

Intimacy, Ecstasy: Eros and Communion with the Cosmos in *Possibles futurs*

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In Guillevic's later poems, the quest for communion both mellows and intensifies.¹ Because he is at ease with himself, he is able to more fully impart moods such as peacefulness or exuberance. Alongside his inquisitiveness and lingering uncertainties, a relaxed and grateful intimacy characterizes many quanta, which flow smoothly from one to the next while expressing singular closeness with what is seen and felt. The creative process can be read as overtly sacred in its highly connective gesturing toward beings and things, its ritualized ceremony of viewing the world beyond the self with curiosity and gratitude. The early poetry of *Requiem*, a "prayer of longing for inclusion in the materiality of life and its erotic jouissance, and a prayer for peace from the fear of death and self-loss" (Havir 102), becomes ambitions fully realized. Within this creative process of discovery and inclusion, which by now seems as if it can and should take place in any context, the sexual and the religious, the psychological and the ontological, interweave in intriguing ways, particularly when the publication in Gallimard volumes of sequences written separately makes for certain juxtapositions, as for example with "Magnificat" in *Trouées*. Mutual relationships with what lies beyond the self

evolve across sequences that appear increasingly spiritually oriented. Neighboring realms of thought and action commingle. This study will address utterances in *Possibles futurs* that show a continuum in everyday life between the topoi of immersion in the outer world and admiration for a female companion. Borrowing from the title *L'Éros souverain* (1995; cf. 2007), it will posit that diverse forms of eros possess remarkable power and status across Guillevic's later works,² that communion adds a measure of ecstasy to these works in the form of great happiness in the here and now, and that his sacralizing of the feminine reflects longstanding religious traditions but humbly and judiciously reinterprets them.

To introduce bonds in *Possibles futurs* between man and nature, man and woman, speaker and self, it is useful to note specificities of *Art poétique* that convey merging with the cosmos as a well ordered if always nuanced whole. Amid the speaker's hopes and frustrations as to making progress, numerous statements help us sensually accompany time and space. Crystalline, melodically and rhythmically sure lines of utmost syntactic simplicity bring this objective within reach. It is as if all things approached the speaker and took part in acts of self-knowledge, in a process of mutual self-discovery. Gnostic formulas represent a spiritual-religious desire for rootedness, a longing for the fullest possible attunement to human dwelling within the whole of creation. Microcosm and macrocosm become richly, inextricably fused in a participation in the wonder of creation. The collection's final poem, simplicity itself in its imagery and register, contrasts and unity, allusiveness and self-containment, speaks to this accessible, joyously open-ended communion that the texts of *Art poétique* embody:

Tu ne seras pas la rose,
Elle ne sera pas toi,

Mais entre vous il y a
Ce qui vous est commun,

Que vous savez vivre
Et faire partager. (317)

Philosophical discourse on human dwelling is filtered through modernistic minimalism, while at the same time the compact rhythms and sounds highlight an individual's awe at the "la rose" as a daily presence and as a sign of future promise.

Eros as desire for intimate, sensual ties is accentuated by verb choice. In the example above, "vivre" condenses the contact with the duration of the rose's flowerings into a single word, thus making the experience most immediate, while the causative "faire partager" highlights the need to share this duration and immediacy. Elsewhere, the brevity of the lines "Le poème fait toucher / Le vide / Qui le borde" (251) makes the causative a springboard to sensual immersion in silence and space. The causative is used to suggest both assertive power and accompanying regrets regarding a "besoin d'infini / Qui fait bouger la mer" (173), as if to say the poet influences the innermost rhythms of the cosmos and how we perceive them. The verticality so essential to Guillevician poetics is reinforced by the causative in lines regarding how each poem "vous fait tenir debout, / Monter rayonnant" (271), within a quantum that pushes further in the thematic direction of poems' sensual, physical power by suggesting they can make an emotional and spiritual awakening take place:

Le monde vous entoure de près
Tout en devenant moins lourd,

Traversé par une lumière
Qui ne vient pas d'ailleurs.

