

Jean-Claude Pinson. *Free Jazz*. Nantes: Edns Joca Seria, 2004. 130 pages. 15 euros. ISBN 2-84809-024-3.

Today one of France's most respected and measured critics in the realm of poetics and aesthetics, but, too, one of her most free-spirited and wide-ranging poetical voices, Jean-Claude Pinson offers us here, in *Free Jazz*, not just a text of memorialisation, recognition and praise of one of the greatest American jazz musicians of all time, but, further, a true insertion of the joy of such a recognition in the life of a young boy and, today, that of a mature philosopher and poet. After the important pseudo break from earlier work that *Fado (avec flocons et fantômes)* may be said to constitute — I say pseudo, because, clearly, a marked continuity of vision and tone remains perceptible, although the 'break' gives us a sharply renewed lyricism we may not have expected so soon —, *Free Jazz* boldly pursues a writing of experience at once clear-headed and fanciful, shrugging off inhibitions and preconceptions that might have given pause to other poets, Pinson toying and amusing himself with the 'theatricalities' launched in *Fado*, pushing to the side even, I should argue, elements of the sobering though resilient poetics sketched out in *A quoi bon la poésie?* For *Free Jazz* undoubtedly and wilfully rides on an aesthetics-cum-ethics of upliftment, of aeration, of continued 'experimentation' with the feasibilities not only of form and rhetoric, but, more importantly, those that orient and possibilise the very 'experience' of everyday life as we choose to mould and build it into validity, *valeur*, as Michel Deguy has recently termed it — even though, for the latter, and let us not presume with respect to Pinson, such a *valeur* may float, at least at times, on the waters of some *énergie du désespoir*. To be sure, there is exhilaration here, high and felt appreciation of self, its options, its past gifts (rethought), appreciation too of the other: David Ryan, James Sacré, Don Cherry, etc., but, also, there is a lightness of manner and treatment that, whilst not undercutting serious reflexion, restores an enthusiasm, a *souffle*, at once simple and richly refreshing that the heaviness of certain thought can repress, imagining the tragic or the melancholic to be more noble and justifiable in an age deemed all too readily 'unredeemable'. What such discourse might be worth to a child of three or ten does not seem to be relevant to perpetrators of their own dourness; Pinson's 'rushes' and soarings, his chosen naivetés and determination to 'tout reprendre à zéro, les pieds nus sur le sable', offer such children, as they offer any reader, reasons to live and be passionate, to dream and to assume the innocence of one's 'réenfantement'. 'Too flaky, too flip?', Pinson even asks himself... But he is too immersed

in his own renewed and, for the reader too, renewing energies, his philosophic and visceral self-rejuvenation, to give too much thought to the other-as-absolute-mentor – always a fatal tactic, if one is seeking to know what is truly best for oneself, and, it is always instinctively felt on either side of the equation, for the world. *Free Jazz* is not a book of irony, of dismissal, of lack of concern; on the contrary, it seeks to rise high above indifference and, especially, fear of buoyancy, fear of vigour and delight expressed with ease and straightforwardness – as well as fancifulness and a love of grace, a jubilancy before the miraculousness of Bonnefoy's *choses du simple*, but 'things' experienced in their widest modal range of 'being' and felt, experienced presence. This is the book of a mature poet-philosopher, one who has always sought to orient himself without apology and through personal trial towards happiness and upliftment, equilibrium and appreciation. As such, it is a book to be read above many others published today, a small but significant light on a path some would say is swathed irrevocably in tenebrae.

G rard Titus-Carmel. *Mani re de sombre.* Sens: Obsidiane, 2004. 127 pages. 15 euros. ISBN 2-911914-77-5.



Author of some fifteen books devoted to the meanings and manners of art and poetry, artist of great power and originality honoured by critics as distinguished as Jacques Derrida and Yves Bonnefoy, G rard Titus-Carmel has become, too, a poet of intensity and lucid voice, one, as Bonnefoy has recently suggested, 'cherchant les fondations d'une po sie nouvelle' – this, however, beyond all satisfaction with either pure aestheticism or a lyricism settling for the narrowness of what Michel Deguy has called 'self-story'. *Mani re de sombre* leaps, indeed, over the temptations of 'image' into a space where, if a full sense of 'presence' eludes the poet as he struggles with traumas anguishingly persistent, he may yet claim a reinsertion of self, of existence, of experience, into the poetic, a reinsertion guaranteeing an instinctive refusal of pure formalism, of an empty ringing of the ironical or the ludic in ears closed to the self's lived mystery.

