

Louise Herlin. *Chemins de traverse*. Paris : Editions de la Différence, 2002. 128 pages. 13 euros. ISBN 2-7291-1390-8.

The opening sequence of Louise Herlin's latest collection of poetry – after her recent *Oiseaux de Méryon* (1993), her *Poème inachevé* (1993) and *Synchronies* (1998) – is centred on landscape and one may wonder initially whether this descriptive gesture of closeness yet constitutes a tactic of discreet detachment of the self from that with which some intimacy is nevertheless implicit: is our, and Herlin's, *observation* of the real but the sign of a curious and paradoxical “[infidelity] to [the] immense dance” (9) of what is, an “awakening to things”, as she later argues, that “is not enough” (79), “not the centre nor the key” (79) in our relation to being? Yet leaves do offer us “lessons” (119), if we open to them the fullness of our sensibility and our spirit/mind. And, in effect, discreetly, perhaps cautiously, yet firmly, Herlin's writing projects upon the world a meaning in flux, driven by equally shifting emotion, a meaning not reducible, not quickly rendered by congealing equation, but rather of the moment, though still, one feels, orbiting about some intangible centre that might best be described as the very feasibility of emotion itself before the mystery of things.

Thus can the simplest of phenomena move and stir the heart: a child's drawing, a “valley, [grassy, rich and broad,] offer[ed] opulent for our reading” (17), or, elementary though infinite, “the entire enigma [of being-]there” (17). This is not to say, however, that Louise Herlin's gesture is, finally – pure observation utterly transformed – one of absolute embrace: the world is questioned, emotion can “negatively” tilt experience (: sunset (death and mourning, overcast sky (“Baudelarian lid”, etc.), a sense of lack, ambiguity, existential errancy may surface. But – no doubt because she senses sense in the pure movement of birds in flight, in the (stunning) uniqueness of every phenomenon, in the secret gestation in all of life – Louise Herlin can quietly, often implicitly rather than explicitly, rejoice in the “mille et mille angles de saisie des choses” (47) available to us, in our “incorrigible attente / D'un miraculeux / Retour de possible” (75), in our inventiveness, our desire, our will, the fact one *still* can write an ode to “old stories, discourses, deliriums, foreign cities, dreams, enigmas, mysteries” (85).

A true poet, to be reckoned with, and savoured.