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Poetry as Spiritual Practice: The Poetics of Adonis and Yves Bonnefoy

By

Kareem James Abu-Zeid

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfation of the

requirements for the degree of

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in

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Niklaus Largier, Chair
Professor Margaret Larkin
Professor Chana Kronfeld
Professor Jacob Dalton

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Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

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Professor Niklaus Largier, Chair

My dissertation examines the work of two major poets who wrote in the second half of the twentieth century, Yves Bonnefoy of France and the Syrian-born Adonis (born Ali Ahmed Saïd). In conducting close readings of key moments from their respective poetry, I illustrate how both of these writers, in their own unique ways, construct poetry as a form of spiritual practice, i.e., as a way of transforming both the poet's and the implied reader's ontological, perceptual, and creative relationships with their internal and external worlds.

This work is divided into four chapters, plus an introduction. In the substantial introduction, I invoke writers from various traditions (Buddhism, Vedanta, Christian mysticism, modern nonduality) to explore the notion of spiritual experience as a whole, in particular as it relates to conceptual language, and invoke the writing of Pierre Hadot to propose poetry as a possible means of spiritual practice.

My first and second chapters focus on the work of Yves Bonnefoy. In the first chapter, I trace, in very broad strokes, a spiritual arc across Bonnefoy's first three collections of poetry, from his Surrealist beginnings to his figurations (and idealization) of death in the 1953 collection *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve*, and on to his own "Dark Night of the Soul" as it is poetically expressed in *Hier régnant désert*. In this chapter, I also examine his views on language and his notion of "poetic presence," considering it in relation to Heidegger's own views on "presence" and "Being." In my second chapter, I provide an in-depth and sustained reading of Bonnefoy's subsequent collection, *Pierre écrite*, demonstrating how it represents the turning point of Bonnefoy's poetry and the inauguration of a certain apophatic spiritual practice through lengthy intratextual work on the concept.

In the second half of the dissertation, I turn to the work of Adonis. In the third chapter, I examine some of Adonis' most important critical writings as a backdrop to his poetry and as a means of introducing several key themes, including that of creativity/innovation, which I link explicitly to the spiritual process of this poetry. This examination entails a critique of Adonis' often reductionist critical writings, as well as an examination of the spiritually expansive role Sufism plays for Adonis. I also begin my analysis of Adonis' 1961 collection *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* as an intratextual spiritual practice that is intended to enact certain transformations in the implied

reader. Here, the more didactic aspect of Adonis' poetry as spiritual practice is contrasted with the more subjective spiritual practice of Bonnefoy's poetry. In the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation, I shift my focus of attention from the intratextual to the intertextual and continue my analysis of Adonis' poetry, focusing on a single poem from this collection to demonstrate how Adonis uses intertextual mechanisms to operate a Nietzschean revaluation on certain key Islamic concepts, thereby opening up a new field for spirituality. I show the ways in which Adonis, through subtle and sustained work on key terms and concepts, attempts to bring about a certain spiritual revolution in his poetry.

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Acknowledgments

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I would like to thank both Adonis and Yves Bonnefoy, for their inspiring poetry and reflections on spirituality in general. Although it was many years ago now, I have been fortunate enough to meet with both in person, and I am grateful for their generosity at those times.

Abbreviations

Works by Yves Bonnefoy

AP: *L'Arrière-pays*
E: *Entretiens sur la poésie (1972-1990)*
I: *L'Improbable et autres essais*
NR: *Le Nuage rouge*
P: *Poèmes*
T: "The Feeling of Transcendency"

Works by Adonis

M: *Aghānī mihyār al-dimashqī.*
Th: *Al-thābit wa-'l-mutaḥawwil: baḥth fī 'l-ittibā' wa-'l-ibdā' 'inda 'l-'arab. Vol. 1: al-uṣūl.*
Z: *Zaman al-shi'r*

Works by Others

BT: *Being and Time* (Martin Heidegger)
BW: *Basic Writings* (Martin Heidegger)
Q: *The Quran*

Introduction

On Mystical Experience, Awakening, and the Spiritual Path of Poetry

[O]ur normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. [...] No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question—for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness.

- William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (422)

Few poets have dominated their respective (trans-)national landscapes in the second half of the twentieth century in the way that Syrian-born Adonis (born Ali Ahmed Saïd) has done in the Arab world, or that Yves Bonnefoy has done in France. These two writers cut imposing figures in world literature as a whole, but they are also notable for the conspicuous spiritual and mystic aspects of their poetic work. In conducting close readings of key moments from their respective poetry—and in particular from Bonnefoy's 1965 collection *Pierre écrite* ("Written Stone"), which in my view inaugurates his more "mature" poetics, and Adonis' seminal 1961 collection *Aghānī mihyār al-dimashqī* ("Songs of Mihyar the Damascene")—this dissertation will illustrate how both of these writers, in their own unique ways, construct poetry as a form of spiritual practice, i.e., as a way of transforming both the poet's and the implied reader's ontological, perceptual, and creative relationships with their internal and external worlds. In the case of Bonnefoy, the emphasis is clearly on the poet's (or poetic subject's) own subjective spiritual path; while with Adonis, the poetry is more didactic and focused on the reader, attempting to draw him or her into spiritual experience. In this, I will be following, on the broadest scale, a methodology set forth by Pierre Hadot, who demonstrated that the philosophy of antiquity and late antiquity was also a mode of self-exploration, was always a spiritual exercise, rather than a body of knowledge.

Although both poets are from roughly the same generation (Bonnefoy was born in 1923, Adonis in 1930), although both emerged from surrealist poetic milieus to craft their own unique brands of poetry, although both have been living in Paris for several decades, and although Adonis has translated a significant portion of Bonnefoy's work into Arabic, there is a dearth of studies that compare and contrast the works of the two writers in a sustained manner. This critical gap is all the more glaring when one considers that there is a profound structural similarity between their poetry, namely: both Bonnefoy and Adonis write primarily in a form that I will call "the long poem,"

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wherein an entire collection can justifiably be considered as a single poem, or as a single integrated poetic process, that stretches across dozens or even hundreds of pages. We will see that the length of these poems, which implies specific poetological and rhetorical techniques, as well as a specific temporality, is a core aspect of the spiritual practices that the poems constitute, and also that the two poets' deep mistrust of conceptual language informs their poetry as spiritual paths, albeit in very different ways and in very different cultural contexts. By juxtaposing the works of these two poets, and also by foregrounding the notion of spiritual practice—which most scholars shy away from because of the often nebulous and extremely subjective nature of terms such as "spiritual" and "mystical"—this dissertation fills a significant gap in the existing scholarship on both Yves Bonnefoy and Adonis. Certain aspects of the language of Buddhism, which also entails a mistrust or critique of conceptual language, will facilitate my analysis.

As an integral aspect of the spiritual process, an underlying—and sometimes very conspicuous—experience of "mysticism" underpins the writings of both these poets, and it is no overstatement to call their work mystical poetry, though there are obvious and pronounced differences between their poetry and that of classic "Eastern" mystics such as Rumi, Kabir, and Hafez, or canonical Christian mystics such as Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Ávila. In his 2014 book *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion*, the popular author Sam Harris, a secular atheist, notes one of the difficulties inherent in writing about mysticism or spirituality in the mainstream press, to say nothing of writing about it within academia (11):

> I share the concern, expressed by many atheists, that the terms *spiritual* and *mystical* are often used to make claims not merely about the quality of certain experiences but about reality at large. Far too often, these words are invoked in support of religious beliefs that are morally and intellectually grotesque. Consequently, many of my fellow atheists consider all talk of spirituality to be a sign of mental illness, conscious imposture, or self-deception. This is a problem, because millions of people have had experiences for which *spiritual* and *mystical* seem the only terms available.

Harris is here expressing the same concern that William James expresses in his seminal work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, namely, that "[n]o account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded" (422). For James, mystical experience is one of the most conspicuous of these "other forms of consciousness," and he dedicates an entire chapter to it in his groundbreaking book. In this dissertation, I am taking his point here in a more specific direction, and making the claim that no account of the poetry of Adonis or Yves Bonnefoy can be complete without taking mystical experience into consideration. The fact that the qualities and concept of mystical experience are subjective and notoriously difficult to pin down does not exonerate scholarship from ignoring or glossing over them. Any truly comprehensive scholarship on these poets needs to take mysticism into account. Harris himself, an outspoken proponent of both secularism and atheism, believes that it is very possible to view, and indeed analyze, such so-called

"altered" states of consciousness "in universal and secular terms" (203), and I am inclined to agree.[1]

Before I delve into the idea of poetry as a spiritual practice (as well as into terms like "mystical language" or "mystical poetry"), a discussion of the nature of mystical experience is needed—despite the fact that writers of all ilk have claimed that such experience is "inexpressible" or "ineffable." If mystical experience does indeed form the backdrop to the poetry of Bonnefoy and Adonis (one of many backdrops, for it is not my intention to reduce their complex works to only one of its aspects), then we must at least briefly consider the following questions: What *is* mystical experience? How is it recognized or posited? Is it really so inexpressible that not even a tentative description can be given? And is all mystical experience the same?

In the anthology *Trajectories of Mysticism in Theory and Literature*, Philip Leonard posits that mysticism is the yearning for "union" or "a direct and personal awareness of a transcendent authority such as God, Providence, the Creator or the Infinite," and goes on to note that it is common to pursue that union through "less rational means" such as drugs, dreams, visions, madness, etc. (preface p. x)—we will later see that this "less rational" (or perhaps simply less discursive) aspect manifests in both the work of Bonnefoy and Adonis as a conspicuous mistrust of conceptual language per se. The *unio mystica* that Leonard invokes implies the paradox of an utterly transcendent godhead (or presence, source, etc.) that is simultaneously immanent, and that the individual has access to in one way or another. In his wide-ranging book *Mysticism: Its History and Challenge*, the Dutch writer Bruno Borchert employs similar terminology, defining mysticism as "the experimental [presumably in the sense of 'experiential'] knowledge that, in one way or another, everything is interconnected, that all things have a single source" (3). Any number of philosophers and poets throughout the ages, from Plotinus to Meister Eckhart, from Ibn Arabi to Kabir, could be cited to further emphasize this key point of a basic experience of unity being at the core of mysticism, and as being one of the goals of spiritual practice. William James says as much in his groundbreaking account of mysticism (457):

> In mystic states we become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed. In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note, so that there is about mystical utterance an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land. Perpetually telling of the unity of man with God, their speech antedates languages, and they do not grow old.

Although there does indeed seem to be an underlying "eternal unanimity" to mystical utterance in the sense that a certain experience of unity is evoked, one must be careful not to take this argument too far. In his abovementioned book, Bruno

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[1] In his book, Harris, who holds a PhD in neuroscience, skillfully interweaves his own personal experiences and anecdotes with the results of recent scientific research.

Borchert succinctly defines mystical *language* (as opposed to mystical experience) as follows: "Mystical language is an attempt to utter the inexpressible. The crux of the matter is not so much how something is experienced as what that something is" (18). While it is true, to a certain (and in my view quite limited) extent, that mystical language—including the poetry of Adonis and Bonnefoy—is often an attempt to express the inexpressible, disregarding the *how* in favor of the *what* presupposes that the two are separate, or can be separated. Yet if mystical poetry (or language) is an attempt to inaugurate a "mystical" experience in either the poet or the implied reader, then the *how* becomes very important indeed. This dissertation will consider, among other things, the poetological and rhetorical mechanisms of the mystical poetry of Adonis and Yves Bonnefoy, and in doing so will implicitly transform existing models of mystical literature, expanding them to include a more modern sensibility. In the spirit of the mystical experience itself, this dissertation goes beyond the more traditional definition of mystical language as an attempt to express the inexpressible or ineffable (without doing away with that definition, or entirely denying it). While I suggest the possibility that the temporal act of reading poetry can be considered as potentially inauguratory of mystical experience in the subjective experience of the reader,[2] my emphasis in this dissertation is on poetry as a specific mode of spiritual practice characterized by certain poetological and rhetorical techniques. This poetry functions, among other things, as impassioned spiritual training grounds, and this dissertation explores the mechanisms of that functioning.

Some further clarification is needed to make my own means of critical approach to this poetry perfectly clear, and to reveal my own prejudices on this subject, which are informed by years of study of spiritual texts and, perhaps more importantly still, by years of intensive meditative practice employing techniques from various spiritual schools, including those of Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as prolonged periods of silence and sensory deprivation. First, I am making a subtle but important distinction between mystical experience on the one hand (as a subjective and internal experience) and spiritual practice on the other: while one of the goals of spiritual practice may indeed be (depending on the practitioner, or in this case the poet) to inaugurate mystical experience (in either the poet or the implied reader), it is by no means the only or even the primary goal. This poetry, when considered as a spiritual practice in its own right, goes beyond merely being "mystical poetry." Peak mystical experiences

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[2] As such, this poetry is occasionally not entirely unlike the Zen tradition of koans, or the "pointing" texts and techniques of such modern schools of non-duality as "The Headless Way." See, for example, the classic book of Zen koans *The Gateless Gate*, or the non-dual pointing experiments of The Headless Way at www.headless.org. This potential "pointing" aspect of Bonnefoy and Adonis' poetry cannot, of course, be verified in any kind of philosophical or theoretical fashion, as it hinges solely on the subjective experience of the reader at hand. In this dissertation, I will therefore be focusing more on the aspect of contemplative experience, as well as on the lengthy critiques of conceptual language that are found within this poetry—critiques that can be viewed as preparatory for deeper spiritual and mystical experiences.

are wonderful—perhaps even the greatest and most joyful experiences a human being can have—but they are not exactly equivalent to what various traditions have called "enlightenment" (also known as "awakening" or "self-realization"), which I will preliminarily define as a non-dual state that is posited as the supreme goal of spiritual practice in various traditions, and in particular Buddhism. Although there is a certain loss of self in the union with "God" (or whatever one chooses to call it), this loss of self is temporary. The modern Christian contemplative Bernadette Roberts, who had, until her own deeper awakening (more on this later), assumed that union with God was the endpoint of contemplative practice, acknowledges the transience of that union (*Experience* 10):

> Thus there is no longer any sense of "my" life, but rather "our" life—God and self. In this abiding state God, the "still-point" at the center of being, is ever accessible to the contemplative gaze—a point from which the life of self arises and into which it sometimes disappears. But this latter experience of loss-of-self is only transient, it does not constitute a permanent state, nor did it occur to me that it could ever do so in this life.

A mystical experience (which Roberts would call the dissolving of the self into God) is just that—an experience, something that arises and then passes away. William James lists "transiency" as one of the "four marks" or core aspects of the mystical experience of unity (414-415), noting that "[t]he adjective 'mystical' is technically applied, most often to states that are of brief duration" (79). James does not devote time to a discussion of enlightenment or awakening, freely admitting his own ignorance of Buddhism (567)—and yet the distinction between enlightenment and mystical experience is a crucial one.

In my view, and in the terminology I will be using, there is a fundamental difference between a temporary experience of union with God (or reality, source, Being, the Absolute, etc.) and an ongoing perception of the world through a non-dual lens, wherein the sense of a separate individual self falls away. The latter is what I would call enlightenment, or rather, one of the possible modes or stages of enlightenment.[3] Mystical experiences are peak experiences, and peak experiences, by definition, cannot last very long: if they did so, they would cease to be peak experiences and would instead become plateaus, would be folded into the fabric of ordinary everyday reality. The path to enlightenment may entail mystical experiences, but enlightenment is not itself a single specific experience of the world, but rather a certain *way* of experiencing it. Enlightenment, insofar as one may speak of such a thing with any logical clarity, is not impermanent in the way that a mystical experience is

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[3] Different schools of Buddhist thought delineate different stages of enlightenment, with Theravada Buddhism having four stages (generally referred to as "paths"), while the more expansive Tibetan accounts have either ten stages (called "bhumis" or "grounds") or five (called "paths"). For an interesting overview and comparison of the maps of various Buddhist traditions as well as those from other spiritual models, see Daniel M. Ingram's 2008 book *Mastering the Core Teachings of the Buddha*, pp. 294-362.

impermanent. For if the consciousness or awareness of the individual expands to such an extent that it identifies with all of the material world and even, in certain esoteric traditions, all other possible dimensions, as well as with the single unified and transcendent source of all realities, so that the other (*any* other, regardless of their identity or spiritual faculties) is seen as being just as much one's self as one's own body and mind, then it is not, strictly speaking, possible to die—for how can all of reality die? It is, in the words of one contemporary spiritual teacher from the United Kingdom, "life without a centre."[4]

Coming as she does from a Christian contemplative tradition (she was formerly a nun in the Catholic Carmelite order), Bernadette Roberts, for her part, does not use the term "enlightenment" in her account of this new and wholly unexpected second leg of her contemplative journey (following the first leg of mystical union). In her 1993 book *The Experience of No-Self*, she relates this "second contemplative movement" (105), her journey from a merging of one's self with "God" to no self at all, in great detail.[5] The following is from the introduction to that work (10-11):

> I took for granted the self was the totality of being, body and soul, mind and feelings; a being centered in God, its power-axis and still-point. Thus, because self at its deepest center is a run on with the divine, I never found any true self apart from God, for to find the One is to find the other.
>
> Because this was the limit of my expectations, I was all the more surprised and bewildered when many years later I came upon a permanent state in which there was no self, no higher self, true self, or anything that could be called a self. Clearly, I had fallen outside my own, as well as the traditional frame of reference, when I came upon a path that seemed to begin where the writers on the contemplative life had left off.

Here, in this new mode of being, the entire reflexive apparatus of consciousness, i.e., the ability of thought to refer back to a separate "self," has been permanently extinguished, so that one can no longer speak of "self-consciousness" with any accuracy. As Roberts writes, "*when we can no longer reflect (or check) on the subject of awareness, we lose consciousness of there being any subject*" (94, Roberts' italics). This does not mean that no thought arises, only that it arises without being attached to any particular subject or thinker: "thought goes right on even when there is no self, no

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[4] See Jeff Foster's 2006 book *Life Without a Centre: Awakening from the Dream of Separation*. Foster takes the phrase "life without a centre" from the prominent 20th-century spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986). Furthermore, it should be noted that the term "awakening" is currently a quite popular alternative to the term "enlightenment," and is no less historically valid. The Pali word *buddha* simply means "the awakened one" (it can also be translated as "the one who knows/perceives").

[5] She relates the "first leg" of her journey in great detail in her 1991 book *The Path to No-Self: Life at the Center*. That book was written before the deeper awakening she experienced, and exclusively narrates her experiences of union with God.

thinker, and no self-consciousness."[6] In this new mode of being, it is difficult even to speak of God, or at least of any sort of personal God, because there is no longer a personal self for such a God to relate to. Roberts wrote her book largely because of the dearth of information available on such states, particularly in the Christian tradition—she notes that Meister Eckhart was the only writer she found in that tradition that had anything helpful to offer her as she transitioned to this new state (11) and embarked upon "the journey beyond union, beyond self and God, a journey into the silent and still regions of the Unknown" (16).

Although this may sound like an "altered" state of perception, within traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as nature-based indigenous traditions across the world, it is generally considered that this is in fact the "true" or "natural" way of seeing things, that it is true "insight" (nota bene: the historical Buddha's term *vipassana*, which now denotes several different meditative practices that the Buddha taught depending on who is using the term, simply means "insight" or "true seeing"[7]). In his 2015 book *The Mind Illuminated*, Culadasa (aka John Yates), a neuroscientist who is an ordained teacher in Tibetan and Theravada lineages, also emphasizes the non-transient nature of awakening, as well as its cognitive aspect: "Awakening isn't some transient experience of unity and temporary dissolution of ego. It's the attainment of genuine wisdom [...]. This is a *cognitive event* that dispels ignorance through direct experience" (loc. 488-495[8]). This inherently metaphysical valuation of a "truer" or "more natural" mode of perception is implicitly, and often explicitly, present within the work of both Bonnefoy and Adonis, and both of them, in very different ways, posit the notion of a certain *return* to more natural primordial states that we have forgotten or fallen out of—and that Bonnefoy sometimes characterizes in Christian terms as a fall

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[6] For a sustained analysis of the actual nature of thought as it relates to mind from the modern perspective of a clinical psychologist, see Mark Epstein's 1995 book *Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective*, and in particular Chapter 5, "Nowhere Standing: The Buddha's Fourth Truth," which is directly relevant to the present discussion.

[7] For example, in the Theravada Burmese Vipassana lineage of Saya Gyi U Ba Khin (1899-1971), which spread around the world and has gained impressive popularity in the Western world through the work of S.N. Goenka (1924-2013), "vipassana" refers to a specific and detailed meditation technique that involves repeatedly scanning one's awareness through each and every part of the body (they invoke the Buddha's discourses the Satipatthana Sutta and the Mahasatipatthana Sutta as justification for this view). This is in contrast to the Thai Forest Tradition of Ajahn Chah, who uses the term "vipassana" in a much broader sense of "insight" without it referring to a specific technique. And in the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, "vipassana" often simply refers to clear (even if only momentary) insight into the nature of reality, and is frequently linked with Dzogchen meditation practices wherein awareness is simply turned inwards upon itself.

[8] I am citing from the Kindle edition of this book, in which "locations" are given in lieu of page numbers.

from Grace, and at other times characterizes in more Heideggerian terms as a forgetting of Being. As we shall see in this dissertation, they both emphasize the prominent role that conceptual language plays in this fall, in this forgetting, and attempt to reverse it in their own ways. Their poetry, as spiritual practice, can thus also be said to serve a certain didactic function: they implicitly attempt to teach the reader how to live, or at least, how to (best) perceive the world.

A growing body of rigorous psychological and neuroscientific research is revealing the key aspects of the mode of perception that has historically been referred to as "enlightenment" or "awakening," using accepted psychological methodology to map the various facets of this way of being in the world. Among the most notable findings of that research is the fact that ongoing perception of union with a higher source is, in fact, only one stage of enlightenment, and that there are other stages beyond that where even the perception of unity falls away (which is entirely in line with Buddhist descriptions of the fully awakened or enlightened state).[9] This transition from an experience of oneness with transcendent unity to something "beyond" even that can also be found, if one knows to look for it, all across the spectrum of spiritual literature—in recent years, perhaps most clearly in the aforementioned book by Bernadette Roberts.

For the sake of clarity, I will provide a brief and simple analogy to elucidate such a state of being, since conceptually describing such non-conceptual modes of perception is ultimately doomed to failure (though some failures can, of course, be more felicitous than others—a testament to the growing popularity of spiritual literature in mainstream markets in the US and Europe over the past few decades).[10] Imagine you are an individual cell located somewhere in a human body—let's say inside one of your fingers. For most of your life, your entire world and reality seem to consist of "your" internal experience within that cell, and it is the focal point of your concern and your awareness: you worry about regulating your mitochondrial proteomes, you take pride in how efficiently your nucleolus synthesizes ribosomes, and you always pay close attention to how many and what kind of molecules pass through your cell membrane (relaxing and letting a few extra ones in during the holidays, then

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[9] The psychologist Jeffrey Martin refers to these distinct modes of perception as "locations" on a continuum of "persistent non-symbolic experience" (more on this term further in this Introduction). He documents the transition from the location characterized by an experience of unity with God (or whatever one calls it) and an all-pervasive sense of love for all existence ("Location 3") to an experience of even greater well-being wherein all sense of unity and even all personal emotions fall away ("Location 4").

[10] The German-born spiritual author Eckhart Tolle (b. 1948), who is said to have changed his first name (from Ulrich) in homage to Meister Eckhart, is perhaps the most prominent example of this popularity. Although he hails from no specific spiritual tradition or religion, his two books *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (1999) and *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* (2005) have sold a total of over 8 million copies.

regretting it a little while later). One day, either as the gradual result of many years of meditative and contemplative practices, or perhaps quite suddenly and out of the blue, you awaken out of the perception of that cell being a separate entity in the body, and come to identify instead with the entire organism as a whole. It's all "you." And the cell right beside you, as well as other cells in parts of the body that you cannot even perceive with your senses, are just as much "you" as your own individual cell. It is, quite literally, an experience of selflessness, and you suddenly realize, experience, and embody (as opposed to merely understanding conceptually) the Buddha's term *anatta*: "no separate self" (one of the three characteristics of existence). Upon investigation, you find that there *is* no separate self, a phenomenon Sam Harris refers to as the *intrinsic selflessness of consciousness* (82).[11] And if you are a cell who was educated in the so-called Western world, you will think that Descartes did, in fact, get it wrong. I do not exist because I think. Rather, all thought (including thoughts about the "I") arise against an impersonal background of awareness.

This is where things, from the conventional viewpoint of separation, start becoming very strange indeed. For a while, your experience might be one of unity with a larger whole, and you might call that whole God, or something similar. But even in that, there is still a subtle experience of individuality: "I" am unified with God (or whatever term you prefer), and I perceive and embody the overflowing love of God in all moments of my life. But as you deepen into your nature, it is possible that even that experience of unity with something greater than oneself will disappear, as the self more fully dissolves. With truly no perception of a separate self, no perception of unity is possible, for even unity is still a dualistic experience (as it implies the possibility of its opposite, separation). Even terms like "divine love" often vanish here, as everything melts into a unified field (so who would love whom?). Phenomena (sounds, sights, etc., and also thoughts) arise within the space of awareness, but there is no "I" for them to attach to, and indeed even the physical body (however it is perceived in any given moment) is seen as being just another object arising within vast impersonal awareness. At this stage, terms like "pure consciousness" or "pure awareness" are common, and even the sense of agency disappears.

