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Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-88642-0 — Twentieth-Century French Poetry
Edited by Hugues Azérad, Peter Collier
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General introduction

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L'observation et les commentaires d'un poème peuvent être profonds, singuliers, brillants ou vraisemblables, ils ne peuvent éviter de réduire à une signification et à un projet un phénomène qui n'a d'autre raison que d'*être*.

René Char, 'Arthur Rimbaud'[1]

Comme l'arbre, comme l'animal, il [le poète] s'est abandonné à la vie première, il a dit oui, il a consenti à cette vie immense qui le dépassait. Il s'est enraciné dans la terre, il a étendu ses bras, il a joué avec le soleil, il est devenu arbre; il a fleuri, il a chanté.

Aimé Césaire, 'Poésie et connaissance'[2]

Poetry is the plough that turns up time in such a way that the abyssal strata of time, its black earth, appear on the surface. There are epochs, however, when mankind, not satisfied with the present, yearning like the ploughman for the abyssal strata of time, thirsts for the virgin soil of time.

Osip Mandelstam, 'The Word and Culture'[3]

I

In 'Fin du mandat, besoin d'une alliance', Yves Bonnefoy – France's profoundest poet and theorist of poetry of the twentieth century alongside Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Reverdy, André Breton, Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant – confronts us with what he sees as poetry's urgent task: 'instituer dans la société un espace de vérité'. His conception of poetry and of how we should approach it goes against the grain of what he calls 'conceptual thinking', which would in his eyes be a book of critical readings merely consisting of analyses of poems whose sole role would be to confirm our beliefs of what we want to see in poetry. Good intentions could be the critic's worst enemy when approaching a poem, and Bonnefoy makes explicit what is wrong in our all too tempting need to ascribe a mission or 'mandat' to the poem, our tendency to bring it back to the everyday categories of our thinking lives, but also to the recesses of our desires and fears. For what we perceive as our most human attributes conceal within themselves an unacknowledged inhumanity. Far from being a mystic, as he is sometimes considered by critics, Bonnefoy posits poetry as a transgressive act,

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a constant struggle against the illusion that we take for our reality, against the concepts which turn us away from the true discovery of ourselves, our sense of immediacy, our presence to the world and to others. Bonnefoy warns us against what is too obvious in poetry, what makes it apparently so necessary to us, and what apparently confers on it its unique status.

Bonnefoy's text makes for difficult reading, not so much because of its density, but because its view of poetry challenges our assumptions of what poetry is, what it should tell us, what poems mean to us. His vast survey of what poetry has meant to mankind and of what it should be could seem either simplistic or plainly wrong. How can a poet indict poetry in such a forceful manner? How can poetry not be about desire, the expression of our innermost anguish, our aspirations, our feelings? Is not poetry the sheer pleasure of wielding words for ludic purposes, for the intrinsic beauty of language?

One thing is certain, Bonnefoy is not speaking as a French poet here, but as a poet who has no time for pseudo-universalisms or sweeping generalisations. His text can be put alongside many similar reflections on poetry written during the course of the last century, from Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and Hart Crane to Sylvia Plath, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery and Louis Zukofsky, from Rilke to Marina Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandelstam and Paul Celan, from Dylan Thomas and W. H. Auden to Eugenio Montale, Federico García Lorca, Derek Walcott and Octavio Paz. It is with true humility and an absolute commitment as a poet that Bonnefoy tells us of the double pitfall which risks wrecking poetry's project: an over-conceptual approach to poetry, in its writing and its reading, even down to its commercialisation, and the more naïve approach, which allows dreams and desire to prevail, however tempting and vertiginous they seem. Conceptual thinking, if allowed to rule unmatched, detaches us from our relation to the world, cuts us off from our acceptance of finitude. In a recent interview, Bonnefoy states that 'la technologie met des concepts en conserve et nous les fait consommer à tous moments de notre vie'.[4] Poetry, in contrast, should allow for the play of chance, the sense of time and the sense of place to be at the centre of our lives, not in order to hem us in or curtail our human aspirations, but in order for us to delight in presence – when we are closer to ourselves; when hope and joy, but also a profound disquiet, take hold of us and urge us to move forward.