— Vous êtes poursuivi. (271)

Of particular interest is the circulation of invigorating forces. The poem not only causes an uplifting, active, radiantly energizing stance, but also sets into motion first a centering embrace, then the curious pursuit of the writer and reader by the poem, the world it describes, and the world's immanent light. Though the last line adds a slightly comical touch, this diminishes if we look to the previous quantum:

Le poème est là

Où celui qui s’y love
En arrive presque

À toucher l’espace. (270)

The reflexive “se lover” implies the physical effort involved in interacting with the poem, as well as, crucially, a movement toward rebirth from within a womb and the intense attraction between world and self that the poem sparks. Without insisting solely on merging with the universe, *Art poétique* highlights related actions that resonate with the reader attuned to the sensual and the spiritual. These actions expand our awareness of writing as eros when we note their lucid yet suggestive phrasing, along with images such as making “la durée” one’s lover (216) or relying on writing to make one’s body feel as if it “se fondait / Dans plus vaste que lui” (257).

A core part of Guillevic’s poetics in *Possibles futurs* is this same desire to bond with all things, to joyously acknowledge and prolong mutually beneficial contact with the world outside the self. In addition to sometimes approaching the erotic, we are never far from eros in the primitive, cosmic sense of attraction that ensures cohesion. Considering eros through the sections “La Plaine,” “Elle,” and “Lyriques”—as well as in passing “Le Matin,” “L’Innocent,” and “Du silence”—will demonstrate continuities among various aspects of this life force. We will examine in “Elle” and “Lyriques” how accompanying a feminine Other effects a multifaceted, post-religious communion with the cosmos. Analytical aims are to complement existing ethical and ontological readings of Guillevic, to probe his mythical side, and to identify Guillevician communion as a dimension of the sacred today. A related aim is to situate eros with regard to his overall praxis formally and thematically. For instance, *Art poétique* periodically bridges into relationality as ecstasy. As a mature statement of poetic intentions, it legitimizes such strategies. Time, space, light, and elemental beings and things all play a role in this discovery of world and self. Some words and structures hint at intimacy as ecstasy, while others express such feelings outright, as when accompanying clouds and looking within “les alentours” from this new perspective leads to the statement “Je ne trouve à dire / Que l’extase” (240), or when the

relationship of a “vase blanc” to the slowness of time and to the speaker make it inhabit his “royaume de jouissance” (224).

In *Possibles futurs*, the section “La Plaine” places similar scenarios within an extended intersubjective dialogue. The interlocutors are the speaker, his inner self as an addressee, and the plain as an addressee. This is a typical Guillevician dialogue in its *tutoiement*, formal compactness, alliterative music, inquiry tirelessly pursued, and reflections that expand and contract in their depth. At the same time, several aspects add singularity relative to eros, for example “la plaine” as a feminine principle (9), as an embodiment of space (10), as a part of nature vast and active enough to embody most all of nature (13), and as an entity with which to dialogue at length. Indeed, each page of “La Plaine” foregrounds intimacy in novel ways. The initial setup has a touch of humor in its slight exasperation at the risk of self-repetition, yet there is much thankfulness for the network of thought and feeling beginning to be formed within the context of shared closeness and a longstanding “pacte.” The evolving exchange necessitates alertness and physical effort, “quelque chose de neuf / À lui arracher” (9), almost as if the speaker had to be close to the plain’s soil. The relational diction emphasizes physical, sensual, intuitive interpersonal exchange, whether through the frequent use of subject pronouns, noteworthy phrases such as “[i]vres seulement d’exister” and “[c]e courant qui n’en finit pas” (10), or the introduction of pivotal Guillevician terms such as “[s]e connaître, s’épouser” (11). While the poem’s ethical and ontological aspects propel this exploration of world and self, as with the need to “découvrir dans l’autre / Ce qui est en soi,” so too does the “passion” of many quanta, the emotional, psychological, and spiritual effort involved in a tireless exchange, one where “[o]n ne s’épuise pas” (11).