A different analogy, one used frequently by the Indian Advaita (nondual) teacher Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981), is helpful to explain this lack of a sense of agency, which is perplexing to many, and which many erroneously equate with a kind of vegetative state.[12] Consider the functioning of your body after you eat a meal. How much conscious "agency" goes into the digestion of that food? Your body simply takes care of it naturally, as it were, and generally (if you are healthy) without too many problems. In the state of awakening or enlightenment that transcends even the experience of unity, *all* functionings of the individual (thought, movement, etc.) are

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[11] Harris notes that this is, in fact, his own non-metaphysical translation of the Buddhist technical term "the dharmakaya of emptiness." An analysis of the connotations of the term *dharmakaya* is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

[12] This analogy recurs throughout Nisargadatta's recorded self-inquiry talks with his students, collected together in the volume *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj.*

perceived as occurring spontaneously and naturally without any personal volition, just as digestion occurs spontaneously and naturally, for there is no separate person to have volition. To return to our initial analogy of the cell: the cell simply functions, performing its tasks in the world, without any undue suffering. There is impersonal awareness of all that happens—some would call it "loving," because this awareness is separate from thought (it observes even thought itself), and it accepts all objects of awareness without reservation. As such, it is not an experience of dissociation, but rather of radical involvement in the world, as everything that arises is perceived and accepted. In a more esoteric interpretation of the Gospels, this also explains the famous quotation by Jesus, "not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42)—it is the end of personal will, a deep surrendering that has dissolved the illusion of personal control, of agency. To cite a more modern example, the experience of "bottoming out" is common among all sorts of addicts, and is frequently accompanied by a spiritual opening.[13] But the experience of loss of personal will need not be so dramatic, and is frequently evoked by artists of all ilk to describe their experience of artistic creation—for example the Swiss-German painter Paul Klee, to cite just one prominent example: "Everything vanishes around me, and works are born as if out of the void. Ripe, graphic fruits fall off. My hand has become the obedient instrument of a remote will" (387).[14] The cell, now, has woken up to its true nature, and finds that when its consciousness disappears into the totality of the organism (i.e., all of existence), suffering falls away in the face of peaceful awareness. It also finds that it does not die when the individual cell dies, because it is much more than any individual cell: upon investigation, it finds that it is not only the entire body, but that it is the source from which the entire body arises, the source of all existence. The latter is the more esoteric aspect of the teaching, and one that is extremely difficult to demonstrate, whether by logical deduction or by analogy and metaphor—it is attested to by texts and testimonials since the beginning of recorded human history, and yet it defies any logical or conceptual proof.

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[13] Bill Wilson (better known as "Bill W."), the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, who had taken LSD in controlled medical experiments together with Aldous Huxley in the 1950s, was enthusiastic enough about the possibilities of LSD to aid in opening up this spiritual dimension of surrender and ego-loss that he considered adding LSD to the 12-Step Program. He even explained the substance's mechanism in spiritual terms: "It is a generally acknowledged fact in spiritual development that ego reduction makes the influx of God's grace possible. If, therefore, under LSD we can have a temporary reduction, so that we can better see what we are and where we are going—well, that might be of some help" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 370-371).

[14] Klee's voluminous writings on painting and the nature of consciousness reveal a lifelong spiritual journey, and also indicate just how intricately spirituality and art were bound together for him. His experience, it should be noted, is by no means unique among artists, as the present dissertation will demonstrate with the examples of Bonnefoy and Adonis. My presentation of Adonis' work in particular will weave together the notion of creativity with that of spiritual practice.

From the perspective of awakening or enlightenment, strictly speaking, there is no "I" writing this dissertation. There are thoughts arising spontaneously in (impersonal) awareness, followed by a physical unit (the body) performing the actions necessary for those thoughts to be communicated to others (taking down notes, organizing ideas into logically coherent sequences, typing words on a laptop computer, revising those words, etc.). And behind, beneath, and within it all there is impersonal awareness—or, to cite the famous 8th-century Advaita Vedanta teacher Adi Shankara, "eternal, undifferentiated, unshaken Consciousness."[15]

This perspective that takes a step beyond the concepts of the analytical mind is well suited to analyze the poetry at hand, which, as we shall see, goes beyond conceptual thinking to uncover more revolutionary modes of perception. Even the philosopher William James, who freely admitted to having only second-hand knowledge of mystical states and to being "forced to look upon the subject so externally" (413), found it necessary to give the topic of mysticism lengthy consideration. As a scholarly intervention, this dissertation is truly comparative, not least because it allows, and indeed encourages, my years-long exploration of these non-ordinary modes of perception to shed light on aspects of the poetry at hand, whether explicitly or (as is more often the case) implicitly.[16]

A recent catch-all psychological term that is quickly gaining currency to describe states of enlightenment reveals one of several reasons why such a comparative approach can be fruitful: *persistent non-symbolic experience* (PNSE). The term PNSE was coined by the psychologist Jeffrey Martin in an attempt to find "neutral" non-religious vocabulary to use when conducting interviews with his research subjects, but was derived from a paper published by the psychologist S.R. Cook-Greuter in the *Journal of Adult Development* (Cook-Greuter 230, cited in: Jeffrey A. Martin 4):

> Eastern psychologies have often pointed to the nonsymbolically mediated, or immediate ways of knowing as the only kind of knowing that can lead to enlightenment or true insight into human nature. In fact, they consider our addiction to language-mediated, discursive thought as a major hurdle in realizing our true or divine Self, or union with the Ground.

This quotation, and the term "persistent non-symbolic experience," brings up an extremely important facet of the discussion of enlightenment, one that is of prime

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[15] Translated from Sanskrit into Tamil by Ramana Maharshi, before being translated from Tamil into English by Arthur Osborne, revised by K. Swaminathan (Ramana Maharshi, *Collected Works,* 196).

[16] Please note that I am not claiming enlightenment for myself, or anything of that nature. I am merely noting that I have some familiarity with the experiences and modes of perception that I discuss in this dissertation (whether union with something that transcends the individual self, or a broader experience of no-self). In any case, strictly speaking, no individual can ever actually *achieve* enlightenment or awakening, because it is not an individual "I" that wakes up, but rather the totality that wakes up *from* the limited perception of an individual I.

importance (though in very different ways) to both Bonnefoy and Adonis: the question of conceptual language. In both Cook-Greuter's description above and in Bonnefoy's own implicit and explicit poetic ontology, it is *symbolic* representation, the most evident and widespread example of which is conceptual language, that keeps us from a different mode of perception—Cook-Greuter uses the term "enlightenment," while Bonnefoy frequently refers to "presence" or "plenitude." Language *gets in the way*, as it were, and yet it is the medium Bonnefoy works with. Hence, a new mode of *contraconceptual* poetry is born, a poetry that functions as a spiritual practice, both pointing toward and attempting to inaugurate a new mode of perception.

Discussing mystical states in particular, William James notes the following in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (461):

> [Mystical states] break down the authority of the non-mystical or rational consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith.

Bonnefoy's poetry, a slow working against the concept and the image in favor of a more direct and unmediated perception of reality, also seeks "to open out the possibility of other orders of truth" on the ontological level. Using very similar rhetorical and poetic methods to those of Bonnefoy, Adonis will take up a similar contraconceptual mode of poetic and spiritual practice, but will expand it from the realm of "mere" ontology into the domain of political and religious critique. In his writing, the more overtly anti-authoritarian aspect that James makes mention of comes to the fore, in an unconcealed attempt to "break down the authority of the non-mystical or rational consciousness." Through his unique poetry, much more so than through his critical writings on Arab culture, Adonis reveals the full insurrectionary potential of language. And although both Bonnefoy and Adonis were, particularly in their early careers, greatly informed by the surrealist movement, with its emphasis on the irrational and the unconscious, the two of them went on to express surrealism's great mistrust of conceptualization in new and unexpected ways, in modes of writing that were much more refined and nuanced than much surrealist poetry. By considering their poetry as modes of spiritual practice (though not reducing it to this definition), this dissertation sheds new light some of the more subtle aspects of their writing.

Several aspects of what I mean by "spiritual practice" have, by now, come to light in this introduction, and I employ the term in part to take this poetry beyond a superficial definition that views the poetry as merely pointing toward mystical experience. While the texts at hand can occasionally be read as being pointers, they constitute—within the temporal act of reading—a form of spiritual practice, one whose goals are by no means dissimilar from those of "formal" meditation. In his book *Being Dharma: The Essence of the Buddha's Teachings,* the renowned Buddhist monk Ajahn Chah (1918-1992), who was largely responsible for bringing the Theravada Thai Forest Tradition to the Western world, notes that in spiritual practice, "[w]hat is important is to uproot conventional reality, the seeming appearance of things, to make an end of them and be liberated" (103). This view, which is by no means an aberrant or unique

one among Buddhist teachers, reveals just how closely the "goal" of meditation lines up with the "goals" of the poetry of Adonis and Bonnefoy—"goal" being a paradoxical and not entirely appropriate term here, since in many ways the path *is* the goal. Both meditation and this poetry can, with equal justification, be considered spiritual practices, although the poetry necessarily engages more actively with language than meditation tends to do.

My view of poetry as a spiritual practice is, it should be noted, largely derived from the writings of the French philosopher Pierre Hadot, who viewed the philosophy of antiquity and beyond as a form of spiritual practice (or as spiritual "exercises"). He also notably characterized his own mode of philosophy in terms of spiritual practice, most recently and most succinctly in 2008, in an online essay entitled "My Spiritual Exercises," which he published 2 years prior to his death:

> Philosophy is not primarily a theoretical and abstract activity, but rather a new mode of perception, which Bergson qualifies as 'naïve,' in the sense that the artist views nature without any *a priori*, liberating himself from the selfish habits and interests that prevent us from seeing reality as it is.[17]

Like Hadot's philosophy, the poetry of Bonnefoy and Adonis represents a new "mode of perception," and in this sense those poems can be called spiritual practices, exercises intended to, in the words of Hadot, "trigger self-transformation" (ibid.)[18] as well as a new way of perceiving the world. This is akin to Merleau-Ponty's remarks in his 1945 *The Phenomenology of Perception*, wherein he defines phenomenology as "a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them" (Merleau-Ponty, *Basic Writings*, 63), and notes that phenomenological reflection "slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice" to reveal that world "as strange and paradoxical" (70). Indeed, phenomenology itself, and especially that of Martin Heidegger, frequently discovers, through this suspension of the natural attitude, a hidden spiritual dimension that analytic philosophy generally glosses over (although the phenomenologists often refer to this dimension as "ontological" rather than "spiritual"). There are deep parallels between the work of Heidegger and that of Bonnefoy in particular, and these will be highlighted in this dissertation.

My methodological approach throughout this dissertation (including the present introduction) weds a more linear and analytical orientation with an ever-deepening spiraling around certain key themes and characteristics, which allows for

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[17] Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this dissertation from French, German, and Arabic texts are my own. One of Hadot's best-known accounts of "spiritual exercises" can be found at the outset of a 1977 essay of the same name, published in French in his book *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (see pp. 19-22 for a brief introduction to the topic), and in English in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (pp. 81-82).

[18] Here is Hadot's full definition of spiritual exercise, from the same article: "Personally, I would define spiritual exercise as a voluntary, personal practice intended to trigger self-transformation."

unexpected aspects of this poetry to be brought to light.[19] The more analytic or conceptual aspect of my analysis allows for clarity and communicability, while the meditative "spiraling" and the willingness to engage with the spiritual dimensions of this poetry allow for a richer and deeper understanding of these works of poetry. In terms of literary, philosophical, or linguistic theory, I take a text-immanent approach in this dissertation, theorizing from within the poetry at hand and calling upon external philosophies and theories only when they are beneficial to the examination of that poetry.

My contention, once again, is two-fold: first, that the poetry of Yves Bonnefoy and that of Adonis—replete as they both are with visions, dreams, and even madness—represent a means of approach to this more "fundamental" mystical or unitary experience (this assertion is virtually self-evident, and needs little exposition, though it is an important underlying assumption of this dissertation); and second, that they also, through their own unique rhetorical and poetological techniques, constitute their own unique forms of spiritual practice, the characteristics of which are explored in this dissertation. As means of spiritual practice, this poetry transforms both the poet's and the implied reader's most fundamental relationships with the world by transforming their relationships with the *languages* through which that world is conceptualized and hence perceived. This is one of the core paradoxes of mystical poetry as a whole, and of the poetry of Bonnefoy and Adonis in particular: namely, that language itself—which most would argue is, by its very nature, a conceptual beast—is used to approach or attain a non-conceptual perception of the world. Here, the core paradox of this dissertation also comes to light: I am using a language that is, it could be argued, even more conceptual than that of poetry to elucidate largely non-conceptual spiritual practices. This paradox is unavoidable, and perhaps even productive. While this dissertation is, in one aspect, a scholarly intervention in the existing critical literature on Bonnefoy and Adonis, it can simultaneously be considered a kind of spiritual practice itself, or at least a supporting element of such a practice, for it attempts to translate the contraconceptual practices of these two poets into more "ordinary" conceptual language—the act of understanding on a more conceptual level has its clear place within spiritual practice. This dissertation is an act of love, and its goal is not to reduce the works of these two poets to any one of their dimensions (not even the "spiritual" dimension), but rather to broaden and deepen our understanding and appreciation of these texts, which constitute, in my view, some of the most remarkable poetry of the twentieth century.

My study comprises four chapters, plus the present introduction and a brief conclusion. The first chapter, entitled "Spiritual Turbulence: The Early Phase of Bonnefoy's Poetry," traces, in very broad strokes, a spiritual arc across Bonnefoy's first three collections of poetry, from his Surrealist beginnings in *Anti-Platon*, to his figurations (and idealization) of death in *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve*, and on

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[19] This dual approach mirrors my own educational training in both "analytic" and "Continental" philosophy. The practice of spiraling is largely derived from Heidegger's later writings, but I strive for a clearer exposition than is often found in those works.

to his own "Dark Night of the Soul" as it is poetically expressed in *Hier régnant désert.* In this chapter, I also examine his views on language and his notion of "poetic presence," considering it in relation to Heidegger's own views on "presence" and "Being." In my second chapter, "Coming Back to Earth: The Spiritual Practice of *Pierre écrite*," I provide an in-depth and sustained reading of Bonnefoy's subsequent collection, *Pierre écrite*, demonstrating how it represents both an end to the "dark night" and the turning point of Bonnefoy's poetry, and I discuss how that collection represents the inauguration of a certain apophatic spiritual practice. This concludes the first half of the dissertation, which focuses on Bonnefoy's writings. In the second half of the dissertation, I turn to the work of Adonis. In the third chapter, "The Struggle for Arab Culture: On Adonis' Critical Thought and Poetry," I examine some of Adonis' most important critical writings as a backdrop to his poetry and as a means of introducing several key themes, including that of creative innovation, which I link explicitly to the spiritual process of this poetry—this examination entails a critique of Adonis' often reductionist critical writings, as well as an examination of the spiritually expansive role Sufism plays for Adonis. I also begin my analysis of Adonis' collection *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* as a certain intratextual spiritual practice that is intended to enact certain transformations in the implied reader. Here, the more didactic aspect of Adonis' poetry as spiritual practice is contrasted with the more subjective spiritual practice of Bonnefoy's poetry. In the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation, "Shaddad's Reply: The Intertextual Spritual Practice of *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*," I shift my focus of attention from the intratextual to the intertextual. Here, I continue my analysis of Adonis' poetry, focusing on a single poem from his collection to demonstrate how Adonis uses intertextual mechanisms to operate a Nietzschean revaluation on certain key Islamic concepts, thereby opening up a new cultural field for spirituality. I show the ways in which Adonis, through subtle and sustained work on key terms and concepts, attempts to bring about a certain spiritual revolution in his poetry. In my short conclusion to this dissertation, I tie all these strands back together, in addition to offering more general remarks on the spiritual potential of poetry.

Chapter One

Spiritual Turbulence: The Early Phase of Bonnefoy's Poetry

Truly, all being is hard to demonstrate; it is hard to make it speak.
– Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (27)[20]

To others again is revealed the glory, the infinite value and meaningfulness of naked existence, of the given, unconceptualized event.
- Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (10)

When viewed through the lens of spiritual practice, there are two key phases in Yves Bonnefoy's ongoing poetic career. The first comprises all the poetry he wrote up till and including his 1958 collection *Hier régnant désert*. This early phase of his career was one of spiritual turbulence and upheaval, as well as rapid spiritual transformations, and is consequently characterized by a number of different poetic attitudes and modalities. The second phase begins in 1965 with the publication of the collection *Pierre écrite*, which represents a decisive turning point in Bonnefoy's poetic career, and the inauguration of what I would call his mature poetics, which has persisted to the present day. This is not to say that his poetry has been stagnant after 1965, but rather that the spiritual underpinnings of that poetry, while perhaps "deepening" (to use a spatial metaphor), no longer underwent any radical changes. The spiritual shift that occurs between *Hier régnant désert* and *Pierre écrite*—the spiritual impasse or "Dark Night of the Soul"[21] that he finally overcomes with the latter collection—is a pivotal moment for Bonnefoy's poetry. In the present chapter of this dissertation, I examine the first phase of Bonnefoy's career (up to and including *Hier régnant désert*), its hallmarks and characteristics, and analyze that poetry as a means of spiritual practice and contemplation, of meditatively "working through" the ontological thickets of spiritual experience. Due to space constraints, this examination remains an overview, as it

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[20] From the chapter entitled "Of the Afterworldsmen" ("Von den Hinterweltlern"); the English translation is that of R. J. Hollingdale. The German reads: "Wahrlich, schwer zu beweisen ist alles Sein und schwer zum Reden zu bringen" (*Also* 27).

[21] This term was coined by Saint John of the Cross (San Juan de la Cruz), the 16th-century Spanish mystic poet of the Carmelite order, to denote the difficulties the spiritual hardships one encounters in the arduous journey toward union with God. The term is currently experiencing a revival in modern Western spiritual circles, and I will discuss it in more detail later in this chapter.

covers a large poetic area fairly quickly—although I offer close reading of key sections from the collections under discussion, the interpretations I offer largely remain on a more global scale. In the second chapter, which provides a close and sustained reading of *Pierre écrite*, I examine the "turn" that occurs with that collection, and consider how it subsumes and transcends Bonnefoy's earlier poetry. Many of the poetological and rhetorical techniques that Bonnefoy employs remain the same across the two phases, yet we will see that a fundamental shift in attitude occurs, one that permeates all of his post-1965 poetry.

1. *Anti-Platon*: Bonnefoy's Surrealist Beginnings

The title of Yves Bonnefoy's first—and extremely short—collection of poetry reveals a central ontological preoccupation that never leaves Bonnefoy's poetry: *Anti-Platon*, or "Anti-Plato," a 9-page collection (or poem) that he wrote in 1947.[22] Surrealism as an artistic movement was formally inaugurated with André Breton's 1924 *Le manifeste du surréalism*, and the movement would flourish in both literature and painting for about two decades, before beginning to recede in popularity following the end of the Second World War. In terms of its poetry, there was a strong emphasis on dreams and the unconscious. Reason or the analytical mind was generally seen as an impediment to accessing the deeper unconscious layers. Many, though by no means all, Surrealist poets practiced automatic writing, and the writing tended to include bizarre imagery and strange, irrational associations. After Bonnefoy moved from his native town of Tours to Paris in 1943, he had extensive contact with many Surrealist poets, most notably André Breton upon the latter's return to France in 1946—Breton had left for the United States during the Nazi Occupation, and his work had a pronounced impact on Bonnefoy's early poetry. At this inaugural moment of Bonnefoy's poetic career, a time in which he still considered himself part of the by-then quite mature Surrealist movement (he would "break" definitively with the Surrealists in 1947—more on this later), Bonnefoy significantly decides to define himself in negative terms, as being *against* Plato—yet "Plato" here is more than any single man or even any single philosophy. The title of the collection represents an entire ontological and linguistic attitude toward the world (for being and language cannot, as we shall see, be separated in Bonnefoy's work, whether in his poetry or critical writings), one that it becomes necessary to combat through a poetry of negation. This negation, and the concomitant affirmation of something else in its place, represents the first significant moment of Bonnefoy's poetry as spiritual practice.

In *Anti-Platon*, the fundamental opposition that emerges is between specificity and universality, between immediacy and eternity, and Bonnefoy positions himself firmly on the side of the former as early as the very first words of this Surrealist collection: "Il s'agit bien de *cet* objet," he writes, before embarking on a series of potent images that ends with the following: "la tête en cire d'une femme tournant échevelée

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[22] He had written some essays before this, as well as some preliminary poetry, including the 1945 version of *Le Cœur-espace*, and the 1946 work *Le Traité du pianiste*. For a collection of these earliest works, see his *Traité du pianiste et autres écrits anciens.*

sur le plateau d'un phonographe" (P-33[23]). The immediate specificity of this image, its moving ("tournant") and imperfect ("échevelée") nature is then, still in the very first poem of the collection, directly contrasted with the realm of Plato: "Ce rire couvert de sang, je vous le dis, trafiquants d'éternel, visages symétriques, absence du regard, pèse plus lourd dans la tête de l'homme que les parfaites Idées, qui ne savent que déteindre sur sa bouche" (ibid.). In a move characteristic of Bonnefoy, mortality ("couvert de sang") is placed in direct opposition to a certain notion of transcendence here, that of the Platonic realm of "Ideas" (sometimes translated as "Forms," a rendering that works just as well for our purposes). Bonnefoy's implicit critique of Platonism is simple here, and is reminiscent of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity (or any number of modernist critiques): Platonic Ideas, those pure Forms that represent the supposed essence of things, transcend time and mortality, thereby inaugurating a new moral order that is based on love of those transcendent Ideas. The world below—*our* world—is thus devalorized in the name of that other realm. Such a facile transcendence that forgets death, ignores the here and now, and passes over the inherent finitude of existence is quite simply untenable for Bonnefoy in the modern period.[24]

Among poets of the early 20th century, it is Paul Valéry who, for Bonnefoy, most clearly embodies this Platonic view. Indeed, when reading Bonnefoy's later critical writings, and in particular his well-known 1959 essay "L'Acte et le lieu de la poésie" ("The Act and Place of Poetry"), one wonders if Bonnefoy might have been tempted to name his first collection of poems "Anti-Valéry" instead, had Valéry not been recently deceased (he died in 1945). Bonnefoy's lumping together of Valéry and Plato, whether justified or not, reveals a further aspect of the transcendent state that will be critical for grasping Bonnefoy's later poetry (I-100[25]):

> Valéry a méconnu la présence. On se veut aristotélicien contre lui. Car la rêverie de l'Idée porte en poésie un grand risque, c'est que le mot ne fait plus scandale. [...] Voici pour le langage un bonheur possible, mais au prix de quel abandon ! Une paix—répéter, imiter, décrire—mais une paix sans acte ni âme, tout le contraire de ce qu'a voulu Mallarmé !

The word "presence" from the beginning of the citation above is a key term—perhaps *the* key term—in Bonnefoy's poetological repertoire, and denotes a certain mystical encounter with the world, or as Bonnefoy succinctly calls it in an essay from 1961, "la pure évidence du fait de l'être" ("Dualité," no pagination). As a very preliminary negative definition—one that we will modify and expand later as we move further along Bonnefoy's poetic trajectory—"presence" can be said to be that which stands in opposition to the transcendental attitude represented here by Valéry and Plato, and which in the early poetry of *Anti-Platon* is characterized in part by a certain immediacy and specificity within language itself. Bonnefoy views Valéry's work as a poetry that

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[23] The abbreviation P- refers to Bonnefoy's book *Poèmes*.

[24] It should be noted that the very first edition of *Anti-Platon* contained a lengthy and more direct allusion to Plato that Bonnefoy deleted from all subsequent editions. For more on this, consult Arnaud Buchs's book *Yves Bonnefoy à l'horizon du surréalisme*, p. 81.

[25] The abbreviation I- refers to Bonnefoy's book *L'improbable et autres essais*.

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forgets reality, a poetry that is closed upon itself and shut off from the world, nothing more than "le songe au bord d'un monde idéal" (I-127), a "discipline pour se retraire de ce qui est" (I-120) by means of a language that is so formally perfect that it cannot express any vital portion of reality. Indeed, for Bonnefoy, the "pure forms" of Valéry's poetry—his perfect rhymes, his flawless meter—are the poetic equivalent of Plato's Ideas: "La demeure si vaine, l'abandonnée de Baudelaire, est habitée à nouveau. Mais ce n'est plus cette fois pour y sauver l'existence, c'est pour se sauver d'elle dans un acte de pure forme, secrètement immobile, ce que je veux nommer la mauvaise mort" (I-120). This coupling of "form" with immobility, timelessness, and a lifeless transcendence ("la mauvaise mort," as opposed to a more vital embrace of mortality) will persist in Bonnefoy's work.[26] Much later on, in an interview from 1980, Bonnefoy will go so far as to implicitly attribute a certain violence to Valéry's mode of poetry, calling it a "domination prétendue de l'intellect sur les formes" (E-90[27]).

Anti-Platon represents the tentative beginnings of Bonnefoy's spiritual practice, one that will unfold in time over dozens of collections of poetry and prose. As the collection's title indicates, this poetry is inherently oppositional, and this itself is significant, for although Bonnefoy's critical writings will attempt to spiral around the question of "presence"—of "Being," of a mystic encounter with the world—in oblique yet positive terms, his poetry, in contrast, is primarily one of *negation*, it represents a spiritual via negativa that is itself its own approach at presence. The beginnings of this apophatic path are evident in *Anti-Platon.* The poem is a not particularly subtle rejection of "trafiquants d'éternel" such as Plato or Valéry ("Eternité, je te hais!" we read at one moment of the collection: 37). In *Anti-Platon*, Bonnefoy rejects idealized visions of language and poetry—and of existence itself—in part by rejecting rhyme and any common formal poetic meters (alexandrines, decasyllables, etc.), thereby refusing himself the "bonheur facile des rythmes" (I-127). He also, as we have seen, negates the Platonic Idea by means of an almost exaggerated specificity ("il s'agit bien de *cet* objet"). And, in typically Surrealist fashion, he further combats formal perfection with paradoxical and often jarring images (for example, the aforementioned wax head of a woman spinning on a gramophone).

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[26] This critique that turns Valéry into a kind of lucid Neoplatonic poet is not entirely unfounded on Bonnefoy's part. Valéry does indeed evoke his "mère Intelligence" (Valéry, *Poésies*, 56, verse 5) in his poem entitled "Poésie." Valéry's *Moi Pur* ("Pure I"), that "absolu de la conscience" (Valéry, *Lettres*, 245) that turns the intellect into the supreme good in the world, is well known. In this critique, we can thus see Bonnefoy's absolute refusal in the face of all solipsism (including that of Nietzsche) and all Cartesianism. Yet Bonnefoy's critique of Valéry, suggesting as it does that Valéry's poetry represents a total retreat in the face of reality, is quite one-sided, for he often glosses over the corporality and sensuality that are omnipresent in this poetry: Narcissus and Monsieur Teste are not the only poetic figures in Valéry's universe.
[27] The abbreviation E- refers to Bonnefoy's book *Entretiens sur la poésie*.

