

Homage to Guillevic: The poet of atavistic nostalgia for the primeval

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For Thomas R. Flynn in friendship and appreciation

When each day/ is sacred/when each hour/ is sacred/ when each instant/ is sacred/ earth and you/ space and you/ bearing the sacred/ through time/ you'll reach the fields of light.

[Quand chacun de tes jours/ Te sera sacré,/ Quand chacune de tes heures/ Te sera sacrée,/ Quand chacun de tes instants/ Te sera sacré,/ Quand la terre et toi,/ L'espace avec toi/ Porterez le sacre/ Au long de vos jours,/ Alors tu seras dans le champ de gloire].

Guillevic, "Opening" / "Ouverture" in Guillevic: *Selected Poems* (pp. 137-138)

I

I intend to provide brief phenomenological and psychoanalytic descriptions of nostalgia for the primeval. The thrust of my effort will be to show how such nostalgia for the primeval coincides with the search for the "thing-in-itself", "*Das Ding an sich*", of German philosophy and particularly of phenomenology. That is to say, the object as it appears to our consciousness before any other consideration. Even though creative imagination is intensely at work in the equation of the thing-in-itself with the primeval, the result is not merely phantasmagoric. I will then apply this description and analysis to the innovative poetry of the distinguished 20th century French poet (Eugène Guillevic) would like to. Born in Carnac, Brittany, in 1907, as a poet he used the patronymic Guillevic. He died in Paris in 1997, leaving behind an impressive body of innovative poetry.

This psycho-phenomenological description of atavistic nostalgia for the primeval will serve as a category to the psychoanalytic definition of nostalgia in general. Thus, the aim of this combination of phenomenological and psychoanalytic approaches will be threefold. First, I shall try to make as intelligible as possible my understanding of the psychoanalytic origin of obsessive nostalgia with its secondary narcissistic elements and illusory spatio-temporal structures in lived experience. This effort will make manifest how such nostalgia psychically strives to restore and then maintain a fantasy world sustained by idealized remembrances of things past. Subsequently, I define the nostalgia for the

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primeval as an imaginative search for the thing-in-itself, which henceforth I shall refer to as atavistic nostalgia. Finally, I give examples of atavistic nostalgia as recurrent images from a representative selection of Guillevic's poems.

One of the most characteristic dimensions of nostalgia (Greek *nostos* + *álgos*), and *Heimweh* or "homesickness" in German, is that it conveys a negative and deleterious effect. Its psychical pain occurs with various intensities as a delusional but relentless effort to relive one's past. Within this perspective, nostalgia develops into pathology of associative memories. As appealing and often compelling as nostalgia may appear, it always carries in it an irreducible quotient of what Freud designated as "secondary narcissism" or "ego libido". One experiences it as an uncanny melancholy, even painful moroseness, yet its experience is paradoxically at once sweet and agonizing.

The object of nostalgic consciousness is a given, unchanging, unchangeable, and obsessively sought past. The acuity and complexity of its pain is that of a narcissistic wound. Nostalgia tends to substitute itself as the first and sole object of the ego. Under its relentless psychical pressure, the libido gradually withdraws from the present and divests itself from the exterior world, and doubles up on itself, as it were.

We experience extreme nostalgia as an intense regressive idealization of the lost objects of infancy, the breast, and the mother. What psychically rushes forth is a desire to replace the present vicissitude of pleasure with the constant nostalgic pleasure of the past. Such resurgence of the time past, along with its spatial component, intimates itself as our true home, where all our potentials were *already* fully realized and therefore totally exhausted. At the unconscious level, the whole process passes itself off as a fantasy of paradise regained: the retrieval of the primary love object, the body of the lost mother.

One experiences such nostalgia, then, as a deep desire to live the present not as here-and-now but rather as its own negation as an absolute past. In this sense, the nostalgic person does not psychically conjugate lived experience as present progressive (*Erlebnis* of German phenomenological tradition and *le vécu* in French). For nostalgic temporality no longer coincides with "ekstatic" or qualitative time suggested by Jean-Paul Sartre, which is the lived experience of time (*le vécu*) as "I am" and "there is" as it glides into the present perfect "I have been" and "there has been". The obsessive nostalgic time belongs rather to the order of linear time, *chronos*, or clock time of the past perfect as "I was" and "there was". In its psychoanalytic context, nostalgic time coincides with the time of the mother of infancy, the temporal dimension of paradise lost. The delusional reliving of the non-ekstatic temporal existence robs the present from the implied wide-open possibilities of the anticipatory "I will be" and "there will be".

