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# Guillevic as Eco-poet: Apples, Roundness, and Affinities with Thoreau

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## Abstract

This article will explore eco-poetics by comparing notes on tonic wildness: Eugène Guillevic's poetry collection *Sphère* (1963), particularly the poem "Rond", and Henry David Thoreau's late essay "Wild Apples" (1859-1862). It will show how both writers foreground ethics and ecology via the materiality of words, the pull of nature, and the nuances of narrative voice. I will emphasize ways in which renowned French poet Guillevic exemplifies eco-poetics, despite critics not applying this label to him. I will develop parallels between Guillevic and Thoreau, consider Guillevic's love for the non-human, and discuss the environmental and ecological stakes of his sensuous communion with the outer world. I will analyze these writers' lively, invigorating poetic stances, highlighting the creative responses that Guillevic invites to the natural world and intersubjectivity, habitat and humanity, the senses and ecological paths that provide a future orientation. Kin perhaps to essayist Michael Pollan, Guillevic inscribes us in the cosmos and immerses us in cyclical growth, including by celebrating apples' implicit call to inscription in the biosphere. His meditative, dialogic voice and affinities with Thoreau help eco-poetics as a category embrace immediacy and self-awareness as well as historical and literary trends since antiquity.

Awestruck, inquisitive, emboldened, rooted in natural surroundings, drawn to what is wild, primitive or ancient: Eugène Guillevic (1907-1997) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) share many such traits.<sup>1</sup> They seek out nature for solace, companionship, and self-understanding. Unsettled in relation to the modern, so-called civilized world, they gaze in fascination at the earth and its creatures large and small, as a window on interrelatedness. Tracking the flow of days brings joy and wisdom by way of space and light, flora and fauna, time unfolding within space. Observation of concrete particulars informs gradual illumination regarding how world and self connect. The here and now situates us within process, chance, non-Newtonian contingency, a historical and affective ebb and flow<sup>2</sup>, a Humboldtian Cosmos that lives "only with our help"<sup>3</sup>. However, neither writer wholly fits the template of the eco-poet as this figure has been canonized of late. The American essayist-explorer Thoreau helped shape contemporary eco-poetics – for instance, as to "ecocentrism, an appreciation of

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1. A preliminary version of this article unrelated to Thoreau was "'Rond' and a Poetics of Roundness, within and beyond *Sphère*", *Notes Guillevic Notes*, vol. 9, Fall 2019, p. 7-18. The present article is entirely new, but permission to reference that version is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks are also due to the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, for Sam Taylor Fellowships to research Guillevic and the sacred.
  2. Paraphrase of analyses in Laura Dassow Walls, "Believing in Nature: Wilderness and Wildness in Thoreauvian Science", in Richard J. Schneider (ed.), *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*, Foreword Lawrence Buell, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2000, p. 18.
  3. Laura Dassow Walls, "Greening Darwin's Century: Humboldt, Thoreau, and the Politics of Hope", *Victorian Review*, vol. 36, n° 2, 2010, p. 95: "Humboldt resurrected that ancient Greek word [Cosmos] to designate the way that nature exists outside human purpose yet is brought into order and beauty – into the Cosmos – through human cognition and perception. [...] Humboldt's views synthesize Enlightenment beliefs in rational, secular progress and the free agency of all peoples with Romantic beliefs in the centrality of feeling to perception, of beauty to the intellect, and of nature to the soul."

wildness, and a scepticism toward hyperrationality"<sup>4</sup> – but precedes it by over a century. He predates the ecoawareness that works such as Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* set in motion in literary studies as of the 1970s. The preeminent French poet Guillevic is a chameleon-like observer whose pithy, often aphoristic or zen-like reflections only distantly echo Wordsworthian expressions of the sublime and who has received no mention in the emerging field of ecopoetic criticism. Thankful for kinship with nature but favoring modest, measured, idiosyncratic verse, he rediscovered his poetic voice in the early 1960s upon realizing – ironically relative to global environmental crises in the 2020s – the importance of not raising it, of humbly connecting the human and the non-human, in endearing, philosophical expressions of love rather than laments for threatened human and social orders.<sup>5</sup>