Such images—and Bonnefoy himself later noted that it was primarily the power of the image that attracted him to Surrealism[28]—strike not only against formal perfection, but also against meaning itself. "Quel sens prêter à cela," the poetic voice asks, before introducing yet another bizarre human figure of wax and then melting it down, abandoning "le corps entier aux caprices de la flamme" (P-35). The question the poetic voice asks is clearly rhetorical, yet if one were to give an answer here, it would surely be: "None, no meaning at all." Meaning itself becomes enmeshed in the idealized Platonic realm, and a deep poetic parallel is established between Platonic Ideas on the one hand and conceptual language on the other—a connection we will explore in greater detail later in this chapter.[29] The movement of *Anti-Platon* is a movement away from fixed concepts, and at this stage in his career Bonnefoy has an incredible faith in the power of the Surrealist image—and of the evocation of specificity—to overcome the naive transcendence of eternity. Here, the immediacy of presence is simply affirmed, and that seems to be enough for the unnamed figure in *Anti-Platon*, who "triomphe aisément d'une éternité sans jeunesse et d'une perfection sans brûlure," as we read in the very last poem of the collection (P-41). Presence is affirmed, specificity is evoked, and eternity is explicitly rejected. The beginnings of a spiritual practice are clear, yet Bonnefoy has yet to find his mature poetic voice at this early point in his career— within the poetic drama itself, it seems that the poet believes simply evoking "presence" itself is enough, and that evoking the specificity of objects suffices to overcome the transcendent pull of conceptual language. The poetic drama thus remains somewhat shallow.

Yet this first stage is an important moment, a necessary stopping point that will itself be transcended on the way to a more mature poetics. For the sense of the sacred and the spiritual (Bonnefoy uses the word "religious" at times[30]) within the domain of poetry was one of the reasons Bonnefoy was so drawn to Surrealism. Surrealist writing, which yokes an inherently transcendent aspect (*sur*-realism) to specificity, appealed to Bonnefoy's sensibility and resonated with a certain spiritual experience he had had since childhood: "Dès l'enfance une certaine idée que j'avais du lieu, par exemple, ici ingrat et décoloré, ailleurs—ou plutôt 'là-bas'—riche de substance, eut tout à fait, me semble-t-il aujourd'hui, le caractère d'une intuition de la transcendance" (E-79). This

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[28] "L'image, c'est ce qui m'avait touché le plus, et d'emblée, dans les œuvres surréalistes, poésie autant que peinture," he states in an interview with John E. Jackson from 1976 (E-68).

[29] In his essay "Yves Bonnefoy and the Temptation of Plato," the critic Graham Dunstan Martin argues that when Bonnefoy uses the term "concept" in his poetological writings, he is referring exclusively to the "classificatory aspect" of the Saussurian *signifié* (96). While I do not believe that Bonnefoy is always so precise in his use of the term "concept," I would argue that, largely due to this classificatory potential (i.e., the rendering of an abstract essence of something, a "classification"), the *concept* is the virtual equivalent of the Platonic Idea for Bonnefoy.

[30] For example, in a 1976 interview with John E. Jackson, from the book *Entretiens sur la poésie* (E-79).

"other place" that Surrealism (according to Bonnefoy) attempts to access or evoke through the power of the intense encounter with the specific object is a double-edged sword, carrying within it at one and the same time a call to the sacred and—similarly to Platonism and the poetry of Valéry—a naïve form of transcendence. The great irony of *Anti-Platon* becomes clear from Bonnefoy's own comments on Surrealism: a transcendent mode of thought (Surrealism) is being used to combat the transcendence of Platonism. Although, in Bonnefoy's work, a more immanent mode of poetry has thus not yet been achieved, a clearer sense of the sacred, at least, has been added to this transcendent aspect—this is the "gain," the spiritual acquisition, of *Anti-Platon*. In a short 1964 essay on Surrealism entitled "The Feeling of Transcendency" (originally written in English, and hereafter abbreviated as T-), Bonnefoy notes that the greatness of Surrealism, which he calls "the only genuine poetic movement this century has had" (T-137), was its "its effort to reanimate in secular times, and necessarily outside the perimeter of religion because of the times that are ours, the feeling of transcendency" (ibid). Yet he also notes a core contradiction within Surrealism, namely, the contradiction between "a desire for participation in the sacred" on the one hand and "a secret love of nothingness" on the other (T-135), where nothingness is equated with transcendence (because the latter is empty of all substance).

Bonnefoy would thus soon announce his official "break" with Surrealism. When Breton first returned to Paris in 1946, Bonnefoy attended his regular "salons" (which were essentially Breton presiding over a group of admiring young writers), but he quickly grew tired of "these long café conversations that lead nowhere" ("The Art of Poetry," no pagination): "After a year we had to sign a new manifesto, and I didn't. The manifesto was called *Rupture inaugurale*, and indeed a rupture it was for me" (ibid).[31] It was not Breton's apparent lack of charisma that caused Bonnefoy to "break" with the movement in 1947. Bonnefoy has related the reasons for this break on numerous occasions throughout the years, and he provides a particularly succinct and lucid account in his 1976 interview with John E. Jackson, where he describes Surrealist thought as a

> gnosticisme, une pensée de la transcendance, oui, mais qui, s'attachant
> indûment à tel objet ou aspect de notre univers [...] en déduit qu'une part
> de notre réalité, cet objet, porte donc dans son être les traces, à tout le
> moins, d'une réalité supérieure : ce qui dévalorise les autres choses du
> monde, par contrecoup, et donne le sentiment que la terre est une
> prison, puisque les choses basses y prédominent, et la divinité une
> absence. (E-80)

This "thought of transcendence" is equivalent to what Bonnefoy calls "a love of nothingness." Arriving at a more mature spiritual stopping point, Bonnefoy comes to view the transcendence inherent within Surrealism—the *sur*, as it were—as a trap, and implicitly critiques his own adherence to a certain intense specificity ("cet objet") in *Anti-Platon* that was the mark of this transcendence. Breton thus becomes the bearer of

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[31] Both of these citations are from an interview entitled "The Art of Poetry" that Bonnefoy gave to the *Paris Review* in 1994.

"occultism" (E-79), and Surrealist language seems to have in some ways acquired an even more seductive and dangerous aspect than Platonic language, that "mimologie parfaite, qui ferait du langage un double de la réalité" (Genette, *Mimologiques*, 33) advocated by Plato's Cratylus.

The perilous lure of Surrealism is apparent in Bonnefoy's frequent use of the word "demons" and its cognates in relation to them:

> To the virtual presences of full existence traced in the warlike works of the [Surrealists] was opposed the thick and heavy actuality of a bad presence: a world stripped of sense, abandoned to demons whose appearance was foreign to all our wishes, a world inhabited by nothingness alone. (T-136)

Although the danger of overly instrumental or conceptual language has been overcome, the price with Surrealism, Bonnefoy is saying here, is a certain nihilism, the absence of all meaning whatsoever ("a world stripped of sense"). As Bonnefoy states farther along in the aforementioned interview with John E. Jackson, "L'attitude gnostique [i.e., Surrealist], autrement dit, c'est de substituer à tout, et à autrui en particulier, une image, qu'on tient pour le seul réel" (E-81). Simply put, the Surrealists possess too vast a faith in the powers of poetry (E-81):

> Qu'il n'y prenne garde, et l'auteur va penser que son texte a trié du monde ce qu'il y avait là de vrai et de pur, et que ces quelques mots sont un reflet ou un dire du dieu absent [...]. Je crois qu'on peut affirmer, ce qui aiderait aux travaux critiques, que toute littérature, toute poésie surtout, étant pour une part écriture, sont pour une part de la gnose. Mais les surréalistes, ah, combien plus que les autres poètes, réserve faite de leurs aînés du symbolisme tardif!

Because of the inherent lure of the transcendental concept that is the hallmark of human language, all writing is to a greater or lesser extent a form of gnosis, of transcendence; but the Surrealists, Bonnefoy tells us, take this gnosis much farther than others. With them, language has become something that can somehow penetrate much deeper than reality *as it is* in its simplicity, and it is this view that Bonnefoy rejects, preferring for his part to found his poetry on what he calls a "réalisme profond" (I-121).[32] It is in his 1953 collection *Douve*, which represents the next stage of Bonnefoy's spiritual practice, that we begin to see this profound realism manifest itself.[33]

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[32] For a much more in-depth look at Bonnefoy's tortuous path through Surrealism, consult Arnaud Buchs's *Yves Bonnefoy à l'horizon du surréalisme*. In reference to *Anti-Platon*, Buchs argues that in setting up a vastly simplified notion of Plato, Bonnefoy is essentially establishing his own sort of "Platonism" (80-81).

[33] Still, it should be emphasized that Bonnefoy's rejection of Surrealism is not total. The critic Olivier Himy, among others, notes that the role of the subconscious was one of the most appealing aspects of Surrealism for Bonnefoy: "Yves Bonnefoy a retenu, plus qu'une autre, cette leçon du surréalisme: l'inconscient donne accès à un degré de réalité que méconnaît la conscience" (75).

There is also a very historical aspect to the appeal Surrealism held for Bonnefoy: it represents a mode of writing that for him evoked "a more intense mode of being that might have consumed our inauthentic adhesion to objects and practices invented by a modern sensibility which is more and more forgetful of the sacred" (T-135). Surrealism, then, was the first, albeit flawed, modern poetic means that Bonnefoy found to combat the inauthenticity of present-day society and the forgetfulness of the sacred. One is struck by the overtly Heideggerian diction that Bonnefoy employs here, almost in spite of himself, for he always keeps a careful distance from Heidegger in his critical writings (likely due to Heidegger's involvement with the Nazi regime). There is a deep parallel between the forgetfulness of the sacred that is the underlying engine of Bonnefoy's poetry (early and late) and Western philosophy's famous "forgetfulness of Being" (*Seinsvergessenheit*) that is the underlying motivation for Heidegger's own ontology (early and late). Heidegger's writings on instrumental or conceptual language shed light on Bonnefoy's post-*Anti-Platon* poetry in particular. I will turn to Heiddeger's views on this topic now, considering them as an extremely helpful backdrop to Bonnefoy's own post-Surrealist work.

2. On Instrumental Language: Presence as Critique in the Work of Heidegger

Bonnefoy's mistrust of the concept and of instrumental language in general is evident throughout his critical writings. In his essay "Les Tombeaux de Ravenne," which was published the same year as his collection *Douve* (1953), he writes the following manifesto-like statement: "je défends une vérité tenacement présente sous la vérité du concept, tenacement combattue" (I-21). This insistence on a certain presence beyond or "beneath" the concept—which he would later call an "infra-conceptual" order (I-268)—is bound up with a view of language wherein the speaking subject has moved out of the central position in favor of presence itself. This is Bonnefoy's implicit reformulation of Heidegger's famous leitmotif "Die Sprache spricht" ("Language speaks"), first formulated in Heidegger's 1950 essay "Die Sprache."[34] For both Bonnefoy and Heidegger, the notion of "presence" is linked to language itself, and it is in the works of these two thinkers (both poet-philosophers in their own ways) that this loaded term and its cognates finds its most sustained articulations. The critical literature on "presence" often points towards presence as a certain plenitude, a mystic encounter with the world that is ultimately inexpressible, or very close to inexpressible.[35] While this is one aspect of it, I will here be focusing primarily on the

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[34] Cited from James K. Lyon's book *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger* (129). It should also be noted that this de-centralization of the subject is the foundation of Buddhism and notions of enlightenment/awakening, as I discussed in my general introduction to this dissertation.

[35] In his monograph on Bonnefoy, *A la souche obscure des rêves*, the critic John E. Jackson provides a succinct definition of Bonnefoy's idea of presence: "Cette éternité est sans doute à comprendre comme l'absolutisation du présent, un présent si plein qu'il échapperait à la dimension temporelle par l'excès de sa plénitude" (111).

more linguistic aspect of presence. In this other aspect, presence implies a lengthy process of critique: a critique of conceptual modes of thought that is at one and the same time a critique of otherworldly transcendence. In this reading, presence itself implies not only a contained subjective experience (that of mystic plenitude), but also a sustained spiritual practice within the domain of language. Indeed, it is this *presence as a process of critique* that makes possible an approach at the aforementioned *presence as mystic plenitude.* Bonnefoy will take up Heidegger's call for a non-conceptual mode of thought in his own poetry, allowing language to speak in ways that upend our ordinary relationship to it—a move that will later become critical for Adonis' poetry, who takes the critique of conceptual language out of the more "basic" ontological realm, where it by and large remains for both Heidegger and Bonnefoy, and expands it into the domain of the political.

The later Heidegger's critiques of conceptual (read also: calculating, mathematical, theoretical, purely instrumental) language are well documented. As Heidegger writes in his 1946/1947 "Letter on Humanism," "there is a thinking more rigorous than the conceptual" (BW-258).[36] How is one to think of this *other* thinking? To answer this, we must first examine the issue of conceptual language as it appears in the earlier (1927) work of *Being and Time* (abbreviated as BT).[37] Here, conceptual language corresponds to what Heidegger critiques as "traditional ontology" (BT-129), and although the clear links that Heidegger later establishes between being [*Sein*] and language are not as explicit in this earlier work, they are implicit in the early Heidegger's coupling of language with equipment.

With reference to Descartes, one of the foremost figures writing entirely within the framework of "traditional" ontology, Heidegger notes that his (Descartes') ontology is primarily determined "by his ontological orientation in principle towards Being as constant presence-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*], which mathematical knowledge is exceptionally well suited to grasp" (BT-129). This connection between traditional ontology and the notion of presence-at-hand is significant, considering the context in which Heidegger first introduces the term presence-at-hand, namely in his famous analysis of equipment [*das Zeug*] and tools [*das Werkzeug*] in the chapter "The Worldhood of the World" in *Being and Time*. Presence-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*] should by no means be equated with what Heidegger later names 'presence' [*Anwesenheit*, *Präsenz*], a term that I shall soon turn to. In his discussion of equipment, Heidegger does not introduce the term "presence-at-hand" until after a more primary notion has first been developed, namely that of 'readiness-to-hand' [*Zuhandenheit*]. *Readiness-to-hand* is "the kind of Being which equipment possesses" (BT-98). To put it succinctly, when we use (for example) a hammer for the act of hammering, we are engaged in a certain non-theoretical mode of being. This is the ready-to-hand, which "is not grasped

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[36] The abbreviation BW- refers to the English volume of Heidegger's *Basic Writings*. Bonnefoy will later echo this comment of Heidegger's by calling for "[u]ne compréhension non conceptuelle" (E-27).

[37] It is impossible to maintain a clear-cut separation between "language" and "thought" in any of Heidegger's writings, early or late.

theoretically at all" (BT-99). Among the most significant errors of traditional ontology is the tendency to look at things purely theoretically, that is, as merely existing present-at-hand objects, without taking the ready-to-hand, the non-theoretical, into account. "Theoretical behaviour is just looking, without circumspection" (ibid.), without considering things in their greater context. Indeed, it is only when things are put out of use—for example, when they break—that they exist in the mode of presence-at-hand as *un*-readiness-to-hand. When the hammer is broken, it suddenly stands out to us conspicuously, and indeed makes the entire workshop stand out as well. In other words, when we can no longer make non-theoretical use of the hammer as something ready-to-hand (that is, we can no longer simply *hammer* with it), we suddenly become aware of it as merely present-at-hand.

This discussion of equipment is noteworthy because it is one of Heidegger's first and most convincing demonstrations of what a non-theoretical or non-conceptual kind of behavior might be. As he does in his remarks on traditional ontology, Heidegger here couples the notion of presence-at-hand with the theoretical/conceptual, and this time explicitly links readiness-to-hand with an *other*, non-theoretical mode that he presents as more primary and authentic than presence-at-hand. There is a certain *naturalness* and *simplicity* to the ready-to-hand: one simply hammers, naturally, without the conceptual mind becoming particularly involved. This analysis is preparatory for his preliminary remarks on language later in *Being and Time*. In the section entitled "Being-There and Discourse. Language," Heidegger carries the parallel between language and equipment (or words and things) to its logical conclusion (BT-204):

> Language is a totality of words—a totality in which discourse has a
> 'worldly' Being of its own; and as an entity within-the-world, this totality
> thus becomes something which we may come across as ready-to-hand.
> Language can be broken up [*Zerschlagen*] into word-Things which are
> present-at-hand.[38]

And a few pages farther on, in a critique of the Greek mode of thinking as language based primarily on "assertion" [*Aussage*]—which I believe should be subsumed under what Heidegger more generally refers to as theoretical thinking—Heidegger notes the following (BT-209):

> [T]his [Greek] logic was based upon the ontology of the present-at-hand.
> [...] But if on the contrary we take this phenomenon to have in principle
> the primordiality and breadth of an *existentiale*, then there emerges the
> necessity of re-establishing the science of language on foundations
> which are ontologically more primordial.

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[38] The German title of this section is *Da-sein und Rede. Die Sprache.* We are, in this section, a far cry from the later Heidegger's remarks, where language is not by any means an "entity" [*Seiendes*], but rather the house of being itself (cf. BW-217). This example of language being dubbed a worldly entity could be viewed as one piece of evidence for a decisive "turn" [*Kehre*] in Heidegger's thought, but I would note that Heidegger himself does not seem to be entirely convinced of his remarks here, as shall become clear from my later analysis.

In keeping with the overarching parallel between language and equipment, the "more primordial" foundations that Heidegger writes of here point towards a science of language that would recognize language's authentically ready-to-hand mode of being. If we are indeed to accept this parallel, then one can think of Heidegger's own mode of writing in *Being and Time*—with its strange, difficult, and entirely unnatural plays on cognates—as a certain way of putting ready-to-hand language out of use in order to demonstrate the workings of the entire linguistic workshop. In other words, Heidegger makes language itself strange to us by "breaking it" in a certain sense, precisely by *not* allowing it to be ready-to-hand, by not allowing it to come to us as naturally as the hammer comes to the hand, and thereby revealing that it is in fact ready-to-hand on an everyday basis. What Heidegger performs with language mirrors what he analyzes with regards to equipment, and could be considered as further establishing the parallel between language and equipment that he himself sets up. And yet, in doing so, his own language ironically seems to remain in the same theoretical (present-at-hand) framework that he is attempting to dismantle. This is the apparent linguistic impasse of *Being and Time.*

These are not, however, Heidegger's last words on the matter. For, at the end of this section of *Being and Time* ("Being-there and Discourse. Language"), he casts doubt on whether the aforementioned parallel between language and equipment is in fact the most productive framework within which to analyze language. He notes that "philosophical research must resolve to ask what kind of Being goes with language in general. Is it a kind of equipment ready-to-hand within-the-world, or has it Dasein's kind of Being, or is it neither of these?" (BT-209). There is more than one answer to this question, I would suggest, for there is more than one possible mode of language. I now turn to Heidegger's later writings, as he does not even attempt to answer this question in the remainder of *Being and Time.*

In his later writings, Heidegger abandons his efforts at analyzing language as something authentically ready-to-hand, and in fact the notion of "authenticity" now becomes coupled with something very different from ordinary instrumental language. The potential parallel between language and equipment disappears entirely. In what seems to be quite a reversal of his earlier stance, it is now "common" language that Heidegger attacks. The following excerpt from his 1951/52 lecture "What Calls for Thinking?" ["Was heisst Denken?"] is especially illuminating (BW-388):

> The place of language properly inhabited, and of its habitual words, is usurped by common terms. The common speech becomes the current speech. We meet it on all sides, and since it is common to all, we now accept it as the only standard. Anything that departs from this commonness, in order to inhabit the formerly habitual proper speaking of language, is at once considered a violation of the standard. It is branded as a frivolous whim.

Clearly, "proper" language is no longer an entity (*Seiendes*) to which we can attribute the ontological status of the ready-to-hand.[39] Rather, language as "the house of Being" (BW-217) now occupies a central role in Heidegger's thought. Here, it is important to note that language is not Being itself, but rather its "house"—for Bonnefoy, in his critique of Surrealism, follows Heidegger by implying that the Surrealists took their language to be "presence" or "Being" itself, rather than merely a mode of Being. In the the later work of Heidegger, language takes up a unique position, and those who use language skillfully—most notably, poets—can be said to be the guardians of the house of Being.

"Being," as Heidegger writes in 1946/47, "remains mysterious, the simple nearness of an unobtrusive governance. The nearness occurs essentially as language itself" (BW-236). Heidegger's own language, much more so than in *Being and Time*, now itself becomes an embodiment of that other, non-conceptual and non-theoretical thinking. It is an ever-renewed means of approach at the mystery that is Being, which he later (in 1956) names "the simple, plain presence [*Vorliegen*] that is without why—the presence [*Vorliegen*] upon which everything depends, upon which everything rests" (*Principle* 127). In other words, as the critic Frederick Olafson has convincingly argued, the term "presence"—whether as a translation of *Anwesen*(*heit*), *Präsenz*, or, as in the above example, *Vorliegen*—is entirely synonymous with "Being" [*Sein*] in Heidegger's later writings, and thus cannot be separated from language.[40] This notion of presence as being dominates Heidegger's later work, and he appears to view the abstruse and difficult nature of his later writing as necessary for any sort of approach at this presence: "The liberation of language from grammar into a more original essential framework is reserved for thought and poetic creation," he writes (BW-218).[41] His later writings—which are generally meditative spiralings around questions of language and Being (presence), rather than the more linear progressions of *Being and Time*—embody

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[39] If anything, one is tempted to equate the "common" language cited disparagingly here as having a ready-to-hand mode of being, but I would caution against this, for these remarks come from a point in Heidegger's career when the aforementioned framework of *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* was almost entirely abandoned. If a parallel is still to be had between Heidegger's more developed views on language and the frameworks offered in *Being and Time*, then surely it is to be found in: (1) the reference to man's "fallenness" [*Verfallenheit*] into the inauthentic mode of the "Man" [*das Man*]; and (2) a common critique of conceptual modes of thinking.

[40] Olafson astutely notes that the later Heidegger's radicalized notion of presence is not to be equated with either the merely (atemporally) present-at-hand [*Vorhanden*] or with a purely temporal present instant, but rather as a notion that encompasses all three of Heidegger's temporal "ecstasies," past, present, and future, and hence is a notion of presence that subsumes even absence (as the past and future). Cf. Carman p. 432 and Olafson pp. 422-424. This more expansive notion of presence is entirely in line with Bonnefoy's 'mature' poetry (i.e., the 1965 collection *Pierre écrite* and beyond).

[41] This pejorative use of the term "grammar" is akin and indeed parallel to that of conceptual language.

just such a mode of thought, and are a means of dwelling near the inexpressible experience that is mystic presence. Heidegger thus clearly views himself as one of the "guardians of this home" that is language (BW-217), that famous house of Being, of presence. Yet there are other guardians, namely, those engaged in what Heidegger calls "poetic creation." Bonnefoy has heard Heidegger's call to safeguard a more authentic relationship to presence or Being, and his poetry begins to answer that spiritual call.

In an essay on Bonnefoy and Heidegger, Marlène Zarader emphasizes the primacy of language in the works of the two writers, in particular with regards to a safeguarding—or in Zarader's terms a "restitution"—of this more authentic relationship to Being: "Poète [Bonnefoy] et penseur [Heidegger] s'accordent ici pour conférer au langage une structure de *restitution*—qu'il ne faut pourtant pas comprendre commune une structure naïve de retour. Le langage n'est évidemment pas la simple désignation d'une présence première" (228). It is language itself, and not the linguistically endowed subject (as poet or philosopher), that takes center stage here, and Bonnefoy's subsequent (post-*Anti-Platon*) poetry will enact a remarkable fusion between the powerful imagery of Surrealism and the decentralized subjectivity that is characteristic of Heidegger's work after the Second World War.

3. Figurations of Death: Bonnefoy's *Douve*

In the early 1950s, after his break from the Surrealists, Bonnefoy begins to develop his own increasingly nuanced and complex critical and poetic formulations concerning instrumental or conceptual language. His critical formulations of the time conspicuously echo Heidegger's writings, especially Heidegger's later utterances. In his 1953 essay "Les Tombeaux de Ravenne," Bonnefoy writes the following concerning the concept (I-13-14):

> Sans doute le concept, cet instrument presque unique de notre philosophie, est-il dans tous les sujets qu'elle se donne un profond refus de la mort. Je tiens pour évident qu'il est toujours une fuite. Parce qu'on meurt dans ce monde et pour nier le destin l'homme a bâti de concepts cette demeure logique, où les seuls principes qui vaillent sont de permanence et d'identité.

To translate this into Heideggerian terms, the concept is that which allows man to forget his own mortality, his own Being-toward-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). [42] Indeed, Bonnefoy uses even stronger language here, asserting that the concept is more than merely a *forgetting* of the nature of our Being, but rather a "profound refusal" of death. We have already noted the insistence on death in his earlier collection *Anti-Platon*, as well as that collection's rejection of the concept. [43] Yet it is in Bonnefoy's stunning *Du*

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[42] The critic Jean-Pol Madou emphasizes this aspect of forgetting in his essay on Bonnefoy's critique of Mallarmé: "Ne retenant de la chose sensible que l'épure intemporelle, le concept ne se fonde que sur l'oubli de la mort et de la finitude" (32).

[43] The notion of death, too, provides a strong link to the work of Heidegger. As Julian Young writes in his essay on Heidegger entitled "Death and Authenticity": "Genuinely facing up to death ('anticipation' or 'authentic being-towards-death' Heidegger calls it)

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mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve—published in 1953, the same year as his anti-conceptual essay "Les Tombeaux de Ravenne"—that he fully comes into his own as a poet of mortality, and that his poetry begins to take on more nuance as a spiritual practice. In the following section, I will offer a brief yet global examination of *Douve* from the lens of spiritual practice, continuing to explore the spiritual arc that began with *Anti-Platon.* For *Douve* represents (after *Anti-Platon*) the second clear way station of Bonnefoy's spiritual path, one that will ultimately find mature expression in *Pierre écrite.* My remarks in the following are not intended to offer an in-depth analysis of this lengthy and complex poem (*Douve*), but rather are preliminary remarks that interpret the collection in its entirety as mode of spiritual practice, and that lay the groundwork for the lengthier and more detailed analyses of *Pierre écrite* that follow in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

      The epigraph to *Douve*—a quotation from the preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—reveal the central role that death plays in this phase of Bonnefoy's spiritual path: "But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it" (P-43, Hegel *Phenomenolgy* p. 19 for the English translation).[44] The spiritual practice of *Douve* is primarily a practice of death, of allowing mortality to penetrate the poetic subject (the "I" of the collection). Bonnefoy couples this Hegelian optimism with the Heideggerian critique of conceptual language and with the strange intensity of Surrealist imagery to arrive at an entirely new kind of poetry. Although transcendence of all types—whether transcendence via the Platonic Idea qua concept or what Bonnefoy views of the more nihilistic transcendence of the Surrealists—is rejected, that desire, that "démon secret jamais enseveli" (P-110), as Bonnefoy names it in *Douve*, continues to be present, and it is this desire that gives birth to the necessity of *Douve*, of a poetry devoted wholeheartedly to death, to bringing conciousness out of the realm of the transcendent and back to the world below. *Douve* as a collection can be considered a sustained meditation on death, on our own inherent mortality.