If *Mani re de sombre* is an obsessive book, then, it is centred on what Reverdy called the only truly significant encounter made in this world, the 'encounter with oneself', an encounter leading to a deep and persistent quest for self-knowledge and avenues of continuation when mourning

seems to take up all the available corporeal and spiritual space. *Manière de sombre* remains, however, and astonishingly, courageously, a book of exceptional eloquence, and this, in spite of the sense of language's increasingly ebbing power and purpose. Over and above the slowly unwinding rhythms of either the exquisitely mathematised *carrés* of *Fougères* and *Ronces* (the first and third suites of the tripartite *recueil*) or the freely unfolding central prose section, however, what strikes the reader is the rhetorical and expressive integrity of a text caught within the paradox of a consciousness of its relativity yet never surrendered to, and ever placed in the context of an ontology of a touching beauty and a profound, unsayable enigma of 'presence' whose implications are not erased in the face of a felt and ironic pervasive 'absence'. Titus-Carmel is sensitive, too, to choices he is constantly making, choices seemingly inevitable, as those resulting from deep loss and grief may appear to be, yet assumed, embraced even, this, again, in the face of an 'eternity' sensed to be at once 'faceless' and offering a kind of recuperation and even 'redemption'. A major 'metaphor' of *Manière de sombre*, as with various recent poetical and plastic creations of Titus-Carmel, is that of vegetation, leafing, complex and interwoven vegetal fibres, flecked, indeed penetrated, with both shadow and light. Yves Bonnefoy has just written somewhat in this direction in the context of Titus-Carmel's exhibition, *Feuillées*, and he has rightly seen, I believe, in these traces of yet non-representational forms, an abiding connection with *les choses du simple* which may constitute a 'hope' in the midst of shadows and a night that press in upon the heart and the psyche. Bracken, brambles and 'jungle': if these quasi-*blasons* can speak of freedom, of wild and spirited energy once deployed in the world of a lost childhood and a lost love, they can speak too of labyrinthine, tearing and confusing, even frightening mental space that any sense of 'grace' finds difficult to counter. Crepuscular coolness can seduce, but it can, too, offer a direr temptation; 'fire' may be available, but it lingers essentially in 'embers'; 'unity' is a beautiful dream, but it does not necessarily imply transcendence as haunting intertwined voices impinge on the poet's consciousness. And yet, as we read in *Serré dans le jour*, the central volet of *Manière de sombre*, '*tu as tort de me plaindre, car qui sont véritablement ces voix faillées que je n'entends plus, toutes allées se perdre dans la rouille immense des automnes, où la lumière dépérit sans drame ni soubresauts, sinon celles aimées jusqu'à la pure dilection, mais que l'absence a soudain pétries entre ses doigts violets d'absence ?*... A poetry of profound melancholia, yet a poetry of exceptionally delicate caress of a love, a perfection and an imperfection of loves cast into the mystery of human time, embraced in

a mixture of impotence and triumph within the soul and a language that trails achingly in its wake.

A very powerful book, of great beauty and at once subtle and shattering emotional density; a book of a great poet of our day.

Esther Tellermann. *Une odeur humaine.* Tours: Farrago/ Edns Léo Scheer, 2004. 176 pages. 15 euros. ISBN 2-84490-137-9.

Six books of poetry precede this, Esther Tellermann's first venture into the realm of the *récit* : *Une odeur humaine*. But, of course, this is to overlook the intensely though brokenly narrative manner of collections such as *Distance de fuite* (1993), *Pangeia* (1996) and *Encre plus rouge* (2003), where we sense a firm effort to articulate the most splayed out experiences and reflections on them, despite a level of what André du Bouchet termed 'incoherence' that only bears witness to the hiatus gaping between world and word, when the former is lived as a place of high trauma, anguish or extreme 'puzzlement' at best, the latter as a trace lingering far behind, capable of mere stuttering, a kind of simulacrum of speech. This said, *Une odeur humaine* remains a strange book, a book of many strangenesses we may not have expected after Tellermann's earlier work. We move from the elliptical, the arcane even, the discreetly unconfessed of the last fifteen years, to a language explosive, delirious, overflowing and implicitly highly confessional. A language, and, indeed, a rhetoric and narrative structure that seem to leap straight from the psychoanalyst's couch, an ebb and flow of surging self-exploration and self-avowal, dialogical – the *docteur* is ever present –, shifting, never firmly anchored, never lodged in any established identities, for the latter are shrouded in a questioning and declaration that can only achieve the relativity of their felt drifting desire. If love, its intrinsic beauty and desirability, its somehow transcendent 'logic', lie at the centre of this swarming would-be-self-defining tumble of words at the very edge of a sort of articulate *démence*, it is not a love that brings the serenity and the upliftment one might imagine available via its unfoldment. This is a narrative of teemingly oxymoronic proportions: fears, vilification, murderous and suicidal impulses, flickering images of God and some 'negative theology', intimacy and terrible distancing, love of the body and scorn for it, desire for the other and utter scepticism as to the worth of resultant exchange, extreme forthrightness and ubiquitous indecision, fault, guilt and yet innocence and dream, the

