Jean-Marie Gleize, Emmanuel Hocquard, and the Challenge of Lyricism

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If the fate of French poetry loomed large in the attention of poets, editors, and critics from the 1970s through the 1980s, during the past decade the question of poetry has come to focus on the continuing viability of the lyric.[1] What is clear is that conventional views of lyricism (and, by extension, of the lyric phenomenon, expression, or moment) have lost their sway. Tradition holds the notion of lyricism to denote some unquantifiable overabundance of meaning, an excessive state, or enthusiasm translatable by a particular disposition of the subject to language.[2] Although this view of lyricism reflects most directly a person's perceived relationship to the sublime, Jean-Michel Maulpoix explains that lyricism can not be reducible to the simple expression of the self (117). Instead, the word "lyricism" draws attention to that which lies outside the self. That is to say that rather than a subjectivity, lyricism foregrounds an other (117). And in so doing, lyricism can be understood as an objectivity.

In the absence of any consensus on the essence of lyricism, however, competing views have found currency and polemics have ensued reminiscent of those surrounding the crisis of poetry twenty years ago.[3] Of course, controversies over poetry are not really new. Although much of the initial attention to the problem of lyricism recalls the form / content antitheses of the 1960s and, further back, the old spirit / letter dichotomies stemming from Rimbaud and Mallarmé, recent models of situating lyricism shift the emphasis

from formal and thematic considerations to more pragmatic ones.[4] The proposed models arise, in part, from the perception of poetry as under siege, and each model addresses that perception to some extent. To illustrate, Yves di Manno observes that contemporary poetry seeks its center of gravity somewhere on the form / content continuum.[5] Whereas the former pole designates formal aspects of the work, including syntax and versification, the latter accounts for the writer's encounter with the real, with time, history, and dream. French poets, di Manno asserts, have difficulty breaking out of this polarizing opposition since, unlike the American Objectivists who have found in the collective voice of the epic a way out of the creative conundrum (84), the French counterparts are attached to the lyric in its intimate, inward-looking, subjective dimensions.[6] For his part, Christian Prigent sees the major tension in poetry as the opposition between a literature which is difficult, cruel, and irregular and that which is expressed by lyricism and which is personal and subjective.[10] Aligning himself with the proponents of the former view, Prigent cites Artaud in characterizing this literature as the search for "un langage vrai" 'a true language' (28). This is the language that Kafka calls "le négatif" 'the negative,' Bataille "la part maudite" 'the accursed part,' and Beckett "l'innommable" 'the unnamable' (29). According to a third model, proposed by Jean-Claude Pinson, poetry since the 1960s has bifurcated into a sacerdotal or ontological paradigm, on the one hand, and a textualist paradigm on the other. The first holds poetry to be the word of being, while the latter—ever since Mallarmé, in fact—seeks to hypostatize the letter.[9] A defender of the ontological model, Pinson perceives a diminished status of the textualist model since the 1960s and 1970s.[13]

Notwithstanding Pinson and others who favor the content / ontological dimension, one key shift that has occurred in the conception of lyricism has been the eschewal of the metaphoric in deference to the literal. For many, this side of poetry demands that one focus on textual units and privilege separateness and restriction over expansion and effusion of meaning. An emphasis on literalness draws attention to the presence of sections of prose, and to repetitive blocks of language at the expense of some transfer of meaning ordered on the vertical axis of the speech act. As Maulpoix observes, the 1960s saw a surge of attention to the individual unit. He char-

acterizes this lyricism, which continues long beyond that decade, as the tendency towards a fixed, stopped, or halted literature (PA 121). In support, he notes that Ponge favors a halt at the object, Roche a halt at the image, and Hocquard a halt at the syntagm. This poetry, to which he refers as a lyricism of movement, abandons all claims to the effusion of meaning through metaphorical relationships.