      Unlike the earlier Surrealist work of *Anti-Platon*, the focus here is no longer on the intense specificity of the object, of *this object*, but rather on the central poetic figure

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is a temporal, more specifically, causal, and, more specifically still, psychological, antecedent of authentic living" (102). The motif of death works in similar ways in Bonnefoy's work. The critic Michael Bishop, for example, writes the following in his book *The Contemporary Poetry of France*, employing some distinctly Heideggerian terminology: "[Death] is the one phenomenon that, for Bonnefoy, flings us back towards our existence, our leaking yet potentially full being-in-the-world. It provides the very point of anchorage, that totally irreversible attachment to the earth that, viewed falsely, inauthentically, evasively, death itself ironically has so often deprived us of. In short, it is the 'bottom line', the very fundament, of our life" (121-122).

[44] Hegel goes on to note that Spirit wins its truth only when it finds itself "in utter dismemberment," and refers to the arduous process as a lengthy "tarrying with the negative" (ibid).

of Douve, and our relationship to it/her.[45] But who or what is Douve? On the level of grammar and semantics, "Douve" is a feminine noun in French that denotes a moat. The feminine aspect is important, as Bonnefoy evokes traditions of mystical love poetry in this collection, but with a twist. Here, Douve is not some heavenly Beloved, but rather the earth itself, an elusive lover that the poetic subject simultaneously creates and attempts to grab hold of and conquer (and, at one moment, even rape[46]). Douve is a figuration of presence—of plenitude—and also of death, of death considered as the horizon of our existence, as a vital and necessary force within life, a force needed to combat the lure of transcendence, including what Bonnefoy views as the naïve form of Surrealist transcendence. Bonnefoy retains the violent imagery of Surrealism in *Douve*, yet transforms it, inaugurating his own unique poetics.

As a poetic figure, Douve represents the infra-conceptual, a realm that seems to exist beneath or beyond the concept. Against the *immobility* of the concept, an immobility that is necessarily present anytime that language is evoked (we hear "Douve," and a moat is signified), Douve responds with perpetual *movement*, with impermanence, as we see from the collection's very first poem: "Je te voyais courir sur des terrasses, / Je te voyais lutter contre le vent, / Le froid saignait sur tes lèvres. // Et je t'ai vue te rompre et jouir d'être morte, ô plus belle / Que la foudre, quand elle tache les vitres blanches de ton sang" (P-45). From the outset, Douve is associated with movement ("courir"), violence ("lutter"), death ("sang," "morte"), and rupture ("te rompre"). Douve is a Phoenix of sorts, perpetually dying, and perpetually being reborn from her own ashes. This becomes even more explicit at the end of the collection's fourth poem: "Village de braise, à chaque instant je te vois naître, Douve, // A chaque instant mourir" (P-48).[47] Douve is a figuration of the potency of the present moment, its

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[45] In the view of Mary Ann Caws, the opening section of *Douve* "enlarges upon" the poetry of *Anti-Platon* (5). While this is true with regard to the anti-transcendent thrust of *Douve* as a whole, there are still very significant differences between the two collections, and a fundamentally different attitude toward language and reality.

[46] Notably in the poem entitled "Vrai corps" (from the section "Derniers gestes," or "Last Rites"), which begins with the following: "Close la bouche et lavé le visage, / Purifié le corps, enseveli / Ce destin éclairant dans la terre du verbe, / Et le mariage le plus bas s'est accompli" (P-77). The poem ends with a violent union, and with the poetic subject speaking through the conquered figure of Douve: "Douve, je parle en toi ; et je t'enserre / Dans l'acte de connaître et de nommer" (ibid.). Concerning the notion of the Beloved in *Douve*, Mathieu Dubois (in his monograph on *Douve*) links the more transcendent aspects of the figure of Douve with the notion of Agapè, noting that "le danger avec l'*Agapè* est la tentation de se replier sur une idéalité loin de l'expérience empirique de la vie, don't le corps est le lieu intime" (111). Dubois thus links the more corporeal aspects of Douve with Eros—in his reading, both Agapè and Eros serve to correct and modulate the other (109-112).

[47] Five poems later, in the collection's ninth poem (all nineteen poems in the first section of *Douve* are given roman numerals but no titles), "Phénix" is evoked explicitly by the figure of Douve herself (P-53).

inherently impermanent nature. This extended love poem to Douve is thus a love poem to impermanence itself, a call not only to accept our inherent mortality but also to embrace it and love it. This embrace of death is the core spiritual practice of *Douve*, and one that is common to spiritual practices of all ilk, and especially those of Buddhism. One of the common metaphors for enlightenment (in Buddhism and Hinduism) or for union with God (in Christian mystic traditions and in Sufism) is *dying before you die*. The death of the "ego," i.e., the death of the illusion of a separate self, is what allows one to be free from suffering, and to merge with something that transcends the individual.[48] The poetic subject's repeated union with Douve represents an embrace of impermanence, and a refusal to be drawn into the transcendent realm of immobility, of unchanging or eternal forms, concepts, or Ideas.

In Buddhism, impermanence—*anicca* in the Pali language—is the first of the "three marks of existence," the other two being "suffering" (*dukkha,* also translated as "dissatisfaction") and "no-self" or "no-separate-self" (*anatta*). The Buddha mentions this first characteristic of existence in verse 277 of the *Dhammapada*: "All created things are transitory [impermanent]; those who realize this are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to pure wisdom" (205). Thus, virtually all Buddhist meditation is intended to lead, among other things, to insight concerning the impermanence of all existence—impermanence being one of the primary gateways to the deeper truths of enlightenment.[49] This is particularly true of modern Burmese vipassana (popularized outside of Burma and India by S.N. Goenka), a school I practiced in for several years. The core practice in this school involves scanning your awareness systematically throughout your body, from head to foot and then from foot to head. As your power of awareness increases, you are able to detect sensations on increasingly subtle levels (beyond or "beneath" the domain of gross sensations such as heat, pain, etc.) and within the body as well (e.g., you can pass your awareness through your spinal column, etc.). At one key stage of this practice (the fifth among the "standard" sixteen stages of insight knowledge in Theravada Buddhism), known as *bhanga nana* or "knowledge of dissolution" (translated more precisely by the prominent Buddhist monk Achan Sobin S. Namto as "knowledge of the dissolution (ceasing) of formations"[50]), you are able to perceive the entire physical structure of the body (including the interior) at the same time, and the body is seen to be composed of highly vibrating particles. This is where Buddhism and particle physics meet, for the illusion of solid matter disappears during the experience of *bhanga nana*, and the entire physical structure of the body is seen to

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[48] This is what allows for true compassion to enter, for one no longer sees the other as other, but rather as a part of one's own self. If the path is followed to completion, the self will eventually be perceived as the totality of being, so that nothing and no one is viewed as being separate from oneself.

[49] Some of these meditation techniques involve direct reflection on death: for example, meditating overnight in charnel grounds was once a common practice in various schools of Buddhism, and many schools still practice various direct meditations on and visualizations of the death of the individual self.

[50] Namto, *Insight Meditation*, 98, 114. For more on this stage, see also Ingram, 211-220.

be an assembly of particles that are constantly arising and passing away. As a collection and a spiritual practice, *Douve* parallels this key moment on the path of vipassana (and many other insight practices), for Douve's own "body" is never allowed to congeal, can never be held onto. As Bonnefoy writes at the beginning of the second and untitled poem of the "Derniers gestes" ("Last Rites") section: "Que saisir sinon qui s'échappe, / Que voir sinon qui s'obscurcit, / Que désirer sinon qui meurt, / Sinon qui parle et se déchire?" (P-66). Interestingly, "knowledge of dissolution" is the gateway into what is now commonly referred to as the "Dark Night" period of meditation—a fact that will become significant when we analyze Bonnefoy's subsequent collection, *Hier régnant désert*, later in this chapter.

Yet it is not only through overt poetic associations with death and impermanence that Douve becomes a figuration of mortality, but also through a poetic process that is only possible via the workings of the "long poem." Across the 70 pages of poetry that comprise *Douve*, Bonnefoy creates images time and again only to reshape them on the following page, only to destroy them and create new ones in their place. Douve, as we have noted, is repeatedly reborn, each time with new connotations, with unexpected associations, until the signified (the *signifié* in the Saussurian sense of the word) is entirely destabilized through a lengthy *intra*textual poetic process wherein each poem enters into a complex relationship with every other poem in the collection, and each is understood in relation to the whole. This jarring of the signified-signifier relationship implies a critique of transcendence, for by subverting the idealizing (that is, conceptualizing) power of language, the lengthy path of poetry brings the poetic subject (and the reader) back to a more immediate relationship with the world. This intratextual process of designification and deconceptualization is part and parcel of Bonnefoy's poetry, and forms a key aspect of what he frequently calls *poetic presence*: "Dans l'espérance de la présence, on ne 'signifie' pas," we read in one of Bonnefoy's critical essays, "on laisse une lumière se désenchevêtrer des significations qui l'occultent" (I-251). This is the infra-conceptual aspect of presence, of the "goal" of Bonnefoy's poetry as spiritual path. Bonnefoy refuses to abandon poetry, as Rimbaud once famously did, for there is a "light" hidden beneath the significations of language, and his poetry seeks to reveal that light to us. *Douve* is thus a love poem not only to "death" in the more generalized anti-transcendental sense of the word, but also a love poem to the process of designification itself. Just as the self, in meditation, slowly unravels itself to reveal the true nature of existence (oneness, interconnectedness), language here works to undo its own significations, revealing a certain "light"—a sense of the sacred, of what Heidegger calls Being—beneath. Through an intentionally limited diction that eschews almost all terms and imagery related to modern society, Bonnefoy, over the course of this collection, repeatedly gives certain key terms—"stone," "night," "water," "tree," etc.—new and unexpected associations, so that the "ordinary" *signifié* is jarred and destabilized.[51] This is most evident with the figure of Douve herself, who

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[51] The very meticulous lexical analysis of Jérôme Thélot in his book *Poétique d'Yves Bonnefoy* includes lists of the most common nouns used in all of Bonnefoy's first four

remains nebulous throughout the collection, and is never allowed to solidify into any one image for longer than the space of a poem—although the Beloved has a signifier, "Douve," it does not have a clear signified (*signifié*). Douve appears as a human or a beast running across the terraces at the outset of the collection ("Je te voyais courir sur des terrasses," P-45); yet just a few poems later her body cracks into the earth and she appears to be closer to the common meaning of Douve as "moat" ("le versant souterrain du visage," P-52); this earthly aspect of Douve continues near the end of the first section, where Douve's entire body seems to be that of the natural world ("Le ravin pénètre dans la bouch maintenant, / Les cinq doigts se dispersent en hasards de forêts maintenant..." P-61); and later on in the next section, Douve appears transformed as a deer ("cerf," P-71), a bird ("l'oiseau," P-75), and a stone ("Cette pierre ouverte, est-ce toi" P-76). This intratextual designifying poetological technique, inaugurated in *Douve*, will remain one of the hallmarks of Bonnefoy's poetry.[52] This lengthy poetic process is an integral part of Bonnefoy's spiritual path. A certain "tarrying with the negative," as Hegel calls it, is needed for maturation, for an at-least temporary release from the lure of the concept.

Yet Bonnefoy's optimistic Hegelianism, his faith in the powers of evoking death within language, is problematic if it is taken as an end in and of itself, i.e., as the endpoint of the spiritual path. Along these lines, in his book *L'Entretien infini*, Maurice Blanchot offers a gentle critique of Bonnefoy's idealization of death (49):

> Je ne trahirai pas l'auteur de *L'improbable* [= Bonnefoy] en situant plus exactement en ce point son défi. Car cette mort, par une étonnante vocation, l'esprit et le langage ont réussi à faire d'elle un pouvoir, mais à quel prix? En l'idéalisant. [...] Et comment ne serions-nous pas amenés à prétendre qu'en cette dénaturation idéalisante, c'est l'obscurité même et la noire réalité de l'évènement indescriptible qui s'est perdue, détournée par nous, grâce à un étonnant subterfuge, en moyen de vivre et moyen de penser? Nous nous retrouvons donc devant ce qu'il faut appeler "le grand refus."

Although Blanchot focuses his critique on Bonnefoy's poetological and philosophical essays and not on his poetry per se, this same excessive optimism, this overly vast confidence in power of the word, can be seen throughout *Douve*. The thirteenth poem of the collection's first section, for example, begins with the following stanza: "Ton visage ce soir éclairé par la terre, / Mais je vois tes yeux se corrompre / Et le mot visage n'a plus de sens" (P-57). In an appeal to the mortality inherent in life here below, it is the earth and not the sun that lights up Douve's face. And it seems as if the image, or rather the negation of the image—those eyes that are corrupted—is so strong that it

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major collections of poetry (from *Douve* to *Dans le leurre du seuil*), as well as an aggregate list covering all four collections (141-144).

[52] This continues to be the case, all the way to Bonnefoy's more recent collections—in his later poetry, starting with the 1975 collection *Dans le leurre du seuil*, the figure of the *child* is frequently used to point toward the potential state of "innocence" from concepts.

could actually detach the word from its own conceptual charge ("Et le mot visage n'a plus de sens"). The poet's confidence in his own poetic powers, and in his own powers of insight and observation, are vast here (it is noteworthy that it is only Douve's eyes—and not those of the poetic subject, whose sight remains clear—that dissolve here: "Mais *je* vois tes yeux se corrompre"). Similar examples can be found throughout the collection,[53] and at one point the poet even gives voice to the dream of a material language, a "Parole jetée matérielle / Sur l'origine et la nuit" (P-66), in what seems to be the utter opposite of the linguistic lucidity of Mallarmé, for example, who saw language as infinitely—and gloriously—absent. This optimism is even present in the structure of the collection itself, which is composed of five sections, an odd number that allows for the possibility of resolution on the formal level (along the lines of classical Greek drama—it is no coincidence that the poem's first section is entitled "Théâtre"), and for a dialectical Hegelian reading of the collection along the lines of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

Bonnefoy gives free rein to his poetic dreams in this collection, letting them run wild. This leads to a certain spiritual impasse. The examples cited above, though few in number, are representative of the attitude or orientation of the collection as a whole. Yet Bonnefoy himself at times seems uncertain of his own ontological optimism, and a certain ambiguity begins to be revealed—a vacillating between this idealizing optimism (which is reminiscent of *Anti-Platon*) on the one hand and a more lucid linguistic stance on the other. Nowhere is this more evident than in the collection's final untitled poem, which I here cite in its entirety (P-113):

>Le jour franchit le soir, il gagnera
>Sur la nuit quotidienne.
>O notre force et notre gloire, pourrez-vous
>Trouer la muraille des morts ?[54]

This poem, the culmination of *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve*, is conspicuous for its ontological and poetological optimism, and forms a stark contrast to the final poems of Bonnefoy's two subsequent collections, as we shall see. Whereas the collection began with a cold and windy storm ("le vent," "le froid," and "la foudre": P-45), here we have a clear and serene scene of daybreak, of the overcoming of night, of "la nuit quotidienne"—of that everyday darkness that is the domain of so-called normal instrumental language. *Douve* thus literally ends with a moment of enlightenment, of light breaking through the darkness. And it is not merely a personal subjective enlightenment, but rather a universal one reminiscent of Hegel's universal path of Spirit, which operates on a very grand scale (that of humanity, for Hegel, or at least

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[53] For example, in the refrain "Que le verbe s'éteigne" of poem III of the section "Douve parle" (P-85).

[54] Galway Kinnell and Richard Pevear's excellent translation of this poem reads as follows: "Day breaks over evening, it shall sweep beyond / The daily night. / O our strength and our glory, will you be able / To pierce the rampart of the dead?" (Bonnefoy, *Early Poems*, 167).

that of Western civilization[55]): the use of the first-person plural here ("notre force et notre gloire"), as opposed to the singulars used at the outset of *Douve* (only singular personal pronouns—mostly *je* and *tu*—are used in the collection's first 18 poems[56]), suggests at least the possibility of a collective salvation through the powers of the poem. This possibility of liberation is evident in the meter of the poem as well—10 syllables, then six, then twelve, then eight—wherein we can see an attempt at liberating the poem from pure form, from that lifelessness that Bonnefoy believes characterizes Paul Valéry's poetry, as we have already discussed. This poem's rhythm, or rather anti-rhythm, thus evokes the victory of *movement*—of (idealized) life-affirming death—over the stagnancy of *immobility* (pure form, naive transcendence through the Platonic Idea or the concept). Bonnefoy's idealistic portrayal of death is at its apex here.[57]

And yet even here there seems to be some doubt. The immediacy of the present-tense verb "franchit" quickly gives way to the future tense with "gagnera." While the evocation of the future is an expression of hope here—light *will* win out over darkness, the poetic subject forcefully declares—one wonders if this is not an attempt on the part of the poetic subject to convince itself of this hope, of the powers of its own poetic language. The poetic voice, in other words, does not seem quite sure here. Has the poetic subject's faith in the powers of such language become too vast? Has the potency of Douve, that figuration of mortality and death, been overly idealized? Fittingly, the collection ends with a question, one that betrays the doubts that are breaking through the poetic consciousness. Five years later, these doubts will be burst onto the page in *Hier régnant désert*, a collection that more fully acknowledges the inherent absence of language, and that seeks to transcend the naïve idealization of death that characterizes the poetry of *Douve*.

4. Dark Nights of the Soul: On *Hier régnant désert*

As I noted in the preceding section, the canonical maps of the stages of insight in Theravada Buddhism state that the stage of "dissolution" marks the entryway into

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[55] See Ricardo Duchesne's essay "Hegel and the Western Spirit" for an insightful sociological discussion of Hegel's predominantly Western orientation, even beyond Hegel's emphasis on "the rationalizing activities of formal and theoretical reason" (63).

[56] The collection's first section, "Théâtre," comprises nineteen poems in total, and it is in the last of these poems that the first-personal plural enters and the poetic subject finds a more grammatical union with his Beloved (albeit a temporary one): "Au premier jour de froid *notre* tête s'évade" we read in that poem's first verse (P-63, my emphasis).

[57] I am not suggesting that dreams of transcendence or idealizations are not present in the later poetry of Bonnefoy. Quite the contrary. But we shall see that those dreams are accompanied by greater—or at least more obvious—lucidity in the later poetry. In *Hier régnant désert*, the impasse of such idealism is consciously evoked. And in *Pierre écrite*, the decisive turning point in Bonnefoy's spiritual-poetic practice, the dream of transcendence is evoked with the ultimate goal of critiquing and negating that dream. This type of self-reflective critique is by no means obvious in the poetry of *Douve*.

what modern commentators now typically call "the Dark Night of the Soul." The latter expression is in reference to a famous spiritual work by the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic poet Saint John of the Cross, who was a founder of the Discalced Carmelite order.[58] My contention in this final section of the present chapter is that while *Douve* represented Bonnefoy's more optimistic phase, i.e., the "heady" early period of his poetic-spiritual path that seems to find a remarkable vigor in embracing the impermanence of all things,[59] his subsequent collection, the 1958 work *Hier régnant désert*, represents his own Dark Night of the Soul, a certain somber period of the spiritual journey that needs to be crossed in order for a deeper poetic and spiritual maturation to set in. Where *Douve* is characterized by a sense of vigor, movement, and plenitude, *Hier régnant désert* is distinguished by a sense of lethargy, stagnancy, and

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[58] In Buddhism, this phase has traditionally been referred to as "the Pit of the Void" or, as the prominent Western Buddhist teacher Shinzen Young somewhat casually notes, "the unpleasant side of *bhanga*" (dissolution)" (98). In the canonical sixteen-stage map of the stages of insight, "the Pit" comprises stages five through ten. Daniel M. Ingram provides the following simplified names for these stages: Dissolution, Fear, Misery, Disgust, Desire for Deliverance, and Re-Observation (211-223). Achan Namto provides the following names (which are both more technical and more precise than Ingram's): Knowledge of the Dissolution (Ceasing) of Formations; Knowledge of the Fearful Nature of Mental and Physical States; Knowledge of Mental and Physical States as Unsatisfactory; Knowledge of Disenchantment; Knowledge of the Desire to Abandon the Worldly State; and Knowledge Which Investigates the Path to Deliverance and Instills a Decision to Practice Further, to Completion (Namto 98). The Pit has been crossed once the eleventh stage ("Equanimity" or "Knowledge Which Regards Mental and Physical States with Dispassion") has been reached.

[59] This headiness and optimism is, indeed, quite characteristic of the meditative path up until the so-called Dark Night. The fourth stage on the canonical Theravada map of insight, known as "the Arising and Passing Away," is the one immediately preceding the entry into the Dark Night, and it is characterized by strong bliss, and a (misleading) sense that one has found the Truth, so to speak. As Daniel Ingram notes, "the rapture and intensity of this stage can be basically off the scale, the absolute peak of the path of insight, but it doesn't last" (211). Here, people frequently believe they are enlightened, leading to the names "tentative awakening" and "pseudo-nirvana" (Kornfield 147), and according to Ingram many people who have had "born again" experiences have just passed through this stage. I can personally attest to the truth of this, as I once, on my second ten-day Burmese vipassana retreat, spent approximately 24 hours in a state of uninterrupted bliss and rapture, believing I had achieved enlightenment. My experience quickly and very drastically darkened, however, and my remaining days on the cushion in that retreat were colored primarily by physical pain and a deeper sense of (non-specific) anguish and despair than I had ever experienced. These feelings stayed with me, though in a less intense form, for eight months afterward, until I realized I needed to return for another retreat so as to move through the Dark Night.

emptiness: an experience of fullness has given way to one of emptiness in this later work.

But what exactly *is* a "Dark Night of the Soul"? What are its characteristics? Before examining *Hier régnant désert*, a very brief discussion of this remarkably unpleasant—and frequently ignored—phase of spiritual life is needed.[60] First, there are many names for this stage of the spiritual path, names that vary according to the tradition and the author at hand. In Buddhism, as I've already mentioned in a footnote, it is generally referred to as "the Pit of the Void," or alternately as "the Knowledges of Suffering" (*dukkha nana*), and it immediately follows the "Arising and Passing Away" stage, which is characterized by plenitude and bliss. Within the Christian tradition, the seventeenth-century Benedictine monk and mystic Augustine Baker refers to it as "the great desolation"; similarly to Buddhist writers, Baker notes that this desolation generally follows an experience of union with God marked by great ecstasies, for "an extraordinary consolation is usually attended by succeeding anguish and desertion" (314).[61] The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, promulgated in 1992 by Pope John Paul II, refers to the phenomenon of spiritual "dryness": "Dryness belongs to contemplative prayer when the heart is separated from God, with no taste for thoughts, memories, and feelings, even spiritual ones. This is the moment of sheer faith clinging faithfully to Jesus in his agony and in his tomb" (*Catechism*, para. 2731). Here, the Catholic Church is taking up a term that featured prominently in Saint John of the Cross's writings on the subject, for Saint John makes repeated reference to "drynesses" or "aridities" in his descriptions of the Dark Night, noting in particular that one of the night's key functions is to purify the soul of imperfections or impurities—and it should be noted that Saint

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[60] There is a tendency, particularly in the West, to paint the spiritual path as a progression into ever-deeper states of bliss. This distorted view could not be further from the truth, and the inquisitive modern-day seeker will be hard-pressed to find references to the Dark Night in the vast majority of spiritual books on the market. There are some notable exceptions, many of them quite recent: the prominent meditation teacher Jack Kornfield's comprehensive 1993 book *A Path with Heart* (148-152), the Catholic monk turned psychologist Thomas Moore's 2004 book *Dark Nights of the Soul*, as well as the aforementioned books by Daniel M. Ingram (211-233) and Culadasa (Appendix F, 409-413).

[61] More specifically, this desolation follows what he refers to as an "intellectual passive union" with God, which he asserts is "the second and more perfect sort of passive union" (311). His major work, the 1657 *Sancta Sophia*, or *Holy Wisdom*, is remarkable for its minute categorizations of the various types of union with God. The notion of passivity is also key to Saint John of the Cross's own account of the Dark Night, which he also refers to as the Passive Night because, in this crucial phase of the spiritual journey, it is God who does the purification. Baker was very familiar with Saint John's writings, and makes numerous references to them in *Holy Wisdom* (e.g., pp. 43, 57, and 61). Such passivity is also evident throughout *Hier régnant désert*, and is in marked contrast to the vigorously active poetry of *Douve*.

John was said to have spent some 45 years in his own Night.[62] This metaphor of dryness, of course, already finds resonance in the title of Bonnefoy's collection, "Hier régnant *désert*" (my emphasis), perhaps best translated into English as "Yesterday's Desert Dominion."[63]

These are just a few of the numerous authors from virtually all major spiritual traditions that make reference to such a state. The descriptions of this phase of the journey vary according to the author at hand, and in particular according to the tradition and pre-existing conceptual framework of that author—a Buddhist writer is more likely to describe it as an initial yet incomplete perception of emptiness or the void, whereas a Christian or Sufi author will more frequently make reference to losing one's connection with God. All the same, certain general characteristics are evident that transcend doctrinal differences. The most obvious of these is on the emotional level: the experience of a dark night is characterized by immense suffering and despair, and frequently by a wavering of faith, whether in God or in one's specific meditation practices.[64] As Culadasa notes, the Dark Night is often accompanied by "feelings of

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[62] We see one such reference, for example, at the outset of Book I Chapter IX of *Dark Night of the Soul* (translated as "aridities" by E. Allison Peers (57), and as "drynesses" by Gabriela Cunninghame Graham (69)). It should be noted that there are, in fact, two phases or parts to the Dark Night of the Soul in Saint John's description, namely, what he refers to as "the passive night of the senses" and "the passive night of the spirit." It is also important to note that it is somewhat misleading to refer to the *Dark Night of the Soul* as a stand-alone work: although it has been frequently published as a separate book, it is actually the second half of a single work, which begins with the *Ascent of Mount Carmel.* Both books are, ostensibly, spiritual expositions of a single poem that Saint John wrote.