The motif of being ever more wedded each to the other plays a significant part in this encounter, and becomes especially suggestive regarding eros as a will to live in tandem sensually. In the opening pages, hints of this sensuality appear that cannot be fully gauged, as existence itself, relationality whether near to or far away from the plain, is the primary framework. Yet in the following quantum, we observe what might be called a vital pagan rite:

Je me suis tenu sur toi,
Je me suis étendu sur toi,
Je me suis roulé sur toi,

Et tout cela je peux le faire
Encore et encore,
Et je le ferai,

Mais tiens-moi compte
De ce qui fut dans le passé,
De cela dont rien n'est oublié. (12)

The will to live that surges forth, the passion of such an encounter, is unusually physical and Other-centered. Even if meant only figuratively, these energetic actions can be surprising, not least with the second stanza's insistence on their future repetition and the third stanza's implication of a similar shared history. The unmistakable parallels to sexuality surpass the ontological epic of the real often attributed to Guillevic's oeuvre (cf. Guillevic 1980; 2012, 268), and gesture toward the sacred in its primitive sense. Moreover, a mythical side emerges in the dialogue between the speaker and the plain as an embodied, personified, all-knowing part of nature. In subsequent quanta, the marital, sexual, religious, and phenomenological fuse regarding these interlocutors' "épousailles" (16, 18): the speaker feels 'enveloped' by the plain during their mutually satisfactory plunging into depths (13); arisen as he leans over the plain (14); and, together with the plain, "Au plein de [leurs] épousailles / Dans l'enténébrement glorieux" (16), as if they were a gleaming tower for all of the earth and sky. The nuptials—whether authentically earthbound to modern eyes, or religious and philosophical in an ancient sense of festive union with God—prove all the more sacred as a ceremony unconstrained by time, a union marked by "répétitions" (18) that prolong and validate it. On the penultimate page, where separation occurs, mention of "Un nombril toujours / À quoi se sustenter" (19) suggests an umbilical cord connecting the speaker and the plain, the present relationship as an anchoring center, and the emotional, psychological, and spiritual nourishment of future contact. In sum, "La Plaine" merges intimacy broadly perceived and the ecstasy of physical proximity, including in its last distich "Mais voguant en nous, / En cette sphère que nous créons" (20). Eros as an aspect of the sacred in Guillevic surpasses—even as it mirrors—the erotics of close human interpersonal relationships.

“Elle” and “Lyriques” focus on interpersonal relationships while delving further into a near-ethereal perfection. When these sequences portray communion, we see moments of exchange and mutual participation in the world’s unfolding that invite analysis as unusually heightened communion, as connections between world, self, and other that ensure cohesive and sensual dwelling in harmony with time and space. Along with a shift to more compact quanta, many of which approach the proverbial, there is a transition to celebration of the feminine through praise for a companion. In “Elle,” the speaker makes reverential third-person observations that situate her primarily in relationship to herself and to the outer world, while in “Lyriques” direct address establishes relationships between the observer, the person observed, and their experiences together and surroundings. In both cases, the feminine allows cosmic, elemental wholeness, as if ‘she’ were a mix of Gaia, Aphrodite, and various male gods acting upon the universe, yet functioning within one person rather more subtly than in the stories of Greek mythology, in the manner of “le matin” anthropomorphized and shrewdly saying, whether in rebuke or as reassurance, “Ne vous trompez pas, [...] Le cosmos existe / Et vous en êtes” (61). We learn toward the end of “Lyriques” that the speaker is generally addressing “[s]a femme” (51), but the resonance of *Possibles futurs* far exceeds autobiographical detail, as when in the same quantum he feels he recognizes her rising up to him “[d]u fond des âges.”

The continuity between “La Plaine,” “Elle,” and “Lyriques” enables us to see eros’s wide-ranging role and effects, as “[c]e courant qui n’en finit pas” (10) that all sentient beings—including those in nature and the elements personified—feel pass through them within the context of evolving relationships. A central component of these relationships is an eminently respectful “complicité” among beings and things: a discreet and longstanding alliance or mutual understanding, as in the quantum “Nous ne cessons pas / De nous inventer // Dans la complicité, / Comme la terre et le soleil” (42; cf. 52). Desire, though less physical and more subdued, stimulates close exchange and partnership, what we might call making earth, sky, and the elements fellow conspirators, as in these opening quanta of “Elle”:

Elle marche,
L’air la porte,

Elle ouvre un espace
Rendu plus présent.