The present analysis aims to situate both writers at the forefront of ecopoetry today, particularly Guillevic, as much concerning his devotion to wildness and wilderness as his status as a canonical poet. I will argue that reading him through Thoreau can reinvigorate his canonicity in French-speaking critical circles while also introducing him to ecocentered literary debate for Anglophones, who understandably highlight writers more familiar to themselves and their own traditions.<sup>6</sup> As with Thoreau, there is much to unpack. The choice of points of departure from their respective oeuvres, moreover, can affect the demonstration. Salient features will include scrutiny of the later Thoreau – "Wild Apples" (1859-1862) as well as Journal entries – and of poems by Guillevic from the 1960s. Though *Carnac* (1961), *Sphère* (1963), *Avec* (1966), and *Ville* (1969) form a general backdrop, core ideas will become apparent through *Sphère* and the poem "Rond". Ecological and environmental matters will be addressed gradually, alongside other points. It bears reiteration that Guillevic's own penchant in this period was to avoid social issues, preferring brevity and levity instead, earnestness as well as humor, compact statements that typically build only slightly, incrementally, even surreptitiously to any crescendo of insight or awareness that English-language readers might expect. Thoreau will prove a perfect foil for this process of gleaning, thinking, meditation, and profound discovery. The two writers' works will exemplify authorial strategies that awaken us to our surroundings: a focus on seeing nature as an anchor for culture, on gleaning wisdom through literature, and on embracing difference in view of promoting future growth. Thoreau's ideas and style will inform examination of Guillevic's immersion in nature's riches, contrasts, and cycles. The three parts of the overall analysis, "Apples", "Roundness", and "Trembling", will first discern aspects of Thoreau through which to study Guillevic, then

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4. J. Scott Bryson, "Seeing the West Side of Any Mountain: Thoreau and Contemporary Ecological Poetry", in Richard J. Schneider (ed.), *Thoreau's Sense of Place*, op. cit., p. 143.
  5. Guillevic avoided social issues due to regret over his politically oriented sonnets (cf. *Terre à bonheur*), in afterthought a sign of his inspiration having briefly run dry. Note nonetheless "chansons" such as "Morbihan" (*Sphère*, suivi de *Carnac*, Paris, Poésie/Gallimard, 1989 [1963, 1961], p. 98-99), or cries against injustice as in the ecocentric poem "Bretagne" (*Creusement: poèmes 1977-1986*, Paris, Gallimard, 1987, p. 61).
  6. Of note regarding Guillevic and ecopoetics in France are the following by Gwenola Caradec: "La portée écologique du motif des nuages dans *Art poétique* et *Étier*", *Notes Guillevic Notes*, vol. 1, Fall 2011, p. 21-28; "*Partie prenante*": *environnement et poétique dans la littérature française et francophone des XX<sup>e</sup> et XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012.

consider apples and roundness in *Sphère* while emphasizing affinities with Thoreau<sup>7</sup>, and finally look at other poems from the 1960s as well as two sequences on wildness, “Sauvage” (in *Creusement*, 1987) and *Ce sauvage*.<sup>8</sup>

## Apples

Thoreau and Guillevic write with equal verve, precision, and flair. In our initial examples, “Wild Apples” and “Rond”, they evoke a bounty to be experienced anew as well as communicated to fellow beings. Less discussed by specialists than Thoreau’s other works, “Wild Apples” asks that we “align” ourselves with nature’s true wildness<sup>9</sup> and thus regain an Edenic lost innocence, be rejuvenated by wild apples’ celestial fullness, variety, radiance, and non-commercial appeal. To find and eat wild apples is to savor their indefinable hardness, to be suffused with ineffable delight, to reinscribe oneself in humankind’s spiritual history yet remain far from the madding crowd. Though associated with Americans’ frontier ethos and impulse toward westerly wandering, wild apples as described by Thoreau suggest to us the broader ethos of heeding nature’s slowly evolving and mysterious if tangible laws, instead of following market trends at odds with timeless, unpredictable joys. Commentary on “Wild Apples” before exploring Guillevic will bring out the palpable communion with the outer world that the writers convey: their modest, perhaps old-fashioned, but effective ecopoetic *modus operandi*.