Despite a focus on the individual unit, the poeticity of these projects lies in the demonstrated movement between points of stasis (121). Displacement, altered states, or shifts in relationship: it is through incremental change that poetry offers up its expression, whether in experimental writing that highlights the literal or in conventional lyricism. As Maulpoix observes, special issues of literary and poetry reviews (*Le Débat, Action Poétique, La N.R.F.*, and some others) have identified several poets whose projects are characterized by literality: Emmanuel Hocquard, Anne-Marie Albiach, Claude Royet-Journoud, Jean-Marie Gleize, Olivier Cadiot, and Pierre Alferi (118). Among recent projects that appropriate to themselves a common lyrical designation, two in particular, Hocquard's *Un Test de solitude: sonnets* (*A Test of Solitude: Sonnets*) (1998) and Gleize's piece "Le Sonnet comme mystère formel contribution à l'ambiance photographique" ('The Sonnet as Formal Mystery Contribution to Photographic Ambiance'), illustrate the potential for poetry to reiterate and to reinvent itself through a sharpened recognition of alterity and through an exploration of the relational dimension.

1. "The Sonnet as Formal Mystery Contribution to Photographic Ambiance"

Appearing in the collection *Non,* (*No,*) (1999), the piece titled "Le Sonnet comme mystère formel contribution à l'ambiance photographique" consists of ten sonnets, arranged two to a page. At the top of each of the five pages is a running title line with half of the series title followed by an arrow to indicate the continuation of the title on the next page. Thus the title reads as follows:

> le sonnet est un mystère formel, contribution à →
> l'ambiance photographique. Le sonnet est un mystère→
> formel. Contribution à l'ambiance photographique. →
> le sonnet est un mystère formel, contribution à →

l'ambiance photographique. Le sonnet est un mystère →

the sonnet is a formal mystery, contribution to →
photographic ambiance. The sonnet is a formal →
mystery. Contribution to photographic ambiance. →
the sonnet is a formal mystery, contribution to →
photographic ambiance. The sonnet is a formal →[9]

The use of the sonnet here suggests both a desire for poetry in one of its lyrical expressions as well as an inclination towards that which is innovative. By its definition as a "little sound or song," the sonnet belongs to a long line of traditional verse forms yet is characterized by its potential to incorporate novelties or "deviations," most specifically in the form of "tails" or added verses. Interestingly enough, each of ten pieces of the sequence is built on a deviated sonnet structure of fifteen lines—rather than fourteen. Deviation from the norm is also signaled by the absence of verse structure. Within the fifteen lines of each piece no effort is made to establish and maintain a rhyme scheme. Nor do the sonnets reflect any effort to follow standard conventions of stanza and tercet forms. In terms of syllabification, the lines themselves are in blank verse.

As for the language itself, the sonnets are largely devoid of verbs, relying, rather, on substantives. Common nouns join proper nouns, gerunds, and some adjectives in constituting what appear to be segments of language, separated by periods and conjoined graphically by extensive use of hyphenation. The units designate named places, images, states or conditions. In naming places the nouns invoke cities, streets, and a variety of landmarks (Tarnac, Pas de la Mule, Jardin des Plantes). They also designate destinations, as in bus or train scheduling poles (Paris-Villedieu, Nantes-Bernerie, Brigent-Porthcawl, Marseille-Gènes). Among the common-noun images, we read of "draps blancs" 'white sheets,' "Lits de bois" 'Wooden beds,' "Écluse" 'lock,' and "Volets" 'shutters,' and among states and conditions designated are included deafness, fear, guilt, surveillance. On occasion the sonnets include snatches of language in English, as if to draw attention to the otherness which a foreign language suggests: "Black milk," "No man's land," "End of street," "Mother night."

The place of these sonnets in Gleize's work is relative to his view of literalness. Literalism, he asserts, does not exist since "liter-

ality" is essentially only the desire for literality, the tension towards that which is the most literally possible.[10] It follows, he goes on to explain, that strictly speaking, if there are no literal utterances but only utterances tending towards some yet-unrealized literal utopia, then there is no literal poetry either. There is only poetry that points in the direction of literalism, while never achieving that literalism. Furthermore, literalism is a fact of language, and relates to the very difficult question of what is, what takes place, and what is transferred to words.