Similarly, the spatial dimension of nostalgia is not that of "hodological" or lived space as first conceived and formulated by psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890-1947). The measurable metric, mathematical, and geometric space of, say, geographical and topological maps and charts fall into the scientific domain. The hodological space (from Greek *hodos*, signifying path or way) is the experiential space, a *way* of being human in space-time, Heidegger's *Dasein*. It signifies at once being with space while comprehending and appropriating it rather than scientifically isolating, understanding, and explaining it in conceptual terms. In other words, the hodological space is a hermeneutic ensemble of spatial perspectives. Along with their temporal dimension, spatial lived experiences embrace an individual's biological, psychological, social, cultural, aesthetics, and even religious apprehension of the environing world. That is how our understating of spatial designation of "high" and "low", "up" and "down", and "right" and "left" come to signify multiple perspectives of lived experience of space.

In the light of the psychoanalytic and phenomenological description of nostalgia that I have thus far given, it represents a wish to fantastically *reconfigure* memories of the past. Nostalgia often renders memories hauntingly euphoric to a hallucinatory extent, transforming them into phantasmal images of lived experience through the psychical agencies of magical thinking, wish-fulfillment, and daydreaming. However, in the Lacanian perspective, nostalgia is an attempt to reconfigure so that a wish may continue to exist only as a "lack" (*le manque*). Therefore, it stands for the unbroken presence of a desire as an inalterable absence, or the loss of the mother of infancy, which nostalgia itself can only gratify as fantasy.

As I have noted, the illusion that once our life was simultaneously ideal, well integrated, and complete constitutes the psychical matrix of nostalgia. Thus, it implies an absolute ontological and developmental finality. It delineates a task that only our death and disappearance in the bosom of Mother Earth can only irrevocably accomplish. Clearly, in its most regressive form, nostalgia corresponds to cases of arrested psychological development, which are fraught with *masochistic and negative drives of the death instincts*.

To the extent that nostalgia for one's earlier life attempts to declare one's life as already closed in upon itself, it may psychically fulfill the requirements of an unalterable unified whole, which symbolically presents the permanent state we attribute to death. As such, it closely approximates, and depending upon the degree of its force even coincides with, the Freudian death wish (*Todestrieb*). The connection between nostalgia and the death wish and the more general death instinct may sound too far-fetched, or at least odd. Just the same, it is psychoanalytically justifiable. For as unlikely as it may seem, nostalgia exhibits phantasmal imitations of the final closure of one's life at the time of one's inevitable death. In fantasy, it places a particular life lastingly beyond any further disclosure or change; that is to say, beyond lived experience and its endless hermeneutics.

Living fully in the concrete present – which is all that we truly have – its imperfections and unconscious vicissitudes notwithstanding, becomes in itself problematic. In the gathering darkness of this mode of nostalgia, a heavy burden of death wish masquerades as a new horizon of life. Clearly, in its most regressive form, nostalgia represents an arrested psychological state, a way of being human that is not subject to further transformation. It successfully cancels out the possibility of existential freedom and responsibility in the midst of life.

Now, I would like to advance the notion that there exists a different, that is, benign, lively, and energizing nostalgia. It is on the side of the life instinct for it is creative and therefore imagination fuels it rather than obsession with the past as an ensemble of lost objects. I would define it as longing for our origins, which still situates itself squarely within the psychoanalytic concept of the lost mother of infancy. The symbolic dimensions of the lost mother of infancy and its unlimited manifestations transcend the concept of the mother's body as a specific corporeal entity. As Heidegger puts it in a different context in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art", "Origin here means that from and by which something is what it is and as it is. What something is, as it is, we call its essence or nature. The origin of something is the source of its nature" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 17). The love of origins is a love of beginnings. The atavistic nostalgia for beginnings therefore radically differentiates itself from nostalgia for a fixed and idealized vision of the past as secondary narcissism.

