"Les mêmes mots débordent": The Sacred in Guillevic's *Le Chant* and Vargaftig's *Un Récit*

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Much can be said about the sacred in Guillevic. There is his self-professed attachment to archaic practices to consider, what Stella Harvey calls Brittany's "ancestral presence" and "mythical atemporality" (3). There is his inimitably generous fascination with the real that engages us in dialogue with our immediate surroundings, including his reflection on our place in the cosmos that attunes us to the outer world's ebb and flow. The intensity of his gaze and sharp focus of his style intuit the intimacy of the here and now, while surpassing notions of physical setting to suggest that an understanding of the past and immersion in the present can imbue us with the passion to move gracefully toward a shared future. His religious materialism tends now toward mystic awe and wonder, now toward material discovery and frank questioning, and thus resists critical commentary on the naming of the divine. Nonetheless, his meditative, iterative approach foregrounds poetry's ties to everyday spiritual life, as an essential means of communication with one's "labyrinthes" (*Vivre en poésie* 148).

This article uses a comparative approach to address related aspects of Guillevician quanta. It argues that *Le Chant* establishes a sacred space rooted in daily spiritual life by ritually returning to writing as an exploratory process, by emphasizing elemental deep words that recur, and by sharing respect and reverence for poetry's expressive ability and for the poet's surroundings, delight in the world's creative surge and veneration for the presence of beings and things. The phrase "Les mêmes mots

débordent" is the first part of poem 48 in Bernard Vargaftig's *Un Récit*: "Les mêmes mots débordent / Sans être les mêmes" (54). Close readings will highlight similarities and differences between these writers' rhythmic élan and depth of vision, underscoring a prayer-like urge toward wholeness, which in Vargaftig's case is equally a healing of wartime's psychic wounds, a hopeful recognition of past and present selves. We will also touch on the paradox in Judaic mysticism of divine essence as at once immanent and transcendent, absent and accessible through the word and the Book, as well as the medieval idea—which reemerged in eighteenth-century East-European Hasidism, and which Jacques Lardoux borrows from Guillevic in citing a "risque de la joie totale" (*Vivre* 159; Lardoux 1990, 5)—that existence should on some level be joyous, all the more so when we develop ties between microcosm and macrocosm by invoking a higher power.

We will supplement Lardoux's idea of a "sacré sans Dieu" by contemplating a philological thread inherent to Talmudic traditions that Robert Alter and Henri Meschonnic bring to life in their translations of holy books: biblical Hebrew not as a vehicle for a message to be summed up in prose, but as a uniquely condensed ancient poetics that performatively enacts the mystery of the human relationship to the divine. The background for these formal and thematic comparisons is the hypothesis that Vargaftig (1934-2012), as at once poet and practicing Jew (Minetto), imbues his haunting verse on the omnipresence of childhood fears of deportation with traces of Hebrew in terms of his linguistic choices and stanzaic forms. Complementing this hypothesis as springboards for analysis are Guillevic's title, *Le Chant*, and "le chant" as a compact syntagma and prayer-like refrain with remarkable affective and theological significance. Vargaftig, for his part, uses words that appear densely coded, but likewise prove to have spatiotemporal depth, historical rootedness, and poetic flow. Along with occasional mention of the sacred, drawing on Georges Bataille, Mircea Eliade, and other sources, this study will identify a powerful immersion in the cosmos, positing as does Guillevic that the poet as intermediary to forces in the outer world fulfills a social and spiritual role, irrespective of contemporary views on monotheistic religion (*Vivre* 36-37, 158-62).