First, there is Thoreau’s strategic jiggering of narrative voice to notice. As Steven Fink has shown, in “Wild Apples” he progressively addresses two kinds of readers: those who will breezily accept facts without applying deeper lessons to their own lives, and the already wild and “self-sufficien[t]” who will recognize the metaphorical importance of standing somewhat outside of society, literally “out-of-doors”, where truer, humbler riches can be found by those receptive to the landscape’s gifts, reluctant to master or “exploit” it, and keen like Thoreau to strive for a “high calling” despite what the masses might think.<sup>10</sup> Thoreau structures the essay carefully and logically, moving from history, to apple varieties in the context of seasons, to fleeting beauty, to a foreboding that our welcome of the wild apple may not last, yet opts throughout for an energetic conversational style not without what Lawrence Buell calls “gentle mockery”<sup>11</sup>. Whereas the reader might be accustomed to a linear unfolding of events

7. Cf. Steven Winspur, *La Poésie du lieu: Segalen, Thoreau, Guillevic, Ponge*, Amsterdam / Atlanta, Rodopi, 2006. The present study expands Winspur’s richly evocative examination of place by heading in new directions, emphasizing views on wildness in a different array of texts.

8. *Ce sauvage: poème*, Toulouse, érès, 2010 [1980] can also be found in the posthumous *Accorder: poèmes 1933-1996*, Éd. Lucie Albertini-Guillevic, Paris, Gallimard, 2013, p. 159-177. As Guillevic’s outlook develops dynamically, its aims and moods shifting at times, one could also highlight an ideal of harmonious anchoring in the social order, for instance the conviviality discussed below.

9. Ronald Wesley Hoag, “Thoreau’s Later Natural History Writings”, in Joel Myerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 159.

10. Steven Fink, “The Language of Prophecy: Thoreau’s ‘Wild Apples’”, *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 59, n° 2, 1986, p. 215, 216, 221, 224, 225, 229.

11. Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 106.

within for example the storytelling frame of *Walden*, this essay's narrator does not hesitate to vary the tone and incorporate seeming asides, thus symbolically obliging the reader to find, like someone gleaning wild apples, hidden truths in unexpected places. The naturalist's science plays a role, yet so too does Thoreauvian ecological and spiritual proselytizing meant to surpass familiar logic and easy categorizations, to please and surprise with the immediacy of sensations. This perceptual swaying to and fro is exemplified by the humorous aside about eating wild apples from full pockets "one first from this side, and then from that", to hold a steady balance.<sup>12</sup>

Second, the flavor of the wild apple, the tonic sweet tang felt today of the ecocentrism for which it is a vehicle, emerges thanks to Thoreau's attention to diction, itself a tour de force in terms of communicating an unspeakable tenderness and thrill, cultivating the "savage or wild taste" necessary "to appreciate a wild fruit"<sup>13</sup>. He evinces thereby a liberty in which to partake: the paradoxical freedom of being bound to and respectful of the endless spaces where nature, left on its own and free of graftings, can beautifully flourish. This is no small feat, accomplished in part by moving from Latin to Greek, assertion to citation, present-day English to Robert Herrick and old English, the comical – "Van Cow" – to the biblical.<sup>14</sup> Section seven of the nine total, "The Naming of Them", turns factual science into word games that jestingly "reckon up" uncataloged species of "wild apples"<sup>15</sup>, even as the essay adamantly asserts the shortcomings of popular, bland graftings.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the close attention paid to the phrasing, rhythm, and pacing of sentences and paragraphs to make them eminently listenable and readable, all of which ensure "pulsat[ion] with fresh life"<sup>17</sup>, a central stylistic flourish is the use of utterances with paired adjectives. Whether "volatile and ethereal", "vivacious and inspiring" or "spirited and racy", the wild apple, as well as the attitudes and experiences it symbolizes, elevates us to godlike status, keeps the human soul and senses from being "flattened and tamed".<sup>18</sup> Such expressions form the pulp that make the essay Edenic and "ambrosial", a balance of opposites that blend to help us envision the biosphere and our immediate localities as a garden where, with luck and care, and despite the essay's ending note of pessimism based on the Book of Joel, we might still find strength and joy, provided we reestablish some measure of wildness in order to make the garden's "pleasures"<sup>19</sup> more real.

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12. Henry D. Thoreau, *Wild Apples and Other Natural History Essays*, Ed. William Rossi, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2002, p. 162.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 140, 141, 147, 145, 153, 165. "Van Cow" could translate in French to "Delavache".

15. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

16. Though Thoreau jests in places, meticulously documenting natural history as he did in real life counteracts popular culture overdetermined by market logic. In a similar recent example, the food documentary by Celine Serreau, *Solutions locales pour un désordre global / Good Food Bad Food*, Mongrel Media, 2011 [2010], Philippe Desbrosses rediscovers a lost potato variety listed in older catalogs and is fined by the French government for not respecting the newer official catalog.

17. Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal: 1837-1861*, Ed. and intro. Damion Searls, Preface John R. Stilgoe, New York, NYRB, 2009, p. 542 (February 3, 1859).

