

Comptes rendus/Book Reviews



Philippe Jaccottet. *Cahier de verdure*.

Paris. Gallimard. 1990. 85 pages. 59FF.

It is some years since Philippe Jaccottet published his last collection of poetry, *Pensées sous les nuages* (1983), and even longer since we saw appear *Beauregard* (1981) and *Les Cormorans* (1980). *Cahier de verdure* is thus doubly welcome, and, indeed, one of his most felicitously felt and meditated books, perhaps his finest. For, although his various relatively recent *carnets*, *chroniques* and *lectures* may speak with eloquence and even restrained passion of the creative act, or some lived experience, or, again, of the specific poetics of Scève, Novalis, Mandelstam or Jourdan, I can think of no other book in which Jaccottet has attained to such serenity within questioning, such a sense of buoyancy in the face of planetary turmoil, such a modest, instinctive, yet firmly articulated resolution of forces that, still, would seek to plague and to divide. Of course the word resolution is relative, metaphoric, but it does come close to recognizing some surer intuitive leap of experience that *Cahier de verdure* both writes of and writes.

Organized in prose and verse counterpoint that, yet, does not pretend to some conceptualised and reductive superstructure, the various texts retain an osmotic, open quality, refusing to lock themselves either in Mallarmé's "signifiances idéales" or in some sense of semiotic closure. All are purposive, transitive, symbiotic. Their function is not to establish a shimmering interiority, no matter how we may characterize the texts *a posteriori*. They are places of passage, change, rather than "tombs"; they thus seek in some measure that Dupinian *déchirure* and that sense of unfinishableness of which André du Bouchet speaks — in order to remain with immanent possibility, the exquisite beauty and meaning of trace, the knowledge that poetry is not a victory over the world, but a fleeting caress of its paradoxical, easily missed sublimeness.

Cahier de verdure is, in many ways, a wonderfully transparent book, yet, like all meditations upon being, thought and language, it retains an implicit density. Somewhat *au hasard*, I shall mention, in conclusion, the following factors: 1. the tensions of a persistent sense of joy, now, and the feeling of the latter's cosmic fragmentation and dispersal; 2. fear, the *leurre* of speech, the feeling of alienation, which seek to erode what we seek to affirm; 3. the self's ignorance, "imbecility" even, may interlock with Jaccottet's discourse is at once double and one —, but this ambivalence can tilt the emotions towards either pole, thus seeming to unbalance the experience of presence which, in fact, is predicated upon an embrace of the authenticity of a totality of one's beliefs; 4. a consciousness of the fact that the *same* experience of a few wild flowers along the road's edge — *séneçon*, *berce*, *chicorée* — can be the focus of thoughts of death and feelings of inexplicable wonderment — this consciousness may release our being from our beliefs, as it were, allowing us to understand that choice exists, reality is within us; 5. thus, we may, like Jaccottet, perceive grace, meaningfulness, in simplicity, in the ephemeral; thus we may sense the conjunction occurring in existence, the criss-crossing participations, the deep meaning of some unnamed beauty — cherry-tree blossoms, birds in flight, mountains against the dawn light; 6. consent is possible, as for Bonnefoy, without the "deconstructions" of *Beauregard*; 7. the discourse of, say, flowers is "higher" than that of "hell", and even "[les fleurs] parlent de ce qui pourrait l'emporter à la fois sur elles et sur lui"; 8. the latter, for this "negative theologian", would imply, as he suggests in his closing "Le mince croissant de la lune aperçu...", that all discourse is subsumed under a "guardianship" that is telluric, cosmic.

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