

Dreuilhe's *Corps à corps* : Metaphor/Phantasy and Mobilisation

- ¹ The *New York Times* broke the story on 3 July 1981 with the headline “Rare cancer seen in 41 homosexuals”¹. Kaposi’s Sarcoma quickly became known as the “gay cancer”², and when AIDS became the term generally accepted in 1982, it was often referred to as the “gay plague”. *Corps à corps* was published in France in 1987 by Gallimard in the series “Au vif du sujet” when Alain-Emmanuel Dreuilhe was thirty-eight, and in North America in 1988³. The events narrated in the book probably took place in 1985-1986, which is the point of juncture between what Weeks characterises as the second and third periods in the AIDS pandemic (the period of moral panic and the time when governments started to take the illness seriously)⁴.
- ² Presented as a “Journal de Sida”, the text is not a *diary* in the traditional sense of the term. There are no dated entries, and the book is divided into twelve sections – all connected to the “military metaphor”⁵, with no specific chronology within these sections. *Corps à corps* is written in the first person by a narrator who identifies himself as the author of the book: Alain-Emmanuel Dreuilhe, and presents himself as being gay and HIV positive, having developed AIDS⁶. His partner (called “Oliver” in the book) has just died; he was also HIV positive. Having lost Oliver in the span of three months (57) (a blitzkrieg) and finding himself alone and near to despair (with the feeling that the enemy was dropping propaganda leaflets telling him to surrender too, 40), he started to write a diary for the first time in his life in order to have a companion⁷. The illness is referred to as a mental illness, not so much because the virus can attack the brain, but because it forces people with AIDS (PWAs) into isolation and anguish and therefore alienation (14)⁸. Later on in the text he comments that through writing, that most *solitary* of acts, he sensed the true plight of a whole *generation* (123). This shift from the individual to the collective will be one of the key characteristics of his text.
- ³ The action takes place in New York where Dreuilhe has lived for the last decade, working as a translator. His experience will be different from that of the French PWAs, because he is living in the United States, even though he is not American and must have felt he was a foreigner. He describes having been ill for the last three years. The book develops into a long “military metaphor”. AIDS is the enemy attacking Private Dreuilhe’s body and resistance is organised warfare. This process corresponds to what Michel Danhe calls psychological techniques of visualisation, which are supposed to encourage the immune system to start *fighting* infection⁹. In this scenario, the PWA is no longer a passive victim but becomes an active agent who can call on resources so as not to give in to the virus. The latter is identified as a visible target and loses in the process some of its aura of invulnerability, redressing the balance of power. And this is certainly Dreuilhe’s aim: “Mon espoir inconscient est que ce livre, surgi comme une excroissance cancéreuse, hors de mon cerveau, devienne un appendice monstrueux qu’il sera possible de séparer finalement de mon corps” (178). The “military metaphor” could be conceived of as a shield (whose function is to protect Dreuilhe by fictionalising his life situation). However, this image could also alienate readers reacting negatively to its extended use, as war is, generally speaking, a male affair, while also alienating pacifist homosexual readers.

Dreuilhe described himself as a civilian before he was mobilised and he mentions at the beginning of *Corps à corps* having been a deserter for a long time and having avoided conscription into the French army (19)¹⁰.

- ⁴ Michael Sherry writes that the language of war was ubiquitous in the discourse on AIDS during the 1980's and that it seemed to be dissipating by the early 1990's¹¹. Quite a few books were published in America using the military metaphor. Sherry convincingly demonstrates how this is specific to America and rooted in its history of conflicts. He also mentions Dreuilhe's book to show that it is not a uniquely American phenomenon¹². Analysing the reception of *Corps à corps*, David Wetsel shows how it "stands in a no-man's-land somewhere between France and America. American readers, unused to the French rhetorical tradition, perhaps misunderstood Dreuilhe's courageous vision. French readers (particularly gay ones) have been mystified and even offended by Dreuilhe's brilliant and extended martial metaphor"¹³. We can see that *Corps à corps* has been caught up in the wider debate about the merits or drawbacks of using this metaphor for AIDS writing. In turn, the use of this metaphor has impacted on a stronger, more uncompromising representation of homosexuality as both visible, in the sense of being an identified "enemy", and a community under attack, which by defending itself claimed its existence and a right to exist, to have a voice.
- ⁵ One could argue that Dreuilhe had lived in New York for ten years, and that therefore he was quite imbued with American culture if not its history of conflicts. What a lot of North American commentators may not have been aware of is the fact that Dreuilhe had lived in proximity to military conflicts during his entire childhood: he grew up with civil war in Cairo, surrounded by Nasser's tanks, and then lived through the Indochinese war (Cambodia, Vietnam); references to these events pepper the text¹⁴. In a straightforward reading, this could explain the origin of the military phantasy. In an interview, Dreuilhe is asked if the war metaphor came to him because of his childhood experiences and exposure. He replies that he has never put these two facts together; in his book he tries to avoid talking about his personal history, and only does so when it has a connection with his illness: "Je voulais me présenter comme une entité collective dont je serais une sorte de porte-parole"¹⁵. An *individual* choosing the term "*collective entity*" seems to refer to the literature of mobilisation.
- ⁶ There had been a tendency prevalent in the early to mid-eighties to say that homosexuals got what they deserved with the HIV virus following years of sexual liberation. There was talk of innocent victims like haemophiliacs and people with blood transfusions, and guilty ones like homosexuals, IV-drug users and male and female prostitutes. Stereotypically, gay sex was linked with promiscuity and this presented a direct threat to the nuclear monogamous family in a country steeped in Catholicism. Indeed, the spread of the virus was facilitated by the French government's reluctance to start advertising and prevention campaigns, not wanting to recognise the realities of gay sex. Moreover, the first prevention campaigns in 1987 were marked by an assumption of universal heterosexuality which did little to target the gay population¹⁶. Pratt says that homosexuals ended up being framed in France "as the cause of AIDS, rather than the group most in need of clear information, but were also blamed for not doing enough to prevent the spread of the epidemic"¹⁷.