If Gleize is so interested in the potential for literality, why then, does he bother with the sonnet? The answer may well be inscribed in the larger context of what poetry is and what can be done to revitalize its perceiving flagging status. In his essay "Pourquoi je joue du tam tam maintenant" 'Why I'm beating the tom-tom now,' he proposes three scenarios for those who wish to work for the revitalization of poetry.[11] Whereas the first two pursue the reinvigoration of poetry through a confirmation and reworking of existing forms of poetry, the third option represents a total disavowal of verse (71). This stance is taken by those who question the entire prospect of poetry after poetry and underscores the commonality for affirming that which is "other"; that is, writing. In opting for the complete eschewal of verse, Gleize makes two points that will help us understand his relationship to the sonnets. The first is that he sees invention and negation as reflecting the tensions and contradictions between prose and poetry which often pass through the same work and coexist in the same time and space. Second, he claims that the forms of poetry we know are neither eternal nor natural. That is to say that there is nothing intrinsically "French" about the sonnet, nor is it a form which will last forever (74). For Gleize the sonnet stands for something admirable and recognizable, a familiar convention that is nonetheless open and is endlessly adaptable. It is for him "cette magnifique forme fixe infixée infixable" 'this magnificent fixed unfixed unfixable form' (75). As for his own involvement with the sonnet, Gleize first of all openly adheres to the formal responsibility of writers. "Je crois à la responsabilité formelle des écrivains" 'I believe in the formal responsibility of writers,' he writes, "Écrire c'est prendre un parti" 'To write is to take a side' (72). Furthermore, he goes on to explain, even if the position taken is not formulated,

the least verse line is in effect an act that situates the one who writes
it at a particularly determined point (72). Thus, in choosing the
sonnet form (a recognized, standard form with all its far-reaching
potential for change and interpretation), Gleize makes a deliberate
attempt to illustrate his belief in the revitalization of poetry through
invention.

The importance of this experimentation with the sonnet ex-
tends beyond a mere demonstration of what is possible. Gleize's use
of the sonnet has direct bearing on the nature of lyricism by evoking
the understood dichotomy between metaphor and literalness. Unlike
pieces which advocates of lyricism would fault by dint of a perceived
preference for stasis and "literal impassivity," the sonnets of Gleize
demonstrate the inclination to begin with traces of inherited forms.
From those traces something else is affirmed, something which is
poetry but something which is also not poetry. In its affirmation of
something else, the sonnets enact the relational dimension implicit
in lyricism. Although traditionally the relationship present in lyri-
cism is that between subject and language, here we find a lyricism
situated wholly within language and enacted through a poetics of
displacement. In signaling a relation by analogy, metaphor signals
the act of transfer or transport according to the vertical axis of the
speech act. What Gleize's sonnets do is testify to relation as well but,
rather, on the horizontal axis of the speech act, where combination,
contiguity, and homogeneity of grammatical elements serve to fuel
the poetic process. At a closer look, the transfer or transport reestab-
lished in Gleize's sonnets is characterized by a move that according
to the definition of the word "displacement" implies a supplanting
as well as a change of place.

As the notion of transporting suggests, one element or one
place is carried across, or conveyed, to another. With their reliance
on substantives (and especially those denoting specific places or
things) and their use of hyphens and commas, the sonnets—with
their linkings between cities afar and between contiguous points on
a trajectory—draw attention to the potential for being transported.
The profusion of nouns, each one individual and self-sufficient,
testifies to Gleize's belief that from the literal, the distinct, and the
neutral may arise a lyricism based on horizontal relationships, on
interactions and reciprocities. Not without interest do we find place

names repeated, but in differing relationships: "Brigend-Ewenny road," "Brigend-taillis," "Brigend-parc," as though the repeated element forms an axis around which others orbit (31). The movement within sonnets and between sonnets progresses in increments, with each syntactic unit occurring as just one point in a web of multiple dialogic relationships.

