

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

can debate and doubt them?; 2) to the extent that *l'arrière-pays* is the hinterland of dream, structure of an otherness denying "this-ness", art itself therefore, and of course language, is there not in *L'Arrière-pays*, as indeed in Bonnefoy's entire oeuvre, the ever-developing temptation of art's (self-)persuasion, its finely *image*-ing and conceptualising, structuring hubris, which, inevitably, are in conflict with Bonnefoy's initial premise?

*L'Arrière-pays*, of course, opens at a crossroads, a place and act of choice allowing self-assumption along the axis of imagined absolute and lived relativity, the experience of finiteness. To embrace and articulate, as does *L'Arrière-pays*, the dilemmas, the allurements and the deceptiveness of the pursuit of perfectibility and intelligibility, is, in effect, Bonnefoy's way of releasing himself from the "dangers" besetting self and text. To write one's way through conceptualisation is one way of "vanquishing image in image", as he says elsewhere. Writing and its structuring conceptualisations thus give way to a kind of becoming; they relativise themselves, question, contest, undercut; come closer, in short, to language as sheer, and mere, presence, words, like the brambles of *Ce qui fut sans lumière* — "that scratch our face but are just nothingness scratching nothingness in the light". The "equations" of meaning developed in *L'Arrière-pays* thus remain loose, free, beyond final truth, though on one of the infinite paths of "truth". They evade the reductions language seeks to impose upon being and thought. Poussin's realisation of the opaque and unsayable meaning of his brilliant sensual presence, a realisation that roots his art in the mystery of blinding visceralness, does not solve the equations his intellect had set out to wrestle with. Yet his gaze upon the world before him and the creation resulting from it, whilst never letting go of the ideas and dreams of otherness and some *amont du réel*, finally relax into the *hic et nunc* traversing him and traversed by him. And this is sufficient, as is Bonnefoy's unresolved, unresolving traversal of himself he calls *L'Arrière-pays*.

Michael Bishop  
Dalhousie University

**Henri Pichette.** *Les Épiphanies*. Paris: Gallimard, coll. Poésie, 1998. 205 pages. ISBN 2-07-040456-0.

**H**alf-forgotten, almost seemingly half self-forgetting and finally determined to rewrite even his essential texts, Henri Pichette occupies a very particular if, despite Gallimard's recent attention with the publication in the same collection of *Apoèmes*, somewhat obscure place in modern French letters. *Les Épiphanies*, originally published in 1948, is, Louis Roinet tells us in the (1969 Gallimard edition) preface accompanying this