Atavistic nostalgia by extension and in its widest, most inclusive sense is nostalgia for the primeval as the origin, where the thing-in-itself in its endless manifestations resides. Atavistic nostalgia as libido finds its object in our environing world. It prodigiously invests itself in our sensual appreciation of the environing earth as the Great Mother, as Mother Earth. Our libido invests itself in the ambient nature as it once did in the body of the biological mother of infancy with the sensual experiences of unity it offered. As William Wordsworth reminds us:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky.
So was it when my life began;
So is it now that I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth (91)

Atavistic nostalgia does not signify in psychoanalytic language a regressive movement to be *childish* but rather to be *childlike*, which is a different emotional tendency altogether. Atavistic nostalgia for the primeval origin of the thing-in-itself is a veritable reinvestment in the prelapsarian poetry of the childhood of the natural world as it bursts upon our consciousness. Atavistic nostalgia is a harking back to the call of our infantile experience before the development of pre-judgments and prejudices, whether they are familial, religious, educational, cultural, and so forth. It is an original way of being *human in the world* that is at the spiritual core of phenomenology, a world anterior to Freud's superego. In short, atavistic nostalgia represents a sort of originary archeology of sensations that attempts to produce glimpses of our earliest emotions and perceptions.

As I have already mentioned, atavistic nostalgia for the primeval origin of the thing-in-itself is a way of making the whole of the so-called external world in which one exists the object of the libido. Defined as such, atavistic nostalgia avoids the inevitable pain and melancholy of narcissistic wounds of nostalgia for a past as paradise lost. They quicken our senses and make us keenly present to our environment. Within atavistic nostalgia, we have an inkling of the pre-reflective awareness; that is to say, the domain of comprehension that precedes what we know reflectively and formulate consciously as ideas and concepts. Accordingly, meditation on the pre-reflective visual, aural, tactual, olfactory, and gustatory senses magically give us an inkling of the inconceivable of human experiences at the dawn of human existence on earth. Nostalgia for the primeval defies the solipsism of narcissistic nostalgia. It creates its own epistemology and attendant body of interpretations or hermeneutics. Based on our lived experience of prelapsarian consciousness in childhood, it constitutes our earliest intentional phenomenological comprehension and appropriation of our world but without comprehension, understanding, or conceptualization of it.

The arts can always express with greater simplicity phenomena that conceptual fields such as philosophy and psychology can theoretically come to grips with. In the context of our discussion, the following passage by George Eliot situates our theoretical discussion more succinctly and clearly within the art of fiction:

We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it – if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lispng to ourselves on the grass – the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows – the same redbreasts that we used to call “God’s birds”, because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known?

(*The Mill on the Floss* wrote 57)

One may even say that atavistic nostalgia for the primeval is a sort of paleontology of sensations. It evokes in those who experience it their earliest emotions and perceptions and intensifies their creative possibilities. Consequently, there is an elucidation of the creative alchemy that remembrance of things past can bring to our lives. Hence, reliving the originary appearance of reality upon our consciousness as a child considerably enlarges the role of memory as a mode of creativity. On the plane of remembrance, such nostalgia places us again in the midst of our primal encounter with the world. In my view, it suggests an analogue to the prehistoric, prelinguistic human life on earth, now beyond all remembering. In this sense, the temporal dimension of our infancy and our relationship to the mother would coincide with the childhood of the human world and its earliest *sensual perceptions* of reality. It may sound mysterious and even mystical, but works of art bear witness to this seemingly ineffable connection.

On the plane of philosophy, I believe this atavistic nostalgia for the primeval corresponds to the long saga of seeking the thing-in-itself. In its most compelling form, it is the call of “*das Ding an sich*”, that so enthralled Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) and later phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and his many followers such as French philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). From a psychoanalytic point of view, one may say the thing-in-

itself finds its most complex hermeneutic dimension in the Freudian theory of the triadic structure of “psychic apparatus” as the “id”, the given, or “what was originally present”, in distinction to “what was acquired in the course of the ego’s development” (*An Outline of Psychoanalysis* 36). For me, the “id”, “*das Es*”, or “the It” echoes the intrusion of nature as an ensemble of the unlimited modes of the thing-in-itself in the psyche itself. The id provides an umbilical cord between the human mind and the materiality of Mother Nature, so to speak. Freud writes, “It [the id] contains everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is laid down in the constitution – above all, therefore, the instincts, which originate from somatic organization, and which find a first psychical expression here [in the id] in forms unknown to us” (*An Outline of Psychoanalysis* 14). Of course, there is also the shadow of *Das Ding* in Freudian “thing-presentations” (*Sachvorstellungen*). The concept of “thing” *Das Ding* (*la chose*) in Lacanian psychoanalysis delineates the final frontier of the known, beyond which lies what we cannot symbolize and therefore cannot comprehend and conceptualize.