If Gleize's sonnets recall what Maulpoix calls a lyricism of movement, they also share some characteristics with what he refers to as a lyricism of precariousness, that is to say, lyricism as a wandering in the "peripheries" of the subject (PA 121). This dimension of lyricism suggests a walking around from place to place, an intellectual, affective, and ontological nomadism in which the circumference is here everywhere and the center nowhere (125). According to Maulpoix, this lyricism of precariousness recalls the Derridian notion of destinerrance. On first glance the sonnets convey this sense of perambulation by the rolling title occurring throughout the pieces, never appearing in exactly the same form on consecutive pages. Within the sonnets themselves, the foregrounding of place names also contributes to the realization of a peripatetic lyric. We observe this itinerance—this movement between units or elements—within individual sonnets, many of which delimit the spatial sphere evoked. Thus, for instance, from the substantives in the initial sonnet ("Tournelles-Bastille. / Maison du Fourreur. Quatrième ardt."/ "Dôme"... "Archives" / "Synagogue" / "Pas de la Mule" / "Vosges." "Arcade sourcilière.") we perceive perambulatory displacement, a mode of traversing spatially juxtaposed units. The itinerancy of this sonnet occurs in the progression or cartographic displacement implied by the places designated.

What is more, these spatially-localized reference points throughout the sonnets highlight the presence of the circumferential impulse and the absence of a center. Elsewhere in Gleize's work we find evidence of an assumed void there where the center is expected. In the opening piece from *Non*, a prose segment entitled "Léman, restes" 'Léman, remains' we read the following:

> Lausanne – cathédrale
> C'est de ce vide que je parle, intérieur de l'oiseau,
> carne-vitrail, sa Carcasse, depuis
> toujours, ont (foulé les gisants), sortis toute la lumière,
> Eux "reformés."

> Lausanne – cathedral
> It is of this void that I speak, inside of the bird,
> tough church window, its Carcass, since always,
> have (tread the statues), chased out all the light,
> Them "reformed." (N 11)

If in "Léman, restes" the poet identifies the void as the subject of writing (the cavernous volume of the cathedral), in *Altitude zéro* he talks about the Lac Léman as a place that announces the vanishing point of writing: "Léman est ce paysage" 'Léman is this country-side,' he writes, "au centre de l'Europe, comme un trou (le trou de l'évier, où tout pourrait disparaître). Il est ce lieu, entouré de points (villes) reliés par des routes. On en peut faire le tour . . . J'ai voulu m'acheminer vers ces formules du lac, en faire simplement (exacte-ment) (voir) et sentir l'extraordinaire vacuité" 'at the center of Europe, like a hole (the hole of the sink, where everything could disap-pear). It is this place, surrounded by points (cities) linked by roads. One can take the tour of them. I wanted to make my way towards these lake formulas, to make of them simply (exactly) (see) and feel the extraordinary emptiness' (AZ 49). Here Gleize explains what his sonnets show: the perambulatory impulse of poetry, whose lyricism is located in incessant displacements in space.

But Lac Léman is not the only place name common to both the sonnets and the prose pieces. In the same essay, "Matière du lac," Gleize goes on to observe that from that point onward a series of places can be superimposed on Lac Léman, places that would enjoy a status of equivalence: the hole of a lock (Tarnac, in the center of France), the plains of Ganagobie (Alpes-de Haute Provence) Dong Hu, le lac de l'Est, etc. (AZ 50). It's all the same, he says. Léman is a place-name that designates the entire group of these formal reali-ties, journeys which comprise these realities and of which the book is the story (50). Whether it be about Ganagobie, Léman, Pékin, or Walton, he continues, the question is one of a space devoid of a cen-ter or an origin (50). In light of these explanations, we can read the entire sequence "Le Sonnet comme mystère formel" as an example of a lyricism of movement and a lyricism of precarity. Indeed, each of the sonnets is deprived of a center. The names and places and those linked by hyphenation ("Tarnac, Pont Lagorce, Ports, Aix-

La Ciotat / Carthage-Tunis") function much as does the Lausanne Cathedral, whose whole reason for being evoked is to provide the writer a shell around which to write. As if the emphasis on these hollowed-out carcasses of space were not clear enough, Gleize includes some overt clues to interstitial emptiness in his designators of objects and place: "Corrèze. Creuse," "No-man's land," "Jardin des Plantes. Grande Serre," "Grille," "Arbres morts," "Cimetière."