*

La pesanteur est en elle
Juste ce qu'il faut
Pour que la terre
La retienne. (23)

As with the earlier image of a “nombril” (19), eros as a critical lens can expand our understanding of implicit and explicit references to a center (cf. 29, 39, 53), for example in “L’Innocent” as that which we visually seek or mentally grasp that allows us each to feel nourished and sustained:

Être soi-même
Qui se fond dans les autres
Sans s’oublier

Et couler, source,
Dans la source. (136)

A specificity of “Elle” and “Lyriques” is their sacralizing of this process and these bonds, as emanating from a female Other who exemplifies the human capacity to catalyze, prolong, and nuance them. Through her, they repeatedly say, desire is not only a rising up to radiantly confront or penetrate the world’s depths, but also a gentle and unspoken flow each into the other, “[s]ans s’oublier,” as well as an impulse to recognize and give thanks for greater equilibrium among beings and things.

In their tone, form, and imagery, the initial lines of “Elle” just cited exemplify the feminine as a conduit to sacred, sensual, elemental ties between world and self. A key shift occurs relative to “La Plaine” in that someone other than the speaker becomes the center of all that is. Nonetheless, we take part in a similar dynamic: the creation of a space in which beings—including the reader—become more present to the world and can model their future actions on literally and figuratively uplifting experiences. Eros has dual importance:

first, concerning the observer's intimate knowledge of the essence of the observee, within vignettes that have both hymnal and Éluardian aspects, and second, as regards the reciprocal intimacy between "elle" and the outer world. The latter is of particular interest, as it informs near-religious ecstasy on the speaker's part and gives shape to mythical dimensions within the quanta, at times as if "elle" embodied prehistory itself. This reciprocal intimacy is so glorious that it might edge toward exaggeration were it not for the speaker's perseverance in exploring this theme. Physicality remains central, as both an exchange of energy between world and self and an ability on the part of "elle" to channel cosmic forces, to become a supreme but much loved force herself. For instance, the air carries her when she walks; she unites, as a metaphorical ocean, the streams that inhabit the air; her weightedness is near-weightlessness, perfectly gauged to align with gravity so that the earth keeps her in place as a close acquaintance might (23); her love becomes the locus of the whole world's love, with and through her (34).

Such references might seem fantastical, but are often anchored in the body and in a sacred corporality, which together underscore a sensually and spiritually charged flow of energy. For example, the intense light her body proclaims is likely present in her possession of what the tree "[t]ait de lui-même" (24), of what makes us engrossingly watch a stream's water flow (25), of what makes flowers, corals, and sunrises draw inspiration from her (25). It is as if the "sève" (171) present in phenomena were extracted from a feminine divine essence, incorporating yet exceeding the ontological via the sacrality that flows forth from "elle," as in the quantum "Quand elle coule sur elle / L'eau retrouve son origine" (31). Guillevic does not necessarily insist on an omnipresent sacrality, depicting her instead as rooted in a center (29) or walking toward her "consécration" (28). One could argue, however, that an underlying life force keeps sacrality always within the realm of the possible, ever renewed, as when she is a "jonction d'éléments" that traverse her (28) or keeps walking "Vers sa consécration / / Par ce qui l'environne / Et l'environnera" (28). Furthermore, Guillevic imbricates sensuality and spirituality, the human and the elemental, beings and their surroundings, in such a way that fine distinctions fade in importance.