⁷ At first glance, we can find traces of these characteristics in *Corps à corps*. AIDS is represented as World War Three, involving 165 countries (28), and is compared to a tank destroying everything in its path, rolling over all the defences put up by modern medicine, ignoring any cry for mercy and oblivious to the crushing of the limbs it drives over (42). Dreuilhe, the first person narrator, refers to himself as a civilian whose life was shattered when he was mobilised by AIDS (14-15). Lymphocytes are massed on the border whilst lavish pleasure (the pre-AIDS gay scene) has reduced the T4 cell count, the main defence of the Maginot Line¹⁸. It all started with border skirmishes (flu, bronchitis) which were ignored (23), as when the Popular front in France ignored Hitler's intentions. The specificity of AIDS is that it reinvents guerrilla warfare, using psychological warfare (137) and PWAs, if they are to stand a chance, must engage in this type of war (17). The body is invaded by the HIV virus and the gay community is likened to Troy (143, 149), welcoming the fatal horse (the liberalisation of sexuality) with open arms; indeed a whole section is entitled "Le cheval de Troie" (36-54). Medical treatment with AZT is likened to V-2 missile bombardments on the enemy (40). The only difference between AIDS and war (though the narrator questions whether it is really a difference) is that PWAs are dying for no reason, whereas in war there is supposed to be a cause worth fighting for (48). Dreuilhe is deeply ambivalent in his relationship to AIDS: though wanting to extricate it from his body, he also paradoxically calls it "mon dernier amour" (14) and writes that he finds it romantic (77). Elsewhere he confesses: "Il y a forcément amour entre nous puisqu'il y a eu jalouse" (189). *Corps à corps* is presented as a love letter to AIDS, with the ambiguity of being both weapon and white flag (189).

⁸ Given the specific context, how did the French gay "community" react in the early years of the epidemic? The character of Foucault/Muzil says in the novel by Hervé Guibert: "Un cancer qui toucherait exclusivement les homosexuels, non, ce serait trop beau pour être vrai, c'est à mourir de rire"¹⁹. The character of Muzil understands that society at large would like to get rid of homosexuals, by inventing a disease which would strike exclusively at the heart of their population. But this reaction also captures what ended up being the reaction of disbelief of a lot of homosexuals at the thought of prevention: they were not asked to carry a pink triangle, but they were doomed with an illness called SIDA following the previous years of sexual liberation, told to wear protection at all times, and that the best way of staying seronegative was to be in a monogamous relationship; indeed, backrooms and saunas would eventually be closed.

⁹ There was no tradition in France of liberationist thinking and action, nor an organisable community base that would have permitted gay men, at least, to respond effectively. Whilst in Northern Europe, Britain and The United States, there were some debates about sex and gender, this was not really the case in France. After May 68 and the militancy of the 70's with people like Guy Hocquenghem and the FHAR (Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire) created in 1971 and disbanded in 1974, there was a general lack of political will to carry on fighting for gay rights. In any case the FHAR rejected "any concept of homosexual identity and visibility", declaring that the individual is not the proper subject of politics²⁰. The main movements were the CUARH (Comité d'Urgence Anti-Répression Homosexuelle), created in 1979 but active from 1980, which focused on combatting discrimination and working towards the integration and public recognition of homosexuality, and the GLH (Groupe de

Libération Homosexuelle). It is no coincidence that Dreuilhe, one of the first writers to publish a book about living with HIV, had lived in America for a number of years, and was living in America at the time of the publication of his book. He was much more embedded in American “communitarism” than in French “republicanism”. Caron has shown that the community approach to the epidemic in the United States while AIDS was rather seen as a personal tragedy in France reflect the differences in AIDS writing between the two countries: plays like Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart* are collective rituals whereas “the (auto)biographical narrative appears to be the most appropriate literary form to convey the experience” in France²¹. *Corps à corps* serves as a conduit for American discourses on culture and representation, which developed later in France.

¹⁰ Wetsel states that *Corps à corps* “is quintessentially French in style and sensibility”²², with many allusions to Proust²³. Indeed *À la recherche du temps perdu* contains many observations about the Great War which Dreuilhe applies to his situation (45) and he describes AIDS as his Albertine (“ennemi terrifiant et familier, comme un démon ou un génie”, 15); again one notes the ambiguity towards AIDS. There are also nods to other writers like Barthes²⁴ with the odd reference to Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (60). The text also contains a good deal of humour²⁵, including parodies of classical lines²⁶ and also self-irony²⁷. Dreuilhe is positioning himself within the French literary tradition. Throughout the text, there are also many allusions to Greek mythology, and the odd one to Shakespeare (52). But Dreuilhe is wary of producing “literature”. He believes that words dilute his perception of AIDS as possessing violent strength. In fact he uses the term “art engagé” (178) to describe *Corps à corps*.

¹¹ Dreuilhe believes that it is only if one can stand back from an event that one gains the necessary perspective to give a useful rendering of it, including communicating feelings. But he is immersed in the war, positioned on the front line, and time is running out (178). Throughout the text, time is lived at a “fast forward” pace with hours counting as days and months as years (191), the illness providing what Dreuilhe eloquently calls “un raccourci de l’existence, qui en est aussi une amère parodie” (191). And inevitably, AIDS brings on a confrontation with death, which PWAs did not expect in their thirties but in their seventies (126). This fact is all the more difficult to bear as, in his analysis the agony of his partner’s death, Dreuilhe notes that the last stages of the illness created a barrier between them, and Oliver died alone. Dreuilhe is therefore under no illusions, he knows that he will die alone too. Suddenly he realises that to mourn for Oliver is a way of mourning for himself (58). Writing the death of Oliver is a way of writing his own death²⁸.