This is why poetry is at its best when it takes upon itself to unveil its own defects, when it becomes aware of its lacks, its shortcomings. One is reminded of Pierre Reverdy's aphorism 'La poésie, c'est le bouche-abîme du réel désiré qui manque'.[5] Poetry is also demanding of us, the readers, to be lucid. This is where the alliance proposed by Bonnefoy lies: instead of offering a make-believe, yet another system – conceptual or dreamlike – that would distract us from ourselves, poetry should make the same demands of the readers as it makes of itself; and the poet should seek to forge an alliance through which we, and also poetry, could access the plenitude of presence. Presence is the shared objective of this alliance and it can only exist as a shared experience, when both poet and reader

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can partake in 'le mode sur lequel l'unité de l'être ou du monde se révèle, en deçà ou au-delà de la saisie conceptuelle que le langage peut en faire, l'évidence de l'Un offerte à une perception qui ne dissocie pas'.[6] This notion of presence was intuited by Bonnefoy after he had studied mathematics, philosophy and logic in the 1940s, and with a learned awareness of psychoanalysis. The only faith Bonnefoy ever had was faith in poetry, and in art's redemptive powers in a world ruled by conceptual thinking: in a recent book on painting, *Remarques sur le regard*, he writes that 'l'art est la guérison du concept'.[7]

The repercussions of presence are multiple, and presence was conjugated by the various theories that were developed in the second half of the twentieth century, in France and in the rest of the world, from structuralism to poststructuralism and deconstruction. Bonnefoy never abnegated the power of reason; his position is not to hanker after a pre-linguistic-turn era. His position complements and balances out the conceptual turn which has been holding sway, often so brilliantly, over the humanities for the last sixty years. Presence does not ignore the developments triggered by Saussure: his assumption that meaning in language is created by opposition and difference, that there is no natural link between language and the world. Indeed, Bonnefoy happily acknowledges the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign, but he tells us that the story is more complex, that it is only half told if one exclusively follows Saussurean tenets.

Presence – and how could we forget that deconstruction was precisely the debunking of presence – takes linguistic discoveries in its stride as a necessary and even beneficial stage in the course of human thought. But presence is also a constant struggle against the illusional, against misconceived and comfortable notions of identity, against self-congratulatory art and against a world of certainty. If transcendence there is, it will be found in immanence. Bonnefoy was not alone in trying to rectify the balance: Bachelard, but mainly Merleau-Ponty and Ricœur in France, and Gadamer in Germany, also developed ways of breaking through the so-called prison of language. Merleau-Ponty, in his seminal article 'Le Langage indirect et les voix du silence' declared that even though 'le signe ne veut dire quelque chose qu'en tant qu'il se profile sur les autres signes', language is also 'comme un être', and for the writer in particular, 'il devient à son tour comme un univers, capable de loger en lui les choses mêmes – après les avoir changées en sens'.[8] Bonnefoy's view of language is in many respects akin to what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'langage authentique' which he finds in painting and writing in particular: 'Une vision, une action enfin libres décentrent et regroupent les objets du monde chez le peintre, les mots chez le poète.' In a move not dissimilar to the ideas found in 'Fin du mandat', Merleau-Ponty advocates a unique role for art: 'ce qui n'est pas remplaçable dans l'œuvre d'art, ce qui fait d'elle beaucoup plus qu'un moyen de plaisir . . . c'est qu'elle contient, mieux que des idées, des matrices d'idées . . . qu'elle nous apprend à voir et finalement nous donne à penser comme aucun ouvrage analytique ne peut le faire, parce que l'analyse ne trouve dans l'objet que ce que nous y avons mis'.[9]

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The crucial awareness that, despite conceptual thinking, language can still offer us access to the world, albeit by 'voies détournées' and also because of them, is why poetry still has a role to play – for each individual, but also for society. Poetry helps us live, it gives us a privileged access to ourselves *in* the world. Bonnefoy puts the cards clearly on the table: 'la poésie n'est rien d'autre, au plus vif de son inquiétude, qu'un acte de connaissance'.[10]

Underlying Bonnefoy's text is the history of philosophy, which was intertwined with the history of poetry throughout the twentieth century, first in Germany, then in France. Even though the style of the text could seem paradoxically conceptual, it is not subservient to concepts, and it does not illustrate or demonstrate. The text is an incarnation of what it propounds, and not what Bonnefoy called an 'excarnation'. His critical essays and his poetry possess the same quality of writing, for both genres of texts seek to establish presence, to bring about 'la parole, laquelle commence à chaque fois que nous secouons dans le discours du langage l'emprise des articulations conceptuelles, de leur regard – ou absence de regard – sur le monde'.[11] This perfect admixture of extreme rigour and poetic style reflects the kind of alliance put forward by Bonnefoy: here, an alliance between philosophy and poetry; there, an alliance between poets and readers.