The rolling header to each page alerts us as well to the lack of a center on several accounts. First of all, inasmuch as the rubric "Le Sonnet comme mystère formel. contribution à l'ambiance photographique" announces the sonnet as a mystery, it draws attention to the hidden, incomprehensible side of the poetic form. Secondly, the reference to a photographic ambiance which the contribution is alleged is soon discovered to be inexistent. As the notes at the back of the book indicate, the sonnets were written for erstwhile photographs which, we learn, have either been destroyed or have never been taken. In other words, these sonnets contribute to an ambiance that is based on nothing which exists. The use of the word "ambiance" can hardly be construed as neutral. In its denotative meaning of an atmosphere surrounding one's environment, "ambiance" conveys some unnamed essence or entity that is being surrounded. Additionally, the Latin root *ambiens* also yielded *ambire*, to go around, and here we are not far from the peripatetic character of the whole work.

2. *A Test of Solitude: Sonnets*

Since the late nineteen sixties, Emmanuel Hocquard has been embarked on a quixotic test of poetry—poetry in the Wittgensteinian sense of the term; that is, poetry whose goal is the logical clarification of thought. Poetry for Hocquard is above all, an intellectual activity, one which seeks to undermine any sense of a poetry out there capable of being seized through metaphysical activity. Poetry is for him, rather, the activity of arranging, gathering, and redistributing elements of language. Such an endeavor assumes, among other things, intentional displacement, reconfigurations, repetitions, rewritings, and calculated movement across incremental nodes on a trajectory.

What attests to this dynamism is, as is the case with Gleize, the

awareness of something lacking or, in Hocquard's words "le mot manquant" 'the missing word,' an aporia, an insurmountable impasse. As we have seen with Gleize, the poet is confronted incessently with this lack to the point of obsession. In the early collection *Album d'Images de la Villa Harris* (*Picture Album of the Harris Villa*), the poet unearths fragments that impress upon him the importance of what is missing. This experience impresses upon him an effective method of working—the spreading out of components in order to perceive resulting logical relationships. In a lecture some years ago, Hocquard spoke of his fascination with that which lacks and of its nascent reception on the part of other readers. He recounts the story of a conversation with an established poet who told Hocquard that he had read his books but added "C'est très bien, mais j'ai le sentiment que vous tournez autour de quelque chose que vous n'avez pas encore vraiment abordé" 'It's very good, but I have the feeling that you're turning around something that you haven't yet really approached.'[12] Unwittingly, of course, in alluding to this elusive center around which so much gathering, enumerating, arranging and rearranging take place, the poet identified the very point at which lyricism takes definition.

Hocquard's interest in the dynamism of form takes the forefront of his collection titled *Un Test de solitude: sonnets* (*A Test of Solitude: Sonnets*).[13] From the substantives of the title, we may infer three poles of interest, or characteristics. First, the work is identified as a test. The noun "test" designates an entity, a fixed set of forms or structures. However, this set of forms suggests, additionally, an ongoing strategy to evaluate or assess. This sense of process stands as an important corollary to the notion of test as a collection of discrete items. Throughout the collection, therefore, the constituted texts each serve the goal of exploration. The second substantive also looms large: "solitude." Not only is the collection designated as a test, but it is further specified as a test of solitude. In suggesting the situation of one who lives alone or, more generally, the state of being apart, solitude depends upon separation, the act or state of being other, and of being other by means of some gap or interruption. As a test of solitude the collection is announced as a structured investigation or enactment of being alone. Expressed alternatively, we can say that in denoting separation, solitude suggests objectifica-

tion. Thus, to test solitude is to practice the experience of an object. A test of solitude is the practice of objectification.