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Space imbued with "passion" is our first keynote, a motif from *Sphère* that is present as the epigraph to *Le Chant* (321; cf. Lardoux 2003) and apparent in Vargaftig's aforementioned poem from *Un Récit*. In both writers, repetition helps to reinscribe the sacred. An always unfolding relationship with beings and things is inexhaustibly revisited. Vargaftig, however, must face down ongoing, ubiquitous fears. This process situates him at the cusp of rich and almost overpowering relationships not just with world, self, and other, but also with the childhood self—too often obliged to remain silent during the Occupation and thus fixated on perception—that remains dramatically a part of him. These writers inhabit space and convey its ceaseless energy. From their relationship between world, self, and poetic song emerges a greater fullness of space, as well as an array of human emotions, as in any number of poems from *Le Chant*'s first pages that point to space as a centering, stabilizing, quasi-religious companion, the 'salvation' of any observer (329) yet at the same time an indefinable "prière / De l'horizon" (341):

> Le chant
> Ouvre ses espaces
> En dehors de l'espace. (324)
>
> Le chant élargit
> Et concentre
> L'espace où il se livre. (325)
>
> Entendre le chant,
> C'est s'ouvrir
>
> À l'immensité
> De cette promesse
>
> Qu'il apporte,
> Fait presque toucher. (328)

Regardless of religious persuasion, we cannot help but feel augmented, uplifted, aware of song's "plus que lui-même / Qui se dérobe" (348) and keen to prolong an intersubjective exchange. Because song, prayer, and musicality as motifs interweave with that of space's passion, this fervent contact with space echoes ideas across faith traditions regarding interaction with the divine. The semantic fields in *Le Chant*, ranging for example from "l'eau d'un ruisseau" (323) to "une promesse" (328), "acolytes" (335), "grâce" (389), "gloire" (395), and "joie" (397), hint at religion while remaining very much open to interpretation, thanks to the elemental settings in which they are found.

In this respect, reading Vargaftig through Guillevic and vice-versa nuances each poet's aims. Vargaftig's poem 48 can be taken as an expression of trauma survival, including love and eros as paths to identity regained, but also as a reminder of *Le Chant*'s idea that song aligns us with the 'promise' of space's forward-surging passion. Alongside *Le Chant*, its opening lines "Les mêmes mots débordent / Sans être les mêmes" (54) gain clarity by conveying a passion for contact with the outer world that poems reaffirm. Each verset's words implicitly reinscribe space's power and presence. What could thematically be considered a certain confusion becomes, simultaneously, identification with space and all that constitutes it, as what we can and must inhabit through words in order to feel whole:

> Les mêmes mots débordent
> Sans être les mêmes
> Et la rue les rideaux le morceau d'ardoise
> Et l'inclinaison
>
> L'échelle un tablier
> Un mouvement ce
> Que la stupeur a volé à ton enfance
> L'aveuglement hurle
>
> Et trembler ne recouvre
> Rien de plus fugace
> Comme m'auraient traversé et comme appellent

A côté du langage
Nuée et rupture
Dont ton parfum multiplie l'immensité. (54)

The context here is Vargaftig's obsessive counting, between the ages of six and eleven in and near Limoges, of all the eye could see in his surroundings (*Silence* 44-45), as it was too dangerous to have friends and to talk in public while in hiding and on the move. His commentary on the awareness he had of words while in hiding, however, performatively overlaps with actions in the present moment. The two closing stanzas, for instance, highlight the poem's measured trembling as a gesture toward greater immediacy, toward recognition and provisional reparation of the inner break reflected by the *rejet* "ce / Que la stupeur a volé." His loved one's "parfum" represents a sensual fusion with space, albeit one that can only partly heal his dissociations. Though the idea of the sacred is less clear-cut than in Guillevic, there is a likeminded impulse in Vargaftig of ritually returning to words for heightened perception of beings and things in the here and now. There is a process of, as Guillevic describes it, expanding as well as concentrating "[l]'espace où [le chant] se livre" (325). All that is intimate within the world is made to coincide to the extent possible with intimate aspects of the self, in a mutual act of belonging similar to that described in Bataille's *Théorie de la religion* (*Bataille* 59-60). Poetic song allows an embrace of "l'ailleurs / D'ici même / Et d'on ne sait où," perhaps also strengthening our desire for this "Ailleurs presenti" (325). Read together, the two poets musically immerse us in space and intersubjectivity, while also facilitating our closeness to what lies just at the edge of perception, "[à] côté du langage" (*Un Récit* 54), within "[u]n versant d'éclair" that singles out "ce que l'espace accomplit" (55).

