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René Galand, Form and meaning of the spiritual struggle in the poetry of Maodez Glandour

"*Le combat spiritual est aussi brutal que la bataille d'hommes* » (Arthur Rimbaud, *Une Saison en enfer*).

I first read a work of Maodez Glandour, *Le Mauvis de proche-nuit* (a French translation of his poem *Milc'hwid ar serr-noz*) in Armand Robin's *Poésie non traduite*. My immediate reaction: "This is a true poet." Years later I discovered another one in Frañsez Kervella's study on Breton versification, where Glandour's poem *Erc'h war an enezeg* [snow on the islands] was quoted in its entirety [See final note for references and abbreviations]. When I started to write poems in my native Breton, I was happy to find out that Maodez Glandour had been on the jury which had awarded me the Xavier de Langlais Prize in Breton literature. This is when I first wrote to him, and we exchanged some letters. He gave excellent advice to younger writers, and he did encourage them. He had no equal for explaining to them the exact meaning of rare words or expressions. He did not always share their ideas or agree with their way of writing, but, as he wrote in one letter, "*da bep unan da vont avat gant hent ar frankiz*" [let everyone follow the road of liberty]. He also wrote: «*Santerezh don, skritur pizh, setu merk ar gwir skrivagnerien* » [Deep sensibility, spare style, such is the hallmark of authentic writers]. I have another reason for placing Maodez Glandour in the top rank of poets: his conception of poetry. It is manifested in every one of his books, and especially in *Komzoù bev* [Living words].

Poets like Paul Claudel, Saint-John Perse and Jorge Guillén have had the power to make visible the beauty of creation. This is also what Maodez Glandour does. Under his eyes, the slightest detail is changed into a marvel: a white kitten playing with dry leaves, two butterflies above the blue sea, a glowworm in a strong wind, the play of midges in the last rays of the sun (*KB*, pp. 82-85). Dry leaves unfold their wings, and they suddenly change into "*evned bev, evned, / O tinijal da bell*" [Living birds, birds / Flying in the distance] (*KB*, p. 46)

Maodez Glandour mentions a rhyme about the sun which a mother composed for her children" : "*Me'm eus ur moutig brav / Na gar nag an noz nag ar glav, / Kement a sked a zo dezhañ / Ma n'hellan ket sellout outañ*" [I have a beautiful kitty / Who cares neither for night nor rain, / He shines so much / That I can't look at him] (*KB*, p. 121). The woman's feeling for nature is similar to Saint Francis of Assisi's. She never heard of Keats, but she could have made hers his celebrated line: "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." (*KB*, p. 100). Maodez Glandour has followed his people's example (*KB*, pp. 13, 70). Ten strings on his harp are not enough for him. He needs "*skeul diniverus an holl draoù*" [the infinite scale of all things] in order to "*pignat ha diskenn gant skeul-gan an holl voudoù ha klevout o sonadeg veur*" [go up and down the scale of all beings and hear their majestic symphony] " (*KB*, p. 15). Every being speaks and sings: a blue tit, a redbreast, and the erratic choir of midges as well as the music of the spheres. ((*KB*, pp. 33-36, 44, 59).

Why so much joy? The answer is clear:" *Ar bezañ a zo abeg a-walc'h da bep boud. Ha bleunienn ar bezañ eo al levenez. Galvet gant Doue e teñvalijenn an nannvoud e respont pep tra dezhañ gant levenez*" [Being is reason enough for each creature. And the flower of being is joy. Each thing called by God from the darkness of non-being answers to him with joy] (*KB*, p.37).

Maodez Glanndour would agree with Saint Thomas Aquinas, for whom evil is emptiness, nothingness. This is why rejecting Being is the worst sin, the sin against the Spirit. The Creator has given man the freedom to choose: "An dibab a zo lezenn ar vuhez. Hag hon dilenn 'zo hini ur bersonelezh, hini ur youl gouiziek evit en em ren." [Choice is the law of life. And our choice is the choice of a person, the choice of a will able to govern itself] (KB, p. 14). Every one may choose between the Angel of life and the disciples of nothingness: "Gant hor youl eo un drama a renomp" [It is a drama which we conduct with our will] (KB, p. 14). And this is the spiritual drama which unfolds in the long poem *Imram*.

The title of the poem refers to an Old Irish literary genre, a story about an adventurous sea voyage, an odyssey. In Maodez Glanndour's poetic narrative, the protagonist is an explorer. As he navigates on the sea of his imagination, his boat encounters unknown lands. The first one is the accursed land of the Giants' War: "An douar-mañ 'zo leun a nevedoù / Savet da furmioù lies an emgarantez, / Ha pep hini a yudas: Me eo Doue. Emgann doueoù gant o c'hoant foll da holl lezenn" [This land is full of sanctuaries / Erected to the various forms of self-love, / And everyone shouted: I am God. The combat of gods filled with their mad desire to be the entire law] (KB, p. 148).