The third substantive of the title is the final word: "sonnets." This is the word that provides the link to lyricism and the poetic tradition. Defined as a poem of fourteen lines in two quatrains, on two rhymes and two tercets, the sonnet form lends itself to Hocquard's investigations. "J'écris les sonnets de Viviane" 'I write Viviane's sonnets,' we read early on (i, XV), and thus is set into motion a series of pairs, equivalencies, and overlappings. Only rarely in the collection does Hocquard reference directly the sonnet form. But when he does, these references are telling, as this one illustrates:

> Un espace sonore
> Le blanc qui sépare deux strophes est une ligne.
> De sorte que ce sonnet a quatorze lignes.
> Comme les précédents.
>
> A resonant space
> The blank that separates two stanzas is a line.
> So that this sonnet has fourteen lines.
> Like the preceding ones. (i, XXVIII)

This particular quatrain comprises the middle of three sections of equal length and comments on what becomes obvious about this collection; namely, that the sonnet form (two quatrains, two tercets, two rhymes) privileges sets of two. Constituting the central four lines of a twelve-line piece, this quatrain shows the poet's attempt to grant line status to the blanks separating stanzas. Thus, in functioning as counterparts to the bursts of language, the interstices extend the twelve lines to sonnet length.

Hocquard's methodical positing of individual parts as increments in some overarching scheme of poetry accounts for the inquiry announced by the title. As we have seen, in language denoting the logic of procedural process, the title announces a studied task of achieving—by means of sonnets—the examination of the state of being alone, distinct and separated from some other. The endeavor results in two sets of numbered sonnets: thirty-three in Book One, and twenty-five in Book Two. Addressed to Viviane, a woman who sells bread in the village of Fargues, the pieces in the collection por-

tray the poet's daily activities. Mundane errands relating encounters with friends, snatches of discussions pertinent to new projects and those taken up in other books—notably in *Voyage à Reykjavik: Chronique* (*Trip to Reykjavik: Chronicle*), are all found in the collection's fifty-eight sections. Throughout the collection the poet traces several distinct problems: grammar and syntax, the truth of tautology, and the nature of solitude.

As is the case with all of Hocquard's books, these centers of interest do not exist in isolation but, rather, overlap. Nor is there in Hocquard an expected starting point, a place from which everything else progresses according to a determined methodology. In this volume, the issues of tautology, grammar, and the nature of solitude are broached early on:

> Octobre. Le retour des rouges-gorges. Ce que j'ai
> sous les yeux.
> Viviane est Viviane. Seule, évidente.
> Vous dire que je l'ai vue.
> Comment je l'ai vue, n'ayant que ce nom à ma
> disposition.
> Vous montrer que mon regard
> je l'ai vue ainsi:
> Viviane est Viviane.
> C'est à dire que j'ai construit une solitude.
> C'est à vous que je pense.
> Sourire unique.
> Je vous parle de mon sourire.
> Sa bouche.

> October. The return of the red breasts. What I have
> in sight.
> Viviane is Viviane. Alone, evident.
> To tell you that I've seen her.
> How I've seen her, having only this name at my
> disposition.
> to show you that my look
> I've seen her thus:
> Viviane is Viviane.
> Which is to say that I've constructed a solitude
> It's you I'm thinking of.
> Only smile.

> I speak to you about my smile.
> Her mouth. (i, II)

This sonnet presents some of the main threads of thought that the rest of the sonnets elaborate. The most striking proposition is the tautological one: "Viviane est Viviane" 'Viviane is Viviane,' an assertion which Hocquard repeats throughout the collection with some variation: "Viviane est Viviane. Seule, évidente" 'Viviane is Viviane. Alone, evident' (i,II); "Sa voix de Viviane est Viviane" 'Her voice of Viviane is Viviane' (i, VII). From this proposition and its variants, Hocquard tests the concept of a tautology. First he directs attention to verbs, positing that the verb *voir* (*to see*) is a state of being verb. He then extends the rule of state of being verbs to all verbs, except "être" 'to be' which, for him is the word that contains all words: "Etre est le mot qui contient tous les mots. Et qui contient le mot manquant. C'est le Joker. Le centre de la tautologie" 'To be is the word that contains all the words. And which contains the missing word. It's the Joker. The center of the tautology' (i, XVII). "Etre" 'to be,' we surmise, is the center of the tautology much as it is the center of the proposition "Viviane est Viviane." Hocquard pursues his train of thought by affirming the self-literality of statements. If he asserts that every utterance is a tautology, then it follows that every proposition is what it says and nothing else (i, XXI). The tautology, furthermore, explains nothing and is explained by nothing. It is itself "seule, évidente" 'alone, evident.'