¹² In *Corps à corps*, the narrator states that it was during his psychoanalysis that the warrior metaphors came to him; he used them to express how he felt he was fighting alone whilst the civilians (HIV negative people) lived as before: this made him both bitter and determined to stay alive (42-43). It is interesting that he includes both homosexuals and heterosexuals in using the term “civilians”. In an interview Dreuilhe gave in Montreal for the publication of his book, he explained that the psychoanalyst, a woman who specialises in working with PWAs, encouraged him to develop military metaphors after he had referred to his doctor as a general. “Elle me dit: ‘C'est intéressant, pourquoi ne mettez-vous pas cela par écrit, pour qu'on en parle?’ ”²⁹. So he proceeded to do so and stated that the fact of writing about it dispensed him from talking to her about it. He felt much better and was not interested in repeating to her

what he had already written down; the psychoanalysis carried on along conventional lines (his family, his relationship to Oliver).

13 I propose to read *Corps à corps* as the *hidden* part of the therapy, or rather the part hidden from the therapist but shared with readers. We are effectively positioned as therapists, being given the missing part of the puzzle withheld from her. For my main theoretical tool, I will rely on Graham Dawson's *Soldier Heroes*³⁰, itself heavily influenced by Melanie Klein, referring specifically to the second chapter "Masculinity, Phantasy and History"³¹.

14 Dreuilhe explains the reason behind his use of the military metaphor in a passage where he insists that he really wants to demystify and exorcise AIDS, just as a soldier must see the human being behind the invincible aura of the enemy (52). On "Apostrophes"³², we learn that when he started his book, it was in order to show AIDS that he was not frightened of it. Another possible motivation for his turning to metaphor is that, in this particular case, it creates a necessary distance to write AIDS. Unable to bear writing about the loss of his eyesight to the cytomegalovirus, Dreuilhe instead uses the allegory of France losing the two provinces Alsace and Lorraine to Germany.

15 Following Dawson, I prefer to substitute the term "phantasy" for "metaphor". Fantasy refers to imaginative forms; "phantasy" also includes unconscious processes. It is "an ongoing process, a kind of narrative"³³ where both psychic and social dimensions are present. It crosses the boundaries between the "real" and the "unconscious". Dreuilhe extends his military phantasy to society at large. Hence the enemy is defined, not so much as the HIV virus, but as the media, public opinion, his father, all his friends and allies, as well as partly himself ... when they say and believe that AIDS is incurable and fatal (16). My use of the term "phantasy" is technical. I understand that the ravages inflicted by the HIV virus on Dreuilhe's mind and on his body³⁴ are so threatening to his sense of self that he has to put up the most vigorous defence he is capable of; he needs to mobilise all of his resources into this military phantasy in order to survive psychically all the more so since he believes that socially he is alone in the world because of a lack of external solidarity. There is also a distinction between military and militaristic, the latter not necessarily following from the former, and Dreuilhe never crosses this boundary.

16 In his analysis of soldiers and masculinity, Dawson notes: "The self's defensive responses are shaped by the need to maintain composure in social as well as psychic life"³⁵. The phantasy is therefore extended to society. We saw above that Dreuilhe's first use of the military phantasy was served to express how he felt he was fighting alone whilst those behind the lines lived as before. This makes of *Corps à corps* a testimony to the political apathy surrounding the AIDS crisis in the mid 1980's. Dreuilhe uses the powerful image of the Holocaust, which is an image used not uncontroversially by American writers at the time. Hence, he compares himself to Anne Frank writing her diary (60), the hospital uniform of PWAs³⁶ as being the striped pyjamas, the uniform of POWs (4) and the Jewish people taken away in the midst of indifference from their German petty bourgeoisie neighbours is equated to that of the heterosexual population watching their homosexual neighbours taken away by the illness (49). He also uses the image of the Occupation in France during the Second World War. For the time being, the enemy has the upper hand but the

Resistance is getting organised. The tactic is to play for time until the landing in Normandy of the American scientists, especially as “nos corps sont territoires occupés et seule une résolution farouche permet de ne pas perdre l'espoir” (27). One can sense in this sentence immense desperation: either Dreuilhe lies down and dies, or he invents the military phantasy; indeed, he talks at times of deserting, as when his intestinal war breaks out again (69). During the television programme, he describes using metaphors as a way of reassuring himself. By making comparisons with world events, he is also affording legitimacy and a place in history to the homosexual community, inscribing it in a time and space continuum.

¹⁷ Dawson summarises Melanie Klein's explanation of the processes of social as well as psychic composure as follows: “Self-composure is always established on the basis of an imaginative positioning of others: as they are drawn into the internal psychic world, and allotted parts in the narrative fantasies that are played out within it”³⁷. This is where we find a creative leap in Dreuilhe's positioning of others. We saw that at the beginning of his psychoanalysis he was comparing his doctor to a general (which prompted his analyst to ask him to elaborate on this by writing it down). From there it is a short step to setting up in his phantasy world a whole army fighting alongside him, united in one cause: defeating the enemy. He needs to believe that he is not fighting alone, for he knows that he would be defeated: the odds are too overwhelmingly stacked against him. Even an imaginary readership is drawn into *Corps à corps*: “Chacun de mes lecteurs deviendrait un de mes soldats” (178). He is mobilising the whole community, not just the homosexual community.

¹⁸ Dreuilhe is too guarded, as can be gleaned from some passages, not to *know* somewhere inside himself that his way of making sense of his status as a PWA is a phantasy. He needs to protect this phantasy from outside assaults, for personal disintegration would assuredly follow. If we now return to the question as to why Dreuilhe chose not to share his writing with his analyst, it seems relevant to this issue. As Dawson writes: “In analysis, interest is directed through the manifest form of imagos [imaginative figures], towards the unconscious fantasies underlying projective investments in them”³⁸. In a way, it is much safer for Dreuilhe to confide his text to readers whose interpretation need not concern him, than to his psychoanalyst. Indeed, he reports in the text his analyst telling him that the thrill of excitement which only danger can provide (the very situation he is describing to her, 39) is a characteristic of narcissism (188). This makes him wonder whether he takes himself to be a hero writing his “autohagiography” to which he responds that in fact he is in dialogue *with* AIDS: “Je m'adresse au SIDA lui-même (...) pour lui faire savoir (...) que je ne me – et ne le – laisserai pas faire (...)" (*ibid.*).