18. Henry D. Thoreau, *Wild Apples, op. cit.*, p. 144, 155, 156, 158.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 144, 164.

Third, the grounding in history provides ample perspective on past practices. The vast knowledge behind Thoreau's breezily uplifting February 1860 talk<sup>20</sup>, rooted variously in mythology, natural science, poetry, rituals, even "prophecy", teaches us with great patience not just fascinating facts, but also "how to eat an apple with the proper spirit"<sup>21</sup>. We grasp the semantic richness of the word "apples" and, as in Thoreau's "Autumnal Tints", take a broad view on nature, from a single fact or phenomenon to its past context, present evolution, ongoing beauty, and incitement to future observation as well as devotion.<sup>22</sup> As critics have often observed, Thoreauvian wildness proves inseparable from ecocentric intelligence as well as spiritual yearning. Here, to eat a wild apple is to revel in nature: nature understood as interwoven in culture rather than separate from it, an inherent and necessary strand of humanism, present moreover in the hidden corners of perception to which Thoreau leads us, including via the wry metaphorical reminder that the Saunterer's Apple "not even the saunterer can eat in the house"<sup>23</sup>. From a 21<sup>st</sup>-century perspective, we recognize the reach of ecocriticism "as a multiform inquiry"<sup>24</sup>, one that can embrace everything from the apple tree at the dawn of humankind's appearance to the gods eating apples "to become young again", from what "stray[s] into the woods" as if unseen to apples' visual sparkle and stains "commemorating the mornings and evenings [they have] witnessed"<sup>25</sup>. We accompany with a sunny disposition the unfamiliar or undomesticated, sensing anew our belonging amid flora and fauna. In sum, Thoreau's exposition invites us to revisit and reconnect with the Ancients, for instance from the Song of Songs to Virgil<sup>26</sup>, so that we develop a complex web of associations based on the apple as a physical fact in all its grandeur and simplicity.<sup>27</sup>

### Roundness

In the Journal, Thoreau looks to seasons for inspiration: "You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment."<sup>28</sup> At one point in *Sphère*, a collection that gathers poems of varying lengths and hues, Guillevic does exactly this by way of the apple. He implicitly posits that the apple – wild or ordinary no longer matters – mirrors the power of nature, as well as of the soul to commune with time and space, of the mind to take in beauty, of the senses to exult. Hardly a botanist of Thoreau's caliber, he nonetheless introduces remarkably similar concepts and techniques: dialogue and familiar diction as lively

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20. Cf. the notes by Rossi in Henry D. Thoreau, *Wild Apples*, *op. cit.*, p. 212-215.

21. Cf. Ronald Wesley Hoag, "Thoreau's Later Natural History Writings", *op. cit.*, p. 159.

22. Comments on the posthumous "Autumnal Tints" (1862) draw on analysis of this "paradigm of perception" in Ronald Wesley Hoag, "Thoreau's Later Natural History Writings", *op. cit.*, p. 158-159; cf. "Autumnal Tints" in Henry D. Thoreau, *Wild Apples*, *op. cit.*, p. 109-139.

23. Henry D. Thoreau, *Wild Apples*, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

24. Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, *op. cit.*, p. 430 (note 20).

25. Henry D. Thoreau, *Wild Apples*, *op. cit.*, p. 140-141, 149, 159.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 141, 161; cf. p. 213 (note 2) and p. 214 (note 12).

27. Cf. Virgil, *The Georgics of Virgil*, Trans. David Ferry, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005, Second Georgic, p. 83 [complementary to the different passage cited by Thoreau]: "Earth brings forth from herself in ample justice / The simple means of life, simply enjoyed."

28. Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal: 1837-1861*, *op. cit.*, p. 563 (April 24, 1859).

paths to spiritual progress; words' materiality as a means to embody the world's beauty; beloved landscapes as expressions of our curious, ambiguous place in the world since time immemorial. His sharp, patient gaze locates ripeness or its absence in himself by conversing with his surroundings. The following discussion picks up our prior emphases and provides added elaboration regarding roundness. In addition to a range of affinities with Thoreau, we will explore how Guillevic's verse augments Thoreauvian ecopoetics and thus could boost awareness of canonical French poets meriting appraisal within this burgeoning field.