For these reasons, one may state that atavistic nostalgia for the thing-in-itself becomes the capital of enchantment of the domain of poetry of things. French *chosiste* poetry, such as Francis Ponge’s *Le Partis pris des choses* (*The Voice of Things*), tends to create a materialist cosmogony whole and entire. So, poetry of things gives birth to its own psycho-philosophical and aesthetic concerns. In such concerns, one simultaneously finds the inevitable background and the horizon of our lives, aiming to reveal to us the daybreak of our awareness of our world and our continuing consciousness of as it leads into our future. In the perspective of the interrelated phenomenological and psychoanalytic descriptions, atavistic nostalgia for the primeval reveals much through its history, philosophy, psychology, and aesthetics of the thing-in-itself. However, it intimates that its immeasurable expanses reside in the arts, particularly poetry. Or so I believe. It awakens in each one of us the longing for a primeval past when the world was young.

II

Entre el vivir y el soñar/ ha una sera cosa/ Advinida.
[Between living and dreaming/ is a third thing./ Guess it].

Antonio Machado, Quoted and translated by Denise Levertov in *Guillevic: Selected Poems* (viii)

In *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, Paul Ricoeur writes, “The [phenomenological] thesis of the world is a sort of blindness in the very heart of seeing. What I call living is hiding myself as a naïve consciousness within the existence of all things: “In natural living I live the fundamental form of all ‘actual’ life” [Edmund Husserl] (20). One may say this naïve consciousness, which is at the core of the spiritual quality of phenomenology, finds its best expression in the infant’s view of the world. What the child simply perceives as a sensual flash of appearance on consciousness takes voluminous work for the reader with a conceptual formation and the phenomenologist to elucidate. That is the reason for the great difficulty of producing true phenomenological descriptions of the objects of our consciousness in philosophy and psychoanalysis. Finding once more the spatio-temporal lived experiences of childhood means to many of us the discovery of not so much our childhood but rather *when the world was young* to our budding senses.

In this sense, many sensitive and sensual poets are among the best explorers of a direct vision of the world, as-yet unmediated by the intellect. Their poetry resonates with the appeal of returning to the novelty, sparkle, and the uniqueness of the thing-in-itself. Everyone can make their own list of such poets according to their own knowledge and culture of reading poetry. In my own case, I respond to the poetry of American poets William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, and French poets Francis Ponge, Jean Follain, and, Guillevic as efforts to pursue most passionately the poetry of atavistic nostalgia. Theirs is a desire to resurrect the world when young before any conceptual considerations; or put more technically, the thing-in-itself. However, for me, Guillevic singularly

stands out in this group as the lyrical poet of the thing-in-itself. Edmund Husserl's call for return to the thing-in-itself becomes a generative principle of considerable consequence in the thematics and stylistics of Guillevic's poetry. In the context of our present discussion, Guillevic's poem "Art Poétique" ("Art of Poetry") particularly strikes me as clear and compelling. Here is the American poet Denise Levertov's translation of Guillevic's "Art Poétique":

I don't speak for myself,
I don't speak in my name,
It's not a question of me.
I'm nothing but
a little life, a lot of pride.
I speak for all that is,
in the name of all that has form and no form.
It's a question of all that weighs
and all that is weightless
I know that everything that surrounds me
longs to go further, to live more intensely,
to die more fully, if dying
is what must be done.
Don't think you hear inside you
the words and the voice of Guillevic.
It's the voice of the present moving toward the future,
the voice of the present sounding from under your skin.

*[Je ne parle pas pour moi,
Je ne parle pas de mon nom,
Ce n'est pas de moi qu'il s'agit.
Je ne suis rien
Qu'un peu de vie, beaucoup d'orgueil.
Je parle pour de tout ce qui est,
Au nom de tout ce qui a forme et pas de forme.
Il s'agit de tout ce qui pèse,
De tout ce qui n'a pas de poids.
Je sais que tout a volonté, autor de moi,
D'aller plus loin, de vivre plus,
De mieux mourir aussi longtemps
Qu'il faut mourir.
Ne croyez pas entendre en vous
Les mots, la voix de Guillevic.
C'est la voix du présent allant vers l'aveni
Qui vient de lui sous votre peau].*

("Art Poétique", "Art of Poetry" in *Guillevic: Selected Poems* 110-11)

I would suggest that the main declaration of "Art Poétique" is: "It is not a question of me". As a poet, Guillevic regards himself as nothing more than a "little life", that is in its fullest a modest life. His life poetically dwells in the world and as an artist of language on the far side of *nostalgic narcissistic obsessions*. His poetry is not about him; he does not speak for himself, in his own name; it is not a question of him, not at all. His is not a libido devoted merely to the ego in isolation from the world. It is not a matter of a poet's megalomania with him.