¹⁹ Since the military phantasy is essential to his survival, he cannot afford psychically for his therapist to take apart his defences. This is perhaps the greatest merit of *Corps à corps*. Dreuilhe is going along with psychoanalysis but also substituting for it his own way of coping with AIDS. He believes the military “phantasy” to be the best defence against disintegration. And what he is doing by writing and publishing his book is offering it to other HIV positive people and PWAs (186) as a way of empowering what he calls his “compagnons de lutte” (186). Even the fact of his death will become an act of witness. I quote Chambers: “The death of the PWA, whether as an author or no, has already the sense of an act of witness and constitutes a mode of address ‘for others’, one that the writing of a diary only amplifies and specifies”³⁹.

20 Dreuilhe is also recording the death of his partner, Oliver, mainly in the section entitled “À la recherche de l'allié perdu” (55-65). The military phantasy is fine-tuned into a nuclear war followed by an atomic winter, with their isolation rendered as the three of them (including Oliver's mother Julia) stuck in a space capsule (57). What functions for an author as a phenomenon of distancing may well have an involving effect for the reader: this nuclear winter landscape is evocative enough to transcribe the utter devastation of the experience to the reader. We are then told that Oliver unplugged the machines that kept him alive, perhaps to save his lover who was getting weaker himself from looking after him (59).

21 Over the last few paragraphs, I have been building up a picture of *Corps à corps* as a political gesture. Dreuilhe himself referred to his book as “art engagé” (178). Indeed, the opening paragraph of the text makes the point that everyone else has talked about AIDS but PWAs, who have had their voice muffled by all these so-called experts (11). Elsewhere he writes that everything said or heard in the media about PWAs appeared to him to be false (59), and that if PWAs don't fight, they will be the last homosexuals, which is something Le Pen and his affiliates are hoping for (187). Dreuilhe also appeared on French national television in the autumn of 1987 in the literary programme “Apostrophes” to talk about his book, which is also a political gesture.

22 Discrimination is rife, and this text serves as a witness to this, reminding us of conditions in the mid 1980's. In hospital, Dreuilhe is asked to wear a mask so as not to breathe out the virus (105), nurses wear gloves and masks when they deal with PWAs, and there are little red labels on their notes reading “Precautions – AIDS” (107). All this, added to the fact that few people are authorised to visit PWAs, makes Dreuilhe compare a stay in hospital to the situation of soldiers in the trenches because of the isolation and of the quarantine conditions they live in (103). He has to beg and plead for his dentist to keep him as a patient since others may flee the practice if they know the dentist treats an HIV positive person (132). Funeral parlours systematically cremate all PWAs (43). Dreuilhe reports a heterosexual doctor treating PWAs telling him he feels more closely involved with a white homosexual PWA “from a good background” than with a black drug addict – which is bound to have an impact on the quality of care and treatment (33). Dreuilhe denounces the danger of setting-up the binary “good/bad” in relation to PWAs.

23 But the army is not united. Dreuilhe reveals that there are clear divisions between what he describes as typical PWAs (black, often socially deprived heterosexual drug addicts) and mostly white homosexual lawyers, teachers, students, sales executives and white-collar workers, the situation being reminiscent for him of the Vietnam war with its forgotten black soldiers; now as then the media focuses on the suffering of white middle-class Americans as the acceptable face of society (31-33). There is also self-sabotage at work. Dreuilhe talks about HIV positive people who have not gone on to develop AIDS as walking time bombs (44), an army marching toward itself. Dreuilhe is raising the issue of social responsibility.

24 Dreuilhe is aware that what he calls conscientious objectors will criticise the way he has militarised the conflict and blame his latent “neofascism”; others will say that, in the context of the military, courage has no value (186-187). This seems to be an appropriate point at which to tackle what has been the general debate around books like *Corps à corps*. Representing one camp is Susan Sontag with *AIDS and Its*

Metaphors. Sontag wants “to see retired (...) the military metaphor [because of] (...) the effect of the military imagery on thinking about sickness and health (...) it over-mobilizes, it overdescribes, and it powerfully contributes to the excommunicating and stigmatizing of the ill (...) We are not being invaded. The body is not a battlefield. The ill are neither unavoidable casualties nor the enemy”⁴⁰. Representing the other camp is D.A. Miller. He starts by making the point that Sontag’s closing recommendation that military metaphors of illness be “retired” is itself a violent act since there is violence in forced retirement, before pursuing: “Unwilling to specify which war metaphors are particularly demoralizing to people with AIDS, Sontag characteristically rejects them all (...)”⁴¹. For Miller, some military metaphors are useful in terms of resisting AIDS through “militancy” and AIDS activism. Slogans like “Fight back, fighting AIDS”, organisations like “Mobilisation against AIDS” empower PWAs. Finally, he concludes: “It is almost unspeakably insulting to suggest that ‘fighting AIDS’ sooner or later means fighting people with AIDS (...) her text makes a last recommendation that would deny [PWAs] the right to speak of themselves – polemically, militantly, in any voice but that of victims (...)”⁴².

25 Situating himself within memory studies, Christophe Broqua has shown that military metaphors and references to wars are privileged instances of the opposition between national and illegitimate or underground memories. Broqua then cites three examples of these: a poster showing an image of war soldiers and the legend “In fifty years, we will not have veterans: ACT-UP Paris at war against AIDS”; World Women’s Day saw some women going to the Arc de Triomphe and lying down below a banner reading “To the unknown HIV positive woman”; on 11 November 1996, during the annual military parade commemorating the first world war armistice, militants unfolded a banner showing Jacques Chirac with the following question “How many dead from AIDS has he buried?”⁴³. It seems undeniable that these “metaphors” are actually empowering for PWAs and ACT-UP Paris militants. And it is indeed difficult to reconcile these examples with Sontag’s argument.