What is "le chant"? How does Guillevic use this syntagma to make it richer in meaning, and to what extent do theme and variation make the sacred more tangible? Let us first address Guillevic's strategies, then how Vargaftig uses related techniques to fleetingly put us in touch with the cosmos and with the mysteries of inner experience. Guillevic embeds a refrain that carries affective and theological significance, enacting a

poetics of "fascination" that involves reaction, response, reuse as well as transformation of a vocabulary of the sacred, and osmosis between the sacred and the profane (Lardoux 1990, 35; cf. *Vivre* 158-59). Of particular interest are the active, anthropomorphized aspects of "le chant." It opens its spaces "[e]n dehors de l'espace" (324), weds silence (324), "[s]e chante lui-même" (326) and thus speaks to us (327). World and self participate in this singing, wherein the voice rises and modulates within various registers while keeping itself "[d]ans la hauteur" (354), creating a certain melody across the various quanta as they progress. In the poem's middle pages, images of dark and light extend the semantic reach of song via polarities such as good and evil, quotidian suffering and redemption through prayer, and the interplay of cosmic cycles:

> Dans le soleil
> Le chant
> Incorpore de la nuit. (357)
>
> Auprès
> D'une bougie allumée
>
> Le chant
> Prend de l'ampleur. (358)

Furthermore, in dreaming of "une lumière / Toujours neuve" (358), "le chant" brings together the many as one, metaphorically moving "Vers la source" (23) and gathering a sum total of voices, "[d]es milliards de chants" (359). Regarding Guillevic's evolution as a writer, one can also point to "le chant" as an expression of postwar sorrow and anguish, as a "cri / Qui se retient, / / S'étonnant / De ce qu'il devient" (357). Formally and thematically, the lines with a minimum of syllables impart the restraint that accompanies emotion, as if to suggest that connecting the sacred and the profane requires devotion but also great care, as a processual and relational process.

Other aspects of this process include the permutations of "le chant" as a substantive and the fact that Guillevic never quite defines this term, asking us instead to inductively grasp its polysemy. As presented within

this long poem, “le chant” almost refers to concepts common to postwar critical debate such as *l’être-là*, *la présence*, and *l’habiter poétique*. As poetic song, “le chant” embodies the communication of emotion and of passionate world-self relationships, but also, through the sum total of these quanta, an organizing principle within the universe that contributes to our construction of a meaningful existence. In centering us and “se donn[ant] / À lui-même” (329), it helps us to “habiter / Durablement, / / Naviguer / Avec lui, au besoin” (328). It is not so much strictly within us as inherent to our surroundings, whether as “[l]e chant de la marée” or “[l]e chant du désert” (340), the “psalmodie” of “le rossignol” (394) or a song “[qui] existe par lui-même / Permanent” (398). A range of descriptions that break from the substantive “le chant” especially emphasize the extent to which individual beings and things participate in and contribute to collective song as a sacred act. The first such sequence, “Faites-moi donc / Entendre un chant / Qui se renie?” (337), points up the affirmative nature of each individual act of song, no matter how limited its potency as it seeks to carry “Un plus que lui-même / Qui se dérobe” (338). Similarly, another sequence explains that each act of song contributes to a larger, overarching, macrocosmic design: “Un chant peut s’éteindre / Comme un arbre s’éteint, / / Mais le chant continue / Comme dure la forêt” (342). Whether theistic or atheistic, such statements indicate an appreciation for the numinous. They welcome a creative life force that permeates the human and natural worlds.