Just the same, the phrasal declaration of his having “a lot of pride” clearly shows that the poet immediately recuperates and augments himself as a poet. His little life as a poet permits him to have the transcendent pride of oneness with all that exists. In being an artist of language embracing the earth and the ambient sky he acknowledges the function of his primary narcissism as self-support while transcending its boundaries. The poet’s active creative imagination rushes headfirst into an embrace of human existence and human way of life within the sheltering fold of nature that offers it sustenance. His intervention in imaginatively appropriating the world is very much akin to a child’s birth into the world, inhabiting it for the first time and making it his or her own flesh and blood through the agency of primary sensations and primary narcissism.

Consequently, Guillevic’s pride as a poet alchemically transforms the lead of self-preoccupation and secondary narcissism into the gold of poetry. He speaks for *all that is, for all that lives, and for all that wishes to die more fully and well*. For there is no dying fully and well without having lived prodigiously fully and well. In short, he imaginatively holds closely to the real in its totality, an act that clearly differentiates itself from mimetic realism. In this fashion, Guillevic’s poetics defines subjectivity as consciousness of an object, as does phenomenology. He indissolubly does away with the subject-object dichotomies and polarities that divide our world and render it irredeemably broken. Such poetics makes amply manifest how our immediate consciousness unfolds, how we form our perceptions, and how we create images of absent objects, and bring into being our imaginal world. Accordingly, his poetry becomes coextensive with the objectal world as the horizon of our lived experience of the world.

Elsewhere, Guillevic has referred to this state of creative grace as “living in poetry”, which for him consists of “making an ordinary object, however humble, become the equivalent of the ocean or a menhir. Living a degree of exaltation in communion with everyday things, a sprig of heather just as much as the ocean” (*Living in Poetry* 118). As Heidegger has pointed out “In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lightening. Thought of as a reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree that are beings” (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 33). This is the “clearing” where “communion with everyday things” takes place.

I would think it reasonable to say inhabiting the world in communion with the realm of things is to live magically in the presence of the originary past, the primordial. One imagines a mode of gazing directly at the world with the *unmediated vision* of the prehistoric men and women, living in a state of total awe and wonder of being. Let us call it the quintessential new experience, because it is the experience of the marvelous, in the etymological, strong sense of this adjective as miraculous, *le merveilleux* in French. Seeing, perceiving, and naming all that has form and weight as it detaches itself from invisibility and formlessness, defining itself as contour, size, color, and visible mass are tantamount to magical lived experiences. One may put forward the notion of the primal invisible as the background of all visibility, which coincides with our lived experience of language as emerging from silence. Without silence, there would be nothing but sounds; therefore, no discernible utterance and therefore no language. So one can categorically state: Without the invisible, there would be no visibility, and without silence, there would be no language. Our desire to return to this original moment of silence and the invisible in creative activities intimates a profound and authentic nostalgia for the pre-historic, even pre-lingual world. Perhaps atavistic nostalgia gives us an experience however elementary of the primal silence and invisible that is the background of Guillevic’s concept of “living in poetry”.

Now, it is our common experience that every attempt at discovery of the primeval is improbably difficult and mostly ends up in impenetrable mysteries. Matters aesthetics also possess their own particular mysteries. Thus, the poetics of the originary appearance of things at the pre-historic stages of human existence on earth is an exceptionally difficult task for the imagination. No doubt, one can only approximate it through the psychological effort of atavistic nostalgia. It partakes of intricacies on two different but parallel planes of the as-yet-unknown. In “*Voir*” (“To See”), one of his most condensed and compact poems, Guillevic hints at his own unmediated vision of the world as the foundation of his aesthetics. Let us take a close if brief look at the following poem:

It's a question of seeing
so much clearer,
of doing to things
what light does to them.