26 An interesting dimension to the debate which has hardly been touched upon in the secondary literature is the gendered nature of the “military metaphors” – though women readers have the ability to phantasise as much as their male counterparts. In *Corps à corps*, the war is men’s business. Women are there as support for comforting the soldiers, as soldiers’ mothers (188), often ashamed to tell the truth about their son’s illness for fear of having to admit that they are either homosexuals or drug addicts (47) or as mourners (*Stabat Mater*) (31). Dreuilhe himself broaches this issue when he writes that if unconsciously he started by comparing the epidemic to war, it is because it concerned men. As he is writing, he agrees that more and more women and children are being afflicted. But, according to him, women are presented by the media as victims of men who have infected them, a type of civilian casualty; personally, he thinks that they wish to remain neutral like Switzerland (31). And of course Dreuilhe’s therapist, to whom he refuses to show his writing, is a woman.

27 There are two strands to the military metaphor polemic: the public and the private. In terms of the private sphere, and this is where my use of the term “phantasy” rather than “metaphor” might hopefully advance the debate; concentrating on Dreuilhe, one can see how the use of the phantasy encompasses both the psychic and the social, and that even private metaphors have social implications. And this in turn makes Sontag’s argument weaker. In the process of writing, a kind of identification takes

place for Dreuilhe “with an idealization of what the self would like to become and has discovered”⁴⁴ and this is the way he has chosen to survive. I am not claiming that Dreuilhe is an infantryman waiting to be born. On the contrary: he is in danger of feeling totally overwhelmed because of the “desintegrating effects of anxiety”⁴⁵ caused by AIDS and he therefore needs to put up defences. He has to visualise these defences as inner and outer, projecting an imagined solidarity with the whole world. This shows the apathy of governments in reacting to the AIDS crisis, both in the United States and in France, and the devastating effect it had on PWAs but also their extraordinary resourcefulness. Dreuilhe is struggling to feel empowered, having to imagine through figuration a sense that society has joined him in his battle against AIDS.

28 Dreuilhe explains the title *Corps à corps* as follows: the outer defences (the social) have failed PWAs and the enemy has reached individuals; the only thing left is hand-to-hand combat with a blade⁴⁶. Having been let down by society - which did not stop the enemy - PWAs can count only on their individual courage and personal resources (30). Dreuilhe has little time for Fritz Zorn in his book about cancer, *Mars*⁴⁷, since he is judged to have kept his diary (“journal”) *as a pacifist*. This confirms my analysis about the specificity of Dreuilhe’s diary in shifting from the individual to the collective. *Corps à corps* could signify a *hand-to-hand combat* with the social as well as with the biological body.

29 It may be appropriate at this stage to go back to the generic conventions of *Corps à corps*. We saw that it was presented as a diary, but lacked the conventions of diary entries, since it consists of twelve sections all linked to the military metaphor, and with no chronology. It resembles more a type of autobiographical writing but this label would not do justice to the committed aspect of the text with its metaphors of mobilisation. Martine Delvaux rightly describes the text as an autobiographical discourse, but one that includes a social and a public dimension, further elucidating: “Le texte de Dreuilhe est certes une auto-narration du sida, un ‘journal’, mais c'est en tant qu'il se situe à un carrefour du ‘je’ autobiographique, du discours historique et d'un discours social contemporain du moment de l'écriture (...)”⁴⁸. She argues that Dreuilhe’s text puts into question autobiographical discourse as solipsistic. Hence Delvaux keeps the label “journal” for *Corps à corps* but widens its definition from private diary to “le quotidien”, and to Dreuilhe’s formulae of the “journal-tract”⁴⁹. One can see now more clearly how Dreuilhe transforms a genre, traditionally reserved for an *individual* experience (the diary), into a *collective* uprising. This tinkering with genres shows the difficulties inherent in trying to represent an experience previously unknown (being a PWA), that is either misunderstood or mis-recognised by society, and in turn by literature, given that there are only conventional means available for presenting something that is understood *not to be amenable* to conventional representations. It also shows the ingenuity of Dreuilhe. His recourse to the military metaphor is readable as an attempt to make available, through figuration, Dreuilhe’s own sense, as a PWA, of being embattled... embattled physically and biomedically, but also socially.

30 In *Corps à corps*, AIDS is constructed as the enemy which the individual body and the whole social body must get rid of. In the social context of the time, Dreuilhe tries to convince each reader to become engaged in the fight against AIDS. As Lévy and Nouss write: “La maladie se métaphorise quand une société donnée en a besoin et

elle se met à signifier en fonction de ce besoin (...) pour les sidéens, face à une médicalisation qui apparaît majoritairement répressive et un discours social les stigmatisant, la maladie devient une identité qui illustre le refus de cette oppression”⁵⁰. Dreuilhe’s military phantasy affords him a way of not fragmenting internally as well as a cultural referent to reach out to other people, where he can manufacture for himself a *figural*⁵¹ sense of solidarity with the outside world waging the same war as his⁵².