Guillevic situates us to an extent in well-charted territory. *Sphère* does not focus solely on the environment, but does bear resemblance to Louise Westling's appraisal of American and British ecocentric approaches to poetry and to literary criticism, from works through which we consider "fresh possibility" and attain "a primal realm of authentic being", to those that express wariness about "unmediated access to an essentialized natural world" and develop "qualified and distanced" views.<sup>29</sup> Guillevic is much loved in France and elsewhere in part because he continually treads this tightrope, leaning now to one side of its exhilarating or troubled expanses, now to the other. However, it is possible that his succinctness, restraint, range of subject matter, and inclination toward long sequences composed of brief bursts of poetic energy make him at first glance less apt for comparison to fellow ecopoets. He deviates from Anglophones' tendency toward poems that narrate with expressive concreteness and detail a powerful response to a given situation, drawing instead on French and German traditions. Like his peer and friend Jean Follain, he conveys the essence of his contact with the outer world by means of "*un verbe le plus exactement pur*", avoiding expansive descriptions and opting to translate truth and beauty that lie deep within us – "*au plus profond de son être*"<sup>30</sup> – and may remain hidden. As regards German romanticism, Guillevic's interests leaned in this direction due to adolescent years (1919-1925) spent in Alsace, where he learned German and Alemannic and came to love the hilly, wooded landscapes<sup>31</sup>, which complemented his childhood familiarity with Brittany's dramatic coastal seascapes. Much could be said, for instance, about Guillevic's absorbing of lessons from the living earth (Schlegel) and attentive listening to non-human others (Herder)<sup>32</sup>, or, closer to the present day, about what the artist Paul Klee states as a maxim based on Goethe, that the artist couples "earthly rooting" with "cosmic intimacy"<sup>33</sup>.

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29. Louise Westling, "Introduction", in John Parham (ed.), *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, Aldershot / Burlington, Ashgate, 2002, p. 2, 4.

30. Jean Follain, *Le Magasin pittoresque*, Préface de Hugues Labrusse, Dessins de Jean Follain, Cairon, Amiot-Lengane, 1991, p. 19 (emphasis in original). Guillevic also sees truth and beauty in the precision and symmetry of geometrical forms, as in *Euclidiennes* when preceding each text with a simple drawing, including for the circle or the sphere (p. 157-159, 176-177).

31. Bernard Fournier, *Le Cri du chat-huant, le lyrisme chez Guillevic: essai*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2002, p. 405.

32. Kate Rigby, "Earth's Poesy: Romantic Poetics, Natural Philosophy, and Biosemiotics", in Hubert Zapf (ed.), *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, Berlin / New York, De Gruyter, 2016, p. 45, 53.

33. Jacques Brosse, "Postface: The Life of Trees", in Laura Rival (ed.), *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 301. Cf. ideas in D. H. Lawrence regarding "the ancient magnificent living in the cosmos" (1931) and "the living universe of Pan" (1936), quoted in Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry*, Second Edition, Nottingham, CCC, 2011

The poem “Rond” modernizes such ideas with gusto. Like “Wild Apples”, it affirms nature’s potential for connections to culture, the senses’ awakening of the mind, and dialogue’s vibrancy as a cue to celebration of the non-human. Gently proselytizing, convivial in all respects, it points to Guillevic as an eco-poet while also allowing surprise at how so little can say so much, how we can find in simple, elemental things significance, elegance, unity, past gleanings, and future promise:

– Qu’est-ce qu’il y a donc  
De plus rond que la pomme?

– So what’s rounder  
Than an apple?

– Si lorsque tu dis: rond,  
Vraiment c’est rond que tu veux dire,  
Mais la boule à jouer  
Est plus ronde que la pomme.

– If when you say “round”,  
It’s really “round” you mean,  
Well a marble is rounder  
Than an apple.

Mais si, quand tu dis: rond,  
C’est plein que tu veux dire,  
Plein de rondeur  
Et rond de plénitude,

But if when you say “round”,  
It’s “full” you mean,  
Full of roundness  
And round with fullness,

Alors il n’y a rien  
De plus rond que la pomme.<sup>34</sup>

Then nothing’s rounder  
Than an apple.