Subsequent utterances are equally striking as regards “le chant” incorporating and nonetheless surpassing human song. For example, an aspen may well have intimate knowledge of “La réserve de chant / Qu’il y a dans le sol” (344); an “absence de chant” separates “notre dedans” from “[le] dehors” (345). Guillevic conveys the centrality of intersubjective ties via wisdom about the natural world as well as earnestness concerning our place within it. Varied registers imbue *Le Chant* with the ‘joy’ of which he speaks (350, 352, 393, 397), while portraying a sensitivity to the ontic that approaches near-religious sentiment. We need to hear “d’autres chants” to be sure of our own (350), to stay open to the “murmures” of “des essais de chant” which, in an unusual metaphor, “se surplombent” (351), as if within a churchlike—or even Babel-like—setting. The image of being able to “dans son être / Éclater enfin” approaches mysticism as much as

sexuality and seasonal harvest, while the idea of a storm as a song seeking rest and freedom from "l'usure" (353) edges toward notions of redemption. The verb *chanter* introduces overtones of an "[a]pothéose" (355), as well as numerous now humorous, now moving gradations of synergy within the human and natural worlds, stretching as far as "l'intérieur / De l'atome" (384):

> Collé à la terre
> Le grillon de mon enfance
> Me chante l'univers.
>
> La cigale
> Ne me chante qu'elle-même. (367)
>
> Pour qui aime
> Au plus secret de soi,
>
> Chantent des yeux,
> Chantent des mains,
>
> Chante ce corps
> Qui se découvre. (369)

This mix of humor and future hope, of devotion and admiration, distinguishes the closing quanta, which attend to birdsong, self-reproach, and the moving beauty of a stone that would enable future hope through a symbolic kiss shared (398-99). In short, we see Guillevic using repetition to gesture toward the sacred, to inquire of the outer world and of poetic song how they function. By prioritizing regular contemplation of relatively concrete realities rather than overtly religious themes, he puts us all the more in touch with the spiritual, with bonds that potentially unite us with our surroundings on countless levels, from the practical to the psychological, the ontological to the theological. He encourages belief in its broadest forms by not pointing to it too directly, preferring instead in this long poem a ritual use of elemental deep words that recur, of enigmatic utterances that transmit to the reader an at once awestruck and

measured gaze onto the real, one exemplified by phrases as brief and straightforward as "Chante, galet, / Je t'écoute" (376).

Whereas Guillevic wrote *Le Chant* over a period of just over a year (399) and as if coexisting with the seasons, Vargaftig relies on repetition in *Un Récit* as a means to productively face the psychic wounds of a past that is always present: "Je vais vers l'enfance, elle n'est pas au passé" (*L'Aveu* 40). Along with reflecting on childhood, he honors the memory of the June 10, 1944 events at Oradour-sur-Glane that he felt could almost have involved him directly, having been in hiding in Saint-Junien when his mother had him brought back further south on June 9 closer to Aix-sur-Vienne (*Enfance* 71). He writes as if rising flames still make him mentally flee into language and touch "comme un trou dans les mots" following the shock "[d]e n'avoir pas été brûlé" (*Poésies* iii; *Silence* 12-13). For these reasons, his writing is commemorative. Though he does not write solely in response to these events, they figure in *Un Récit*, for example in the lines "l'été que l'explosion disait" and "Sans qu'on m'ait brûlé" (46, 64). About twenty years after he published his first poetry collection in 1965, *Chez moi partout*, Vargaftig evolved the code that characterizes *Un Récit*, of words, images, and motifs—which vary from one volume to the next—recurring in meticulously condensed, tightly measured versets.

A comparison of Guillevic with Vargaftig regarding deep words is fruitful because these poets fuse inner and outer experience. Vargaftig puts us in touch with the cosmos with singular urgency in that he continually relives his strange childhood imposition of silence while paradoxically making it present through words, words that refer semantically to a dynamic outer world and that formally embody the unending tectonic as well as psychological shifts he experiences. *Un Récit* gestures toward the sacred in subtle but significant ways. It identifies bonds to the real, commemorates personal and collective loss, envisions a rebuilding of bonds that have shattered, ritually reinscribes creative forces inherent to this overarching process, and spotlights language and sensual communion as essential to this reconstruction. Though as four-stanza poems the sonnet-like structures of *Un Récit* have a distinctive music relative to Guillevic's *Le Chant*, they, too, assert and demonstrate the value of poetic song.