From these initial observations on tautology the following implications emerge. First, when located on the level of utterance, this test of being alone reinforces Hocquard's distrust of representation, a position that the poet pursues openly in *Le Commanditaire* (*The Partner*).[17] In that collection the representational relationship of language to visual image breaks down when the work's photographs disconnect increasingly from the status privileged by illustrations. Although photographs intersect occasionally with written text, most often they seem devoid of any referential function. Reflecting the impact on his work of Wittgenstein's early picture theory and the philosopher's own later critique of that theory, Hocquard's use of language foregrounds its material, literal, and even concretely tautological dimension.[14]

Second, Hocquard's interest in tautology extends beyond its pri-

mary characteristics of literalness to include a probing of the rela-
tionship of tautology to sentence discourse. Tautology, he claims,
"ne peut pas être une phrase, même si elle y resemble, parce qu'une
phrase n'existe jamais seule" 'can not be a sentence, even if it resem-
bles one, because a sentence never exists by itself' (i, XXI). And later,
more emphatically, he states, "Une tautologie n'est pas une phrase"
'A tautology is not a sentence' (i, XXXI). His refusal to identify a
sentence with a tautological statement stems from his perception
of a sentence as necessarily connected to discourse: "Les phrases
s'enchaînent, les unes aux autres" 'Sentences are linked together,
ones to others' (i, XXI). The distinction he suggests relates to the
whole project of the book: testing the practice of objectification.
Here, tautology (which he claims fills the whole space of language)
is the object while a sentence, in connoting a past as well as a future,
belongs to the realm of subjectivity.

Third, although the propositions in *Un Test de solitude: son-
nets* reinforce the poet's mistrust of representation, the very mode
of tautology with its repetitions of the same element but in different
terms presumes the existence of a necessary fold, gap, or space with-
out which tautology is impossible. Since in these sonnets Hocquard
gives special attention to verbs—and especially to verbs evoking
states of being—the essential gap, space, or deviation may be read
in terms of verbs. The most openly relevant verb here is "être," "le
mot qui contient tous les mots. / Et qui contient le mot manquant .
. . le centre vide de la tautologie" 'to be,' 'the word that contains all
the words. / And that contains the missing word . . . the empty center
of the tautology.' Self-literal, self-reflexive, and even introspective, a
tautology always opens on the missing word but never assumes to
say everything: "Viviane est Viviane, oui" 'Viviane is Viviane, yes,'
writes the poet. "La tautologie ne dit pas tout mais oui. / Oui et tout
ne sont pas équivalents. Chaque oui / comble l'espace du langage,
qui ne forme pas pour autant un tout" 'Tautology does not say all
but yes. / Yes and all are not equivalent. Each yes / fills the space of
language, which does not form for as much an all' (ii, II). However
the "yes" of "Viviane est Viviane" does more than put into question
the comprehensiveness of the tautology. In affirming the tautologi-
cal "Viviane est Viviane," the "oui" adopts the position of a perspec-
tive distinctly different from the tautology. The "oui" functions as

an outside context from which the tautology can be viewed as other. The "oui" stands apart from the proposition and endorses it.

The preference for verbs announces another aspect of this "test of solitude" which embraces objectification. The strategy is this: in demonstrating a fascination with the word that is missing, Hocquard proceeds to ask which verbs a noun envelops (i, XIX) and then focuses on the missing word as "un nom que nous révéleront ses verbes" 'a noun that its verbs will reveal to us' (i, XIX). To illustrate, he asks which verbs Viviane surrounds (i, XX). The answer: "Lever les yeux, sourire, dire 'Bonjour,' se tourner, se pencher, prendre le pain, se retourner, peser, tendre le pain, dire 'Au revoir' 'Raise your eyes, smile, say 'hello' turn around, bend over, take the bread, turn back around, weigh it, hold out the bread, say 'Good-bye' (i, XX); in other words, all the activities that characterize Viviane the bread vender. Lest we assume that the attention to the verbs gathered into a noun privilege the subject, Hocquard continues his experiment and dismantles the Benvenistian view of language alone which makes subjectivity possible. For his part Hocquard seeks to demonstrate the opposite: namely, that language is impervious to the place of a subject and can constitute only the object. "Le verbe et son objet sont un," we read, "un le message et le destinataire / Reste à régler la question du sujet" 'The verb and its object are one. One the message and the addressee / the question of the subject remains' (i, XVII).