Relaxed and repetitive, familiar yet philosophical, “Rond” argues in favor of fullness, plenitude, and *joie de vivre* in abundance. Because speech acts in French culture lean toward obliging an interlocutor to interpret a broader context<sup>35</sup>, much hinges on roundness, fullness, apples, and all that such words might suggest to any given listener. For instance, in Guillevic roundness can correspond to grand primeval stones, small pebbles held close, the female form, or the cosmos as a unified whole. In French the word “rond” can also mean “drunk”, a fitting sense as to taking in an apple’s shape, taste, texture, and flavor; or, here perhaps with a macho nod to the feminine other, smallish and corpulent or fleshy. Also part of the word-play are the meanings “functioning well and smoothly”, “frank, sincere, honest, direct”, and, indirectly, warmly interpersonal as in a “ronde” – a dance or a song involving dance.<sup>36</sup> The above discussion of “Wild Apples” provides a perfect counterpoint as regards fullness: the background that Thoreau takes pains to elaborate, Guillevic’s poem is pleased to assert jovially but indirectly. The underlying eco-poetic program is strikingly similar, at once taking us back to the games and play of youth, sounding philosophical depths as did the Ancients regarding plenitude experienced in and through nature, and anticipating ensuing encounters with apples tangibly and as a category (“la pomme”).

[1995], p. 12; D. H. Lawrence, “Remembering Pan”, in Laurence Coupe (ed.), *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 72.

34. Eugène Guillevic, *Sphère*, *op. cit.*, p. 45. All translations in this article are mine.

35. Cf. Laurence Wylie and Jean-François Brière, *Les Français*, 3rd ed., Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall, 2001 [1970], p. 44-46, 61-64.

36. Cf. Isabelle Jeuge-Maynard (ed.), *Le Grand Larousse illustré 2021*, Paris, Larousse, 2021, p. 1025, 518.



As to canonizing Guillevic as an eco-poet, so much depends on the critic's next steps. One renowned text in *Sphère*, "Ouverture", written for the poet's daughter Simone and insistently foregrounding a familiar register via the subject pronoun "tu" (you), rejoices in an anticipated sacrality of days, hours, and instants that will situate her and the eventual reader in "le champ de gloire" (the field of glory). Because earth and space, the human as well as the non-human, are depicted as bringing forth the sacred in the future by carrying it with them along a continuum of days, the often-cited "Ouverture" potentially reads as an urtext from an environmentally sensitive canon:

[...] 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.<sup>37</sup>

[...] When the earth and you,  
Space along with you  
Will carry the rite  
Throughout your days,

Then you will be  
In the field of glory.

The oneness of humankind and the cosmos, the message of hope and togetherness expressed compactly and genuinely, have made this poem a classic. What makes it potentially less canonical, however, is its abstraction. The earth and space in what sense? Where? How? Feeling good generally, or when illuminated by religion in some way? In which days, hours, or instants? What might strike a chord of sublimity for the French reader can seem to others vaguer and more indirect. Interestingly, soliciting Thoreau for an opinion can help. The message thus becomes one of yearning toward wildness, striving to be one's best self, ritually connecting to real and metaphorical horizons that are not yet obvious due to societal constraints. It is the many, regular efforts to reach beyond the self that will give the earth and the interlocutor their roundness, fullness, and brilliance. Indeed, "Ouverture" echoes *Walden*: Guillevic implies that if you advance confidently in the direction of your dreams and endeavor to live the life you have imagined, then you will meet with unexpected success, pass an invisible boundary, and live within newer, more liberal, more universal laws, with the license of a higher order of beings.<sup>38</sup> Such lessons bear reintroducing at times into ecocentric literary criticism, namely the shifts in perception, including perhaps toward acts of social justice benefiting the common good, that humanistic works can spark in us. Guillevic's sentiment aligns with Thoreau's, with a notable shared flair for pithy statements.

Other texts in *Sphère* can, however, make us more plainly earthbound. Those who admire Guillevic appreciate his striving and trajectory. To return to the premise of "Rond" and

37. Eugène Guillevic, *Sphère*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

38. These comments paraphrase a passage in *Walden's* last pages (Henry David Thoreau, *The Portable Thoreau*, Ed. and intro. Jeffrey S. Cramer, London, Penguin, 2012, p. 460): "I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings."

of *Sphère*, roundness and fullness are an aim but never an obvious starting point or end result. The sphere's center – where Guillevic feels seeming possession of time and space, provisional clarity as to the world's turning – is mobile. In Thoreauvian terms, the saunterer must locate it, go into the wild, face his fragility within the enormity of forms and forces, reflect on his outsider status and potential insignificance within the greater scheme of things, as portrayed in the three-part poem "Centre", excerpted here:

[II] Gloire dans la sphère  
Devient sa misère.

[II] In the sphere his glory  
Becomes misery.