Bonnefoy shows little patience with 'mandat' – mission or mandate being the other name for conceptual thinking and for a purely conceptual approach to poetry and language. 'Mandat' also refers to any kind of reading that would solely be interested in seeking out psychological or unconscious motifs in the poet's mind or in his or her creation: any kind of interpretation that would seek to substitute its object for the networks of presence or 'présences à vivre' revealed by the poem. His overall prognosis for certain trends in modern poetry and criticism is scathing but not alarmist. His is also an enterprise of debunking certain myths surrounding poetry: either the myth of privileged forms of subjectivity expressed in the poem, or the myth of absolute self-referentiality – two opposite ways of betraying poetry's project.

Poetry's project is to re-establish an alliance that has been lost, against the slow progression of conceptual thinking which has occupied the empty seat left by religion, which itself had replaced mythology. According to Bonnefoy, the world has become a desert in the wake of divinity's withdrawal from the world, which reason alone has been unable to irrigate. The mandate assigned to poetry has failed, despite some apparent successes. Poetry is in urgent need of re-engaging with the world, to break through the veils of self-complacency, of an alluring but ultimately sterile language which privileges the concept, instead of making us feel anew our sense of being in the world, of a simple existence exposed to chance, time and place. But we should also learn how to accept the necessary exile caused by conceptual thinking, by the deceiving world of images, by our illusory beliefs in poetry itself. This erring and forgetting imply that poetry is essentially an act of memory – the memory of forgotten presence, which the simple hearing of the sound of a word can help bring back: 'le son,

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perçu au-delà des réseaux de significations, c'est de l'immédiat, cet indéfait du monde dont le discours conceptuel dénoue l'unité . . . c'est une présence, là même où la parole tendait de par son jeu de concepts à en empêcher la saisie'.[12] For Bonnefoy, poetry is the memory of what transcends the concept: 'cet infini au sein de la réalité la plus proche, cette transcendance dans l'immanence, cette unité qu'elle offre de vivre, c'est ce dont la poésie a mémoire'.

If poetry is failing, at least in France, it is because its mandate has failed. Most of the poetic enterprises conducted by the Surrealists, Bataille and various other trends of poetry – despite their marvellous discoveries on the plane of language and of the image in particular – became dead ends, even though very few French poets escaped their influence, Bonnefoy included. Painters – and Bonnefoy's passion for painting led him to write brilliantly on art history – fared better, having kept conceptual thinking in abeyance. But for poetry a new alliance is needed, in order for us, for our society, 'de réapprendre la valeur positive de ce qui est, de ressentir la "divinité" du brin d'herbe, de l'odeur du basilic, du rire des enfants, de la forme même de ce chemin que l'on voit tourner devant nous et eux parmi quelques arbres'.

We can of course disagree with what Bonnefoy tells us in his text, but it should not be easily dismissed. His own poetic trajectory throughout the century led him to start writing poetry under the sign of Surrealism, before relinquishing some of its discoveries. But many of the things that Bonnefoy negates have not been abolished: the Surrealist image, for instance, against which Bonnefoy struggled because he saw it as a distraction from presence, as a fascinating but illusory device. This did not prevent him from introducing a new type of image, which Jean Starobinski called 'images précaires', which provide 'un retour à la vérité précaire des apparences . . . si nous évitons de la [l'image] solidifier'.[13] Bonnefoy's prognosis is also not unlike that of Michel Deguy, poet and philosopher, who wrote that 'la poésie n'est plus un royaume enchanté, ni enchanteur . . . La poésie n'est pas seule. Ça veut dire quoi? Qu'elle est avec. Elle accompagne la vie et la vie l'accompagne.'[14]

II

Bonnefoy's text takes stock of what has happened to poetry, in France and probably elsewhere, in the twentieth century, more powerfully than a general history of modern French poetry could do, because it goes to the core of what is at stake, because behind his own prognosis runs an entire poetic tradition which is grinding to a halt.[15] This is not to say that he rejects what the recent and less recent past have created – far from it. French poetry happens to have witnessed a resurgence of creativity in the twentieth century, arguably because of the fact that Paris had become an international hub of artistic effervescence in the late nineteenth century, and in the first half of the twentieth century, when Modernism, exemplified by Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Manet, Cézanne and Picasso, really became a force to be reckoned with. Most poets and artists (from