The explorer goes farther in his search for "an enezenn c'houoret / E-lec'h n'eus 'met karantez, levenez dibaouez" [a sheltered island / Where there is only love, an endless joy], for "Bro venniget ar Boudiged", [the blessed Fairyland], but under their pretty faces there was only "Soubenn ar sorsered" [a witch brew], "Dourenn kalonoù naered, belostoù pauned, / Teodoù kegined, krabanoù guped" [the juice from the hearts of snakes, peacock rumps of peacocks, / Tongues of jays, claws of vultures] (KB, pp. 149-151).

The explorer must go still farther to find refuge "En enez c'hlas an natur c'hlan, / An enez ha n'eo ket bet saotret gant fallentez an den" [In the blue island of pure nature / The island which has not been polluted by man's folly], but this island also has been poisoned by the venom of evil which penetrated it as a consequence of original sin. (KB, pp. 152-153).

He has to sail beyond the deceptive islands of this world and cross the perilous immensity of night before God's prophet comes to cleanse his weak heart: "Glaouenn al luc'h gwirion war da zaoulagad luch! / A mab-den! evit kement a zo bet tors ha daonet enno. / Ha bremañ, lavar d'ar bed Petra 'welez ganto" [The glowing ember of the true light on your squinting eyes! O man! for everything that has been warped and damned in them, tell the world what you now see?]" (KB, p. 157). He has to struggle through "Noz c'hwerv, noz c'harv, / Noz an doan, noz ar boan, / Noz ar gwall, noz ar fall, / Noz ar glac'har, noz ar c'harc'har" [The bitter night, the cruel night / The night of suffering, the night of pain, / The night of evil, the night of badness, / The night of despair, the night of prison] ((KB, p. 172) before he can reach his goal: "En noz a feiz, te sklerijenn va reiz / Dremm veurdezus Jezuz Roue" [In the night of faith, you light of my spirit / Majestic face of King Jesus] (KB, p. 175). He now understands that his world is only "ur skeudenn-lu e skoaz lugern an da-zoner" [a travesty compared to the light to come] (KB, p. 168). One must "dilezel ar gorre, ha mont ha selaou, / Betek ar pep donañ e kalon an traoù, selaou / Ha klevout o c'hevrin, o c'homz kuzh / ... / Betek al lusk, al lañs kentañ" [leave the surface, and go and listen, / Until what is deepest in the heart of thing, listen / And hear their secret, their hidden speech / ... / Until the first motion, the initial push] which was given them "eus Doue da zistreiñ da Zoue" [by God to return to God] (KB, pp. 169-170). Earthly beauty must fade and die: "Pep tra 'varv, met n'eo ket en holl ez afent da goll. / Ha pa'z a da get tra genedus / E kutuilh an

Aeled an anien frondus o tiflukañ, / Da Jezuz d'he mirout en e galon, / Evit un deiz he dasorc'hiñ" [All things die, but they don't die totally. / And even if every thing of beauty should die / The Angels gather their essence as it escapes, / So that Jesus may keep it in his heart, / To raise it up again one day] (*KB*, p. 180).

Such is the mystery of Salvation. Struggle, purification through suffering, understanding, vision of God. These are the stages through which the protagonist of the Greek drama must pass: *agôn, katharsis, anagnôrisis, epiphaneia*. The structure is similar, but its meaning is entirely different. The drama of Oedipus exemplify the ruthless law of the *Ananke*: he did not want to kill his father nor sleep with his mother, but he could not escape his fate. He also had to pay for his *hamartia*, although he was not responsible for it. Maodez Glanndour presents another law, the Law of Love which Christ brought to men: every sin is redeemed by Jesus' sacrifice.