[III] Que toujours misère  
Il se sache encore,

[III] May always misery  
Still be what he knows himself to be,

Glorieux, mais fragile  
Au centre des courbes.<sup>39</sup>

Glorious, but fragile  
At curves' center.

As stated above, specific strategies inform his poetic naming. Purity, simplicity, and a conversational tone lend abstraction to the text, a positive quality in French contexts as regards presuming an appreciation for the reader's intelligence, an ability on the listener's part to intuit broader meanings and semantic possibilities. As with Thoreau's apples, the reader remains open to the richness of keywords. The word "misère" connotes suffering, distress, and discomfort, but also the 'poverty' of Guillevic knowing himself inadequately glorious, the 'lack' of what normally would nourish him, the 'misfortune' of finding out through the poem that he must still fight to make the world his home. The brief lines' kinship with fun-yet-wise nursery rhymes recalls childhood, as a state of innocence from which in this case to either draw strength or sorrow. In sum, such ambiguities paradoxically make Guillevic's poetry more ecocentric to a French ear but, potentially, exactly the opposite to an Anglophone. In particular, words such as glory, sphere, and curves imply an intriguing, hope-filled horizon for some, while possibly connoting a fragmentary, incomplete inner dialogue to others. The secret for merging these perspectives is to pull the camera back, so to speak. If Guillevic has yet to be featured in ecofriendly English-language anthologies, it may be because, as with Thoreau, the enormity of the task he accepts – exploring wildness – is faced from one moment to the next in shifting moods. Additionally, this objective may prevail in book-length sequences not easily anthologized, as with *Carnac*, and in utterances wilfully limited to essential matters.

### Trembling

To conclude concerning a range of poems and poetry collections, *Sphère's* occasional motif of trembling is of special note. This motif helps us see Guillevic straddling the divide between nature and culture. In a sense, he trembles – like Thoreau – with joy towards apples, with desire to share his ecocentric outlook with human and non-human others. Visible in

39. Eugène Guillevic, *Sphère*, *op. cit.*, p. 78-79.

unexpected places in *Sphère* are poetic gems of expression that suggest trembling by introducing a play of opposing forces in well-chosen words. In the poem "Ta main" (Your Hand), for instance, which begins and ends by addressing a beloved regarding hands and wanting to thereby share adventure and remembrance, hands tremble as they ruminate the earth's history and retain the rumbling fury through which rocks hold tight: "Dans toutes les mains / Gronde la fureur / Qui permet aux rocs / De tenir encore. // Toutes les mains ruminent / L'histoire de la terre, / Tremblent de cette histoire"<sup>40</sup> (In all hands / Rumbles the fury / That lets rocks / Still hold tight. // All hands ruminate / The earth's history, / Tremble from this history).

Like Thoreau, Guillevic knows well nature's differences and similarities with respect to himself, yet worries that societal matters might encroach upon his well-being and upon this ever-expanding knowledge. He thus opts to persist in his wildness, to be cautiously serene overall, to persevere. To draw a contemporary parallel between poetry and Thoreauvian, *Walden*-like gardening, Guillevic resembles Michael Pollan in *Second Nature* because he is always starting over, readying himself for the next challenge that, for example, seasons, weather, and kind or hostile soil will send his way.<sup>41</sup> For poets of Guillevic's generation on both sides of the Atlantic, who lived through world wars and other calamities, trembling of one kind or another can be a normal way to poetically translate a simultaneous attraction to the biosphere and uncertainty about its receptivity to human presence. Toward the end of *Avec*, trembling results from being somewhere on earth in the shadows, wanting to bring a stone from darkness into the day's light.<sup>42</sup> Such tensions can prevail even in the city, to whose trembling we can become hospitable by learning to generously interact with space, as in the following passage from the long poem *Ville*: "Le tremblement / Prend quelquefois la ville, pourtant, // Mais c'est le nôtre, / A travers elle"<sup>43</sup> (Trembling / Nonetheless overtakes the city, // But it is our trembling, / Through the city).

In the sequences "Sauvage" and *Ce sauvage*, finally, a more aggressive side also surfaces, though not without humor too. Again mirroring Thoreau, a perceptual movement back and forth between nature and culture, the self and aspects of the outer world that organize our existence, can occur not only when the writer acts genially and in earnest, but also due to a certain desperation surfacing, a surging need to surpass personal struggle by looking far beyond the self or society and by crafting an immeasurably strong, viable, active, intersubjective relationship to the natural world. As Thoreau might say, wild things energize and inspire us by aligning us more surely with the cosmos than society can. Indeed, as outlined above, the things of the natural world can be "volatile and ethereal", "vivacious and inspiring", "spirited and racy". They are the truer, more authentic part of culture that keeps us and our precious senses from being "flattened and tamed", "vulgarized, or bought and sold". Even to a trained eye, their structures can "ma[k]e an impression of thorniness" in which there is,

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40. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

41. Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*, New York, Grove, 1991.