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America, Great Britain, Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia, the francophone countries and from the then colonies of France and Britain in particular) went through Paris before changing tack and moving on artistically. Many an international artist found in France an appropriate ground to develop ideas, get down to work and find an audience. Being at the crossroads between the arts – painting, music, sculpture, dance, photography, sound recording and cinema – but also of scientific discoveries and new theories, French poetry showed a capacity to grow in dialogue with other media, with what René Char called its 'alliés substantiels'. Indeed, the alliance between poetry, the visual arts and music, which was not new as such of course, proved a particularly fecund source of inspiration, as can be seen in Guillaume Apollinaire's 'calligrammes', or word-pictures.

Bonnefoy's call for a new type of alliance – now that, according to him, poetry's mission has expired – is what this volume of close readings would like to start answering, however imperfectly or sketchily. It will afford readers the experience of following an emotional and intellectual journey through thirty-two poems and their accompanying commentaries. The poems were chosen according to a principle of 'elective affinities', the choice being left to the critics, some of whom happen to be poets themselves. Some poems might not be the most celebrated or the most representative, but, given the existence of a number of excellent anthologies of modern French poetry, the critics have felt free to choose works that explore lesser-known aspects of a poet. We trust that the selection will exert sufficient power to make the readers want to explore the many other poems and poets which we regret could not be included here.[16] The variety of approaches adopted reflects the many voices of poetry criticism today, be they predominantly theoretical, historical or stylistic. Thanks to its commentary, each poem becomes a window opening onto the poet and onto poetical and artistic tradition as a whole within a French or international context.

The overall organisation of the volume aims to help the reader rethink the notion of poetic movement, the role of poetics and how we read poetry. Though following a broadly chronological order, the book often groups together poems which were written at different points in time (works by Senghor and Segalen, Michaux and Ponge, for instance), and includes in the same section poets who may seem different at first, but who are working in similar directions and share parallel preoccupations or aesthetic concerns (Glissant and Bonnefoy, for instance). In view of the potential pitfalls of periodisation and classification which 'artificially homogenise literature into linear genealogies',[17] it seemed preferable to think in terms of 'families' or 'constellations' of texts or poets, rather than 'schools' or even 'movements'. To help the reader navigate through this vast corpus of texts, the book is divided into four broad sections which outline the major currents in twentieth-century poetry. The sense of aesthetic and historical development, as well as the play of influences and rebellions, will emerge from the poems and the commentaries themselves, rather than from any rigid categories of literary history.

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The opening section 'Traditions and modernisms' brings together Paul Valéry and Victor Segalen (giving voice and vision to Greek columns or Chinese steles), and Apollinaire (celebrating traditional themes in telegraphic style), for instance, not because their works are remotely comparable, but because they adopt a common 'positioning' towards poetic tradition, bent as they were on establishing continuation, albeit sometimes playful, experimental and ironic, rather than a total rupture with France's literary past. There is also a traditional streak in Apollinaire, as there is a Modernist streak in Valéry. The 'Avant-gardes' section regroups not only the Surrealists, including André Breton's moves between urban and oneiric visions, but also poets who embarked on drastically different aesthetic routes, such as Reverdy (master of a spare, elusive and allusive language) and Francis Ponge (creator of encyclopaedic new linguistic identities for familiar objects). The section devoted to 'Poetics of presence', famously linked to the poets who founded the journal *L'Éphémère*, includes Édouard Glissant, whose now finally acknowledged and celebrated poetics of relation expresses similar concerns about presence, albeit from his own decentring angle. Glissant found poetic experience in the space between image and language, in the spaces opened up between phrases rather than in their synthesis. Finally, and closer to us, the last section 'New voices, new visions' brings together new generations of poets whose concerns vary widely, but who either tend to privilege a more concrete approach to poetry, at the level of voice and of language (Bernard Heidsieck and Michel Deguy), or who embrace a new poetics of vision, not only in the poets' intricate collaboration with painters, but also in their trust in the powers of poetry to 'make us see' (Jean-Michel Maulpoix). Straddling both tendencies, but in a similar vein, Pierre Alferi engages with a vocalisation of 'stuttering' and a peripheral vision of everyday ephemera in order to enact the drama of navigating experience through language.

