

witness to the deluge of blood, the shrill cries of fear, the crushing and slicing through of bone, that are but daily, monotonous rituals in a world hidden from the gaze of the city-dweller. It is a book, too, that captures the atmosphere of field and stable, the mists and suns that alternate their transmutations of them, the complexities and the routine of farm life, its focusses and its *inconsciences*. *Bouchères* is an elegy – and, however paradoxically, also a eulogy – such as the Romantics never dreamed of, fierce and compassionate, brutal and tender. Its texts can become rhythmically dense, fill with teeming perception and implicit emotion, or they can strip down to a bare, stark, or even exhilarated one-line visionariness. The language never lets itself loose upon the inventiveness of a Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Harry Ploughman*; it prefers a curious mixture of sobriety, penetrating detail and quirky, insightful imagery. Nothing is predictable, finally, in these articulations which never sink into morality before a world Commère knows too well to think to really judge it.

A powerful volume by an unusual poet...

Alfred Kern. *Le Carnet Blanc*. Orbey / Paris: Arfuyen, 2002. 149 pages. 14,5 Euros. ISBN 2-84590-015-5.

Most of Alfred Kern's publications date back to the fifties and sixties, though two poetic collections appeared much later, after a long period of silence: *Gel et feu* (1989) and *Le Point vif* (1991), both with the admirable Editions Arfuyen, directed by Gérard Pfister. *Le Carnet blanc*, prefaced by Philippe Jaccottet and introduced by Pfister to whose care we owe these pages gathered in the midst of the author's dying.

Le Carnet blanc, then, is a testamentary work of sorts. It offers poems and *proses*, annotations and meditations, at once situated and spiritually beyond the detail of concreteness. The tone of Kern's writing can be melancholy or enthused, discreet or intense, nostalgic and half-memorialising or oriented towards a future the present cannot envision, tenderly caressive of the livable or elegiacal, yet, though troubled, tinged with a serenity that proffers bare and touching consolations. Not that these pages are not clear-eyed, bold in their own way, unseeking of all compensation. Here is a poetic fragment:

l'instant
la juste mesure d'un rien

qui te ravit qui te bat
paradoxe
du floconneux silence
qui allège la pluie
ta première neige
le passé de l'enfant
le rien à présent
qui flambe
regard amoureux
pour ce rien
qui te surprend
la grande portée
des ombres
encore étrange
au plus vif de ton âge (119-20)

Where illness and the nearness of death might have produced utter refractoriness, disgust even, Kern, though quick, no doubt too quick, to characterise a moment's passage as mere nothingness – an emotional metaphor, after all –, realises equally quickly that there is, within himself, a power of love that can illuminate and fire what is, and that this power of amazement at the seeming insignificance of rain or snow coincides with an upsurging renewal of the strange relationship of self to the “real”, its physical fragrances, its recessed mysteries – the greatest of which is (the meaning of) this amazement-within-the-self.

Yves Bonnefoy. *L'Arrière-pays*. Paris: Gallimard, Collection Art et Artistes, 2003. 120 pages. 21 euros. ISBN 2-07-071141-2.



his is, of course, the reedited text of Yves Bonnefoy's celebrated 1972 *L'Arrière-pays*, but it is beautifully reproduced with many colour illustrations, and the text itself, rich, suggestive, deeply personal, never ceases to repay renewed attention, and, in that, elude any temptation we may have, any feasibility we may think accompanies this temptation, to turn an *acte de présence*, a book of existence and experience, into an *image*, a purely intelligible structure, a place of prestigious conceptualisation. Since 1972, Bonnefoy's entire oeuvre has continued to privilege and meditate the terms of this fundamental choice before us – whether