- 31 I now want to assess the impact of Dreuilhe’s phantasy in the text as it draws to a close. Couched in Kleinian psychoanalysis, the question becomes: how far does the author achieve a sense of composure⁵³ or does he reach a more “defensive mode enabled by psychic splitting (...) based on a denial of destructive and painful aspects of its own experience and of the anxieties to which these give rise”⁵⁴? Essentially, one expects both psychic states to be present, each being the condition of the other. Using the Kleinian schema, phantastical object relations (the latter concept meaning one’s sense of relatedness to social environment) can be identified in *Corps à corps*. I have mentioned the gendered nature of the debate around the military as well as the gendered nature of the denial, and this is relevant here. There is a splitting between the feminised self and the masculinised self which Dreuilhe consistently calls the “martial” side (etymologically, “martial” comes from the Latin *Martialis* - from Mars, the God of War – as we saw, Dreuilhe says that his book is a letter asking the God of War to spare him, 188). He takes his lead from his doctor who is described as using “martial speech” when he tells Dreuilhe, amongst other things, to grit his teeth. The latter concludes that he has just had a real pep talk, reminiscent of Napoleon addressing the troops before Austerlitz (61-62). He derives a certain pride in also adopting this attitude: “Je dois reconnaître qu'il m'arrive de jouir de l'admiration que suscite chez mes proches mon attitude martiale” (79). This attitude is used as a yardstick and Dreuilhe confides that he judges other PWAs according to martial criteria (25). AIDS, or rather one of the side-effects of the drugs (diarrhoea), is seen as feminising the body: “Les écoulements féminisent toujours inconsciemment, ce qui nuit à l'image martiale que j'essaie d'avoir de moi” (69-70). The flip side of a “martial attitude” is sheer *terror* - elsewhere *Corps à corps* is described as a witnessing of his terror (189). His martial attitude is a defence mechanism against fragmentation typical of some shoring up of masculinities. Talking about a PWA who is scared, he comments: “Malgré son intelligence et sa sensibilité, il n'avait pas encore l'esprit martial qui aurait pu le libérer de sa terreur manifeste” (127). Dreuilhe is displaying an iron body when he knows that his body is falling apart. The “martial spirit”, synonym of “militant”, is also applied to women. Hence when his wife is asked by an inquisitive Dutch camera crew how she feels about watching him die, he comments: “Elle a martialement répondu que je vis avec le SIDA, que je n'en meurs pas et qu'elle est là pour m'aider à le vivre” (156). “Martial” is the key strategic defence. So at this stage, because of his splitting (masculine/feminine), it appears that Dreuilhe is showing signs of “denial of destructive and painful aspects of his own experience and of the anxieties to which these give rise”⁵⁵. He is defending himself against his own vulnerability. On an inner level, psychic reintegration would effectively mean that one integrates one’s fears and anxieties, including one’s vulnerability, masculine/feminine side, and sheer terror as well as what Dreuilhe calls the “martial” attitude. But in fact, as we demonstrated, these binaries will carry on coexisting

- towards the end of the text, especially because death is approaching.
- 32 The function of this splitting is not to be read negatively. It provides Dreuilhe with a respite thanks to his military phantasy, and this is where I think that *Corps à corps* is innovative. By-passing psychoanalysis, Dreuilhe finds a way, through writing, using the military phantasy which echoes cultural imaginaries, to mobilise his energies to fight the disease, and in the process to send out a message of hope and militancy. This is done at a time when there had been, since the early 1980's, general apathy and disengagement (but not among those affected), and when a literature of mobilisation was necessary as well as general mobilisation. Dreuilhe is perhaps the only one to have imagined forms of solidarity that might have encouraged a collective response. In so doing, he is encouraging a representation of an homosexual community as homogenous.
- 33 In the acknowledgements at the end of the book, Dreuilhe writes that he has shifted from anger to compassion, from revolt to serenity, and in the process transcended sorrow and self-pity (162). So it looks as if the military phantasy has engendered a sense of compassion and serenity and diffused the necessary first stage of anger and revolt. Even when he compares himself and other PWAs to freedom fighters, Dreuilhe states that their common aim is to glorify freedom, health and peace and to reject constraint, illness and war (174).
- 34 The writing process helps to bring on a sense of reintegration by its reflexive nature: "Plus que ma thérapie, l'écriture m'a fait comprendre la complexité des sentiments que ma situation faisait naître en moi" (185). Ultimately, writing has made him less afraid (123). Dreuilhe believes he has invented *his* figural way of coping with AIDS. "Car il est certainement magique que l'aggravation de ma maladie se soit suspendue depuis que j'ai entrepris ce journal" (185). Dreuilhe has found a new sense of composure thanks to the writing process. Socially, the military phantasy has enabled him to build a sense of solidarity and therefore to survive psychically; it also serves as a political message. He writes openly that even if he ends up dying of AIDS, he is no longer frightened of it because the writing has purified him, giving a sense to the last three years of care, grief and mourning. That sense is encapsulated in the following statement: "Je serai mort pour une cause à laquelle je n'aurai pas renoncé: (...) mon respect pour mon homosexualité et celle des autres (...)" (189). This revealing statement demonstrates that he is not speaking only for PWAs; he wants respect for the entire homosexual community. There is a sense that the community will be stronger after this epidemic and he wants to extend this respectful attitude towards homosexuals to society at large.
- 35 In the context of his sexuality, which is the aspect that defined him before he became HIV positive (163), in the middle of the book Dreuilhe comments on his loss of subjectivity, especially after he stopped having an active sex life (it took him a year to settle into abstinence, 94). He then endorsed instead and *by default* the subjectivity of a PWA (162). He is now again claiming the subjectivity of being a homosexual with pride and dignity (194). This means he has worked through negative images and has therefore entered a process of reintegration. Dreuilhe sees a trade-off between giving up active sexuality and feeling in harmony between body and soul; the war has now become a *holy* war enabling him to access a mystical life through asceticism (97-98).