*[Il s'agit de voir
Tellement plus clair,
De faire avec les choses
Comme la lumière].*

(“Voir”, “To See” in *Guillevic: Selected Poems 6-7*)

First, I would say what strikes me, what I respond to as a reader, is the economy of this poem. Just a few words and no more. What constitute it are unmistakable plainness, simplicity, precision, compression, and clarity. The reader immediately *sees* the poem visually in its scriptural form as it breaks out on the consciousness; and has an “irreal” (*irréel*) image of light, to use Jean-Paul Sartre’s terminology, which indicates the “great ‘irrealizing’ function of consciousness or ‘imagination’, and its noematic correlate, the imaginary” (*The Imaginary* 3). Then there is the simultaneous seeing through the poem, this time conceptually, making it and its multitude of significations one’s own without let or hindrance. All that is extraneous has already been excised from it. Because the poet has left out all that is ornamental, superfluous, or merely poetically patterned in one way or another, save its aural conversational musicality and stripped down scriptural visibility. In this sense, the poem already sketches a kind of preliminary poetics of extreme poetic minimalism, a kind of poetry suspended between scriptural visibility and invisibility, language and silence.

Secondly, the initial phrase of the poem, “It is a matter of seeing/so much clearer” is manifestly stating the premise of his poetics of the thing-in-itself. Now the implicit question is: what precisely offers the possibility of seeing the thing-in-itself “so much clearer”? It would seem to me that such seeing is a matter of seizing the surge of the appearance of the seen on the consciousness, and doing so by unbiased eyes – a difficult operation that requires a kind of phenomenological bracketing of the seen. As a *seer*, in the fullest sense of the term, Guillevic asks that our act of seeing should do for things what light does for them; that is to say, render them fully visible to consciousness. This definition of visibility makes manifest the ground of its emergence of the visible as the consciousness of the appearance of the object and nothing more. Without this kind of visibility as light, there would only be an undifferentiated continuous mass, a continuum of sameness in our world. Various intensities of the appearance of the thing-in-itself reveal to us the reality of the real or the Tao of the real, in its totality.

Guillevic is fully aware of the paradoxical verities of these consciousness as the consciousness of the appearance of the thing-in-itself, of language and its relationship to things, and the ground of emergence of poetry as opening between the two phenomena. He tries to incorporate them all by another paradox: the austere economy of his style that maximizes their effects. The first stanza in his book-length admirable poem *Carnac* conveys the sense of his poetics that I have just outlined,

Sea on the edge of nothingness
Mingling with nothingness...

*[Mer au bord du néant
Qui se mêle au néant...].*

(*Carnac* 30-31)

Clearly, the sea in its immensity delineates itself against the infinite nothingness or void of space as well as consciousness. The void of space at the horizon makes the sea visible as the thing-in-itself as its natural backdrop in reality, in consciousness and in the poem. In addition, each one of the

inexhaustible visual and lingual significations of the poem eventually draw from the evocations of their indispensable dialectical relation with the invisible and silence that surround the phenomenological description of the thing-in-itself and “bracket” it.

Let me offer you one last example Guillevic’s poetics of silence and the invisible from the collection of his poems *Gagner*:

An earthen jar,
A loose page,
A wine glass.
If all is lost,
All is regained. (my translation)

[*Un pot de terre,*
Un papier vague,
Un verre à vin.
Si tout se perd,
Tout se revient].

(*Gagner* 23)

As in the first law of thermodynamics, all is conserved in Guillevic’s poetic universe; that is to say, nothing is ever lost that cannot be again rediscovered and recuperated by reliving it as it reappears in consciousness as primeval, as it did in the first light of the first imaginable mornings of the world. In other words, the primal silence and the invisible always allow us to regain in our imaginal world the origin of all that is visible and audible in their absence as images. One finds this mode of acute atavistic nostalgia for origins in most of Guillevic’s poetry. It is particularly present in *Carnac*, the collection of descriptive poems about his birthplace of the same name, a place of prehistoric grandeur beside the Gulf of Morbihan in Brittany. Guillevic evokes and celebrates *Carnac*’s beaches and Neolithic monoliths or menhirs. In the Breton language, menhir “men” (stone) + “hir” (long) recalls its faraway origins now beyond human remembrance. Just the same, most of his poems fall into this category and are gifts of a world of magical, sentient, “materialist mysticism,” in which Guillevic thinks poetically. Heidegger reminds us in his essay “The Thinker as the Poet,” a “poetry that thinks is in truth the topography of Being” (Poetry, Language, Thought 12). This is an immensely complex and often paradoxical mode of thinking but true, which creates a world whole and entire onto itself. I salute Guillevic for his poetic genius and his generosity to share it with anyone who can read and partake of his nostalgia for primal mysteries.

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