One noteworthy aspect of Vargaftig's style in this regard is his use of nouns ending in -ment, which could be said to mirror Guillevic's technique of reusing the syntagma "le chant." In *Un Récit*, nouns ending in -ment suggest that poetic song is an artisanal affair, one requiring continual return to basic materials, as well as a matter of productively grappling with forces that escape our control: "[le] commencement" (7), "[le] tremblement" (8), "l'éblouissement" (10), "[l]e déchirement" (11). We sense his fascination with the elemental and "[l]'immensité" (7), as well as the pervasive fear that energizes him even as it blocks true resolution of his plight. Fear as an obstacle, along with the momentum it paradoxically adds, are performatively presented via not just nouns ending in -ment, but also Vargaftig's predilection for the conjunction "comme," used more to introduce disparate realities deeply felt than to metaphorically unite them in an eloquent transfer of meaning:

> Et la répétition nue
> Quand l'horizon fait pencher
> Les bleuets là-bas sans disparaître
>
> Comme où tu sais que je crie
> Où commencement et gouffre
> Couraient dévorés par la lumière (7)

If such lines are not always easy to parse, interpretive dilemmas can be attributed to Vargaftig's reluctance to fully 'avow' the details of his "récit." He can only endlessly state a desire to make this "aveu," a key word within his private code related to a prolonged experience of living in hiding, a dance with death during the several years he and others escaped deportation, and an internal struggle for identity thereafter as he recollects having had to deny his own name as a Jew. Relative to Gullevic, he may want to undertake actions similar to those of *Le Chant*, but cannot help carving out a more chaotic "poetic microcosm," one that makes palpable his inner unrest as a "personified, internal geology comprised of mountains, glaciers, ravines, abysses, cliffs, chasms" (Carlson 453):

> Un instant jusqu'à ton goût

Et toujours la poursuite comme
S'ouvrait sans que rien ne s'éloigne

Un à-pic un mouvement
A la fois lumière et murmure
D'être où je n'ai plus aucun nom (34)

As this "à-pic" opens out, it synesthetically does so onto a "murmure / D'être." Its verticality is at once the forward movement of these lines, their expansion on the page, a literal and figurative bringing out into the light, the sudden imbrication of past and present, and the salve of a loved one's recollected presence. As in *Le Chant*, we notice sensual proximity to the outer world and critical distance as regards this closeness. Jolts of abstract, fissured "vitesse comme / Disparait entre cri et mémoire" (35) form a path to the song of a "corps / Qui se découvre" (*Le Chant* 369). However, such jolts are linked more to anaphoric, phenomenological, psychological repetition than to calmly renewed ties to the real: "Et la cour insaisissable / Et où tout me déchirait"; "Et l'ombre se détache de l'ombre / Et le tournoiement / Dont le langage approche" (*Un Récit* 36, 67). As we shall now see by reflecting on poetic form in Guillevic and Vargaftig through the lens of Hebrew verse as well as Judaic mysticism, their respective works nonetheless bring forth in equal measure, in their structure and implicit aims, a "[r]écit toujours plus immense d'être" (85).

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Guillevic and Vargaftig gravitated toward particular styles, altering their discursivity and opting for a warmth and tenderness more overt (Guillevic) or more discreet (Vargaftig). How did they get there? Apart from personal travails during childhood that affected identity and perception (*Signe*, *Silence*), or a healthy obsession with "la place des choses" revisited regularly at the writing table in his later years (Guillevic-Albertini), did they look to ancient sources for ways to formulate an approach to being and to language? Can we hypothesize regardless about the function of such sources in their writing? In commenting on the interrelationship of religion and poetry, Guillevic reiterates basic truths

about the sacred that too easily go missing in our era of doubt, namely that religion—as an institution and a concept-bound ideology—can cloud poetic perception, block access to the spiritual, privilege thought over feeling, and separate us from mythical beginnings and rebirth (cf. Eliade 82-83):