- 36 It is no coincidence that Dreuilhe chose to write his book in French, the language of his family, his *mother* tongue, claiming that he could never have written this book in English because an adopted language always betrays one (19), though his psycho-analysis must have been conducted in English. He speaks of France as the country he had left behind now returning towards him and of French culture and his body being the two pillars to which he clings, saying that he knew from the age of infant stammering, that his first and last hope was the French language (18-19).
- 37 In what is the last sentence of *Corps à corps*, Dreuilhe lucidly prepares for suicide, proving that he is nobody's fool regarding where his illness is leading: "Quand je serai Berlin [sic] en mai 1945, il sera peut-être temps que je nous empoisonne, le SIDA et moi, dans son bunker" (201)⁵⁶. The ambiguity towards AIDS mentioned at the outset of this article is still present here. Hitler poisoned himself with his *lover*, Eva Brown, who had just become his wife (they had been married a few hours beforehand), and Dreuilhe uses "nous", intimating that AIDS is his lover. *Corps à corps* seems in this instance to be referring to sexual encounter, or at any rate to the battle between Eros and Thanatos. The book was finished on 14 July 1987 (201). Whilst writing in New York, Dreuilhe shows that his heart is in France since it is France's national holiday, symbolically the date commemorating the storming of the Bastille, and also *the beginning of a civil war*. This could be Dreuilhe's last wishful gesture within the framework of a literature of mobilisation. Indeed the history of the AIDS crisis shows 1987 as being a turning point in terms of mobilisation and prevention. On 28 November 1988, the year that his book was published in North America, Dreuilhe died of AIDS-related illnesses in New York.
- 38 Wetsel noted that the book invited controversy both in America and in France. But this does not necessarily imply that *Corps à corps* was recuperated by the dominant discourse. Here is perhaps the first example of a text, ambiguous as it is at times, not used by the discourse of monogamous heterosexual masculinities and femininities or by a "just punishment" narrative. For the first time perhaps in the history of AIDS writing in France, "speaking out" means "breaking out".
- 39 At the beginning of this article, I mentioned Dreuilhe noting one difference between AIDS and war in that PWAs are dying for no reason when in war there is supposed to be a cause worth fighting for. Near the end of the book, he talks about fighting for homosexuality, his beleaguered land (161), and compares his act of writing to lighting a candle in the dark, hoping for others to join in so that it becomes a torchlight parade (123). His book stands as a memorial to this belief⁵⁷.

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NOTES

¹ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents*, London, Routledge, 1985, p. 47.

² *Ibid.*

³ Alain Emmanuel Dreuilhe, *Corps à corps*, Journal de Sida, Paris, Gallimard, 1987. Translated into English (US) by Linda Coverdale: *Mortal Embrace: Living with AIDS*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1988. All references to this book will be inserted in brackets in the body of the text, without the abbreviation "p.". Dreuilhe had already published a dictionary and a book *La société invertie*, Paris, Flammarion, 1979. Danthe makes the point that by calling his book "Journal de Sida" rather than "Journal du Sida", Dreuilhe

- could be echoing "Journal de guerre". Michel Danthe, "Le sida et les lettres", *Équinoxe*, No. 5 (Spring 1991), "Le sida et les lettres", Special issue edited by Michel Danthe and François Wasserfallen, p. 51-85, (60).
- ⁴ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents*, op. cit., p. 95.
- ⁵ Examples: "La tentation de déserter; Le front et l'arrière; Le Liban de mon corps".
- ⁶ I shall use Dreuilhe when referring to the narrator and the author but still maintain a distinction between the author of the book and the narrator.
- ⁷ Dreuilhe talked about his book on French national television in a literary programme "Apostrophes", in the autumn of 1987 (online: <http://www.ina.fr/video/CPB87010890>). In it he claims that at first his journal was not destined for publication but only for personal use. The programme was entitled: "Les grandes épidémies: choléra, peste, sida". Viewed courtesy of Raymond Bellour.
- ⁸ This is remarkably close to Simonin: "Pour moi, le virus qui me squatte est moins dangereux que l'isolement auquel on voudrait me condamner". Michel Simonin, *Danger de vie*, Paris, Librairie Séguier, 1986, p. 240.
- ⁹ Michel Danthe, "Le sida et les lettres", op. cit., p. 62.
- ¹⁰ In France, conscription for young men was compulsory and was only abolished in 1997.
- ¹¹ Michael S. Sherry, "The Language of War in AIDS Discourse", In Timothy F. Murphy and Suzanne Poirier, eds., *Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language and Analysis*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 39-53 (p. 39 & p. 50).
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- ¹³ David Wetsel, "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: The Emerging Literature of AIDS in France", In Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed., *AIDS: The Literary Response*, New York, Twayne Publishers, 1992, p. 210-11.
- ¹⁴ For instance, p. 142, 163, 174, 180.
- ¹⁵ "Alain-Emmanuel Dreuilhe: Un combat global", propos recueillis par Chantal Saint-Jarre, *Nuit Blanche*, Vol. 32, Part 6-7 (1988), p. 54-57, p. 54.
- ¹⁶ The point is made by both Arnal, *Résister ou disparaître: les homosexuels face au sida: la prévention de 1982 à 1992*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1993, p. 73 and Jean de Savigny, *Le SIDA et les fragilités françaises : nos réactions face à l'épidémie*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1995, p. 57. See also Murray Pratt, "AIDS Prevention, Gay identity and National Homophobia in France", In Joe Andrew, Malcom Crook, Diana Holmes and Eva Kolinsky, *Why Europe*, Problems of Culture and Identity, London, MacMillan, 2000, p. 142-69.
- ¹⁷ Murray Pratt, "The defence of the straight state: heteronormativity, AIDS in France, and the space of the nation", *French Cultural Studies*, 9 (3), No. 27, October 1988, p. 271.
- ¹⁸ Writing in the 1990's, Guibert will use the analogy of the computer game, the Pacman. Hervé Guibert, *À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie*, op. cit., p. 13.
- ¹⁹ Hervé Guibert, *À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 21.
- ²⁰ Larys Frogier, "Homosexuals, and the AIDS crisis in France", In Joshua Oppenheimer and Helena Reckitt, *Acting on AIDS*. Sex, Drugs & Politics, London, Serpent's Tail, 1997, p. 349.
- ²¹ David Caron, *AIDS in French Culture: Social Ills, Literary Cures*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2001. Larry Kramer, *The Normal Heart*, New York, Plume, 1985. For a more recent account of living with HIV, see David Caron, *The Nearness of Others*, Searching for Tact and Contact in the Age of HIV, University of Minnesota Press, 2014 (See my review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, "Blood counts", 24 October 2014, p. 23).
- ²² David Wetsel, "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: The Emerging Literature of AIDS in France", op. cit., p. 100.
- ²³ In his note 14, *ibid.*, p. 210, Wetsel cites the comparison made by Dreuilhe between the pleasure he takes in discussing his doctors to Saint-Loup's obsession with the Prince de Borodino in Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The reference to Dreuilhe (not given) is actually on p. 60-61. There is also a parody of Proust's title in one of the sections called "À la recherche de l'allié perdu" (55-65).
- ²⁴ Dreuilhe talks about writing "fragments d'un discours belliqueux" (14) which echoes Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Paris, Seuil, 1977.
- ²⁵ "Kotler, mon spécialiste des intestins, (...) m'a dit qu'il fallait serrer les dents (et les fesses, je présume)" (61).
- ²⁶ On the model of "Un seul être vous manque et tout est dépeuplé" (Lamartine, "L'isolement", *Méditations poétiques*, I, 1820), he writes: "J'ai repeuplé mon univers du seul être qui me manquât" (60). The being in question is AIDS.
- ²⁷ After a rather lyrical passage, we read: "(Morceau de bravoure kitsch que tous les discours patriotiques doivent comporter en forme de péroration)" (190).
- ²⁸ The parallel with Guibert is too striking not to be mentioned. Writing about the death of Muzil (on which the character of Michel Foucault is based), the narrator writes that it is not so much Muzil's death as his own that he is writing about. See Jean-Pierre Boulé, *Hervé Guibert: Voices of the Self*, Modern French Writers Series, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1999, especially p. 191-206.
- ²⁹ "Alain-Emmanuel Dreuilhe: Un combat global", propos recueillis par Chantal Saint-Jarre, *Nuit Blanche*, op. cit., p. 56.

