

Philippe Jaccottet. *La Seconde Semailson*. Paris: Gallimard, 1996. 235 pages. 155FF. ISBN 2-07-074399-3.

The third book of Philippe Jaccottet's diaries — after *La Semailson* and *Autres journées* — records the reflections and notations of the period 1980-1994, thus taking up once more the entries of the relatively compact *Autres journées* covering the years 1980-1984. The same wonderful range of entry continues to characterize *La Seconde Semailson*: local landscapes described, meditated; dreams often narrated and commented in detail; critical readings of books and texts of all kinds; thoughts on music, paintings, the relation of language to experience, the meaning of certain experiences, often the simplest, in the context of the current state of the planet; and so on. Ethical, aesthetic and psychological “constants” are affirmed in endless ways, and yet the sheer subtleties and paradoxes of Jaccottet's thought are what strike the reader most and give to these constants a fluid, quite unconcealed quality that accounts in considerable measure for the genius of this great poet.

“Le fait qu'on ne peut dire n'importe quoi,” Jaccottet writes, half-simingly one

senses, but with odd satisfaction, in a September 1981 entry, “est chose à mes yeux très mystérieuse et très reconfortante.” Constancy within fluidity, yes, but also accountability, something viscerally and psychically compelling that demands of him (as of each person) a coherence of scriptural purpose and meaning not necessarily conscious, but real, intuitable despite doubts, loss of confidence, disorientation. It is this discreet but determining *gestalt* that leads Jaccottet, for example, and as he tells us, to refuse the shimmering fascinations of both the surreal and the mystical; to embrace instead, and speak, the “grace” of what Bonnefoy has termed “les choses du simple;” to speak their physical presence, as Jaccottet so often does in diary and poem, but to sense presence lying deep, intangible and yet absolute, far beyond the grasp and limitations of words; to struggle intensely, ethically, psychologically with such onto logical conundrums as that “opposing, yet imbricating, Jaccottet's “shame before all that is unbearable around the globe, and his impulse to sing the exquisiteness of minute traces of existence; to declare, thinking of Clov and Hamm in *Fin de partie* and of course Beckett, his perceptive concern for the latter's “sorte de parti pris du néant. Avec la force et la faiblesse

des partis pris;" to remain sceptical — not this time with regard to the legitimacy of joy: this is, however, a much-debated issue in Jaccottet and perhaps his Achilles' heel — in the face of what he sees (in 1992) as French literature's current proclivities to the psychological, the elegant, the society-conscious yet involuted mode.

"Ne plus écouter que les conseils des fleurs, antérieurs à tout savoir," is his shrewd advice to himself...

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Yves Bonnefoy. *Dessin, couleur et lumière*. Paris: Mercure de France. 1995. 310 pages. 140FF. ISBN 2-7152-1933-4

So many remarkable books on the act and place of art have already been given to us by Yves Bonnefoy — from *Peintures murales de la France gothique* (1954), and *L'Improbable* (1959), through *Rome, 1630* (1970) and *L'Arrière-pays* (1972), to *Sur un sculpteur et des peintre* (1989), *Alberto*

Giacometti (1991) and *Remarques sur le dessin* (1993) — that it can only be with an amazed gratitude that we receive today a book of such freshness and continuing insight as *Dessin, couleur et lumière*. All of the essays the latter contains have wither recently appeared elsewhere, in reviews, catalogues of specialised books, or been offered as lectures, but all are reworked, some considerably.

The range of assessment is inevitably impressive: Mantegna, Goya, Elsheimer, Poussin, Cortone, Tiepolo, Giacometti, and there are surprises, relatively speaking: Delacroix, Hopper, Chirico, Cartier-Bresson, plus two essays on Durand, which opens the volume, and Mozart whilst the painterly realm has its specificities it is never fundamentally separable from the intentions, the poetics, the symbolic rhetorical modes at play in all other creative enterprise. *Les différences du même*, Deguy might say... Beautiful reflective and discreetly moving pieces are to be found throughout *Dessin, couleur et lumière*. The studies, however, are not banally academic, though they are always brilliantly informed, marked by a scholarship second to none. Their foundation is, in effect, ethical, spiritual in the broadest sense of the term, openly meditative. Yves Bonnefoy encourages us, by