rush of words and yet their lame intransitivity, and so on. If, then, the ‘human smell’ emerging from Esther Tellermann’s in many ways mesmerising yet puzzling ‘poetic’ narrative is not altogether one one would not spray against, it remains that it is a smell that belongs not just to the author and her protagonists, but, too, to an epoch, a widespread psychical gestalt that has plagued many over recent years. It is, in effect, a ‘smell’ that yet, despite its disturbing implications, Tellermann assumes and, arguably, beyond the ambiguities and uncertainties of her interrogation, realises has an underpinning meaning which the intensity of her desire and her delirium of utterance can only succeed in implying, never stabilising into a statement felt absolute, or even unambiguously embraced in the ‘hope’ it might thus convey.

There is, finally, a convergence of manners and a continuity of anxious, nervous vision performed by *Une odeur humaine*, factors that initially escape us, but that slowly impress their pertinence on the reading consciousness. We now can read Tellermann’s earlier writing with an odd ‘fullness’ we may have denied it before, but it remains a fullness streaked through and through with an anguish only occasionally alleviated by smiling references to an improbable ‘all-knowingness’ of a Shakespeare.

Hédi Bouraoui. *Struga*. Montréal: Editions Mémoire d’Encrier, 2003. ISBN 2-923153-09-x. 114 pages

““**P**rologue pour une poésie fonctionnelle” lays out the criteria according to which Hédi Bouraoui views the pertinence and the relevancy of both his own work and that of others: sociological, ethical, perhaps implicitly spiritual in the broadest sense of the term, such criteria are conceived as allowing an upsurge of a communion and a vision centred upon “tolerance”, equity and dignity. The trick is, as Bouraoui recognises, to achieve this *engagement* and reorientation of global, planetary thought without high-handedness or moralising, without, paradoxically – and this is, indeed, a delicate matter! – particular seriousness, or, naturally, pretension. And, let it be stressed immediately – but this, too, involves a most precarious balancing act at times – Hédi Bouraoui understands that, if enlarged communion requires a deeply multicultural interweaving of perspectives, it cannot be allowed to drown out the “local”, the specific, the intensely lived and experienced.

The reality of *Struga*, and its accompanying suite, *Margelle d'un festival*, at once corresponds to the above poetics and supplements it in marginally tensional ways. There are poems of collective recognition, poems of friendship and exchange, poems of a sensed available freedom and beauty, if our ideologies can be lowered in order to view and embrace both difference and a certain fundamental interlocking humanity within us all. If such vision may at times seem a touch abstract, it remains intensely felt, a root element of all of Bouraoui's writing. Poems such as *Symphonie de paix*, *Paix meurtrie* or *Voyages interstitiels* stand out here. This, however, does not prevent factors of irony, satire and just plain wit-tiness from finding their place, and a significant one, in *Struga*, and the temptations of a Swift's edge, a Dryden's mockery even, are hard to resist occasionally, in the face of ambient artistic pretension and theatricalness. Whilst unnamed individuals are targeted here, cultural genotypes can stiffen a little as the pen of this observer-in-transit casts its net into the sea of the other's language, behaviour and self-positioning.

Struga offers us its most telling and powerful insights when the poet's eye and heart round upon his own, more deeply grounded *vécu*, sensual, spiritual, soft, caressive, wise. Here, vision and dream drip with lived feasibility and one knows, because one feels, that abstraction can become experience.

Sandra Moussempès. *Captures*. Paris: Flammarion, 2004. 141 pages. 15,50 euros. ISBN 2-08-068633-X.



author of two strikingly unusual *recueils* appearing respectively in 1994 and 1997 – *Exercices d'incendie* and *Vestiges de fillette* –, Sandra Moussempès does not disappoint here, with her strangely obsessive, yet discontinuous and elliptical, half-revealed, half-occulted 'narrative' that is *Captures*. Narrative, most certainly, to the extent that behind all that is articulated lie scenarios lived and dreamed, visceral and imagined, a 'story' of a self barely sayable yet glimpsed and phantasmatically spoken, squeezed into the fragments that the narrating voice can manage to conjure. To speak this 'story', however, has plunged the self into the tensions of desire, intention, on the one hand, and a marked resistance, a curious *pudeur*, even, in one so relatively at ease with the delicacies of an eroticness that can seep from any pore. This said, if poetry is to obey the (non-)poetics of *nescio* limned recently by Christian Doumet in the elegant