Jouissance in the materiality of life becomes increasingly sensual and erotic when references to the body are multiplied, as well as slyly biblical in the quantum "Elle a du serpent / La ductilité / / Et ce qu'il faut de ruse / Pour

être ce qu'on est" (26). Through "elle," the feminine takes on many qualities of the universe, and vice versa, in a complementary exchange that makes "le mystère" (27) more readily manifest. Certainly the male observer benefits from this all-permeating jouissance by contemplating an object of his affections. However, "elle" as female subject takes precedence as a distinctive connection to a cosmos we might otherwise not understand, as a revelatory mechanism of sorts through both her presence and her body. In these various instances, eros plays a key role as an attractive force that ensures cohesion. For example, the fact that she makes the lines of her body sing "[s]ur un fond qu'elle invente" (26) suggests her intellect, cleverness, creativity, and sensuality, the latter evocative of the trees, light, and birds mentioned earlier. Though for those familiar with Guillevic's interest in geometry the quantum "C'est en elle / Que les courbes // Trouvent leur perfection" (30) has added piquancy, subsequent references to her as "chair de l'esprit" (32), as having volcanic eyes "[p]rometteurs d'un destin" (32), or as having eyelashes that recall "[d]es forêts originelles" (33) clarify the depths that her presence represents. One could argue that these depths correspond above all to her capacity to make evident the outer world's energy and to ensure continuity, reciprocity, and veneration, as in the case of her smile being "le fruit de l'alliance // Du futur / Et de la planète" (35), or of her as "Soleil / Et lune ensemble, / Ostensor / De la terre" (36). The final quantum extends this last religious reference by mythologizing her as an archetypal god-like figure, perhaps of fertility and human potential, "Nue [...] Les pieds sur la plaine, / La tête au zénith" (36). In sum, "Elle" gives us a rare glimpse of expressions of feminine essence and female subjectivity in Guillevic, particularly regarding how eros liberates the self and furthers primal intersubjective connections.

"Lyriques," as its title implies, brings this dynamic to the more everyday level of togetherness as a couple, but with added reference to a mutual forward path followed by people and things. The centrality of a "courant" (10) always passing between them, as well as of each entity's permanent "rencontre" (53) with other entities, becomes even more apparent as the generous flow of a life force, one could almost say as the generalized sharing of an abstract caress (cf. 50). A nuance in "Lyriques" is that, thanks to the speaker's companion, this life force gets redistributed in atypical fashion. The world 'envelops' the lovers with presence (53), but inhabiting the world as two also leads to freer perceptual interplay, more imaginative and reciprocal

exchange. Beings and things reach out to each other expansively, see each other with fuller humor and grace, their inner and outer worlds subtly and joyfully transformed. For example, in one instance all things in a “temple désert” (39) will watch the couple and want to help them surpass spiritual poverty, which in another instance is replaced by a universal, reciprocal “gloire” (54). The female companion appears to the speaker “[a]u fond de l’allée” (39), and the speaker sees the path seem to invent itself in response to her. In the context of the intersubjectivity that quanta describe, lines’ extreme minimalism reinforces this boundless back and forth of relationships, this thematic call and response whereby “[t]ous et tout se répondent” (54).

“Lyriques” and “Elle” borrow somewhat from the Song of Songs to show what W. Dennis Tucker calls regarding this part of the Bible “radical *eros*—a deep yearning that knows only the language of intimate communion, the song of the Bridegroom and his Bride” (Tucker 27). Filtering Guillevic through the Song of Songs clarifies how he rewrites religious love poetry to emphasize his companion—and the immediacy of communion—as his guide to the ecstasy of togetherness, wholly separate from the need for any God or gods. Whereas the many “monastic commentaries on the Song concentrated on the relationship between Christ (the Bridegroom) and the soul (the Bride)” (21), “Lyriques” and “Elle” make the speaker the Bridegroom and his companion the Bride. In addition, Guillevic makes each instance of “Je,” “Tu,” and “Nous,” including things themselves, an active participant in the ecstasy of togetherness, in the exchange between the world and the individual soul, much as in the *Symposium* Eryximachus proposes that “Eros exists in the souls of men not only toward beautiful people, but also toward many other things and in other things—in the bodies of all animals, in what grows in the earth, and in general in all that is” (Plato 126). Wry and witty, yet imbued with an all-encompassing view of eros as a yearning to fully dwell within the real, Guillevic crafts a thoughtful human response to the desire for union, a response based on his companion as bride, as a means of accessing world-self-encounters and blossoming within all they bring him.