[63] The critic John T. Naughton suggests this translation in his 1984 monograph on Bonnefoy (82). Anthony Rudolf loses the semantic field of dryness in his translation of the title, "Yesterday's Wilderness Kingdom" (in the book of the same title), and the same is true of Kinnell and Pevear's translation, "Yesterday's Empty Kingdom" (from Bonnefoy, *Early Poems*), though the latter at least captures the sense of emptiness inherent in the French word *désert*. The metaphor of dryness is also present in various Buddhist traditions. Culadasa, for example, notes that the now-popular Burmese vipassana lineage of Sayaghi U Ba Khin (who was succeeded by S.N. Goenka) as well as other lineages are referred to as "dry Insight" (*sukkha-vipassana*) practices "because they lack the lubricating 'moisture' of *samatha*: the joy, tranquility, and equanimity that make it so much easier to confront the disturbing and fearful experiences of Insight into impermanence, emptiness, and suffering. The mind of a meditator who cultivates *samatha* before achieving Insight is suffused with these qualities, and is much less likely to experience a long and stressful 'dark night of the soul'" (429).

[64] Jack Kornfield notes that this has been referred to as the "rolling-up-the-mat stage" due to the fact that it is often here that meditators give up their practice (150). Daniel Ingram makes this point as well, and strongly urges meditators to continue their practice at this stage, noting that if they give up here, "the qualities of the Dark Night

despair, meaninglessness, non-specific anxiety, frustration, and anger" (409). Here, the sense of fullness and plenitude that characterized earlier stages on the spiritual path gives way to a pervading sense of emptiness and meaninglessness. The world frequently takes on an unreal quality, but in a mournful rather than liberating manner. The stage is often experienced as a spiritual trial or test, one that must be passed through in order for deeper awakenings into truth (or God, Reality, presence, etc.) to set in.

This notion of a trial or ordeal is central to *Hier régnant désert*, and indeed Bonnefoy's original title for the collection was *L'Ordalie* ("Trial by Ordeal"), as the critic John T. Naughton notes (82).[65] Five years have now passed since the publication of *Douve*, and the tone of this new poetry is utterly at odds with that of his earlier work. Indeed, *Hier* is by far the darkest and most stagnant of all of Bonnefoy's work to the present day—it represents a sustained period of "dark contemplation," to use one of Saint John's formulations (*Dark Night* 1976, p. 95). "[C]e furent les moments pessimistes de ma pensée incertaine, que je pourrais retrouver dans *Hier régnant désert*, par exemple, mon second livre," Bonnefoy would later note in an interview with Bernard Falciola (E-35). In contrast to the *movement* that seems to have the upper hand in *Douve*, it is now *immobility* that dominates the scene, and with it a strong note of melancholy. The violence of the images of *Douve* as well as that of Bonnefoy's earlier Surrealist poetry fade in this collection, giving way to increasingly self-conscious and self-reflective voices, and with them ever-stronger doubts about the efficacy of poetry. The immediacy and presence of the poetic figure of Douve are called into question here: Douve's presence becomes the emptiness and absence (*désert*) of the new collection's title, and the potency of that poetic dream fades into yesterday's dominion. Here, Bonnefoy seems to be more deeply realizing that "la parole ne peut rien retenir de ce qui est l'immédiat," and that the poem can apparently be no more than "un cadre où la présence s'efface" (I-117). This new attitude is clear from the collection's epigraph, a line from Hölderlin's *Hyperion* that announces what Bonnefoy views as "la dialectique terrible de la création esthétique" (AP-126[66]): "Tu veux un monde, dit Diotima. C'est

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will almost certainly continue to haunt them in their daily life, sapping their energy and motivation" (220). I entered the Dark Night stage on a retreat without knowing what it was, and unfortunately my teacher on that retreat was quite unhelpful, downplaying the significance of my now-suddenly-quite-traumatic meditation sessions. Not understanding what had happened, I mostly stopped meditating, and thus stayed in the Dark Night for over seven months—a period I can honestly say was the least pleasant of my entire life. It was at that point that I happened upon Daniel Ingram's book, and followed his advice to get back to a retreat as soon as possible, whereupon I fairly quickly moved through the remainder of the Night, and into a deeper level of connection and equanimity than any I had known before the Night.

[65] See especially endnote 1 of that page, where Naughton remarks on the significant and problematic changes that Bonnefoy made to this collection. Naughton also observes that this collection "reflects the greatest suffering of [Bonnefoy's] major works" (82).

[66] The abbreviation AP- refers to Bonnefoy's work *L'Arrière-pays*.

pourquoi tu as tout, et tu n'as rien" (P-115). The emphasis now is on nothingness ("rien") rather than plenitude ("tout"), on absence rather than presence. The idealism of *Douve* is thus relegated to the past: "la nouvelle épigraphe [that of *Hier*], dénonciation presque de la première [that of *Douve*], m'apostrophait" (AP-120), Bonnefoy would later write in his oneiric book of contemplative prose entitled *L'Arrière-pays*, in which he takes a look back at his earlier writings.

Like *Douve*, the new collection addresses itself to a poetic figure, but one very far removed from the plenitude and immediacy of Douve—the Hegelian path of progress towards the Absolute is cut off now, a thing of the past. Douve is no longer tenable as a poetic path—she too has given way to a deeper kind of dissolution. This is evident from the very beginning of the new collection. I am here citing the second poem (II) from the first section of *Hier* (first stanza, P-118):

> Vois, déjà tous chemins que tu suivais se ferment,
> Il ne t'est plus donné même ce répit
> D'aller même perdu. Terre qui se dérobe
> est le bruit de tes pas qui ne progressent plus.

The ways forward have closed here, and the progressive path of *Douve* now gives way to immobility and stagnancy, a motif that will dominate *Hier*. This stagnancy is even present on the level of diction, where we see the close repetition of "même" in two consecutive verses, a surprising move for a poet as precise and as meticulous as Bonnefoy, and one that reveals the level of spiritual-poetic languor that has set in, and the sense of endless repetition that now characterizes the journey. A few pages later, the new poetic figure is named "the bird," yet the motif of a triumphant Phoenix-like rebirth is rejected utterly (P-123):

> L'oiseau qui s'est dépris d'être Phénix
> Demeure seul dans l'arbre pour mourir.
> Il s'est enveloppé de la nuit de blessure,
> Il ne sent pas l'épée qui pénètre son cœur.

As he does so often in this collection, Bonnefoy returns to a motif from *Douve* (in this instance, the motif of the Phoenix) to recast it. The bird, that new poetic incarnation of Douve, has wearied of being Phoenix. The choice of verbs is telling here, for the very literary use "se déprendre de" can mean either "to give up on" or "to fall out of love with."[67] Indeed, even the violence and active suffering of *Douve* has given way to a different kind of suffering here—no longer the productive suffering of an active purification of spirit, but rather dullness, apathy, a lack of almost any feeling at all ("Il ne sent pas l'épée..."). The fullness of Douve, the vital intense presence of that mystic encounter with the world, is absent here, and doubt is cast on the possibility of language ever being a true house of Being. Death too ("mourir") is recast here as a certain lifelessness, and is no longer the vital force that it was in *Douve*.[68]

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[67] Kinnell and Pevear translate this as "given up" (*Early Poems* 185), whereas Anthony Rudolf has rendered it as "freed itself from" (*Yesterday's* 21).

[68] In her book *Yves Bonnefoy: le simple et le sens*, the critic Michèle Finck notes that "la mort n'est plus, dans *Hier régnant désert*, que la contrefaçon de ce qu'elle était dans

The leitmotif of immobility and stagnancy becomes even more prominent in the collection's final section, in spite of the inherent movement in that section's title, "A une terre d'aube" ("To a Land of Dawn" or "In a Land of Dawn"). This land of dawn is a strangely immobile reflection of the "Vrai Lieu" of *Douve* (the earlier collection's own final section); in it we find the poem "Le pays découvert," for example, with its image of an almost perfect immobility, which is further emphasized by the lack of active verbs (P-170): "L'étoile sur le seuil. Le vent, tenu / Dans des mains immobiles." And in the subsequent poem, "Delphes du second jour," which contains a direct reference to the "Vrai lieu" of *Douve*, even the past participles fall away for a span in the poem's second stanza (P-171): "Le pas dans son vrai lieu. L'inquiète voix / Heureuse sous les roches du silence, / Et l'infini, l'indéfini répons / Des sonnailles, rivage ou mort." The titles of some of these poems, too, reveal an absence of movement, a certain poetic and spiritual stagnancy: "Ici, toujours ici" (P-172), and "La même voix, toujours" (P-174).

Yet time, death (in its more potent aspect that we saw in *Douve*), and presence do enter the collection here, and immobility is not always utterly triumphant. It is in the figure of the bird, the poetic subject's new Beloved, that we see the transcendent linked most clearly with the immanent. At one key moment in an untitled poem near the end of the collection (P-168), the poetic voice asks it: "Es-tu végétale, tu / As de grands arbres la force / D'être ici astreinte, mais libre / Parmi les vents plus hauts." The tree is a clear and powerful symbol of spiritual experience that is at once transcendent and immanent: the tree stretches into the heavens while being rooted firmly in this mortal earth. The bird thus becomes a clear figuration of presence in the poem (and indeed in the entire collection).

Yet there is still a key difference to *Douve*, and this can most clearly be seen in the collection's very final poem, which is entitled "L'Oiseau des ruines" (P-175), here cited in its entirety:

> L'oiseau des ruines se dégage de la mort,
> Il nidifie dans la pierre grise au soleil,
> Il a franchi toute douleur, toute mémoire,
> Il ne sait plus ce qu'est demain dans l'éternel.[69]

First, there are several obvious semantic and structural similarities between this poem and the final one in *Douve*—so many, in fact, that the poet seems to be inviting us to directly compare the two. Both poems are comprised of exactly four lines; both

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Douve," adding that in *Hier*, "la mort est dépossédée de son pouvoir d'anéantissement dionysiaque" (83). The vital potency of death in *Douve*, its intense quality of negation (here referred to in Nietzschean terms as a Dionysian annihilation), is gone now.

[69] I here provide the two main English translations of the poem, the first of which (by Kinnell and Pevear) is, in my view, a much better rendering of the French (*Early Poems*, p. 289): "The bird of the ruins frees itself from death, / It nests in gray stone under the sun, / It has gone beyond all grief, all memory, / It knows of no tomorrow in the eternal." And here is the translation by Rudolf (*Yesterday*, p. 70): "The bird of the ruins separates from death, / Makes its nest in gray stone beneath the sun / And passing through all memory and sorrow / No longer knows what morrow is, only eternity."

explicitly evoke death, as well notions of light and daybreak; and both employ the verb "franchir," suggesting the possibility of a certain transcendence, of passing beyond. The bird here is indeed a figure of enlightenment. Like the Buddha himself (if one believes those scriptures), the bird of ruins has overcome suffering ("Il a franchi toute douleur"), and is now liberated from the anguish of death, in what appears to be quite a turn away from the poetry of *Douve*, with its repeated exhortations to embrace mortality. The bird is a figure of pure "presence" in the most temporal sense of the word, i.e., as an utterly present-oriented being, having seen through and overcome the illusion of both the past ("toute mémoire") and the future ("Il ne sait plus ce qu'est demain dans l'éternel."). I would interpret that last line of the poem as follows: Now that the bird is in the eternal present moment (the only true moment there is), it no longer knows what future is, and has been liberated from the anguish of time.

Yet in my reading of this poem, we can also, somewhat paradoxically, see the culmination of Bonnefoy's Dark Night, despite the fact that the poetic figure is making its nest under the sun ("au soleil"), in the land of dawn. There is a distance here that was not there in *Douve*. In stark contrast to the idealizing first-person plural that gave the impression of a proximity to—and indeed union with—the figure of Douve at the end of that earlier collection ("O notre force et notre gloire"), the use of the third-person plural here betrays the clear distance between "us" (which includes the poetic subject) and the bird of ruins, that bearer of presence, that enlightened figure. This distance is emphasized by the repetition of the pronoun "il" at the beginning of each of the final three lines, which creates a rhythmic monotony, a dullness that is in contrast to the vibrancy of *Douve*. Furthermore, even the form of this final quatrain-poem bears witness to the failure of the poetic path here, and to a certain spiritual desolation. In contrast to the syllabic irregularity that we saw at the very end of *Douve*, "L'Oiseau des ruines" is composed of four perfect alexandrines, which Bonnefoy views as the most classical, pure, and immobile form of French poetry.[70]

There is no resolution to this poem, just an immobile and ultimately lifeless ending. A figure of enlightenment is there, yet it is far removed from us, and from the poetic subject as well—it is a figure on the distant horizon. The end of this collection is not a moment of ambiguous hope, as we saw in *Douve*, but rather an apparent dead end. This impasse is reflected in the structure of the collection as a whole: Where *Douve* comprised five sections and hence allowed for resolution on the overall structural level, *Hier* has only four sections, and the satisfying resolution of the poetic drama—the fifth act—exists only in a mode of absence.[71] It is empty, void, for the bird cannot

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[70] As Susan Stewart notes in her book *The Poet's Freedom*, "Bonnefoy describes the French alexandrine with its symmetrical halves as particularly suited, as a closed system, to metaphysical and idealized worlds" (249).

[71] The German playwright Georg Büchner used a four-act structure to similar ends in his 1835 play *Dantons Tod* ("Danton's Death"), where the absence of the traditional fifth act is representative of the French Revolution's inability to move forward beyond itself. In that play, death is repeatedly linked to birth, but not as a regenerative motif of rebirth. Instead, as in *Hier*, a stagnancy prevails. I here cite only the very first example

communicate its song to us, cannot convey it in human language. There is no interaction between the poetic figure of presence and the poetic subject (i.e., the lyric "I" of the poem); there is merely distanced description here in this last poem. The bird of ruins casts a long shadow over the poetic subject. Day has broken for the bird, but the poet's own Dark Night of the Soul is not quite over.[72]

Yet even if there is a "failure" of sorts here, the tone of the end of *Hier régnant désert* is by no means one of utter despair. As Saint John of the Cross notes concerning the Dark Night, the spiritual dryness of this state—the "desert" of Bonnefoy's collection—is itself a sign that the process of "purgation" has begun (*Dark Night* 1976, p. 57), although it may not yet be finished. The Dark Night as a whole serves a function of purging the soul of imperfections or impurities, and as such it is—according to Saint John—a necessary stage of the spiritual journey, part of the via negativa towards God/reality/presence.[73] And indeed, managing to maintain one's faith through such darkness and emotional and spiritual turmoil can lead to even greater devotion to the spiritual path.[74] Thus, poetry also has value for Bonnefoy, even if it's merely "valeur en tant qu'échec même" (E-37), as he notes in a later interview.

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of this in the play, though there are many others: "How much longer must we be base and bloody as newborn children, with coffins for cradles? We must make some advance [*Wir müssen vorwärts*]," Danton states in the play's very first scene (Büchner *Complete Plays* p. 5 for the English; *Dantons Tod* p. 7 for the German).

[72] My reading of the end is thus at odds, to a certain extent, with that of John T. Naughton, who sees the collection as a movement "from loss to recovery, from night into day" (85). Rather, I see here something akin to Saint John of the Cross's description of the soul approaching God in the Dark Night of the Spirit (the second and more horrific part of the Dark night of the Soul): "But the question arises: Why is the Divine light (which, as we say, illumines and purges the soul from its ignorances) here called by the soul a dark night? To this the answer is that for two reasons this Divine wisdom is not only night and darkness for the soul, but is likewise affliction and torment. The first is because of the height of Divine Wisdom, which transcends the talents of the soul, and in this way is darkness to it; the second, because of its vileness and impurity, in which respect it is painful and afflictive to it, and is also dark" (*Dark Night* 1976, p. 94).

[73] As Saint John writes in *Dark Night*, "however greatly the soul itself labours, it cannot actively purify itself so as to be in the least degree prepared for the Divine union of perfection of love, if God takes not its hand and purges it not in that dark fire" (1976, p. 40). It should be noted that various spiritual traditions believe it is possible to bypass such Dark Nights altogether, or at the very least to greatly mitigate their effects through certain practices, for example, the intentional cultivation of love, joy, compassion, and other positive emotional states. These ancient practices, which I do not have the space to examine in any depth here, in many ways represent the spiritual world's own versions of positive psychology.

[74] Indeed, in 1959, one year after the publication of *Hier*, Bonnefoy published a short prose text entitled *Dévotion*, which reaffirms his commitment to the poetic-spiritual

Here, Bonnefoy's notion of poetic melancholy comes to the fore—the difficult yet not insurmountable realization that the "all" that the poem seems to offer is at one and the same time "nothing" whatsoever, to once again take up the opposition put forth in the epigraph to *Hier*. We do indeed find "un long chagrin de rive morte" in this collection (P-133), but there is also hope. For in the very existence of the poem, in its dark presence against the white page, we can see an implicit refusal of complete despair, a refusal to abandon the spiritual path of poetry. I here cite the end of Bonnefoy's well-known poetological essay "L'Acte et le lieu de la poésie," published, as I noted earlier, just one year after *Hier régnant désert* (I-133):

> [The poet's] désir est demeuré son désir, son élan vers la plénitude a maintenu dans l'honnêteté du cœur le sentiment de l'impossédable. J'appelle mélancolie cette union de la lucidité, de l'espoir. Et dans ce monde de la Justice, rien ne ressemble plus à la grâce – soit vérité, soit beauté – que cette ardente mélancolie. C'est là au moins le don qu'un vrai poète peut faire. Et dans sa pauvreté, donner demeure son bien.

We can here see the "grace" that the arduous Dark Night has made possible, that union of poetic-spiritual "lucidity" (which was lacking in his earlier collections, with their love of transcendental states and their idealizations of death) and "hope" (the lack of which is all too evident at certain moments in *Hier*, yet these moments must be passed through and acknowledged in order to ultimately be overcome). Just as Christ's passion, in most Christian traditions, allows for a greater and broader salvation, the suffering-filled collection of *Hier* allows for a deeper spiritual resolution in his subsequent work. After *Douve*, Bonnefoy finds himself "back on earth" in the embrace of "rough reality," to cite the words of Rimbaud at the end of his own *Season in Hell*.[75] But Bonnefoy will not take the route that Rimbaud famously took, he will not abandon poetry altogether—he will keep a certain faith in the powers of poetic language, in "cette parole profondément partageable" (E-23) that can reanimate "la parole commune" (E-22). For Bonnefoy, God is not dead, as Nietzsche proclaimed, but rather "still to be born" (E-46).[76]

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path that he has embarked upon (P-177-181). Significantly, he would later place this text in between the collections *Hier régnant désert* and *Pierre écrite* in the main Gallimard edition of his earlier poetry, *Poèmes*.

[75] These are my translations from the very last text in Rimbaud's collection *Une Saison en enfer*, where the poet famously relates the downfall of his dreams of an almost supernatural poetic language: "Eh bien! je dois enterrer mon imagination et mes souvenirs! Une belle gloire d'artiste et de conteur emportée! / Moi! moi qui me suis dit mage ou ange, dispensé de toute morale, je suis rendu au sol, avec un devoir à chercher, et la réalité rugueuse à étreindre! Paysan!" (*Poésies* 151-152).

[76] "Dieu est à naître," in the original French. Perhaps somewhat unfairly to Nietzsche, Bonnefoy dismisses this famous assertion as "une parole naïve" (E-45) in an interview. But he does not comment on the fact that the German philosopher-poet, similarly to Bonnefoy, finds a way out of this modern impasse of a dead God in the dancing and laughing life of the Übermensch announced by Zarathustra.

If Bonnefoy's vision of a poetic presence that allows for the birth of God is contradictory, this does not seem to bother him. For it is precisely on this dialectical threshold between the possible and the impossible that Bonnefoy will write his greatest poetry: "On est toujours engagé dans ce qui est par essence contradictoire, et qu'il faut bien appeler, d'un mot aujourd'hui suspect, notre dimension religieuse" (E-41). Bonnefoy refuses to abandon the spiritual path, and will remain a poet. This via negativa path of his poetry will, despite the difficulties, continue to follow a Heideggerian route in attempting to put an end to the "degradations" (E-20) of language in order to "rebâtir une économie de l'être-au-monde" (E-21).[77] So as not to fall into the supposed nihilism of a Nietzsche or a Mallarmé, or the despair of a Schopenhauer, it necessarily postulates that a return to the One (or God, or Source) is possible, albeit improbable.

We thus arrive, after very turbulent poetic and spiritual beginnings, at *Pierre écrite*, the collection that will establish the new and enduring *ars poetica* of Bonnefoy, an art that he continues to practice. He has left the facile optimism of his Surrealist days and of *Douve* behind him, and he has, if not overcome, then at least given voice to the doubts that dominated *Hier régnant désert*. But we will see that the demons of both transcendence and despair, all those poetic-spiritual temptations that I have been describing in the present chapter, will not disappear so easily from his poetry in *Pierre écrite*. Quite the contrary. I have looked at this earlier work on a fairly large scale, but I will be examining *Pierre écrite* in much greater detail, because of the definitive spiritual turning point that the collection represents—for it is more than merely a spiritual or poetic way station that must be transcended, but rather is inauguratory of a new poetic-spiritual mode or process, one that will be key for all of Bonnefoy's subsequent poetry.

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[77] This is not to say that Heidegger's philosophy itself represents a via negativa, or that describing Bonnefoy's poetry *exclusively* as apophatic paints a complete picture. On the contrary. Indeed, in an essay on Bonnefoy and Heidegger that highlights the motifs of earth ("terre") and inscription, Ashraf Noor establishes a link between Heidegger and the more "positive" aspects of Bonnefoy's thought, that "possibilité de la quête d'une voie positive qui s'ajouterait à la théologie négative" (53), and notes that this is linked explicitly to a certain temporality for Bonnefoy: "Cette recherche frayerait une voie vers un séjour sur la terre dans la lumière d'un sens rempli avec la divinité de l'instant" (ibid.).

Chapter Two

Coming Back to Earth: The Spiritual Practice of *Pierre écrite*

We can see now that the very meaning of Dasein *is "in time."*
Temporality is made concrete by the overwhelming truth that all
being is a being-toward-death. […] Without finitude there can be no
truth. We are at the antipodes to Plato.

– George Steiner on the work of Martin Heidegger (106-107)

Everything that appears is singing one song, which is the song of
emptiness and fullness.

- Jack Kornfield on the period following the Dark Night (151)

Bonnefoy's poetic-spiritual Dark Night does not appear to simply have dissipated with his writing of *Hier régnant désert*, for no less than seven years of near-total poetic silence followed the publication of that collection. It was not until 1965, with the publication of his new collection (or long poem) *Pierre écrite*, that the silence was broken. And from the outset of this new work, and in particular its epigraph from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, it becomes clear that something significant has changed. Just as the epigraph to *Hier* was itself a reply to that of *Douve*, this new epigraph looks backwards and seeks to respond to the previous collection's epigraph by Hölderlin, which, as you will recall, placed the emphasis on nothingness rather than plenitude ("Tu veux un monde, dit Diotoma, C'est pourquoi tu as tout, et tu n'as rien"). Now, however, the order is reversed, and the new epigraph seems to indicate a revised poetic attitude, seems to suggest that a spiritual turning point has been reached: "Thou mettest with things dying; / I with things new born" (P-183). The emphasis has shifted, and the stagnant death or nothingness that was accentuated in the first epigraph gives way to a motif of birth and rejuvenation. And as we shall see in our analysis of *Pierre écrite*, a spiritual turning point has indeed been reached, and Bonnefoy is ready to launch into—and explicitly announce—his new *ars poetica* (which is, as I have been contending, simultaneously an *ars spiritus*). The spiritual practice of Bonnefoy's poetry undergoes a significant and lasting shift with this new collection. Unlike the Dark Night that we saw in *Hier régnant désert*, here the perpetual restructuration of the poetic landscape is no longer a source of despair for Bonnefoy. On the contrary, it is in this new collection that Bonnefoy finds a certain salvation (rather than a dead end) in what

he would later call, in his essay collection *Le nuage rouge*, an "écrire qui serait d'abord une voie" (NR-280)

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I traced—in, admittedly, very broad and general terms—a narrative arc across Bonnefoy's early poetry, beginning with his Surrealist work and moving on to the vibrant optimism of *Douve* and the melancholic Dark Night of *Hier régnant désert*. In the present chapter, I will be tracing a new narrative arc: the arc of the poetry of *Pierre écrite* itself, which has, perhaps, the clearest progressive structure of any of Bonnefoy's long poems. Although it represents a new poetic process, the arc of *Pierre écrite* is not unrelated to that of his earlier poetry (and in some ways reads as a microcosm of it), and I will frequently make reference to motifs and concepts that I introduced in the preceding chapter. Notably, the desire for transcendence—a transcendence of this world, the world below, with its inherent separation and suffering—stubbornly persists in this new collection, though in a very different way. Bonnefoy does not—or cannot—extinguish his desire for such transcendence, but neither does he succumb to despair, or to the doleful melancholy of *Hier régnant désert*. The spiritual task of the poet, now, is to modulate that desire by way of his own poetry. It is to bring that desire—and with it the consciousness of the poetic subject itself, as well as that of the implied reader—back to earth, as it were, back to our own mortality. This poetry thus attempts to "arrive" at—or rather approach—what Bonnefoy repeatedly calls poetic presence, and which I have already discussed with reference to Heidegger as a certain non-conceptual (or infra-conceptual) mode of immanence. This immanence is not merely posited or pointed toward, as was often the case in *Douve*, but rather is approached through a path of spiritual negation. The motif of the "demons" of transcendence thus persists in *Pierre écrite*, in particular in the explicit announcement of Bonnefoy's ars poetica at the end of that collection; but it is radically transformed here. The entire collection functions, as we shall see, as a slow and sustained purging of those demons. It thus represents a meditative path in and of itself. This is the new, more conscious poetic-spiritual path of Bonnefoy. In a first movement, the poetic subject's inherent desire for transcendence is affirmed and expressed, before being slowly negated through the poetic process—one that, for Bonnefoy, requires the modality of the long poem. Bonnefoy thus sees a possible salvation within poetry itself. *Pierre écrite* thus critiques and transcends the earlier poetry of both *Douve* (with its overconfidence in the ontological powers of language) and *Hier régnant désert* (with its stagnation and spiritual pessimism)

The first part of this chapter is devoted to the paradisiacal landscape evoked in "L'Eté de nuit" (the first of the collection's four sections), and also to the rupture of that landscape. The notion of rupture will persist in the second part of this chapter, where I will consider the motif of death that is embodied by the stones of the collection's second section (itself entitled "Pierre écrite"). I will then examine the emergence of temporality in the second half of this collection, before passing to a detailed discussion of the collection's final poem—we will see that this temporality is intrinsically linked to the new ars poetica that Bonnefoy is announcing, and that it is part and parcel of this poetry's spiritual practice.