> À la base de toutes les religions, il y a un grand texte poétique. […]
>
> En somme, on pourrait dire que toute religion est une poésie qui a trop bien réussie et qui par là même s'est figée, s'est sclérosée. Le travail de fouilles, de creusement s'est arrêté. Les choses sont données une fois pour toutes, et il n'y a plus qu'à commenter et appliquer.
>
> Par la poésie, il s'agit de reprendre à la religion notre bien, c'est-à-dire tout ce que l'homme y a investi de lui-même, de ses possibilités. (*Vivre* 35)

Parallels between Guillevic and Vargaftig emerge when one considers the potential role of the Bible as literature in their respective poetics, as a window on the world's turbulent workings and on the human ache for rootedness (cf. *Vivre* 41, *Pays* 52, qtd. in Samain 240). On a general level, Guillevic's comments about "un grand texte poétique" resonate with Eliade's concern that "*religiousness of the cosmos becomes lost* […] when, in certain more highly evolved societies, the intellectual élites progressively detach themselves from the patterns of the traditional religion." Guillevic sitting at his work table to write, if potentially banal as a portrait of routine, corresponds to what Eliade would call "paradigmatic gestures" that revive "religious meaning" (107). Thierry Orfila's use of the term "bénédiction" to refer to the poet's aims is illuminating, as to an everyday need to both "dire du bien" and "'bien dire'" (Orfila 101). On a more specific level, analysis of the very substance of biblical Hebrew says much about how the ancients perceived poetry as inherently an expression of reverence for the cosmos. Given our hypothesis that Guillevic and Vargaftig share a similar near-erotic awe of the outer world in its fine-grained materiality and resounding creative surge, do certain scriptural influences underly their gestures toward the sacred?

Temporally and thematically, a first step toward such an analysis could be the fragments available to us of sayings by the Presocratics. In *Choses parlées*, Guillevic refers to their poetry as "peut-être la plus grande réussite poétique qu'il y ait jamais eu, un corpus dû à des poètes différents, mais qui éclairent le monde, chacun à sa manière" (111). Monique Chefdor reminds us that he likely had a "connaissance […] intime" of their physics, a predisposition toward "une saisie du vécu de la matière," relative to Anaximander's "matérialisme spiritualiste," Democritus's discovery of atoms' setting into motion of symmetrical, complementary opposites, and the Heraclitian notion of a "'monde un et commun'" (Chefdor 196, 200-02). A gnomic quality gives certain statements in his poetry added energy, revealing a consciousness of ties between spirit and matter that is extant in any number of Presocratic fragments: "While changing it rests"; "{The} way of writing {is} straight and crooked"; "Nor is any of the totality empty or in excess" (Heraclitus 51, fragment 84a; 41, fragment 59; Empedocles 221, fragment 19/13).

Another step toward comprehending literary ties to the ancients is the idea of orality. In the case of the Presocratics, much of what we know is based on what the thinkers said or were heard to say. A testimonial quality, in the French sense of bearing witness to an intuition, feeling, or fact, is a hallmark of Guillevician directness. Vargaftig, for his part, devotes great time and effort to rhythm and cadence (Minetto). Furthermore, notions of song, musicality, and the sacred commingle when we place the two poets' orality against the backdrop of the Bible as translated in the last decades. Following on advances in biblical scholarship and evolving conceptions of religion, Alter and Meschonnic have taken to reinterpreting Old Testament works in their respective translations by hewing closely to the original Hebrew, Meschonnic to show that "c'est le rythme qui mène la danse" (*Nu(e)* 12; cf. *Gloires*, *Rouleaux*), Alter to relate "narratives […] composed to be *heard*" with "a distinctive music, a lovely precision of lexical choice, a meaningful concreteness, and a suppleness of expressive syntax that by and large have been given short shrift by translators with their eyes on other goals" (Alter xxvii, xlv). In short, this critical lens helps us to see form that is condensed, paratactic, extraordinarily "concret[e]," "constantly recapitulative" and restricted in its lexicon (Alter xix, xxiv, xxix)—

omnipresent in Vargaftig's later decades and notable within Guillevician quanta—as perhaps emblematic of our poets' worldview centered around the sacred. When Vargaftig states that "Les mêmes mots débordent / Sans être les mêmes" (*Un Récit* 54), he identifies an overflow as much of the perceptual space that constitutes his identity and his contact to the real, as of a poetic-linguistic space in which words' "immensité" (54) communicates a biblical teleology. He praises inherent, vital, if enigmatic connections between beings and things in an active, dynamic, erotically charged world: "Il y aurait le ciel et le sable / Que le silence avait vus / Et ton écharpe une route / Ton premier geste un souffle tes seins" (85).

