

Michel Collot. *Chaosmos*. Paris: Belin, 1998. 96 pages. ISBN 2-7011-2056-X.

Chaosmos: la rumeur soudaine et sourde du gravier brassé le long du rivage, we read at the threshold of this book of prose texts by the eminent critic of contemporary poetry, Michel Collot, "l'évidence d'un jet de pierre blanche dressée contre le bleu de l'horizon. Osmose rêvée de l'ordre et du chaos". The contingency of the immanent absorbs; and although it is felt to be beyond orderable meaning, an impulse, a desire yet urges towards an irrational though perhaps intuitable sense of the world's exquisite harmonies. The vast intricacies of the earth thus seem to offer, like language itself, at best — but why, one asks — "a solemn joy", "an austere jubilation". Collot's textual statement of what is, thus remains characterised by a tenseness, a doubt known to so many of our time, and, further, an investment in this tensionality opposing desolation to exaltation. A strong and resilient trace feeling persists of some high existential pertinence, of the mysterious meaning of desire itself, giving conceivable access to an accord of self and other, of even larger harmonies.

The question that arises in this book of recounted experiences of both earth and art centers around whether language — the right language available via a "deep sounding out" of self — is the sole way of "watching over the marvelous". Is there an inherent contradiction in respecting the need to live raw sensation, the "emotion [we don't call] poetry" (Reverdy), "banal" experience *à ras de terre*, and, on the other hand, art, writing, structure, what Bonnefoy can call our "excarnations" arising from such rough livedness? *Chaosmos* both implicitly and at times explicitly churns over such fundamental matters. It does so with delicacy and sensitivity, with straightforwardness and firmness. And in doing so, it seems to me, its "difference" from what it contemplates, rather than forging pure excarnation, invites us to better sense the strange simplicities of incarnation.

Michael Bishop
Dalhousie University

Gérard Noiret. *Toutes voix confondues*. Paris: Maurice Nadeau, 1998. 119 pages. 85 FF. ISBN 2-862-31-147-2.

The closing text of this fine-boned, yet robust collection speaks of a "hesitat[ion] / In a story in which the most tangible part is still the flight of hornets". *Toutes voix confondues*, in effect, in gathering together the swirling "voices" of being, in dramatising often via dialogue the mystery of our acts, our presence, the swirling identities embraced and imagined by the poem, stumbles into the dilemmas of interpretation and understanding. The strength of the book lies at once in a recognition of this vastness, of the enormities beyond our "history", enormities that "contest" the latter like the gulls circling above our

named places. Hornets and gulls are clear; all the rest remains uncertain. Unless, or course, other criteria of penetration and living of the real are to be opted for. Noiret, indeed, hints that, in the midst of the ceaseless tyings and untyings of (our) being, love remains the central significance despite a perceived dissolving and unraveling that — seemingly — simultaneously besets its emergence and maintenance.

Of course, there is nothing intrinsically problematic in this endless flow of existence, with its rhythmic founding and refounding of our civilisations. As in the work of Perse — where, also, the voices are largely unanchored, planetary, cosmic — rhythm implies difference, multiplicity, contrast, and, once more, a circling back to the challenge of the comprehension of difference, mortality, "the imperious attraction" of it all. A sense of the infinite, the atemporal thus implacably seeps into Noiret's discreet and yet moving poems. It never erodes the concrete, the sensual, the felt fragility of physical passage, yet it forces us to tussle with the latter. *Toutes voix confondues* writes elegantly this tussling, but its concluding "hesitation" I initially referred to, represents not a failure so much as a dazzled continuing attempt to decipher the "incomprehensible writing [of ants upon the graves of us all] / A morse message sent by whom / Received by whom we do not know".

Michael Bishop
Dalhousie University

Yves Bonnefoy. *L'Arrière-pays*. Paris: Gallimard, Coll. Poesie, 1998. 167 pages. ISBN 2-07-040382-3.

A third of the way through this most episodic, and thus autobiographically rooted, of Bonnefoy's books, we read that "l'aire de l'arrière-pays, c'est l'orgueil, mais aussi l'insatisfaction, l'espoir, la crédulité, le départ, la fièvre toujours prochaine. Et ce n'est pas la sagesse. Mais peut-être, qui sait, mieux que cela". And already — *toutes proportions gardées*: much remains to be said in the two thirds of the book to come — we can observe a number of things central to the aesthetics of this great poet of our time: 1. the pride of the "image" or time-space of being glimpsed, imagined or creatable, and alienating us from what is, here and now, is problematic for Bonnefoy; 2. desire shifting our vision from the immediate, the immanent, ephemerality here and now, resists what we are instead of embracing it leads to dissatisfaction, an unfulfilment which the "ideal", the "elsewhere", the "hinterland" cannot remedy; 3. hope predicated upon such credulousness, a Baudelairian belief in the illusory self-transformational power of "departure", "journey", but inevitably away from, out of, the self's real world — such hope is, again, ontologically problematic. But we may be already equally aware of two other complicating issues: 1) if the pursuit of *l'arrière-pays* is "unwise", how is it that it might be deemed better even than wisdom? — are Bonnefoy's categories of judgement intrinsically valid, when, after all, he himself