The structure of *Imram* is that of a spiritual struggle: the struggle of the artist, the struggle of the poet as well as the struggle of man. In the perilous fight, the heart can still sing: "*Rak kerdiñ violoñsoù ne sonont nemet tenn, / Nemet gwasket en krog an dorn hag ar wareg. / Hag evelse kerdin ar gomz, da werzennoù rankes gweañ / Abarzh d'o skrij bezañ ur marzh*" [For the violin strings cannot produce their music unless they are drawn tight, / Unless they are pressed by the hand and the bow, / And it is the same for the strings of speech, you must twist your verse / So that its cry becomes a marvel" (*KB*, p. 173). The explorer struggled through the night of suffering. At the end of his *Imram*, he finds his reward. His soul shall have satisfaction: : « *Ya, krediñ 'ran, rak da gomz n'eo ket un touell, / E taskori din, d'an deiz diwezhañ, kement 'zo ac'hanon, / Va gwad-me, va c'halon-me, va zemez-spered, nann, ne gollin netra: / Brezhon ac'h eus va krouet, brezhon ec'h adsaviñ / Gant va yezh disprizet em genou, / Ha komprenet e vo gant an dismegañser a-wechall, / Gant ar Gall*" [Yes, I believe it, for your word is no illusion, / That you will give back to me, on the final day, everything that is mine, / My blood, my heart, my temperament, non, I shall lose nothing: / Breton you created me, Breton I will be resurrected / With my language within my mouth, / And I will be understood by the one who used to scorn me, / By the French" (*KB*, p. 182).

Such is the artist's mission: reveal to his brothers "*an holl wirionez, / Douarel ha neñvel, / An holl gened, ha dastum, liestumm, / C'hwerv ha c'hwek, d'he diskuliañ, / Da sevel en o c'hreiz bedoù ar skrij, bedoù ar marzh, / Ha diskouez a-dreñv d'an dremwelioù glizin / Da luc'h dizivius o parañ, Doue da!*" [the whole truth, / Earthly and heavenly, the worlds of the cry, the worlds of the marvel, / And show them behind the blue horizons / How your inexhaustible light, O God!, is shining] (*KB*, p. 185). Man will be saved if he strives to go toward God, the Creator of Being, and if he fights against Non-being. The Evil Spirit, for Maodez Glanndour as well as for Goethe, is the one "*der stets verneint*". Such are the main concepts presented by Maodez Glanndour in all his poetry: the glorification of being, the fight against Non-being.

The song of the thrush at twilight causes the poet to answer its song and to "*deurel gant nerzh e galon / Un hesonenn da eren an douar hag an neñv*" [throw with the strength of his heart / An echo between the earth and the sky], and thus to reveal the secret ties between man and the world, between spirit and matter, between light and shade, between harmony and dissonance (*T*, pp. 14, 16, 28). The song of the thrush rises above "*sabad ar bouc'hed*". [the sabbat of the billy-goats (The billy-goat being commonly associated with the devil)]. Similarly, the voice of the poet also rises above the "*fals-doueoù*", the "*arc'hveleion an Naer-gobra*" [the false gods, the arch-priests of the Cobra], the howling of the idiotic crowd, the drums of lies, just as Christ

triumphed over the badness of the world (*T*, pp. 35-38). In *Vijelez an deiz diwezhañ* [Doomsday Vigil], the poet must fight against “*the lackeys of Non-being*”, against “*an dud-preñved / O vordilhañ war an aodoù*” [the men-worms / Who swarm on the sea-shores], against all those who have made of the “*mammennoù ar vuhez / Un andon a varv*” [springs of life / A source of death]. His soul will have to cross the dark night before the Judgment Day comes to return to him “*evel Salomon d'ar vaouez / e herezh kolled*” [as Solomon did to the woman / His lost heritage] (*VADD*, lodenn 1). The man who speaks in the poems of *Va levrig skeudennoù* [My booklet of images] is also a bold fighter. Never will he eat “*bara ar vezh*” [the bread of shame]. Never will he submit to the “*vevelien Gaesar*” [the valets of Caesar] (*VLS*, pp. 40-42). He will live like the music-boy “*A sone 'vit ar bed, 'vit ar mor / 'Vit an evned, 'vit ar pesked, / 'Vit an avel a dremene, / Evit ar vuhez a gane...*” [Who played for the world, for the sea, / For the birds, for the fish, / For the wind which passed, / For the life which sang] (*VLS*, pp. 10-11).

Maodez Glanndour died on November 25, 1986: may his soul, some day, rejoice in seeing his dream for his country become reality.

NOTE *Diaziezoù ar sevel gwerzioù* (Al Liamm, 1965, niv. 108, 109, 110, 111, 112).

The following abbreviations have been for the titles of Maodez Glanndour's poetry collections:

KB: *Komzoù bev* [Living words] (La Baule: Skridoù Breizh, 1949)

VADD: *Vijelez an deiz diwezhañ* [Doomsday Vigil] (Brest: Al Liamm, 1978)

VLS: *Va levrig skeudennoù* [My Book of Images] (Brest: Al Liamm, 1983)

T: *Telennanoù* [Songs for the Harp] (Brest: Al Liamm, 1985)

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