

**Béatrice Bonhomme.** *Cimetière étoilé de la mer. Versets 1995-2003.* Colomar: Melis Editions, 2004. 70 pages. 13 euros. ISBN 2-914333-74-9.

**T**he critical writings of Béatrice Bonhomme are well known, principally in the field of contemporary French poetry, as is her excellent direction of the review *Nu(e)*. Perhaps less well known are her own poetical texts, some shorter samples of which are gathered here in *Cimetière étoilé de la mer*. The collection's subtitle demonstrates that the poeticised prose models elaborated by Claudel, by Saint-John Perse and others, constitute a mode well suiting an expression of surging perceptions, phantasms and obsessions which does not require the kind of formalised rhythmic mathematics that still tends to dominate poetry today, whether opting for the free verse form or for more disciplined and even pseudo-traditional manners. Not that there is anything otherwise manifestly linking Bonhomme to the earlier poets of the *verset*. Her manner is so often swirlingly surrealist in its refusal to regulate its semantic orientation, though, once more, it does not possess surrealism's global intentions and more outlandishly phantasmagorical loosening of its aesthetic or indeed its ethical self-control. Claude Louis-Combet is right to argue that Bonhomme's work 'n'est ni un jeu d'esprit, ni un exercice formel, ni même une grâce descendue des hauteurs de l'expression lyrique'. Her critical writings and admirations show her to be broad and relatively eclectic in her sense of what the poem can aspire to and accomplish, but they also reveal quite unambiguously a deep sense of poetic purpose, a desire to caress in the midst of existential tensions the fragile beauties that belong both to the earth in its strange mysteries and to the human in his or her doings and makings faced with such felt precarities. *Nul et non avenue* finely reveals this purpose and desire, as does the beautiful *Femme de tulle et de pierre posée sur du papier*. Other poems, and none are more than five pages in length, can plunge into the clinging symbols and obsessional memories of childhood, of life's bloodiness, its spatialities and strange 'contents' such as sea and rocks and snow. Yet never is there an abandonment, a resignation, even a twist of irony or derision. 'Car mon coeur ne meurt jamais au coeur de la main du monde', Béatrice Bonhomme writes in *Présence de la pierre*. And, indeed, this is what maintains that special and intense air of centredness hovering throughout her work: a difficult but finally uplifted consent to the paradoxes of being, the embrace of its material and psychic realness, the urgency of lived presence and the authenticity of a language struggling not just to cope with the latter, but dreaming, and at times enacting, a beauty of form, an adornment, fit to restore its felt intrinsic mystery.