Before briefly citing Meschonnic's *Au commencement*, a last step toward seeing continuity in poetic change across the centuries involves recognizing a cultural component that can go missing from French criticism due to "Christianocentri[c]" biases as well as assimilation (Marks 119-20, 127-38), namely the potential for joy in ritual expressions of faith including Torah reading that characterizes Judaism. In other words, could it be that Guillevic's *Le Chant* adopts to an extent Gershom Scholem's arguments regarding the ineffable as offset in the Kabbalah by "'a metaphysically positive attitude towards language as God's own instrument,'" toward language as "'the medium in which the spiritual life of man is accomplished'" (qtd. in Wolosky 368)? Does the open-ended syntagma "le chant" bear a fleeting resemblance to beliefs common to East European Judaism since the Zohar in 1268, with its emphasis on uncovering "the innermost secrets of existence" and on how "every human act has a ripple effect on the entire universe" (Dosick 115)? Does the accretion of layers of meaning throughout *Le Chant*—modestly, indirectly—place the polarities of the cosmos into renewed balance, and thus allow us to dwell in harmony with the divine essence, the feminine Shekinah (Ariel 95-111)? Whether or not Guillevic and Vargaftig work toward such goals, Meschonnic's phrasing of the first words of Genesis in "Au commencement" (27) shows how vigorous a literal, rhythmic rendering of the Hebrew's literary effects can be, and thereby increases our sensitivity to controlled passion and condensed form in our two poets' books:

Au commencement que Dieu a créé

Le ciel et la terre

Et la terre était vaine et vide et l'ombre sur la
face du gouffre
Et le souffle de Dieu couve sur la face de l'eau

Et Dieu a dit qu'il y ait la lumière
Et il y a eu la lumière

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In writing about Vargaftig, Monique Labidoire speaks of poetic structure "[qui] s'invente et décline des voix qui sont liturgies profanes mais rites sacrés" (181). Guillevic, too, in the convivial and questioning, earnest and relaxed voice that animates *Le Chant*, ceremonially mirrors the depths of the real onto himself and the reader, for greater wisdom and clarity as we watch life unfold within the world's song-like melody and harmony, rhythm and counterpoint, stillness and arching sound. Like Vargaftig, if more peacefully, though elsewhere he does address the Shoah (Villani), Guillevic borrows from a relatively ordinary lexicon of elemental realities to make the soul and psyche soar:

À se prêter aux oiseaux
On apprend

Que vivre son corps
Dans les trois dimensions,

S'entendre avec le vent
Ou lutter contre lui

Prédispose au chant. (393)

As a 'predisposition,' this three-dimensionality connects us to the sacred.

It makes poetic song a path toward exploration of our frailty and limits as well as our power and potential. Within contemporary poetic conceptions of immanence, ranging from cautious agnosticism to luxuriance in a spiritual presence within all of creation, it is an attitude toward world and self that encourages what Michael Bishop calls regarding Gérard Titus-Carmel "constance et incessante réouverture" (poezibao). It presciently signals how what may at first seem profane could well be the very core of the sacred, particularly when hailed within the framework of the ancients' fascination for the mystery of all we see and feel. In Guillevic and Vargaftig alike, form becomes not a set of signifiers in search of a signified, but the refinement of material substance in view of letting inner and outer worlds intermix. Condensed, distilled, fluidly fragmented language rekindles our sensitivity to microcosm and macrocosm, inner and outer worlds, texts old and new, immersing us not only in Being and its glimmers of beauty, but also in the sacred as a potential bridge to the divine.

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