And this question will remain open as well since Hocquard tests the potential for poetry to move beyond the tautological impasse and to reinvigorate its own expression. Yet it is within tautology that the poet discerns the means of displacement. Among the figures and personages evoked in the sonnets is Charles Reznikoff (i, XVII), one of the American Objectivists whose work holds considerable importance for Hocquard. Although the projects of both poets have come to intersect on multiple fronts, several features of the Hocquard's understanding of the nature of tautology are informed by his reading of Reznikoff. About the latter's collection *Testimony* Hocquard notes that by means of duplication a model is made to appear, logically, implacably, and overwhelmingly (B 33). More importantly, through the act of repetition—in the gap, the distance, the separation—"on voit soudain autre chose" 'one suddenly sees something

else,' and the model thereby loses its status of original. Despite the use of the same words and the same combinations, the results are not the same utterances. "Cette infime déplacement du même texte" 'this minute displacement of the same text,' notes Hocquard, "ce simple passage d'une forme à une autre, parvient . . . à produire de sens, tout en opérant, au seul moyen de la langue, un nettoyage considérable" 'this simple passage from one form to another, manages . . . to produce meaning, all the while carrying out, solely through language, a considerable cleaning' (33). Hocquard's *Test of Solitude: Sonnets* forms an important model in today's literalist poetry, for in its self-reflective impulses and tautological formulation, the collection presents a lyricism located within language, a lyricism in which meaning is not absent but emerges in the recurrent vanishing point of language.

Both Gleize and Hocquard insist on the dynamism inherent in language relationships. The strategies they follow in their respective sonnet projects, however, stand as counterpoints in the theater of lyricism. Whereas Gleize draws on the profusion of substantives to demonstrate the peripatetic character of the lyric impulse and, by implication, the empty center from which that impulse derives, Hocquard favors a stripped-down lexicon charted primarily by verbs in his tautological experiencing of an object. At the very least, what both projects evidence is that the conception of lyricism need not be static. On the contrary, the sonnets of Gleize and Hocquard stand as testimonies to lyricism's incommensurable capacity for renewal.

Notes

1 See especially Bruno Grégoire and Hédi Bouraoui.

2 Maulpoix, *La poésie* 116, hereafter abbreviated as [PA].

3 Among those writing on lyricism in France, see especially Yves di Manno, Jean-Marie Gleize, Emmanuel Hocquard, Jean-Michel Maulpoix, Maulpoix, Dominique Rabaté, and Jean-Jacques Thomas and Steven Winspur.

4 Jean-Jacques Thomas and Steven Winspur address the possibility of the lyric existing in a context of linguistic experimentation (223). In writing on the work of Hébert and Roche, the authors assert that the force of lyric

lies not in a book's themes, recurrent events, and autobiographical language but rather, in "the seemingly endless flow of performative language that its readers must enact" (230).

5 Yves di Manno, "Centre introuvable," "endquote" 63ff.

6 The connection with American Objectivist poetry provides impetus for much of the innovative work in contemporary French poetry today. Among background works and those which explore this relationship, see Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quatermain; Jacques Roubaud; Yves di Manno.

7 All translations are my own.

8 Pinson draws on Richard Rorty's tracing of the textualist model to nineteenth-century idealism. Rorty sees in both textualism and idealism an opposition to the claims of science as a paradigm of human activity (267-97).

9 Gleize. *Non*, 31-35. hereafter abbreviated as [N].

10 Destremau 22.

11 *Altitude Zéro*: 69. Hereafter abbreviated as [AZ].

12 *La Bibliothèque de Trieste* 13; hereafter abbreviated as [B].

13 N. pag.; hereafter abbreviated as [TS]. The sonnets of this collection are arranged in two books and will be cited by book and by sonnet number.

14 For a discussion of "Littéralité" see Bruno Grégoire 268-69.

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