1. The Transcendence of *L'Eté de nuit*

In contrast to the poetry of *Douve*, for example, the opening section of *Pierre écrite* creates a poetic space that is characterized as a dream, one determined largely by a desire in the heart of the poetic subject: the desire for transcendence. I will begin by looking at the emergence of the poetic demons that we see in the nine-poem series *L'Eté de nuit* that opens the first section of the book (itself entitled "L'Eté de nuit"),[78] and will demonstrate that we are here dealing with an other-worldly transcendence, one marked by the desire for an impossible immortality beyond the realm of time. Over the course of *L'Eté de nuit*, the poetic subject begins to recognize and acknowledge the nature of this transcendence, and attempts to harmonize that desire for immortality with the mortality of the world below. I will argue that this harmonization represents a certain form of poetic presence, yet one that, in the final analysis, still remains within the realm of dreams.

The poetic journey of *Pierre écrite* begins with the image of a world that is not our own (P-185):

> Il me semble, ce soir,
> Que le ciel étoilé, s'élargissant,
> Se rapproche de nous ; et que la nuit,
> Derrière tant de feux, est moins obscure.

Bonnefoy establishes a clear opposition with the very first words of this collection. On the one hand, we have the "nous," we have our world below with its anguishing mortality; and on the other, we have a transcendent world, that "ciel étoilé" over there that "se rapproche de nous." This approach to that other world continues until the moment when—still in the same poem—the *over there* miraculously becomes a *right here*; we are in the process of leaving our mortal world for another, and are entering into the impossible garden by the grace of an enigmatic angel: "Il me semble, ce soir, / Que nous sommes entrés dans le jardin, dont l'ange, / A refermé les portes sans retour" (ibid). The Garden of Eden, lost since the beginning of the world, has been found again within the poem.[79]

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[78] For the sake of clarity, I will use quotation marks to refer to the first of *Pierre écrite*'s four overall sections ("L'Eté de nuit"), and will use italics to refer to the series of nine poems that opens that section (*L'Eté de nuit*).

[79] Bonnefoy also very subtly alludes to the Christian motif of the Garden in the title of this first section. The near-acronym formed by the words *L'Eté de nuit* is "L'E.de.n." (L'Eden). Furthermore, in an international conference at the University of Pau in 1983, Bonnefoy links the motif of the garden with the poetry of Mallarmé and a certain atemporality, noting that Mallarmé's poetic universe "n'est pas vraiment notre monde. Il serait simplement—prendrait-il forme—l'empreinte que nous projetterions dans la donnée sensorielle, dans les limites inaperçues que nous consentirait notre finitude, et sans cohérence intrinsèque: il faudrait dire un jardin. L'harmonie des sensations luxueuses, mais pas celle qui se découvre dans la profondeur du temps vécu" (Favre 46-7).

This world is of an entirely other nature than our own—it is utterly transcendent. This "antique amour" (P-187) of *L'Eté de nuit* is the same one that we find in Bonnefoy's oneiric prose work *L'Arrière-pays*, of which Bonnefoy speaks in his interviews with Bernard Falciola, noting the obsessional or haunting quality that this desire takes: "...une *hantise* que j'ai connue, que je subis quelquefois encore, celle d'un arrière-pays, d'une terre au-delà de l'horizon" (E-15, my emphasis). In the Garden of *L'Eté de nuit*, which is unmarred by the mortality of the world below, objects take on more of an absolute quality. The specific tree of our world becomes "l'arbre universel" (P-185) of the Garden, a tree endowed with a conceptual/Platonic transcendence, with a universality that transcends the *hic et nunc*. The so-called "demons" of Bonnefoy's consciousness become evident here, those temptations against which he will struggle throughout *Pierre écrite*. And for Bonnefoy, as we've seen, language itself contains perhaps the greatest temptation of all. With their conceptual charge, words themselves are lures toward transcendence, making us forget the here and now of our existence. The very word "tree," as a concept, contains a universalizing quality, a temptation to replace the actual tree with a concept, or with an image. This reveals one of the great tasks of Bonnefoy's poetry—that of liberating words, or rather certain words that he frequently names essential or fundamental, from their embeddedness in the conceptual network. Yet such a task is not evident at this very early stage of *Pierre écrite*, where time itself has come to a standstill ("Le temps s'achève," P-186).

Furthermore, the categories of *movement* and *immobility* that were so central to the poetry of *Douve* have been taken up once again here, and the struggle has begun anew. But in the opening section of *Pierre écrite*, it is *immobility*—which represents transcendence and timelessness—that has the upper hand over *movement* (which in turn represents immanence, temporality, and mortality) (P-187):

> Le mouvement
> Nous était apparu la faute, et nous allions
> Dans l'immobilité comme sous le navire
> Bouge et ne bouge pas le feuillage des morts.

Impossibility—this act of moving "dans l'immobilité," this contradictory "bouge et ne bouge pas"—suddenly becomes possible within the oneiric poetic universe. Here, atemporality has the upper hand. The voice of this transcendence, that "angel" that is evoked in the collection's very first poem, offers the poetic subject the forbidden fruit of consciousness: "L'éternité montait parmi les fruits de l'arbre / Et je t'offrais le fruit qui illimite l'arbre / Sans angoisse ni mort, d'un monde partagé" (P-186). Yet in a remarkable inversion of the Christian myth, it is the fruit that is being offered that would lead the poetic subject *away* from mortality and suffering, rather than into it ("Sans angoisse ni mort"). Moreover, an explicitly Christian vocabulary is again taken up, where movement itself is seen to be "la faute" or original sin of humanity. The fruit the angel offers leads the poetic subject back to a supposed Paradise, in an act of temptation that would transcend the entire poetic-spiritual path hitherto traversed, including the Dark Night of *Hier régnant désert*, whose emphasis on absence and emptiness *seems* to have been overcome in these first few poems of *Pierre écrite*: "Vaguent au loin les morts au désert de l'écume, / Il n'est plus de désert puisque tout

est en nous" (P-186). We are, at least apparently, now within the bounds of the *vrai lieu* of presence that Bonnefoy's poetry is constantly seeking. The emptiness of *Hier régnant désert* appears to have given way to a summer ("été") of plenitude.

Of course, in this Edenic Garden, there is a clear ambiguity in the evocation of the so-called angel, who could very well be, as Bonnefoy notes in a later interview, "l'ange déchu, leurrant par mélancolie la conscience" (E-16). This fallen angel is offering us not a fruit of knowledge but rather of otherworldly transcendence. "Ce que nous reprochons à la vie, c'est uniquement la finitude" (E-43), Bonnefoy notes in another interview, and the angel of *L'Eté de nuit* offers the poetic subject—and with it the implied reader—an impossible oneiric world, a world devoid of the finitude that defines our worldly existence. The oneiric aspect is important here, and Bonnefoy makes this explicit, for we are in a "rêve de mai" (P-186), as we read in the second poem of the nine-poem series (each of which bears a roman numeral in lieu of a title, similarly to the opening series of poems in *Douve*). Furthermore, the vocabulary of *L'Eté de nuit* is rife with words that suggest *semblance*, words that repeatedly remind the reader of the unreal nature of this poetic-spiritual overture: "rêve" (poems II, III, V, VII), "il me semble" (I), "ressemblance" (II), "reflet" and "apparu" (III), "presque" (V), and "comme" (II, III, IV, VI). The plenitude suggested by the "summer" is thus coupled with the dream-filled night, and these dreams express a naïve desire that is utterly impossible to fulfill—the desire for another world. It is a "fièvre d'inexister" (P-198) that is at play here, as the poetic voice notes in a poem from the latter parts of the section "L'Eté de nuit."[80] The poetic dream remains in a very initial state in the first few poems of *L'Eté de nuit*, and the dream still needs to be developed and corrected. For it is not the *vrai lieu* of presence that we see here, but rather its atemporal distortion—a powerful vision, to be sure, but one that ignores the inherent limits of our existence, and is thus insufficient for a lucid and self-aware poetic-spiritual consciousness.

The poetic vision of *L'Eté de nuit* slowly changes, however, moving beyond a merely otherworldly transcendence by taking on a new aspect—that of movement, of death. At the end of the third poem in the series, a certain ambiguity enters with the linking of mortality to the atemporal "figure de proue" (P-187), that Beloved that guides the poetic subject: "Souriante, première, délavée, / A jamais le reflet d'une étoile immobile / Dans le geste mortel" (P-187). Even here, the figure itself remains transcendent, although it is now linked to our world below, reflected in the mortal gesture of the poetic subject. Lucidity is now beginning to enter poetic consciousness, and the purely transcendent dream is beginning to be revealed as an impossibility. This ambiguity or confusion increases as *L'Eté de nuit* progresses. In a mysterious transformation, a moment of reunion between the transcendent and the terrestrial, the

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[80] Several critics have discussed the unreal nature of this summer. Livane Pinet-Thélot asserts that what is at stake is "plus d'un été rêvé que réel, et d'un 'jardin' qui tient plus de l'Eden que du monde..." (52). Alex L. Gordon notes that the lovers "seem to have reentered Eden, but this impression is illusory. Removed from time, the self-contained world of love has no substance. The lovers are shadows who have forgotten that a moving shadow marks the passage of time. Their simplicity is that of inexistence" (431).

poetic muse (i.e., the Beloved) becomes the "earth" or "land" ("terre") in the very next poem (IV, P-188): "Terre comme gréée, / Vois, / C'est ta figure de proue, / Tachée de rouge." At this point, the figure of the prow remains a mystery to the implied reader, for in a paradoxical move the mortal earth is now linked to the transcendent realm of immortality and is "stained red" as if with blood.[81] Death is slowly entering the poetic landscape, even though the transcendent realm is still there.

But the poet has asked too much of his dream of transcendence. In trying to harmonize death with immortality within his poetic muse, he has pushed this muse too far, and has almost exhausted her powers as a "figure de proue," as we can see in the remainder of the above-cited poem (P-188):

> L'étoile, l'eau, le sommeil
> Ont usé cette épaule nue
> Qui a frémi puis se penche
> A l'Orient où glace le cœur.
>
> L'huile méditante a régné
> Sur son cœur aux ombres qui bougent,
> Et pourtant elle ploie sa nuque
> Comme on pèse l'âme des morts.

The dream of the transcendent realm and of its reflection on the water ("L'étoile, l'eau, le sommeil") have "worn down" ("usé") the poetic figure, who no longer has the strength to bear the impossible burden of being both mortal and immortal. She has thus been pushed from the warmth of the summer to the frigidity of "l'Orient où glace le cœur," which here represents a realm of despair, an utter lack of hope. Yet while the poetic figuration of the Beloved may have come to despair, the poetic consciousness remains hard at work with the "meditative oil" that proceeds to reign over the heart of the poetic figure—the image evoked here is one of a monk in seclusion, toiling by lamplight late into the night on (and on behalf of) his muse. With this increased level of metapoetic self-reflection, a new element enters the poem, and the Beloved readies to sacrifice herself and her immortality in the name of this world, bending her neck to the blade. This death, this destruction of the poetic figure created, is necessary to bring desire back down to earth, to calm it. In an esoteric spin on Christian myth, it is not Christ who sacrifices himself so that we may regain Paradise. Instead, here the paradisiacal Garden, that dream of another world, sacrifices itself so that we may regain the earth. Death begins to become a more potent force in the collection—it becomes a presence that can struggle against the facile desire for transcendence.

This sacrifice seems to trigger the poem that, as the fifth of the series' nine texts, quite literally forms the axis or central point of *L'Eté de nuit*.[82] Its first stanza reads

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[81] Along these lines, Gérard Gasarian, in a reading of a different poem from *Pierre écrite*, speaks of "le rougeoiement de la présence" (81), linking the color red with Bonnefoy's central spiritual axis of presence (as opposed to transcendence).

[82] John E. Jackson also makes note of the central position of this poem in *L'Eté de nuit*, though he places the emphasis on the poem's second stanza, rather than the first: "Ce

as follows (P-189): "Voici presque l'instant / Où il n'est plus de jour, plus de nuit, tant l'étoile / A grandi pour bénir ce corps brun, souriant, / Illimité, une eau qui sans chimère bouge." The poetic figure's sacrifice has become a certain rebirth here, one that permits—or almost permits—her own benediction ("pour bénir ce corps brun"). We have arrived at the threshold of salvation, which is the moment when our earth, that brown body, becomes "illimité" and finds itself taken by an atemporal instant "Où il n'est plus de jour, plus de nuit." And yet, if we are at the threshold, it seems very unlikely that it has actually been crossed. The poetic voice might evoke a realm "sans chimère," which here seems to indicate a place that is not a dream—that is, in fact, *real*—yet we remain on the threshold of reality rather than within it: for the word "presque" of the first verse indicates that we are *almost*, but not quite, there. This salvation of a more mortal form of transcendence—a terrestrial transcendence, if you will—is merely another aspect of the poetic dream of *L'Eté de nuit*. A purely otherworldly transcendence has been sacrificed, but it has been replaced by a new image of transcendence that is itself nothing more than yet another dream, one not dissimilar to the transcendence that Bonnefoy has critiqued among the Surrealist poets. Bonnefoy speaks of this conscious transition from one dream to another in an interview: "Quand je 'critique' mon rêve, et m'efforce de le réduire, d'y retrouver les beaux désirs simples par la grâce desquels les hommes, les femmes pourraient vivre plus pleinement, avertis qu'ils seraient par eux de l'infini de la finitude, en fait j'en suis encore à rêver" (E-37). Bonnefoy is still dreaming here in the middle of *L'Eté de nuit*, but his dream is, at the very least, beginning to recognize death and to integrate mortality into its images. This is the duty of all lucid poets, according to Bonnefoy. As he notes in his prose work *L'Arrière-pays*, which shares many commonalities with the poetry of *Pierre écrite*: "Je rêvais, disais-je, d'un autre monde. Mais je le voulais de chair et de temps, comme le nôtre, et tel qu'on puisse y vivre, y changer d'âge, y mourir" (AP-62). In this opening section, Bonnefoy is evoking the naively transcendent modes of his poetic past so that he may negate them—so that he may begin to pacify these demons—as the collection progresses.

Rupture and death enter in ever more strongly the farther we go into *Pierre écrite*, and even suffering and desire are slowly attributed to the transcendent poetic figure herself (who is, tellingly, characterized both as the earth and as the sky in this opening series of poems). Here, Bonnefoy has given up the idealism of *Douve*, yet he is also rejecting that purely transcendent figure ("L'oiseau des ruines") that we observed at the very end of *Hier régnant désert*, a figure so utterly beyond us that it seemed to only be a symbol of our separation from divinity. I here cite the first stanza of the penultimate poem of *L'Eté de nuit* (P-192):

> Mais ton épaule se déchire dans les arbres,
> Ciel étoilé, et ta bouche recherche
> Les fleuves respirants de la terre pour vivre

poème est un texte-pivot dans la mesure où le rêve y passe de l'acception positive qu'il a eue dans les poèmes I-IV à une acception désormais négative puisqu'il y est question du 'nœud *triste* des rêves' que les frêles mains terrestres doivent dénouer" (*Souche*, 115).

<div align="center">Parmi nous ta soucieuse et désirante nuit.</div>

The poetic figure of presence, though still a transcendent sky here, is now being endowed with increasingly *human* attributes, most notably care and suffering ("ta soucieuse et désirante nuit").[83] Unlike the Bird of the Ruins, this figure is no longer content to remain in the transcendent realm, but rather is seeking us—and with its mouth, no less, which suggests that its song may indeed somehow be able to reach us. But the moment of contact between these two worlds is also a moment of rupture: "ton épaule se déchire dans les arbres." Here, we come face-to-face with the aspect of presence as immanence, one that Bonnefoy writes of repeatedly in his critical writings, for it is a central poetic and spiritual concern for him. "La présence se donne dans l'univers de l'instant" (I-126), he affirms in his essay "L'Acte et le lieu de la poésie."[84] Several pages later, he offers a paradoxical definition of presence as a "présent absolu où s'évapore le temps" (I-129), thereby effecting a fusion between the transcendent and the earthly. Yet this moment of supposed plenitude is not something that can be held onto; it leaves only absence in its wake, for absence is its other face. "Divise-toi, qui est l'absence et ses marées," we read in the final stanza of the same poem (P-192), and that poetic figure that was once so promising now bears us only the "plages vides" (ibid) of an absence. Yet this absence, for Bonnefoy, has value in and of itself. As he writes in *L'Arrière-pays*, a book that is similarly haunted by visions of another world, it is only "dans la durée qui se brise que se délivre parfois une saveur de l'éternel" (AP-55). It is in this instant where everything is simultaneously delivered and lost that presence finds expression within the poem—presence here viewed as a certain transcendence that is impossible to hold onto, and yet impossible to give up on. Thus, "la poésie naît de sa propre carence," as he states in an interview (E-275).[85]

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[83] I would note the Heideggerian resonance of "care" (or "concern") here, which for Heidegger is a constitutive aspect of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Both care *and* desire imply temporality through an orientation toward the future (and indeed, it is in his discussion of *Sorge* or "care" in *Being and Time* that Heidegger first tentatively introduces the topic of temporality). In this poem in *L'Eté de nuit*, the previously established atemporality of the seemingly transcendent poetic figure is now colored with humanity's inherent temporality—a fusion of the transcendent and the earthly.

[84] This same "univers de l'instant" is evoked in the central poem of *L'Eté de nuit* (which I cited earlier): "Voici presque l'instant..." (P-189).

[85] This refusal to remain utterly in the transcendent realm—or to allow the poetic figure to remain there—can be seen as the mark of a certain spiritual maturity on the part of Bonnefoy. The trap of the transcendent or the absolute is a potent one on many meditative paths, and numerous teachers have signaled it. To cite just one prominent and more recent example, the teacher Adyashanti (born Steven Gray), who was initially appointed to teach within the Zen tradition but then began teaching in a style that is remarkably close to that of Vedanta, is very explicit in his instructions on this topic: "Don't get stuck in the transcendent" (96); Adyashanti also uses the term "the deathless" as a synonym for the transcendent realm (ibid.).

The principle movement of *L'Eté de nuit* is that of a poetic consciousness that is becoming increasingly aware of the fact that it is dreaming. While poetry may be born of its own inadequacy, it is this inadequacy that takes center stage at the end of *L'Eté de nuit*. The poetic subject recognizes that the "universal" (P-185) and "boundless" (P-186) tree is, in reality, nothing more than an "arbre d'absence," as we read in the ninth and final poem of this series (P-193):

> Eaux du dormeur, arbre d'absence, heures sans rives,
> Dans votre éternité une nuit va finir.
> Comment nommerons-nous cet autre jour, mon âme,
> Ce plus bas rougeoiement de sable noir ?

Bonnefoy remains within the realm of paradox and impossibility here, asserting as he does that the summer's night will end even within the timeless realm of eternity, which in turns suggests that the sleeper will indeed wake up from his dream (a motif, of course, that is frequently associated with enlightenment—*Buddha*, after all, simply means "the one who is awake"). The poet has strongly evoked and even sketched out the dream in *L'Eté de nuit*, but only to critique it, and thus move beyond it (though perhaps to other dreams). Yet aspects of that dream clearly persist, even at the end of this stanza, and the desire for a transcendent realm or a transcendent state of existence continues on the part of the poetic subject, for a vocabulary of transcendence remains: "cet *autre* jour" and "ce *plus* bas rougeoiement" (my emphasis). These two words— "autre" and "plus"—will persist and repeatedly come to the surface throughout *Pierre écrite*. "La soif constante du rêve" (E-191) has not yet been calmed, even if that dream is slowly being dismantled by the poet's hand.

This dismantling of the dream comes to a head in the very last stanza of the final poem of *L'Eté de nuit*, where the figure of the sleeper—which I read as poetic consciousness itself—is once again evoked (P-193):

> Dans les eaux du dormeur les lumières se troublent.
> Un langage se fait, qui partage le clair
> Buissonnement d'étoiles dans l'écume.
> Et c'est presque l'éveil, déjà le souvenir.

Once again, we have an encounter between our world below ("l'écume") and a transcendent world ("le clair buissonnement d'étoiles"). Yet the reflection of these stars on the earthly waters is a troubled one, and it seems as if the dream of an Edenic Garden can no longer be maintained, that it is destroyed just at that point where its own language is being formed ("un langage se fait"). This specific dream is ending, but it is very uncertain whether a truly profound awakening can take place yet, for it is "almost" ("presque") the moment of awakening. For a second, it seems as if the poetic voice had almost touched eternity. And in the final verse of this poem, Bonnefoy reveals his poetic mastery, for the comma—the caesura or rupture at the center of the verse—indicates just such a moment of eternity, one that cannot be grasped: "Et c'est presque l'éveil, déjà le souvenir." This comma represents the moment of presence that cannot be grasped, and whose oneiric expression in *L'Eté de nuit* has ultimately proven unsatisfactory. Here, with this evocation of yesterday's dominion, it is telling that Bonnefoy resorts to a picture-perfect alexandrine, similarly to the poem "L'Oiseau des

ruines" at the end of *Hier régnant désert*. Yet the tone of despair of "L'Oiseau" is not present here. The dream is evoked, and is slowly ending. We are in the process of leaving the Garden. And when the Garden—and the dream—is returned to only two pages later in the poem "Le jardin," it should be noted that, in a significant shift, it is now only evoked in the past tense: "voûtaient," "portaient," "pâlissiez," "preniez" (P-195). The present tense that dominated the initial series of nine poems gives way to the past tense (the imperfect and the *passé composé*) in the final poems of the section "L'Eté de nuit." In other words, the poetry has moved from a lived dream to a memory of that dream. The dream that was postulated as almost being real has been seen through, yet the desire for transcendence, that demon that haunts the poetic consciousness, has not yet been calmed.

2. Stones and Death

The tone of *Pierre écrite* changes dramatically between "L'Eté de nuit" and the second large section of the collection, itself entitled "Pierre écrite."[86] While "L'Eté de nuit" was primarily about the evocation of an otherworldly transcendence, the principal motif of "Pierre écrite" is that of death, understood not merely in a physical sense, but in the more Heideggerian sense of finitude, the fact that our existence in this world below is, by definition, limited. Death, which Bonnefoy calls "un aspect profond de la présence des êtres, en un sens leur seule réalité" (I-116), also represents temporality in the poetry of Bonnefoy, and is the polar opposite of the atemporal Garden evoked in the nine-poem series *L'Eté de nuit* in particular. From a purely earthly perspective, we are not eternal beings, even if the desire for transcendence is still within us. The forceful—and at times violent—introduction of death in the poems of "Pierre écrite" serves as a corrective measure against this desire for transcendence. As such, it functions similarly to the motif of death in *Douve*, though without being idealized as an end in itself, as was the case in that earlier collection. As Hegel—who was cited in the epigraph to *Douve*—notes in the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "Instead of dwelling in this world's presence, men looked beyond it [glitt der Blick über sie hinaus], following this thread to an otherworldly presence, so to speak. The eye of the Spirit had to be forcibly turned and held fast to the things of this world" (5).[87] This

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[86] Here, I will use quotation marks to indicate the second section of the collection ("Pierre écrite"), and will continue using italics to indicate the collection as a whole (*Pierre écrite*).

[87] The German reads: "Statt in dieser Gegenwart zu verweilen, glitt der Blick über sie hinaus, zum göttlichen Wesen, zu einer, wenn man so sagen kann, jenseitigen Gegenwart hinauf. Das Auge des Geistes mußte mit Zwang auf das Irdische gerichtet und bey ihm festgehalten werden" (*Phänomenologie* 16-17). It should be noted that this is only one aspect of the necessary orientation of Spirit, for just a little farther on, Hegel notes the need for the reverse orientation as well, particularly in modern times where the spiritual dimension has fallen out of people's lives: "Now we seem to need just the opposite: sense is so fast rooted in earthly things that it requires just as much force to raise it. The Spirit shows itself as so impoverished that, like a wanderer in the

forcible turning of the eye of Spirit back to the things of this world is precisely what Bonnefoy seeks to accomplish with the introduction of death in "Pierre écrite," yet at this more advanced stage of his spiritual journey he no longer holds the intense idealization of death that we saw in *Douve*.

The feminine muse of *L'Eté de nuit*, that prow-figure that represented the transcendent, is no longer visible in "Pierre écrite." She has been replaced by a new muse, if one can call it that, namely: the stone. Yet before examining "Pierre écrite," we should consider the first appearances of the stones at the end of the section "L'Eté de nuit"; and here I would stress the intimate coupling that Bonnefoy establishes between these stones and the motif of death. It is no coincidence that the first poem that follows the transcendent Garden of the series *L'Eté de nuit* (yet still within the section "L'Eté de nuit") is entitled "Une pierre." Indeed, this is the first of a total of fifteen poems that bear this title throughout *Pierre écrite*, and all fifteen of these poems share a striking typographical commonality: in contrast to the other 48 poems of *Pierre écrite*, which are aligned on the left of the page, these fifteen "stones" are all centered on the page. The significance of this typographical aspect is clear: by centering the poems as he does, Bonnefoy presents them as epitaphs, as written inscriptions on tombstones.[88] The title *Pierre écrite* thus bears with it a profound image of death and commemoration. Thus, this "stone" that immediately follows the series *L'Eté de nuit* can be read as a funerary inscription for the Garden that was dreamed of and has now been lost. And indeed, this poem concludes with the evocation of the "mascaret de mort" (P-194), a striking word choice in French, for "mascaret" is a fairly obscure term used to denote a certain kind of wave that is dangerous for navigation, and could thus be read as a wave that comes in to wreck the dream of a transcendent world. Furthermore, the word's clear etymological links to "mask" evoke the image of a mask of the dead, and hence an inauguration of funerary rites for the dreamed-of transcendent world. And finally, the Larousse French dictionary also notes that the etymology of the word is related to "tacher" (via "mascara"), meaning "to stain," so that this stone seems to be "sullying" the dream of the atemporal Garden with the stain of death or time, as was the case with the aforementioned "rougeoiment" (P-193).[89]

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desert craving for a mere mouthful of water, it seems to crave for its refreshment only the bare feeling of the divine in general" (*Phenomenology* 5).