Reading *Possibles futurs* in counterpoint to the Song of Songs reveals much that is germane. References to the body in “Elle,” for example, recall the Song of Song’s meticulous metaphorical descriptions while highlighting immersion in time, space, and the world’s intangible contours. When in “Lyriques” the female companion appears to the speaker “[a]u fond de l’allée”

(39), the path's resulting self-reinvention asserts at once this particular love's preeminence, the sacredness of exemplary human love, the *complicité* of the companion and the path, and the need to downplay elaborate metaphors about her presence. We see that she embodies beauty, truth, and wisdom in the next two quanta, the second of which rewrites the myth of Hyacinth by arguing via a chiasma that the companion's beauty merits not a mere trace in nature, but rather respect as a guiding light:

Je ne t'ai pas demandé
Où nous allons.

Je savais que tu trouverais
Ce pourquoi nous allons.

*

Je ne t'ai pas vue
Devenir jacinthe.

J'ai vue la jacinthe
Vouloir t'égaliser. (40)

"Lyriques" celebrates the feminine in order to acknowledge it as perhaps a prerequisite for communion with the cosmos. Tenderly and with lighthearted impertinence, these quanta welcome the wonder of mystical union but reverse the idea that it points heavenward. The next two quanta cheekily refute transcendence by making the clouds and sky first jealous of the companion's "regard" (40), then weighted with "[d]es devoirs envers nous" (41). When "le ciel [...] se trait[e] de voyeur" (41), there is a comic edge to seeing the heavens look earthward to understand the eros of intimacy that allows ecstasy. Another quantum reconfigures notions of oneness with a supreme power by making a kiss not a chance to awaken to the divine as in the Song of Songs, but instead a redirecting of energy so that it circulates among beings and things: "Lorsque la scabieuse / T'a parlé de moi // Tu lui as répondu / En me donnant / Un baiser de papillon" (41). This kiss allows not ascent to other realms through metaphors of erotic desire, but rather imaginative reinforcement of

communication, not least via the apparently admiring—and perhaps metaphorically healing and soothing—words spoken by the blue button flower.

Other moments in “Lyriques” reinforce this companion’s unique power to lend intersubjectivity great focus and root it in the here and now. Time and again, she initiates the speaker into the inner joy or “béatitude” of two selves complementing each other without concern for “[le] destin” (44), of experiencing “l’espace” as “plein de toi, de nous” (48). Guillevic’s remarks in this respect, which can be at once casual and wise, inquisitive and all-knowing, anchor eros in sensual openness and mutual exchange while making the companion the source for his strength to be himself. Though she can remain somewhat abstract, it is not poetic symbols that help him access her, but rather she who leads the way toward her own self-definition, while also shaping his experience of the outer world for himself and within their love relationship. In one amusing instance, the dove cannot sing for this couple any message erotic or otherwise because they are already “ailleurs” (47), likely drifting into the labyrinths of “la joie” (56). Reading these circumstances through the closing text of “L’Innocent,” one could say that she helps each person or thing “reste[r] ce qu’il est — / Au plus pur de lui-même” (137). Reading them through the sequence “Du Silence,” we might say she facilitates small, subtle revelations as to the purity of one’s inner self and the clarity of “la présence / Indispensable” (168). In sum, Guillevic modernizes the bride motif by making the feminine a crucial mechanism for accessing relational dimensions of the real. His companion attunes him to the cosmos by illuminating a path that her presence helps continually reinvent. The poems of *Possibles futurs* make her fundamental to the experience of eros in that she is a driving force able to let all beings and things “fraternise[r]” (194), in an expansive, nurturing, reciprocal present in which to rewrite—within the ecstasy of intimate communion—timeless tropes of poetry and myth.

Notes

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²See also Maria Lopo, “L'Éros, l'instant,” *Guillevic Maintenant, Colloque de Cerisy 11-18 juillet 2009*, éd. Michael Brophy et Bernard Fournier, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011, 37-51.

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