Reading the poems as they are presented should lead to the identification of new resemblances and differences, and thus to the alteration of our still too artificial and 'conceptual categories', and should elicit some new 'lignes de force'. Obvious ones already exist, between the poets who let their art be engulfed by the power of imagination and of the image (although even here a poet such as Valéry calls into question the status of metaphor through his exuberant deployment of the metaphysical conceit, and a poet like Bernard Noël moves beyond metaphor into a world where voice, feeling and vision uncomfortably merge) and those who abnegated the *fulgurance* of the image in order to pursue a more restrained quest – that of the quotidian, for instance, as in the everyday objects that Claude Esteban or Ponge take as the starting point for an exploration of their own dialectical perception. These 'lignes de force' also exist between poetry and prose,[18] and, related to this perplexing dichotomy, between traditional forms of versification and scansion and what Clive Scott calls 'experimental reading'. This new kind of reading would be best qualified to tally with the new

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demands of modern poetry, as its 'move from the linear to the tabular transforms a perspectival vocality (a single voice moving towards an horizon) to a planar vocality (a voice shifting between the vocal, the devocalised, different kinds of oral enunciation)'. Scott adds: 'We need to recover the qualitative and the heterogeneous in our experience of accent and syllable; we need to make the ear more responsive to latent performance features in verse'.[19] Here Henri Michaux's oral glossolalia disturbs and excites with its ludic deconstruction of representational linguistic signs.

Older poetic topoi are revisited too: landscapes (geology and geography being an intrinsic part of what nature already represented for Romanticism) or 'paysages' will appear in many poems (by Segalen, Char, Jacques Dupin, André du Bouchet, Glissant, Michaux, Aimé Césaire, Amina Saïd), becoming what Jean-Pierre Richard called 'pages-paysages', some calling monuments of former civilisations into question (Valéry, Segalen, Saint-John Perse), and therefore acting as a kind of obverse side of Modernity, while others plunge into urban landscapes (Léopold Sédar Senghor, Jacques Réda, Reverdy, Breton). These landscapes are not objects of representation but complex 'modes of feelings',[20] sometimes addressing societal developments (Senghor, Césaire, Glissant), sometimes seeking to escape the individual/society dichotomy, and searching for an in-between threshold (Philippe Jaccottet, Alferi). In that sense, they are possibly the only outlets left to modern lyricism, which Adorno defined in his seminal essay 'On Lyric Poetry and Society':

> It is precisely what is not social in the lyric poem that is now to become its social aspect . . . the lyric reveals itself to be most deeply grounded in society when it does not chime in with society, when it communicates nothing, when, instead, the subject whose expression is successful reaches an accord with language itself, with the inherent tendency of language . . . When the 'I' becomes oblivious to itself in language it is fully present nevertheless.[21]

One thinks of the hauntingly disjuncted images of Nguyên Hoàng Bao Viêt's poem, where random missed buses and the occasional bomb-blasted doll recalling Anne Frank interrupt any smooth flow of postcolonial interpretation. As the self becomes more alienated from its historical coordinates, it draws us more insidiously into a questioning of our own cultural identity.

Many poems will stake out a claim for 'diversity', thus displacing poetry from its arrogantly assumed French centre. Glissant will engage with French (and Western) poetic tradition complicit in colonisation, first theorised by Segalen, in order to relocate it within the larger context of the 'Tout-monde', but he will also deliberately blur the traditional dualism relating self to nature in nineteenth-century poetry. In fact, Apollinaire revising pastoral tradition in Paris, Blaise Cendrars confronting a capitalist Easter in New York, and Senghor in the same city coming to terms with a new feeling of 'négritude' rather than

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assimilation, have already used shock juxtapositions in order to force the reader to question how they constructed their cultural identity.

Other poems will remind us that poetry and philosophy have been in tense but fruitful dialogue throughout the last century: poets have engaged with philosophers ranging from Bergson, Dilthey, Bachelard and Heidegger, to Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur, de Certeau, Nancy and Deleuze. Philosophers and theorists (particularly Blanchot, Derrida, Cixous and Kristeva) wrote texts which explicitly blurred the boundaries between poetry and philosophy, more to the advantage than to the detriment of both. Thought is not the apanage of conceptual thinking. Marie-Claire Bancquart explores identity through the notion of time, as did Proust and Bergson. Jaccottet's sonnet on ignorance, and the immanence of death within knowledge, or Ponge's elaborate consultation of caressed and constructed 'objeux', also bear witness to this philosophical search for identity through a phenomenology of perception and an enquiry into the boundaries of time and space.