[88] It should be noted that such stones will persist in Bonnefoy's poetry. To cite just two of the more prominent examples: the 1987 collection *Ce qui fut sans lumière* contains three poems entitled "Une pierre," one of which is centered on the page (the collection also contains a poem entitled "L'Eté de nuit"); and the 2001 collection *Les Planches courbes* contains nine such poems, all of which are centered on the page.

[89] http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/mascaret/49687. It should be noted that this association of the stone with death was already present as early as the collection *Douve*: "Regarde, diras-tu, cette pierre : / Elle porte la présence de la mort" (P-93), and also: "Cette pierre ouverte est-ce toi, ce logis dévasté, / Comment peut-on mourir ?" (P-76).

The figure of the stone thus represents, at one and the same time, the death of the dream of the transcendent world and also a memory or commemoration of that world, as can clearly be seen in the opening stanza of "Le jardin," the poem that immediately follows "Une pierre" in "L'Eté de nuit" (P-195):

> Les étoiles voûtaient les murs du haut jardin
> Comme les fruits de l'arbre au-delà, mais les pierres
> Du lieu mortel portaient dans l'écume de l'arbre
> Comme une ombre d'étrave et comme un souvenir.

The dialectic of artistic creation indicated in the epigraph of *Pierre écrite* comes to the foreground in this poem, in a moment of strong poetic tension. On the one hand, we have the stars of the otherworldly Garden, "like the fruits of the tree *beyond*" (my emphasis), whose light is that of immobility, of the impossible transcendence; and on the other hand we have "les pierres / Du lieu mortel," whose shadows threaten to obscure the transcendent light. The central dialect of Bonnefoy's poetry is revealed in these four verses: light and shadow, presence and absence, the transcendent and the earthly, are all juxtaposed here. The immortal light is slowly giving way to the dark density of the mortal stones of this world.[90] The figure of the prow, that bearer of presence, is now merely an absence, a shadow, an "ombre d'étrave" (where the somewhat obscure term "étrave" denotes the front-most part of a ship's bow). The stone here is also associated with memory, and appears "comme un souvenir" of the dream-of summer's night.[91] While still being a symbol of death as finitude, the stone also represents the other aspect of death as absence, as the mere memory of something once present: "La mort reste conçue, du sein du monde essentiel, comme l'invisible, comme l'absence" (I-114). Henceforth, from this moment where the stones enter into the collection, the Garden will only be evoked in its mode of absence, which is to say, within the memories borne by (or within) the stones. If any existence can indeed be attributed to the Garden, it is only within memory, only in a mode of absence. Once again, this is in stark contrast to the more forceful and idealized evocations of the

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[90] This motif of stones causing the disappearance—or rather the fading—of the dream of the Garden is also present in the poem "La lampe, le dormeur," which is located just a few pages farther on in "L'Eté de nuit" (P-199): "Je me penchais sur toi, vallée de tant de pierres, / J'écoutais les rumeurs de ton grave repos, / J'apercevais très bas dans l'ombre qui te couvre / Le lieu triste où blanchit l'écume du sommeil." Once again, the stones are clearly linked with death here ("ton grave repos"). And yet the idealizing power of death that we saw in *Douve* is simultaneously rejected in this poem: "Plus tard, j'ai découvert que c'est un autre songe, / Cette terre aux chemins qui tombent dans la mort" (P-198).

[91] Although there is no space to explore this topic here, the title "L'Eté de nuit" clearly resonates with Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (and Bonnefoy's summer, like that of Shakespeare, begins with a "rêve de mai" (P-186)), and a comparison of certain themes in the two works could be fruitful. It should be noted that Bonnefoy is a renowned translator of Shakespeare into French, and also that he cites *A Winter's Tale* in the epigraph to both *Pierre écrite* and his subsequent collection, *Dans le leurre du seuil.*

realm of presence—that "vrai lieu"—that we observed at the end of *Douve*. The death and destruction brought on by the stones here becomes even clearer in the second and final stanza of the poem "Le jardin" (P-195): "Etoiles et vous [pierres], craies d'un pur chemin, / Vous pâlissiez, vous nous preniez le vrai jardin, / Tous les chemins du ciel faisant ombre / Sur ce chant naufragé ; sur notre route obscure." The "mascaret de mort" of the preceding poem has had its effect, and has resulted in nothing less than a literal shipwreck, "ce chant naufragé," with the lights of the transcendent stars now turning to shadows. The stones have taken the "vrai jardin" (again, note the echo of the "vrai lieu" of *Douve*) from the hands of the poet, even if the desire for that garden—and the memory of it—remains. Slowly, as we approach the section entitled "Pierre écrite," the evocations of the Garden give way to the absence borne by the stones. Thus, the terminal poem of "L'Eté de nuit," is itself entitled "Une pierre" (P-201), as if it were announcing a new poetic space, like the seal on a new *Book of the Dead*.[92]

Like Rimbaud with his dreams of an impossible poetic language, Bonnefoy has come back to earth—or rather, run aground—at the outset of the collection's second section, "Pierre écrite." There is a return to land here, now that the poetic subject has fully realized the illusory nature of the Garden, as we can see in the first stanza of the section's first (untitled) poem (P-203):

> Prestige, disais-tu, de notre lampe et des feuillages,
> Ces hôtes de nos soirs.
> Ils tirent jusqu'à nous leur barque sur les dalles,
> Ils connaissent notre désir de l'éternel.

The transcendent ship of *L'Eté de nuit* has run aground here, has been pulled up to the "dalles" (flagstones or tiles) of the mortal world where the poetic consciousness now finds itself. And although the "désir de l'éternel" is evoked once more, at this point that transcendence is recognized as a dream, as is suggested obliquely by the very first word of the poem, "prestige" (which is respect or admiration based on a certain perception, but not necessarily on reality itself). The dream of the Garden, quite simply, was too much, and this surfeit of poetic imagination is subtly portrayed in the metrics of the present poem. The first verse here, cited above, has no less than fourteen syllables, and is the very first verse in the entire collection that surpasses the syllabic structure of the classic French alexandrine; it also literally seems to spill over, as the caesura occurs where one would expect in a traditional alexandrine (namely, at the end of the sixth syllable), with the two extra syllables occurring in the second half of the verse. This

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[92] In her essay on the figure of the stone across Bonnefoy's entire oeuvre, Isabelle Chol links the stone to (among other things) the tangible material world (which thus stands in strong opposition to the transcendent realm of "L'Eté de nuit"): "La pierre est alors le parangon d'une écriture redonnant au langage une valeur sensible, pour que s'élabore une parole. La rugosité de la pierre devient la métaphore de la matérialité du langage" (68). And in a separate essay also on the figure of the stone across Bonnefoy's oeuvre, Jean-Claude Mathieu writes the following, in a similar vein: "Tourner la parole vers le minéral, risquer le chant à cette pierre de touche, c'est les confronter à la nudité irréfragable du réel, les ouvrir au contact de ce qui leur est fermer" (90).

metrical abundance can also be read as a further attempt to link the feeling of transcendence—that intuition of spirit, of divinity—with the mortality of this world below, a motif that becomes clear later in the same poem (ibid.): "Le pas des astres mesurant le sol dallé de cette nuit, / Et eux mêlant à tant de feux l'obscurité propre de l'homme." Once again, we have a mélange of light ("feux") and darkness ("l'obscurité") here, of divinity ("des astres") with the mortal earthly realm ("le sol dallé"), in an attempt to reformulate a new kind of transcendence, one that is yoked firmly to the earth. And yet these two verses spill over as well, and even more forcefully than the earlier one, for both comprise sixteen syllables. On the one hand, this metrical overabundance indicates the difficulty of containing such an earthly transcendence on the very human plane of language. Yet on the other hand, it also represents an outstripping of the immobile lyricism of the alexandrine, all the more so because this surfeit of syllables destroys not only the classical rhythm of these lines, but also a potential rhyme contained within them. I cite these two verses again, this time deleting the final four syllables of each verse, thereby turning them into alexandrines and revealing the latent rhyme of *dallé* with *obscurité*: "Le pas des astres mesurant le sol dallé [...], / Et eux mêlant à tant de feux l'obscurité [...]." Both rhythm and rhyme are thus destroyed by the inclusion of these four excessive syllables, and death enters into the formal structure of the poem—a death that coexists with the transcendence of the eternal stars. This poem, like so many others in *Pierre écrite*, is a *mise en scène* of what Bonnefoy has paradoxically called "l'infini de la finitude" (E-37), that dream of a presence that cannot possibly be captured within a single poem. A precarious tension is thus established between the transcendent and the earthly.

This tension is at least temporarily resolved in the next poem, one of those entitled "Une pierre," which can be read as an epitaph for the dream of transcendence, even that of a more "earthly" transcendence. I cite it in its entirety (P-204):

<div align="center">

Il désirait, sans connaître,

Il a péri, sans avoir.

Toutes lignes de vent et de déception

Furent son gîte.

Infiniment

Il n'a étreint que sa mort.

</div>

Here, a seemingly external voice imposes poetic and spiritual lucidity on the poetic consciousness. I write "seemingly," because of course the voice of the stone itself comes from within that same poetic consciousness, one that is thus not only in dialogue with itself, but in a certain sense even at war with itself. One prominent aspect of poetic consciousness—the dramatized "self" of the poet—has been defeated here: "Il a péri, sans avoir." In all the dreams of transcendence that we have observed up to now, there has been nothing to hold onto, everything has been "lignes de vent et de déception"— the insubstantiality of the wind nicely juxtaposed with the dual meaning of *déception* as both "deception" and "disappointment." There has been nothing that the poetic consciousness has been able to claim as its own, for it has yet to come to a deeper realization of the truth of existence ("Il désirait, sans connaître"). In attempting to grab hold of transcendence, whether otherworldly or the more earthly transcendence that

Bonnefoy sometimes calls one aspect of presence, the poet "n'a étreint que sa mort." Once again, death here is not a purely physical phenomenon: we are witnessing the slow death of a separate self. This image of the poetic consciousness holding onto its own death represents the beginning of an awareness of temporality, which as we have seen is inherently linked to the motif of death in the work of Bonnefoy.[93]

This movement of the poetic consciousness becomes more explicit in one of the other poems entitled "Une pierre," whose first stanza reads as follows (P-213): "Longtemps dura l'enfance au mur sombre et je fus / La conscience d'hiver; qui se pencha / Tristement, fortement, sur une image, / Amèrement, sur le reflet d'un autre jour." This "winter consciousness" (or "consciousness *of* winter") is in direct opposition to the seemingly fruitful summer of "L'Eté de nuit," and represents a moment of spiritual awakening—or lucidity—on the part of the poetic consciousness. The Edenic Garden is not real, is nothing more than "le reflet d'un autre jour." And any attempt to use memory to poetically reconstitute the Garden (the metapoetic image of the poet bending over an image) is in vain, as we can see from the poem's final stanza: "Qu'aurai-je aimé ? L'écume de la mer / Au dessus de Trieste, quand le gris / De la mer de Trieste éblouissait / Les yeux du sphinx déchirable des rives." Here, the poetic consciousness realizes that his desire of—and his love for—transcendence will have been nothing more than the love of this world below. In an exceptional move for Bonnefoy (whose poetry rarely makes reference to specific places), the word "Trieste" surges from the depths of poetic consciousness to introduce a measure of specificity—the *hic et nunc*—into *Pierre écrite.* Such a concrete reference puts yet another nail in the coffin of the otherworldly Garden, and the poetic consciousness slowly comes to realize that the transcendent prow-figure of *L'Eté de nuit* was in fact a part of our mortal earth after all. Thus faced with his own temporality, the poet can no longer maintain access to the dreamed-of Garden, and the dream-filled night slowly begins to end, as we can see from the poem "Le lieu des morts" just a few pages farther on (P-217): "La face la plus sombre a crié / Que le jour est proche. / En vain le buis s'est-il resserré / Sur le vieux jardin." This is the second of two poems bearing the same title. Due to space constraints I cannot go into a fuller analysis of this poem, yet it should be noted that the lines cited above (and indeed the poem as a whole) can also be read as a sort of emergence from a (condensed) Dark Night. The promise of dawn here seems to give the poetic voice hope for a way out of the darkness.

The encounters with death in this second section of the collection become increasingly violent, for a certain destruction of the poetic self (or certain aspects of it) is at stake here, as we can see from the following "Une pierre" poem (P-209):

> Au centre de la lumière, j'abolis
> D'abord ma tête crevassée par le gaz,
> Mon nom ensuite avec tous pays,
> Mes mains seules droites persistent.

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[93] I write "the *beginning* of an awareness" because the use of the third person in this poem (e.g., *Il* désirait, *il* a péri) reveals that there is still some work to be done, that the poetic consciousness is not yet fully unified.

<div style="text-align: center">

En tête du cortège je suis tombé
Sans dieu, sans voix audible, sans péché,
Bête trinitaire criante.

</div>

This destruction, while violent (and indeed reminiscent of the violent imagery of *Douve*), is in no way pessimistic, for it is what allows the restructuration of poetic consciousness, for there is no rebirth without death; and it is no coincidence that the disintegration begins with "ma tête" here, while the hands alone are saved, those implements that allow for the continuation of the spiritual journey through the writing of poetry. The possibility of continuing the spiritual practice of poetry is all that remains of the self in this poem, for even the poet's name is gone, as well as all metaphysical or transcendent heights ("sans dieu"), and even all notions of right and wrong ("sans péché"). The poetic consciousness has thus returned not to the Garden, but to the primordial time *before* the Garden, yet this initial rebirth is far from glorious, for poetic consciousness is not that of some innocent child here, but rather of a "Bête trinitaire criante," a verse that clearly echoes the "rough beast" of Yeats' famous poem "The Second Coming" (Yeats 185). In Bonnefoy's poem too, it is not a trinity of presence that is evoked, but rather one of absence. This return to a primordial state is, quite obviously, not the endpoint of the spiritual journey, yet this dramatization of the loss of self allows for the potential restructuration of poetic consciousness. It represents a certain clearing of the ground, one that has, significantly, preserved the hands of the poet-creator.[94]

Death or temporality, which was introduced slowly at the end of "L'Eté de nuit," occupies the central position in this second section of *Pierre écrite*—all subtlety has been abandoned now, and death enters violently into the poetry. It is no coincidence that ten of the section's seventeen poems are entitled "Une pierre." The dark atmosphere that dominates the section "Pierre écrite"—this "nuit très dense" (P-209), to cite just

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[94] In keeping with the Hegelian sub-theme that runs through much of Bonnefoy's work, this poem reminds us of Hegel's famous account of Lordship and Bondage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations. But this pure universal movement, the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness…" (117). The German reads as follows: "Dies Bewußtsein hat nämlich nicht um dieses oder jenes, noch für diesen oder jenen Augenblick Angst gehabt, sondern um sein ganzes Wesen; denn es hat die Furcht des Todes, des absoluten Herrn, empfunden. Es ist darin innerlich aufgelöst worden, hat durchaus in sich selbst erzittert, und alles Fixe hat in ihm gebebt. Diese reine allgemeine Bewegung, das absolute Flüssigwerden alles Bestehens ist aber das einfache Wesen des Selbstbewußtseins…" (*Phänomenologie* 119).

one example—is reflected in, or rather absorbed into, the density of these stones, the proliferation of these dark and impenetrable bearers of death.[95]

Death is also present on the formal level of the poetry. Let us briefly consider, to cite just one of many possible examples, the final stanza from the third poem of the section "Pierre écrite," one of the two poems fittingly entitled "Le lieu des morts" (P-205): "Peut-être gisent-ils [les morts] dans la feuille du lierre, / Leur parole défaite / Etant le port de la déchirure des feuilles, où la nuit vient." The alexandrine of the first verse of this stanza becomes the "parole défaite" of the six-syllable verse that follows, and the "feuille du lierre" of that alexandrine becomes the "déchirure des feuilles" in the seventeen syllables of the last verse. Up until the word "feuilles," this last verse reads naturally as an alexandrine, and the French ear does not expect a continuation, and yet a continuation comes: "Etant le port de la déchirure des feuilles*, où la nuit vient*" (my emphasis). With the comma and the four words that follow it, Bonnefoy destroys the natural lyricism of this verse, and it is precisely in this destruction that "night" comes, a new winter's night that now separates us—and the poetic consciousness—from the dreamed-of summer of presence, from the light of the transcendent stars. Yet this night—a condensed Dark Night, perhaps, one that is similar to what we have already seen in *Hier régnant désert*—is necessary for spiritual maturation, and this surfeit of syllables thus represents a difficult yet requisite crack both in the structure of this poetry and in the poetic consciousness itself.

Furthermore, there is a sustained fissuring of the syllabic structure of the poetry in this second section of *Pierre écrite*. Although it is impossible to speak of any strict syllabic regularity in "L'Eté de nuit," there is a clear predominance of alexandrines in that initial section of the collection. By my count, there are 114 alexandrines among the 184 verses that comprise "L'Eté de nuit"—well over half the total verses. This is no coincidence, for as we have observed, Bonnefoy has established across all his writings (poetic and critical) a clear link between the alexandrine and the immobility of otherworldly transcendence, with the former being conceived of as the ideal mirror of the latter. As Bonnefoy notes in one of his essays, "la beauté formelle est le songe au bord d'un monde idéal" (I-127)—a fitting description of the opening section

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[95] Bonnefoy describes the intense *reality* of stones in general in his earlier (1953) essay "Les tombeaux de Ravenne" (I-18): "Jamais je n'ai rencontré plus vive source. On sent inépuisable cette vigne, où indiscernablement le cœur vient puiser la gloire de vivre et l'enseignement de la mort. Telle est la pierre. Je ne puis me pencher sur elle sans la reconnaître insondable, et cet abîme de plénitude, cette nuit que recouvre une lumière éternelle, c'est pour moi le réel exemplairement." Yet while the stones evoked within a poem do call up this intense reality, they can never fully *be* it, for they remain within the unreal realm of language, and the very title of the collection *Pierre écrite* reveals the impossibility of ever fully capturing that reality within language: the words are not, strictly speaking, written *on* stone or contained *within* stone, but rather it is the stone itself that is written, that exists within the unreal universe of language. As such, I believe the title of Susanna Lang's translation of this collection—*Words in Stone*—to be somewhat off the mark.

of *Pierre écrite.* This prevalence of alexandrines gives way to syllabic structures that are far less regular in "Pierre écrite": among that section's 124 verses, we find only 34 alexandrines, a far lower percentage than we saw in "L'Eté de nuit" (nine of these 34 alexandrines occur in the very last poem of "Pierre écrite," which I will discuss a little later in this chapter). Moreover, the *vers impair*—or verse with an odd number of syllables—which was largely absent in "L'Eté de nuit," dominates the poems of "Pierre écrite." In his critical writings, Bonnefoy speaks of the "blessure inguérissable du nombre impair" (I-127). The predominance of this type of verse can thus be said to introduce a certain wound into the poetic substance of *Pierre écrite*—one that keeps all-too-easy transcendence of the Garden at bay. The relative lyricism of "L'Eté de nuit" thus becomes a veritable anti-lyricism in "Pierre écrite." In sum, a certain type of death enters the poetry's formal structure at the same time that it penetrates the semantic-thematic dimension of that poetry. As Bonnefoy notes in one of his essays, "il n'y a de forme que pour la pierre, c'est-à-dire voûtée sur la rupture et la nuit" (I-105).

Nevertheless, there is a danger inherent in this death. If there is no such thing as a real or true transcendence, if there is no realm *beyond* toward which the poet can direct his desire, then what should he desire? As we saw with the "bête trinitaire criante," there are moments of near-poetic despair in this section, and moments of somber resignation, similarly to those we saw in the poetry of *Hier régnant désert.* I here cite the distich-poem entitled "Une pierre," still from the second section of *Pierre écrite* (P-210):

Tombe, mais douce pluie, sur le visage.
Eteins, mais lentement, le très pauvre chaleil.

Here, in a short two-line poem that stands in stark contrast to the evocations of transcendence that we saw in "L'Eté de nuit," the poet seeks to appease his anguish-filled desire, his desire for transcendence. In a moment of resignation, and perhaps also one of linguistic-spiritual lucidity, the poetic voice demands that the lamp that guides the poet (which is perhaps to be equated with the luminous prow-figure from the collection's outset) be put out by that "gentle rain" of sufficiency, of acceptance of the here-and-now. Furthermore, to represent this lamp, Bonnefoy has chosen the somewhat archaic word "chaleil," which according to the *Grand Robert* dates back to 1475, instead of its more commonplace and modern synonyms "caleil" and "calen" (both of which are more recent, dating back to 1552). This use of a word that appears neither in the *Petit Robert* nor in the *Petit Larousse* dictionaries thematizes the extinction evoked in this verse. The lamp's flame is also that of poetic consciousness—it represents both hope and the desire for something *more*, something *beyond*, as Bonnefoy already established in "L'Eté de nuit," where we read the following (in the poem "La lampe, le dormeur," P-198): "Le dieu pressant en moi, c'étaient ces rives / Que j'éclairais de l'huile errante." In "L'Eté de nuit," the presence of this light reveals the still-present hope of finding a transcendent divinity. Yet as death is more fully recognized and embraced in "Pierre écrite," that light is slowly extinguished, and poetic consciousness finds itself "sans dieu" (P-209) and in the dark.

The darkness in "Pierre écrite" is very different from the night of "L'Eté de nuit," as the latter still had the guiding light of the transcendent stars. As I've already

noted, there is a much more mournful quality to it here, and we can read in it a condensed version of a Dark Night, yet one that is much less intense than the darkness and aridity of *Hier régnant désert*, for Bonnefoy has already traversed this spiritual-poetic terrain, is already well versed in navigating this night. The darkness finds its apotheosis in yet another poem entitled "Une pierre," from near the end of the section "Pierre écrite" (P-215): "Le livre de Porphyre sur le soleil, / Regarde-le tel qu'un amas de pierres noires. / J'ai lu longtemps le livre de Porphyre, / Je suis venu au lieu de nul soleil." The evocation of Porphyry here is an implicit rebuke of the more Platonic transcendence of "L'Eté de nuit," for Porphyry was one of the most famous disciples of Plotinus, a philosopher-thinker who followed Plato yet deviated from him by emphasizing immanence over transcendence, and oneness over duality.[96] In addition to this, the evocation of the name of Porphyry combats the transcendent impulse by bringing in a strong specificity (like "Trieste" in the earlier poem we examined). The poetic consciousness thus finds itself in a world that is—at least temporarily—emptied of all metaphysical light ("Je suis au lieu de nul soleil"). The darkness is at its apogee here.

Yet this night does not last long. In the very next poem, a voice emerges from the shadows to call forth the light (P-216): "Porteuse d'éternel, lune, entrouvre les grilles / Et penche-toi pour nous qui n'avons plus de jour." This evocation of light counterbalances the call for appeasement that we saw a few pages earlier ("Tombe, mais douce pluie, sur le visage. / Eteins, mais lentement, le très pauvre chaleil," P-210), and is immediately followed (in the subsequent poem) by a voice proclaiming the immanent end of the harrowing night: "La face la plus sombre a crié / Que le jour est proche" (P-217). This forceful declaration is then followed by an initial sign of dawn in the next poem, entitled "Sur un éros de bronze" (P-218): "Tu vieillissais dans les plis / De la grisaille divine. / Qui est venu, d'une lampe, / Empourprer ton horizon nu ? // L'enfant sans hâte ni bruit / T'a découvert une route." The lamp has been relit here, and the poetic quest for presence ("une route") can begin again. It is hard not to see in this child a Christ-like figure, for it is he (or she) that miraculously saves the poetic quest after the fall from the Garden, and it is he who rekindles the spiritual flame of *love* after the devastating death borne by the stones.[97] But Bonnefoy's view of Christ is

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[96] In addition to his own writings and commentaries, Porphyry famously edited and published Plotinus' *Enneads*. Also, I am obviously generalizing the complex philosophies of both Plato and Plotinus here. Finally, it should be noted that the critic Patrick Née, in his book *Yves Bonnefoy*, makes the opposition between Plato and Plotinus explicit in the short section entitled "Plotin contre Platon" (23-25).

[97] The theme of love, central to so much of the poetry of *Pierre écrite*, is present in this poem as well, albeit quite subtly, for it is the *heart* of the poet that the child seizes in the final stanza: "Le même enfant volant bas / Dans la ténèbre des voûtes / A saisi ce cœur et l'emporte / Dans le feuillage inconnu." Furthermore, the figure of the child plays an important role in much of Bonnefoy's poetry, for it is the child—in Bonnefoy's view—that can experience the light of presence in all its glory, for the child's perception of the world has not yet been clouded by conceptual language.

by no means an orthodox one. As John E. Jackson has emphasized, Bonnefoy considers Christ to be a mystic figure, a savior devoted not to some transcendent heaven but rather to the glory inherent in this world below: "Le Christ, pour Bonnefoy, est essentiellement le dieu qui, à travers le sacrifice qu'il fait en acceptant de devenir homme, et donc de mourir, consacre la terre en tant que telle" (*Souche* 125-126). So it is that Bonnefoy directly links the words "vieillissais" and "divine" in the first two verses of this poem. This association is the first step in a process of deifying time, the very opposite of the atemporal divinity of the beginning of "L'Eté de nuit."[98]

This theme persists in the very last poem of the section "Pierre écrite," entitled "Une voix." I here cite it in its entirety (P-219):

> Nous vieillissions, lui le feuillage et moi la source,
> Lui le peu de soleil et moi la profondeur,
> Et lui la mort et moi la sagesse de vivre.
>
> J'acceptais que le temps nous présentât dans l'ombre
> Son visage de faune au rire non moqueur,
> J'aimais que se levât le vent qui porte l'ombre
>
> Et que mourir ne fût en obscure fontaine
> Que troubler l'eau sans fond que le lierre buvait.
> J'aimais, j'étais debout dans le songe éternel.