- ³⁰ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes. British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, London, Routledge, 1994.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27-52.
- ³² "Apostrophes", 30 November 1987 (online: <http://www.ina.fr/video/CPB87010890>).
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- ³⁴ He has already recovered from pneumonia and is diagnosed with cytomegalovirus in both eyes (73).
- ³⁵ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- ³⁶ Dreuilhe uses "sidatique" throughout, explaining during "Apostrophes" that living in the United States and not reading the French press, he was not sure which adjective to use. In France "sidaïque" had been rejected because it recalls "judaïque" and the political use made of their similarity by the far right in France who wanted to send PWAs, not to concentration camps, but to sidatoria, a word that recalls crematoria, and wanted them, not to wear a yellow star, but as in the case of the Bavarian authorities, tattoos (also reported by Dreuilhe, 165). The term "sidéen" was officially endorsed in France by the "Commission générale de terminologie" in December 1987.
- ³⁷ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- ³⁹ Ross Chambers, *Facing It, AIDS Diaries and the Death of the Author*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1998, p. 28.
- ⁴⁰ Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, London, Penguin Books, 1988, p. 94-95.
- ⁴¹ D.A. Miller, "Sontag's Urbanity", in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin, eds., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 212-220 (p. 219).
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ Christophe Broqua, "De quelques expressions collectives de la mémoire face au sida", *Ethnologie française*, XXVIII, No. 1 "Sida: deuil, mémoire, nouveaux rituels" (January-March 1998), p. 103-111 (p. 108).
- ⁴⁴ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ⁴⁶ Although not kept in the English translation, this message is reinforced on the front cover of the French edition which shows two gladiators fighting with a lion (presumably representing AIDS). One of the two gladiators is lying on the arena floor and appears to be mortally wounded whilst the other one is still fighting the lion who is about to devour the dying man. From Giorgio de Chirico, "Lion et gladiateurs", 1927.
- ⁴⁷ Fritz Zorn, *Mars*, München, Kindler Verlag GmbH, 1977. [French translation] Paris, Gallimard, 1977.
- ⁴⁸ Martine Delvaux, "Des corps et des frontières: les lieux du sida", *L'Esprit créateur*, Special issue on "The Politics and Aesthetics of Contamination and Purity", Guest Editor: Mireille Rosello, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3 (Fall 1997), p. 88.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Lévy and Nouss, *Sida-Fiction. Essai d'anthropologie romanesque*, Lyon, Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1994, p. 174-75.
- ⁵¹ I had used "fictional" in the text but Ross Chambers pointed to the difference between the "fictional" and the "figural". The latter shows that Dreuilhe's phantasy has a *symbolic* function: it solves for him a problem that cannot be solved in the real i.e.: historically, and that recourse to the imaginary (the fictional) would not affect. Chambers believes that most of the discussion about metaphor is disqualified by the assumption that metaphor is a representation and that hence there are good and bad metaphors when in fact it is not a representation but a figuration; it does not signify by referring to an object but by providing an occasion for reading/interpretation, one whose "object" is indistinguishable from the interpretation.
- ⁵² Dreuilhe knows that the Reagan administration had completely ignored the rising AIDS epidemic until finally convinced that it was not simply a "gay plague" but also affecting the heterosexual population (and not before thousands of Americans had died).
- ⁵³ "A more integrated self, open to its own contradictions and more tolerant of painful experience, confronts and strives to transform its anxieties, in efforts to reconcile the conflicting imagos" (Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 34).
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ For a study of writing as opposed to suicide, see Ross Chambers, *Facing It, AIDS Diaries and the Death of the Author*, *op. cit.*, specially "Dying as an author", p. 17-33.
- ⁵⁷ This article first appeared as Chapter V of my book *HIV Stories, The Archaeology of AIDS Writing in France, 1985-1988* (p. 120-141). I am grateful to Liverpool University Press for granting permission to reproduce this chapter, albeit in a slightly modified form.