jottings of his *Poète, moeurs et confins*, then it is hardly surprising to find that a difficulty of saying and even a certain *rien à dire*, as defined by Doumet, lie paradoxically at the centre of such tensions as produced by *Captures*. What is held on to in this narrative half-seizing, half-letting-go, cannot be deemed to be a solid catch. The visible is slippery, thought is swirling, feeling is shifting and mixed, language offering but traces and intermittences, a saying holed and floating in a massive and heaving sea of only theoretically catchable phenomena. Not that Moussempès' writing is flagrantly disruptive, or in other ways limply ludic, toying with fragments of language as if that was all language was capable of achieving, namely some self-referential, autonomous purity-cum-futility. No, there is here purpose, intensity, desire and ambiguity, pain and conceivable pleasure. *Captures* is the diary of a self-exploration, a building of an uncertain picture of the relationships between anatomy and psyche, sensuality and a 'spirituality', in the broadest sense of the term, whose contours remain blurred though formed by teeming experiences, *natures vives*, whose flickering meanings offer as yet but this ambivalence, this sense of 'dilemma' language simply encircles, never quite able to speak, perhaps even confess, the essence of what remains, finally, quasi oniric in character

The writing of Sandra Moussempès is original, at once intriguing and frustrating, miming in this the rapport between the poet herself and the 'real' she seeks to pinpoint via, however, a rhetoric half-determined – as perhaps must be all poetry in order to avoid the flatness of presumptuous, definitively 'knowing' enunciation – to veil the very essence of the swarming *leçons de choses* impinging upon her consciousness.

Yves Bonnefoy & Gérard Titus-Carmel. *Feuillées*. Sens : Le temps qu'il fait, 2004. 63 pages. 22 euros. ISBN 2-86853-397-3.



ritten subsequently to the 2003 exhibition of Gérard Titus-Carmel's *Forêts, Quartiers d'hiver & Feuillées* at La Soufflerie, Poitiers, Yves Bonnefoy's essay which appears here, intertwined with reproductions exclusively from the *Feuillées* suite, seeks firstly to establish the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere prevailing over the past hundred years or so and framing Titus-Carmel's personal plastic and poetic *parcours*, in order, secondly, to move to an evaluation of the ways in which *Feuillées*, for example, at once reveals its connectedness with earlier work and hints at avenues of a subtle transformation at whose centre lies

the 'presence' of an ever mulled experience of being and what Cocteau once called 'la difficulté d'être', ontological anguish itself. Some two years ago Paul Louis Rossi gave us, again with a selection of reproductions from both Titus-Carmel's *Feuillées* and *Memento mori* suites, an essay entitled *L'arbre rouge* which detailed his response to these suites, as well as to a good deal of other recent plastic work. Mortality and gentleness, blackness and the luxuriance and vitality of colour, the sheer beauty and the 'intense musicality' of the layered and finely orchestrated collages, the absolute poetic power of the latter's 'corollaries' and secret imbrications gathering the fragments of a sensed meaning of lived and symbolic phenomena – these are some of Rossi's insistences before the work of an artist and poet we may hold to rank with France's finest of the last fifty years or so. Bonnefoy's own elegant reflection, devoted at once to Titus-Carmel's painting and his poetry, dwells firstly on the experiential pertinence of the resurgence of colour, to be read, certainly against the backcloth of a *deuil* lucidly aware of the hiatus between representation and *l'inconnaissable*, between image and presence, but to be understood equally as conveying a beauty – to which one is, with Bonnefoy, immediately sensitive – of colour's non-representation that manages to place us in contact with '[un] lieu qui ne serait plus l'espace ordinaire, assujetti à des lois', but 'un lieu de nul dedans ni dehors' with its 'light' that speaks of a oneness beyond the aspectual which, paradoxically, the individual collaged components of *Feuillées* still evoke. This beauty is a beauty of 'hope' and unifying caress that, Bonnefoy rightly argues to my mind, beyond speakable meaning, yet continually breaks the surface of a consciousness of the tragic Gérard Titus-Carmel's poetry persistently wrestles with. This poetry is one of ceaseless metaphorical evaluation of the self's alienation, yet it remains bathed in the glow, Bonnefoy feels – and, once more, I believe this to be a just and important intuition –, of feasibilities manifestly sensed to hold their power of ontic mystery and meaning through the darker night of loss and mourning.

A very fine essay on a very fine artist and poet, whose plastic creativity is beautifully sampled via the superb work done by the production team of *Le temps qu'il fait*...

Michael Bishop
Dalhousie University