1950s – a suite of mature and characteristic works beginning with *Carnac* (1961) which arguably extends across the remarkably consistent and fluid production of the following four decades, through *Possibles futurs* (1996) and into a series of posthumous collections.

Guillevic's characteristic minimalism seems so effortlessly adequate to his established poetic persona that it would be tempting to imagine it as having arrived somehow fully formed. His un-emphatic focus on the horizon of the real, approached through a poetics of good-humoured humility, bolsters this sense of a poetic voice both highly recognizable and, as it were, *allant de soi*. One cardinal virtue of this edition of 'écrits intimes' from the decade prior to Guillevic's emergence as a poetic figure is thus to give us a detailed and up-close view of a young intellectual processing a wide range of thoughts, interactions and tendencies proposed by the contemporary scene and his own unfolding life experience, in the search above all for (self-) understanding and self-expression. In his introduction to the volume, Michael Brophy characterizes Guillevic's intermittent practice of varieties of the *journal intime* in these years as a confrontation with self-doubt, which can be read retrospectively in relation to the major oeuvre ahead: '[cette forme d'écriture] est vouée à disparaître en aidant son auteur à surmonter le doute qui l'habite et à s'établir comme poète. Elle nous renvoie à une période capitale de germination et d'émergence qui, au prix d'une impitoyable lutte avec et contre soi-même, annonce

l'œuvre à venir' (7-8). Perhaps equally interesting, one could rejoinder, is the panorama the writings collected here open up of the 'roads not taken' in Guillevic's case – alongside glimpses of moments of breakthrough. As testimony to intense periods of discussion with others and lucid self-questioning, they provide a fascinating case study in the processes of poetic individuation which finished poetic work is often at pains either to minimize or reframe. While enriching our understanding of the established poet Guillevic subsequently became, they also repeatedly demonstrate the complex and occasionally oppressive effect the very figure of establishment can have on subjects still fully embroiled in the drama of their (possible) future symbolic emergence.

The first of the three ensembles here, the *Carnet du Val-de-Grâce* (kept from January 1929 to January 1930, during the writer's military service) opens in a manner which dramatizes this difficult surfeit of possibility: 'Faces multiples en moi, ai-je dit. Et aussi besoin d'activité en tous sens. Plusieurs vies en différents domaines pour satisfaire ce besoin d'activité, à quoi se rattache aussi mon besoin de conquête' (23). The second ensemble, the *Cahier* done over three weeks in August 1935, of comparable length but in a much more fragmented style and bordering more consistently into a form of poetic journal, testifies to a persistence of this oppressive multiplicity: 'Tant de choses travaillent, fermentent en moi. Et je ne peux encore leur donner forme.' (100). Remarkably, this statement on 31 August follows directly in the *Cahier* from what is arguably the present volume's central 'poetic' achievement, the text titled 'Van Gogh', dated 27 August 1935 – arguably in part an essay in projection/identification, with a focus on the destructive potential of the thwarted or unfulfilled creative impulse: 'Mais tu étais seul, ô puissant, / Avec ta rage – / et tu tournais sur toi / Comme ces corbeaux sur tes champs de blé.' (99). 'Van Gogh' was previously published by Brophy together with the third ensemble presented here as *Lieux communs suivi de Van Gogh* (VVV Éditions, Halifax N.S., 2006). The 'Feuillets' yielding these 'Lieux communs' are a series of loose pages, inscribed on both sides, assembled between 1935 and 1938, where Guillevic essays an axiomatic voice

recognizable in a variety of forms and instances throughout the later, established work.

The inclusion in this volume of facsimile reproductions of selected extracts from the *Carnet du Val-de-Grâce* and the *Cahier* significantly deepens our sense of the organic process of self-construction enacted in these documents. There is something both affectively resonant and textually appropriate in seeing the entries of the *Carnet* take form, in several different inks but with an unmistakably consistent energy in the hand, inside the margins of a ledger headed 'Déclarations reçues et constatations faites' and with 'Numéros des procès-verbaux / Analyse très sommaire' in the side heading. Six years later, the effect of the *Cahier*, written largely in pencil in a simple copy book, is more layered and hesitant; paragraphs of prose give way to overwritten and more broken text alongside sketches of objects and places, the facsimile concluding on the pages where 'Van Gogh' stands realized. In this respect, in particular, the production values of publisher L'Atelier contemporain prove congenial to the task of presenting what was a process rather than a product to the writer Guillevic was still becoming.

In her concluding 'Note biographique' for the volume, Lucie Albertini-Guillevic, the poet's widow, sums up his overarching project of 'vivre en poésie' as an epic recommitment to the real which is at the same time subtly and durably transformative: 'c'est prolonger le réel non pas par du fantastique, du merveilleux, des images paradisiaques, mais en essayant de vivre le concret dans sa vraie dimension, vivre le quotidien dans ce qu'on peut appeler – peut-être – l'épopée du réel' (139). As this valuable work of excavation and restitution shows, Guillevic's way to the real was born of prolonged engagement with the difficulty of a possible art and the complexity of the need to make art. In making this textual prehistory of the poet available to us, Michael Brophy has also added significantly to his own very valuable body of scholarship on Guillevic.

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