42. Eugène Guillevic, *Avec*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, p. 199: "[...] Pour le montrer [le caillou sans couleur] au jour, / Pour lui montrer le jour, // Pour nous montrer leurs noces, / Pour tenter la lumière" ([...] To show it [the colorless stone] to the day, / To show to it the day, // To show us their nuptials, / To tempt the light).

43. Eugène Guillevic, *Ville*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, p. 127.

however, says Thoreau with a wink, “no malice, only [in the case of unripe apples and other fruits] some malic acid”.<sup>44</sup> What is more, in the case of the wild apple, the stubbornness and vigor of the tree are not without tactics on nature’s part that parallel those of the author as savage outsider. After many years of cows browsing the small wild apple scrubs, an “interior shoot” unreachable by foes “darts upward with joy: for it has not forgotten its high calling, and bears its own peculiar fruit in triumph”.<sup>45</sup>

Guillevic is likewise well loved for being able to assert now and then a revelation or victory when observing his relationship to world and self, nature and culture, as well as for the hemming and hawing that he instinctively knows will surface in his explorations and with which many could identify, as in these passages from “Sauvage”: “Avec lui-même aussi: / Sauvage, / Pas sauvage” (With himself as well: / Wild, / Not wild); “Heureusement, / Où qu’il soit, / Il trouve ou il crée / Les mouvements de la marée”<sup>46</sup> (Luckily, / Wherever he may be, / He finds or creates / The tide’s movements). He may hear a cry within himself or in nature, but remains all the more wild for doing his best to assimilate it, for instance in the initial lines of “Sauvage” when in remembrance or his imagination he feels this cry climbing to the clouds and cliffs, or perhaps just as audaciously when he describes wanting to eat “le cri du grillon”<sup>47</sup> (the cricket’s cry). In *Ce sauvage*, similarly, he cries out before bedtime to the sun “combien / Il a besoin de lui” (how much / He needs the sun), and avows that his wild sense of time may be most attuned to his personal need for growth rather than clocks, but will still be of small import next to the surging of centuries.<sup>48</sup>

The most fitting last images are those that end *Ce sauvage* and resonate with Thoreau’s anecdote about the indomitable wild apple scrubs he has admired. As regards ecopoetry, Guillevic’s closing images show nature’s perennial strength as a model or metaphor for human resilience. As to canonicity, they underscore his ability to dialogue with nature and culture in condensed, conversational terms, and thus to be categorized wherever critics may wish to place him, within or outside of current debate. In terms of wildness, they suggest that even the briefest of lines can highlight the keen consideration of difference that characterizes much of the best-known poetry across the ages, no matter how it gets classified. They imply, like Edward Abbey’s words in *Desert Solitaire* (1968) about the “curving margins of the great earth” and “that ultimate world of sun and stars [beyond it] whose bounds we cannot discover”<sup>49</sup>, that the margins of world and self will always, per poets’ and seekers’ high calling, stretch further than what culture and society alone let us see:

On élague les arbres,  
Ça repousse.

Trees get pruned,  
They grow back.

44. Henry D. Thoreau, *Wild Apples*, *op. cit.*, p. 144, 155, 156, 158, 144, 148, 151.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 151-152.

46. Eugène Guillevic, *Creusement*, *op. cit.*, p. 145, 169.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 133, 173.

48. Eugène Guillevic, *Ce sauvage*, *op. cit.*, p. 51, 49.

49. Edward Abbey, *The Best of Edward Abbey*, Berkeley, CA, Counterpoint, 2005, p. 73.

Lui non plus,  
On ne l'a pas eu –

Him neither,  
They didn't get him.

C'est pour cela  
Qu'il reste ce sauvage.<sup>50</sup>

That's why  
He's still this wild one.

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50. Eugène Guillevic, *Ce sauvage*, op. cit., p. 57. Note also the reach of the word "sauvage" in another instance critically, as central to Gavin Bowd, *Guillevic: sauvage de la modernité*, Glasgow, University of Glasgow French & German Publications, 1992.

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