

Liliane Atlan. *Le Maître-mur.* Creil : Dumerchez, 2004. 125 pages. 19 euros. ISBN 2-84791-018-2.

The book we have here, albeit in significantly modified and expanded form, originally appeared in 1958 under the pseudonym of Galil. Like all of Liliane Atlan's work, which has already attracted wide critical attention, *Le Maître-mur* offers texts that demand of the reader, as does all writing of deeply felt emotion and planetary pertinence, a suppleness of mind and a great generosity of spirit – this, principally, because of the implicit, even seemingly flagrant, tragicallness of those human comportments that have made of the 20th century something of a wasteland of brutalness and unconscionableness endlessly drawing Atlan's attention. Yet this latter fascination does not constitute the real, the main, challenge required of our mind and spirit : what does, is the unflagging capacity and will for redemption and transfiguration, that desire for embrace and praise of the human spirit in the face of all that might urge us to deem derision and bitterness an adequate and defensible response to the genocides and other horrors unfolded and still unfolding upon our shared earth.

One feels it is almost improper to speak of matters of aesthetics in the context of work such as this. Yet the poethics that reigns generates beauties beyond form, beauties that nevertheless give to form its power and its ontological efficacy. Here, for example, is a short characteristic text, 'Portrait':

Une femme, sereine.
Un morceau d'elle tombe à ses pieds
comme une longue traîne.
Autour d'elle,
de plus en plus nombreux,
des morceaux d'elle.
La voici réduite à quelque motif de décoration.
'Mais de qui parlez-vous?' lui demande-t-on.
De moi, répond-elle en silence.

Sparse, undeveloped, open in its contextuality and its referentiality, the poem – for it is, indeed, a poem, precisely in the face of Auschwitz, despite and beyond the unspeakable that continues to plague and haunt in its more recent avatars – the poem, then, figures not just a woman of the extermination camps, but a woman of so very many cultures and contexts,

ancient and all too modern and hypercontemporary. It is a poem that thus, via the very minimality of its manner, gives a 'portrait' eloquent, beyond its own language, of the ruin and destruction heaped upon woman, who yet maintains a dignity and a courage models for us all. Dramatised, choreographed, as are so many of Liliane Atlan's poetical or prose writings – she is after all a major and original voice in the world of modern theatre (from *Monsieur Fugue ou le mal de terre* to *Un opéra pour Térézin* and *Les mers rouges*) –, her work vacillates in a yet fluid continuity of style and intention between the oneiric and the quotidian, the visionary and the almost purely 'musical', the elliptical and the abruptly clear. That the metaphysical persists in the midst of the implacably mortal is not, in the work of Liliane Atlan, the sign of an empty and airy transcendence: on the contrary, it is something struggled for, earned, projected as that necessary feasibility, that horizon of love and improbable 'praise' of being, beyond its disturbing contrasts and tribulations, that can lead, just imaginably, to a 'happiness' the spirit lets go of at its peril. Here, in conclusion, is 'Peuples d'argile':

Je voyais des êtres se métamorphoser, ils étaient morts mais
quelque chose les travaillait, peut-être étaient-ils de l'argile
sculptée par une main qui ne se montrait pas, une main faite
de leur propre chair qui n'en finit pas de se recommencer.

To read Liliane Atlan is to enter that realm of awful and yet uplifting strangeness entered through the door of trauma and amazed terror, left in an aura of forgiveness and caress, however painful, however equally amazingly lived as a path of transformation of self, and, perhaps, other.

Marie Étienne. *Dormans*. Paris : Flammarion, 2006. 223 pages. 17 euros. ISBN 2-08-068952-5.



auteure d'une vingtaine de titres – recueils de poésie : *La longue* (1981), *Le sang du guetteur* (1985), *Katana* (1993), *Roi des cavaliers* (2002), proses : *La face et le lointain* (1986), *Les soupirants* (2005) et romans : *Clémence* (1999), *L'inconnue de la Loire* (2004) –, Marie Étienne nous offre une œuvre étrangement diversifiée et diversement étrange. *Dormans* s'insère dans cette double étrangeté, à la fois modale, esthétique, et ontologique, affective, psychique, et théâtralise récits oniriques, carnets délicatement expérimentaux mais centrés sur l'expérience,