It is not a coincidence that a philosopher such as Jean-Luc Nancy recently found the need to talk on behalf of poetry in his splendidly and cogently named *Résistance de la poésie*, not so much to defend poetry on the basis of what it is, but on what is external to it, yet motivates it: 'Si nous comprenons, si nous accédons d'une manière ou d'une autre à une orée de sens, c'est poétiquement. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'aucune sorte de poésie constitue un moyen ou un milieu d'accès. Cela veut dire – et c'est presque le contraire – que seul cet accès définit la poésie, et qu'elle n'a lieu que lorsqu'il a lieu.'[22] In effect, theory and philosophy often took their own inspiration in poetry – poetry as a 'matrice d'idées' which unravel themselves in recent and future theoretical debates, whether they be on gender, race or ethics – and this is perhaps where poetry's true avant-garde nature has always lain.

Twentieth-century poetry was a poetry of desire – from Marie Noël's ambiguous appeals to Valéry's celebration of sculpted female figures, and a celebratory exploration of love (Paul Éluard, Aragon). It was also notoriously a 'poetry of voice' and self-enquiry, as nearly every poem in this volume tends to turn into a covert re-enactment of the process of creation, from Alferi's interstitial spaces to Glissant's fusion with the earth, from the sparse questioning of Bernard Noël and Pierre Reverdy to the media-conscious linguistic disturbances of Michaux and Heidsieck. If the twentieth century saw the apotheosis of the image (Pound, Eliot, Reverdy, Breton), it also saw the demise of the metaphor and the rise of a new poetic voice, searching for its own imaginary space, creating rather than reflecting its own identity, listening to rather than dictating its own language.

This *was* the twentieth century, but, since the poems presented here have resisted the test of time, we rather hope and believe that they have already started to herald our own new times, and that they will give birth to further fertile critical study and further creative writing.

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III

Yves Bonnefoy's text which we have chosen as a Foreword serves as a blueprint and as an antidote (in the Derridean sense of *Pharmakos*) to what this volume of close readings hopes to offer. It should be used as a blueprint when reading this volume in light of what it tells us about the new alliance that needs to be found between poets and readers, which requires schools and universities to put younger generations into contact with as wide a range of poems as possible. This book should be seen as an invitation to a series of encounters with poems first, then with the readings which accompany them. But in the same way as Bonnefoy gives us his interpretation of what poetry is or should be, close readings, if done in a manner that does not impose too rigid an ideology or a conceptual grid, offer a window onto the world of the poem and of the poet; and yes, perhaps onto the craft of poetry as well. The danger incurred by any interpretation is also what redeems it in our eyes.

If, as Césaire told us in an article-manifesto published in 1945, poetry is knowledge,[23] but a kind of knowledge that countervails the balance which has so far tipped too much in favour of conceptual thinking, reading a poem, listening to it being read, voicing it ourselves, indeed becomes an adventure. Even though we often remain perplexed when faced with a poem for the first time, and because of this first reaction of incomprehension, dismay even, we all know that, slowly, something happens and the encounter turns out to be a mutual discovery. Poetry requires courage, for true poetry faces you with the unknown, and this unknown is all the more frightening (hence also fascinating) that it is soon revealed to be within ourselves: 'Pour voir le monde, il faut rompre notre familiarité (acquise) avec lui', Merleau-Ponty tells us.[24] This is why poetry makes not so much an aesthetic demand on us as an ethical one. In the act of reading a poem, ethics and aesthetics find themselves, at last and if only momentarily, conjoined.

But what are we going to make of Bonnefoy's stern warning against interpretation? For the reason just mentioned, interpretation can become poetry's ally, and this is what the critics and poets in this book, some of them belonging to the long tradition of 'critical poetry' or 'poésie critique' which started in the era of German Romanticism,[25] set their hearts and minds to do. Commentaries can be either 'musique d'accompagnement' (Deguy) or could be compared to the best of art criticism, when a painting comes truly alive before our eyes thanks to the words of a John Ruskin, Walter Pater, Erwin Panofsky or, more recently, Daniel Arasse or Georges Didi-Huberman. Our eyes switch their attention back and forth from painting or poem to the text. It can create the vertiginous pleasure of partaking in a creative act: what some philosophers called an act of interpretation. In that sense, reading a poem critically should ideally be the symmetrical image of writing a poem, thus giving us an insight into poetry *en acte*. And if courage is required when faced with a poem, humility is also necessary, which

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