

**Bernard Noël.** *Les États du corps*. Fata Morgana, 1999. Np. ISBN 2-85194-483-5.

**I**t is well known just to what extent Bernard Noël's today extensive work — from *Extraits du corps* (1958), *La Peau et les mots* (1972) and *Bruits de langue* (1980) to *L'Été langue morte* (1982), *La Chute des temps* (1993) and *Onze romans d'œil* (1988) — has in some significant measure devoted itself to matters of physicality, physiology, its marvels and its abuses, its strange and wondrous dovetailing, too, with our processes of fabulous and fabulating mentation, our moments equally of relative or even persistent dementia. *Les États du corps* is a most compact text, composed of eleven very short prose pieces, which fuse a discreetly lyrical ellipticalness with a yet manifest ethical cogency of ironic and pseudo-objective nature, and which are accompanied by four engravings by Cécile Reims attuned to — and no doubt inducing in some significant way — Noël's eleven texts. The latter progress with a somewhat esoteric clarity from a “beginning [in which] the body is open like a yes. What sweetness! But [wherein] it forgets itself”, to an “eleventh moment [where] there is no more time, but an activity called Opening or universal Cutting Up [... and where] the greatest slicer is clearly the greatest Nominator as well as the greatest Artist”. It is here, of course, that we reconnect with that older distinction of Noël's between the use of language — or, of course, image — as abusively practised upon the world and others, and its/their use as creativity, revealingly, epiphanically, non-abusively practised upon and via the self, for the (at least possible, but always unconstraining) value any other may find within such a gesture. What “happens” to, upon and within the body, between original, primordial “sweetness” and the clinical yet caressing gestures of writer and artist, is in part exposed in the interposed texts. And, of course, the ethical tussle still goes on, providing the extraordinary contrasts out of which surges the desire of a Bernard Noël — or a Cécile Reims.

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**Guillevic.** *Carnac*. Trans. John Montague, with an Introduction by Stephen Romer. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1999. Bloodaxe Contemporary French Poets 10, bilingual edition. 160 pages. ISBN 1-85224-393-7.

**G**uillevic's extensive oeuvre is avowedly marked by the author's keen awareness of a lived confrontation between what he can term *conscience* and *choses*. It is a confrontation that is not resolved by a Pongian poetics of *objeu* and *objoie* — although Guillevic's lightness of touch, his gnomic, discreetly dancing humour, is certainly

underappreciated — for there is here a greater sense of the relative transparency of language, its power of exorcism (of the ‘monstrous’), its at once awed and careful caress and honouring of the other. If, Guillevic is inevitably a man of language, understanding its frustrations and fallibilities, he is above all a man plunged into the experience of the world, its material, cosmic strangeness, its stunning and rivetting ‘presence’ that, as Stephen Romer says in his very good Introduction to (John Montague’s equally fine translation of) Guillevic’s *Carnac*, half-tempts us to see this atheist poet as a “mystic without a God”.

Guillevic has said of *Carnac* that it “was a great joy for me, a deliverance. I recovered myself, my country, the earth and the sea; I relived everything that I had been”. Language, not as veil, mask, lie, nor necessarily as place of revelation, but certainly as mediator of that access to being which, primarily, motivates and drives its poetic inscription. Such a movement between self and other via such mediation remains, of course, process rather than accomplishment, or, if one likes, accomplishment-only-as-process. As Stephen Romer’s Introduction argues, too, all here is essentially dialectical, (self-)creation swarming in the flux of being and non-being, desire for, and even institution of, order and meaning, and the inevitable sense of the latter’s dissemination, suspension, deferral.

John Montague’s translations, as his ‘Personal Note’ makes abundantly clear, are motivated and felt. They are, too, finely judged, for Guillevic, with his tiny ‘quanta’, is a poet requiring of the translator great discretion and yet firmness and a sure first touch. *Carnac*, then, in bilingual format, constitutes an excellent addition to Bloodaxe’s Contemporary French Poets series and offers much pleasure to specialist and lay readers, students of literature and language alike.

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