Above all else, Bonnefoy seeks to indicate a certain maturation of poetic consciousness here. Time explicitly enters this poem, which is, significantly, entitled "Une voix" and not "Une pierre"—and indeed the poetic voice does seem to have ripened, to have been restructured by the difficult destruction of this night, by the death borne by the stones. To cite the epigraph of *Pierre écrite*, the "things dying" that were inscribed on the stones are in the process of becoming the "things newborn" of the poetic voice. The nine alexandrines of this poem stand in stark contrast to the metrically irregular poems of this section: the collection's destroyed lyricism has, at least momentarily, been reconstituted. Furthermore, the "nous vieillissions" of the first verse here becomes a "sagesse de vivre" at the end of the first stanza, indicating that the poetic consciousness has gained a certain spiritual maturity—or confidence—through the onslaught of the stones. There is, in fact, a double movement at play here: both a (now very calm) acceptance of death and temporality ("J'acceptais que le temps nous présentât dans l'ombre...") and an affirmation of the love of a certain transcendence, an earthly transcendence that cannot quite be equated with that of "L'Eté de nuit" ("J'aimais, j'étais debout dans le songe éternel"). The poetic consciousness still seeks to drink from the "source" and the "profondeur" of this presence, which has now been

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[98] Nevertheless, the transcendence that was sought after in the dreams of that summer's night has not entirely been forgotten, as the poetic voice acknowledges at the end of the second stanza: "– Ce n'est pas que l'antique nuit / En toi ne s'angoisse plus."

brought at least a little closer to earth; it still dreams of reaching "l'eau sans fond" of this immanence.

Dawn finally breaks after the agonizing night of the stones. It was, perhaps, necessary for the flame to be extinguished, so that it could be rekindled beneath a less transcendent—and more temporal—sky. This allows despair to be transformed and overcome. Indeed, John E. Jackson reads not only the presence of death in these stones, but also a "triomphe sur la mort" and a "conscience manifeste qui relègue la mélancolie dans le passé" (Jackson, "Yves Bonnefoy," p. 75). The poetic-spiritual consciousness has accepted its mortality on a deeper level—the illusory Garden has been overcome—but hope has not been abandoned. As the title of the third section of *Pierre écrite*, "Un feu va devant nous," announces, the poet's faith and his flame have been rekindled.

3. Transcendence and Time in "Un feu va devant nous"

After the strong evocations of death in the section entitled "Pierre écrite," the passage of time becomes a central motif throughout the rest of the collection. The tone changes once again with the collection's third section, "Un feu va devant nous," where the difficult—and often quite violent—nights of "Pierre écrite" give way to light, love, and hope. This third section operates a synthesis of the principal elements of the first two sections. More specifically, it establishes an amorous relationship between the transcendence evoked in "L'Eté de nuit" and the death evoked in "Pierre écrite." Time and transcendence are coupled here within a terrestrial union. This union can indeed be said to be an aspect of what Bonnefoy calls presence—a mystic union of plenitude.

The primary drama of "Un feu va devant nous" (hereafter "Un feu") is already hinted at in the very last verse of the preceding section: "J'aimais, j'étais debout dans le songe éternel" (P-219). It is love—and the concomitant desire—that leads the poetic consciousness into its dream. This "songe éternel" has a double meaning here. On the one hand, the dream is eternal in the sense that it is always born anew within the poetic consciousness; on the other hand, the dream is also a dream *of* the eternal, i.e., of the transcendence of our mortal condition. Thus, "La chambre," the first poem of "Un feu," depicts both a nuptial chamber and a room of dreams. I cite the first stanza (P-212): "Le miroir et le fleuve en crue, ce matin, / S'appelaient à travers la chambre, deux lumières / Se trouvent et s'unissent dans l'obscur / Des meubles de la chambre descellée." These verses establish the central relationship of "Un feu," which is a relationship of love. An interpretation of the two lovers depicted here—these "two lights" that call to one another and seek each other out—is critical not only for our analysis of "Un feu," but also for an understanding of much of Bonnefoy's subsequent (post-*Pierre écrite*) poetry. First and most obviously, this love is love of the Other; it represents the existential relationship par excellence. The language of this poetry is conceived of as a shared space, as the place where the seemingly closed-off *I* of poetic consciousness can encounter the Other on ever-deeper levels. The union that takes place in this poem is one step of this longer process whose inherently linguistic nature is made more explicit later on in "Un feu," where the first-person plural is linked explicitly with language in the verse "Le peu de mots que nous fûmes ensemble" (P-

234). This poetry is thus conceived of as an opening onto the Other and an opening onto the external world, as well as a means of perceiving and constituting that world.[99]

Bonnefoy's symbolism does not stop here, for the two lovers inhabit a further semantic field, namely, that of time and the transcendent, the union of which is one of the core aspects of Bonnefoy's poetic presence. This movement of love thus transforms the desire for an otherworldly transcendence into one of a more earthly nature—a motif that takes on an even more prominent position in the collection's third section. "La main pure dormait près de la main soucieuse," we read in the last stanza of the poem "La chambre" (P-212). The "main pure" is that which has not yet been touched by our mortal condition—this lover, this hand, represents transcendence. But "la main soucieuse" is that of the mortal poet, that of our world full of cares. The acts of love that these two undertake over the course of "Un feu" represent a slow marriage of time and the transcendent, and this gentle union stands in stark contrast to the violence of death that we saw in "Pierre écrite."[100] Nevertheless, the two sections serve the same function: that of introducing mortality into this relentless desire for transcendence. Although the desire remains—the same desire we saw in "L'Eté de nuit"—the poetic consciousness' (initially transcendent) lover takes on an increasingly earthly nature over the course of this third section.

Indeed, several motifs from "L'Eté de nuit" return in "Un feu," but now they have been corrected by the addition of time into the poetic landscape. First, we should stress that we are once again in a dream at the outset of this third section: "Et nous étions deux pays de sommeil," the poetic voice asserts in "La chambre"—the dream has not been abandoned.[101] Yet it is being corrected—Bonnefoy would perhaps say *simplified*—with the further introduction of mortality and temporality. The otherworldly transcendence of "L'Eté de nuit" now becomes more firmly rooted in the present moment, and it is this instantaneous moment of presence or immanence that begins to come to the fore here. I now cite the second stanza of the poem "La chambre" (P-212): "Et nous étions deux pays de sommeil / Communiquant par leurs marches de pierre / Où se perdait l'eau non trouble d'un rêve / Toujours se reformant, toujours

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[99] Thus, in her introduction to Susanna Lang's English translation of *Pierre écrite*, Sarah Lawall writes of the relationship "between human consciousness and what is outside; the typical existential awareness of Self and Other" (Bonnefoy, *Words in Stone*, p. xiv). Furthermore, several critics have stressed the importance of alterity in Bonnefoy's poetry: Michael Brophy, for instance, writes of a "communion avec autrui sur le plan de l'immanence" in the work of Bonnefoy (49); and Ashraf Noor, who stresses Bonnefoy's philosophical ties to Heidegger, asserts that "[l]a démarche de la poésie, comme le cours du fleuve, mène à l'altérité, à l'étrangeté afin de retourner au lieu de l'être" (58).

[100] It also stands in contrast to the brutality of the relations and nuptial acts that we saw in *Douve*, where the motif of rape, for example, is explicitly evoked in the poem "Vrai corps," where we read that "le mariage le plus bas s'est accompli" (P-77).

[101] Evocations of the dream and of sleep—some subtle, and some direct—are present throughout "Un feu." As is clearly stated in the poem "Les chemins," it is "une main rêveuse" that guides the poetic-spiritual process here (P-224).

brisé." It should first be noted that it is the "marches de pierre" that are these two lovers' means of communication here—mortality can thus now be found within this dream of presence. The "eau non trouble" represents the limpid infinity of presence, that eternal transcendence that is found within the moment. Furthermore, this limpidity is mirrored in the rhythm of these verses: this stanza (composed of four decasyllabic verses) starts out with no less than 36 syllables not interrupted by a comma or any other clear break. The rupture of this rhythmic limpidity comes immediately after the reconstitution of the dream: "Toujours se reformant, toujours brisé." This comma shatters the dream at the moment of its formation, and thus signals—on the rhythmic level—the instantaneous nature of presence. This strong caesura after the verse's sixth syllable is also striking in that it follows three decasyllabic verses that all have the much more common and "traditional" caesura after the fourth syllable. This type of rift is a central motif in *Pierre écrite's* third section. The union of the two lovers is the moment of presence, of mystic immanence—but also the moment of its rupture. The fire or light that goes before us is that of the "astre / Immobile d'aimer, de prendre et de mourir" (P-231). We *love* ("aimer")—we desire—a certain transcendence, and so it is that we try to take this moment of plenitude in our hands. But this act of taking ("prendre") is also the moment of death ("mourir"), of the loss of this eternity. And the cycle begins again.

This star is to be compared with the "l'étoile indifférente" (P-190) that dominates the sky of "L'Eté de nuit." Such indifference is that of the transcendent state itself, one we saw quite clearly in the distant figure of the Bird of the Ruins at the end of *Hier régnant désert.* For presence—in the aspect that we are discussing here—is conceived of as an ungraspable moment of plenitude, a moment wherein desire has been transcended. In other words, the agonizing desire of our mortal condition disappears in the instant of presence. This is portrayed quite nicely in the poem "La lumière, changée," whose second half I cite here: "Dieu qui n'es pas [...] // Renonce-toi en nous comme un fruit se déchire, / Efface-nous en toi. Découvre-nous / Le sens mystérieux de ce qui n'est que simple / Et fût tombé sans feu dans des mots sans amour" (233). The desire here is that of mystic union: "Renonce-toi en nous" and "Efface-nous en toi." The poetic consciousness here reveals its desire to put an end to the distance between us and this inherent unity of the world, and the resulting marriage is then the appeasing of that desire: "sans feu," "sans amour." But this momentary emergence of poetic or spiritual presence reveals its own absence ("dieu qui n'es pas"), and causes the desire to be born again. This desire, this anguish of separation, is necessary for Bonnefoy as a poet—for as I've mentioned before, the individual poem is in the end nothing more than "un cadre où la présence s'efface" (I-117). As in Buddhist meditation, in poetry desire will—quite simply—keep arising until it is finally extinguished in the poetic consciousness. This is the poetic-spiritual path at hand, one that emerges from the gap between language and this inherent unity of the world, and Bonnefoy seems to embrace the fact that the path may indeed be endless, that "La poésie naît de sa propre carence" (E-275)—and here his spiritual path diverges from that of Buddhism, for example, for Buddhist meditation presupposes an end to the path.

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The rupture of the moment of presence becomes a leitmotif in "Un feu," as we can clearly see from the first two stanzas of the poem "L'Abeille, la couleur" (P-227):

Cinq heures.
Le sommeil est léger, en taches sur les vitres.
Le jour puise là-bas dans la couleur l'eau fraîche,
Ruisselante, du soir.

Et c'est comme si l'âme se simplifie
Étant lumière d'avantage, et qui rassure,
Mais, l'Un se déchirant contre la jambe obscure,
Tu te perds, où la bouche a bu à l'âcre mort.

The first six verses of this poem establish a possible image of a state of presence, but it's an image whose reality seems questionable at best—note the words "là-bas" (rather than "ici"), and of course "comme si" (instead of a less conditional enunciation). This unity is quite literally shattered by an encounter with mortality in the seventh and eighth verses of the poem: "Mais, l'Un se déchirant contre la jambe obscure, / Tu te perds, où la bouche a bu à l'acre mort." The "fresh" ("fraîche") and "flowing" ("ruisselante") water of the first stanza, a water that seems to offer a transcendence of sorts, gives way to "the bitter death" ("l'âcre mort") of this world below. Even the sonorous beauty of the poem is called into question in the eighth verse, with a strange seesawing of the syllables "ah" and "bou": "la bouche a bu à l'âcre mort." This singsong cadence is jarring to the reader, and can be read as a form of death in the rhythm of the poem. Such a move is typical of Bonnefoy's poetry (in *Pierre écrite* and in subsequent collections), for the moment where we are (almost) reunited with the transcendent unity is also the same instant in which that unity is lost.[102] Poetic consciousness inhabits a very "fragile pays" (P-223) here, a country that is constantly dying, and constantly being reborn in new images, which are then destroyed again.

Yet unlike the Dark Night that we saw in *Hier régnant désert*, this perpetual restructuration of the poetic landscape is no longer a source of despair for Bonnefoy. On the contrary, it is in *Pierre écrite* that Bonnefoy finds a certain salvation in what he would later call an "écrire qui serait d'abord une voie" (NR-280), as is evident in the final stanza of the poem "L'Arbre, la lampe" (P-223): "Toi aussi tu aimes l'instant où la lumière des lampes / Se décolore et rêve dans le jour. / Tu sais que c'est l'obscur de ton cœur qui guérit, / La barque qui rejoint le rivage et tombe." This amorous instant is the moment of union between "la barque" and "le rivage," the moment of presence's grace, and also the fall from that grace: "tombe." This fall is also present in the rhythm of the last verse cited above: the French reader expects an alexandrine (or at least a *vers pair*, i.e., an even number of syllables, as we have in the preceding verses), but the word

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[102] Furthermore, it is no longer possible for the poet to hold onto the immortal fruit of *L'Eté de nuit*, that "fruit qui illimite l'arbre / Sans angoisse ni mort" (P-186), as we can see from the poem "La parole du soir" from "Un feu": "Le pays du début d'octobre n'avait fruit / Qui ne se déchirât dans l'herbe" (P-237).

"tombe," occurring as it does at the end of the line, remains monosyllabic, and the verse falls off, leaving only eleven syllables. In this poem, we have a return to the maritime voyage that we saw in "L'Eté de nuit," but the song is no longer "naufragé" (P-195), as it seems to be at the end of the collection's first section, for it this instant of presence that "heals" ("guérit") the darkness of the mortal heart. A light goes before us now, and the poetic consciousness is finding a possible hope within mortality.[103] Here, poetry is perceived as a perpetual approach toward the immanent union of being-in-the-world, and Bonnefoy sees his poetry as effecting a "transmutation de l'abouti en possible, du souvenir en attente, de l'espace désert en cheminement, en espoir" (I-132).

This "cheminement" is no stagnation, but rather a slow progression of the poetic consciousness, and thus potentially of the implied reader's consciousness too, as we can see from the first stanza (and the title) of the poem "La lumière, changée" (P-233, my emphasis): "Nous ne nous voyons *plus* dans la même lumière, / Nous n'avons *plus* les mêmes yeux, les mêmes mains. / L'arbre est *plus* proche et la voix des sources *plus* vive, / Nos pas sont *plus* profonds, parmi les morts." The temporal "plus" of the first two verses (which are most literally translated as "yet") reveal the progression of time, and become the affirmative/comparative "plus" ("more") of the third and fourth verses, with these latter "plus" revealing a shift or progression in our perception of the world. According to Bonnefoy, the spiritual path of *Pierre écrite* has, at this point, effected a change in our relationship with the world—a certain poetic and spiritual maturation or ripening has taken place.[104] This maturation necessarily takes place in time, within a mortal landscape. "Que te faut-il, voix qui reprends ?" the poet demands a few pages earlier, in the poem "La patience, le ciel" (P-230). The reply: "Le temps divin qu'il faut pour emplir ce vase, / Oui, rien qu'à aimer ce temps désert et plein de jour." And indeed, time has passed within the oneiric universe of this collection, for the "rêve de mai" (P-186) of the section "L'Eté de nuit" has become a "pays du début d'octobre" (P-237) in "Un feu." This maturation or ripening culminates at the end of this section, most notably with the title of the final poem, "Le livre, pour vieillir," where the transcendence has now been yoked firmly to the earth, in a sort of poetic awakening: "Tu vieilliras / Et, te décolorant dans la couleur des arbres, / Faisant ombre plus lente sur le mur, / Etant, et d'âme enfin, la terre menacée..." (P-239). The beloved

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[103] "Nous saurons mêler ces deux lumières, / O mon vaisseau illuminé errant en mer," the poetic voice asserts in "La parole du soir" (P-237). The future tense ("saurons") reveals the hope here. I would also highlight the final stanza of the poem "Les chemins," where—perhaps in recollection of previous Dark Nights—the voice reproaches the poet for his past despair: "Qui ramassa le fer / Rouillé, parmi les hautes herbes, n'oublie plus / Qu'aux grumeaux du métal la lumière peut prendre / Et consumer le sel du doute et de la mort" (P-224). Bonnefoy reaffirms his faith in poetry as a spiritual path here, and pushes back against any new encroaching Dark Night.

[104] Indeed, the poetic voice has been seeking "le goût du temps qui va mûrir" (P-231), as we read in a preceding poem. Since such shifts in consciousness are entirely subjective, there is of course no way of verifying whether they have actually taken place within the poet himself.

muse is no longer immortal here, but rather becomes, "enfin," the mortal earth, one capable of old age and death. The dream has been corrected, has been simplified by being anchored in mortality. The poetic consciousness has undergone a certain spiritual maturation in "Un feu va devant nous," and a deeper acceptance of death has been accomplished.

4. Awareness of the Poetic Task in "Le dialogue d'Angoisse et de Désir"

The poetic consciousness has woken up, to a certain extent, in the final section of *Pierre écrite*, entitled "Le dialogue d'Angoisse et de Désir" (note the unusual capitalization of the two nouns in the French title). This is not to say that there are no dreams in this final section of *Pierre écrite*, for dreams are intricately tied to images, as we shall see. While asserting that the image is "l'équivalent du rêve" in "Le dialogue d'Angoisse et de Désir" (hereafter "Dialogue"), John E. Jackson makes the following distinction: "Imaginer, c'est susciter une image. Or l'image est la matrice du rêve. La différence, toutefois, c'est que l'acte d'imaginer est un acte diurne là où le rêve est nocturne. L'un est fait de la conscience, l'autre de l'inconscient" (*Souche* 125). In this final section, the poetic voice continues to evoke images, but now a certain conscious awareness is tied to its own acts of imagining. At least within the landscape of the poetry itself, in "L'Eté de nuit" the relationship between the poetic subject (the "I" of the collection) and the image was largely passive—as opposed to actively creative—as is evident from the very first words of *Pierre écrite*: "Il me semble" (P-185). In the collection's final section, however, the poetic subject is conscious of the fact that it is his own song that creates these images, and establishing the image becomes a more active and self-conscious process.

Let us consider the very first stanza of "Dialogue" to illustrate this point (P-241):

J'imagine souvent, au-dessus de moi,
Un visage sacrificiel, dont les rayons
Sont comme un champ de terre labourée.
Les lèvres et les yeux sont souriants,
Le front est morne, un bruit de mer lassant et sourd.
Je lui dis : Sois ma force, et sa lumière augmente,
Il domine un pays de guerre au petit jour
Et tout un fleuve qui rassure par méandres
Cette terre saisie fertilisée.

The poetic subject is in control of his dream—his image—here. As Sarah Lawall has stressed, the passive "Il me semble" from the beginning of *Pierre écrite* becomes a conscious activity with "J'imagine" here. Furthermore, the image now responds to the orders of the poetic subject: "Je lui dis : Sois ma force, et sa lumière augmente."[105] The

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[105] In her essay "Bonnefoy's *Pierre écrite*: Progressive Ambiguity as the Many in the One," Lawall notes the following: "Here the poet is in charge of his dream ('I imagine' rather than 'It seems to me'), and the god he imagines with a sacrificial face draws energy from the poet's own command [...]. It is a cyclical movement in which the poet

desire of a certain transcendence is still present in this poem, but now the poetic subject is capable of more consciously modulating that desire. The description within this poem reveals that it is an earthly transcendence that is at play here. The "sacrificial" face evokes the image of a Christ-figure who will, perhaps, consecrate this land.[106] Although this face seems to be the earth itself ("comme un champ de terre labourée"), it is above ("au-dessus") the poetic subject, a turn of phrase that suggests a certain transcendence, and distance. Like the Bird of the Ruins that we saw at the end of *Hier régnant désert*, this face is the incarnation of the paradox of presence: "Les lèvres et les yeux sont souriants," but "le front est morne." And once again, it seems to be both of the earth and above it (in verse 14 of the same poem, we read: "Je regarde les hauts plateaux où je puis vivre"). This paradox is indicative of the desire to unify the transcendent sky above with our earth, as we can see in verse 15, where we are presented with "cette main [of the high places] qui retient une autre main rocheuse [i.e., the mortal hand of the stones]." But the poetic subject is aware of the nature of his task here, and knows that his song of presence is ultimately nothing more than a "respiration d'absence" (v.16). The poet's labor, this consecration of the earth, will always remain unfinished ("inachevé," v.17)—in Bonnefoy's view, it *cannot* ever be finished, at least not within the poem. This is the inherent nature of poetry as spiritual practice, for Bonnefoy, for the only true consummation of presence within the poem is also the moment that presence is ruptured, the moment when absence emerges. The awakened poetic consciousness—awake to the fact that the poem is itself a dream of sorts—begins to consider its own means of spiritual exploration (the collection of poetry at hand) and its own condition now: "Et je m'étonne alors qu'il ait fallu / Ce temps, et cette peine. Car les fruits / Régnaient déjà dans l'arbre. Et le soleil illuminait déjà le pays du soir" (v. 10-13). In a move that is reminiscent of moments of insight in Buddhist meditation, the poetic subject realizes that everything was, in fact, already there. Presence, as the divine immanence of the world, is always already there. It is not the nature of reality that changes, but rather our perception of that reality. For Bonnefoy, the task of poetry is to transform our perception of the world (and the world's inherent unity): it is the poem-song, conceived of as a spiritual practice, that can modulate our desire for an otherworldly transcendent state, and hence bring us to that *other* transcendence that is actually an earthly immanence.

    The explicit evocation of the poetic image returns in the third poem of "Dialogue" (P-243), whose second and third stanzas I here cite in their entirety (the third stanza is comprised of a single verse):

        Nous n'avons plus besoin
        D'images déchirantes pour aimer.
        Cet arbre nous suffit là-bas, qui, par lumière,

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composes his own vision of the ideal within the real, a hard-won recognition of the immanent divinity of his own earth" (189).

[106] A similar image of sacrifice can be found in the fifth poem of "Dialogue": "Imagine que la lumière soit victime / Pour le salut d'un lieu mortel et sous un dieu / Certes distant et noir" (P-245).

> Se délie de soi-même et ne sait plus
> Que le nom presque dit d'un dieu presque incarné.

> Et tout ce haut pays que l'Un très proche brûle,

We are *almost* dealing with a moment of presence, of plenitude, here. There is an intuition of the "One" that is near at hand, that is within "cet arbre," and yet that still somehow remains at a distance from us. In the plenitude that is evoked, in the inherent sufficiency of the unity of the world, there would be no need for poetry and its images: "Nous n'avons plus besoin / D'images déchirantes pour aimer. / Cet arbre nous suffit là-bas." Yet the irony is strong here, for the tree evoked within the poem is not—and cannot be—a real tree. Although the poetic subject asserts that we are no longer in need of images, the evocation of that tree itself involves the concept "tree," and creates a new image—and presence once again gives way to absence. Within the individual poem, there is no way to avoid a certain conceptualization. "La difficulté du langage, son incapacité fameuse à exprimer l'immédiat" (I-126) is revealed in these verses. The poetic image of the "vrai lieu" (to once again take up the phrase from *Douve*) of presence is not the vrai lieu itself—it is merely an image that discloses that place in a mode of absence. The sacred name is "presque dit"; the god is "presque incarné"; the One is "très proche," but not fully here. According to Bonnefoy, we live in a state of proximity, a state where the plenitude of presence is never perfectly accomplished or realized, at least within the poem. This is, as he calls it, "la dialectique terrible de la création esthétique, qui vide de leur contenu [...] tous les moments d'une vie" (AP-126-127).

This theme persists in the sixth poem of "Dialogue," with the return of that angel that we saw in "L'Eté de nuit." I here cite the first stanza in its entirety (P-246):

> O de ton aile de terre et d'ombre éveille-nous,
> Ange vaste comme la terre, et porte-nous
> Ici, au même endroit de la terre mortelle,
> Pour un commencement. Les fruits anciens
> Soient notre faim et notre soif enfin calmées.
> Le feu soit notre feu. Et l'attente se change
> En ce proche destin, cette heure, ce séjour.

The angel that had offered us the fruit of an otherworldly transcendence in "L'Eté de nuit" is now an angel of the earth itself ("ton aile de terre et d'ombre"), and the paradise that it can open for us is "Ici, au même endroit de la terre mortelle." A new power dynamic is established here in the collection's final section, for the angel is now largely controlled by the poetic subject, as can be seen from the imperatives within this stanza: "Eveille-nous," his voice commands, and "porte-nous." The poetic subject is fully conscious now, fully aware of the images that it itself is creating—it is, in other words, awake within its own dream. Significantly, the reader is implicated in this new awareness or state of consciousness, as can be seen from the first-person plurals present in this stanza. "Le feu soit notre feu," the voice commands here. And yet, in a strange circular motion, the poetic subject is also in the hands—or the power—of the angel, in the hands of the very image he has created, for the image that he creates can

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modulate his—and by extension our own—perception of the world: "Et l'attente se change / En ce proche destin, cette heure, ce séjour." We have thus taken some steps forward on the path, have made an approach at presence as mystic plenitude. But this new earthly paradise cannot, of course, be grasped and held onto. "Ouvre-toi, parle-nous, déchire-toi, / Couronne incendiée": this angel's divine act of speaking ("parle-nous"), our opening onto the presence of the world ("ouvre-toi"), is also the destruction of that same angel ("déchire-toi"). The crown of this earthly paradisiac kingdom is "incendiée"; and as it burns up in each new instant, it reveals divinity's absence as much as its presence. A similar case can be found at the end of the poem "Une voix" in "Dialogue" (P-248): "Oui, je puis vivre ici. L'ange, qui est la terre, / Va dans chaque buisson et paraître et brûler. / Je suis cet autel vide, et ce gouffre, et ces arches / Et toi-même peut-être, et le doute : mais l'aube / Et le rayonnement de pierres descellées." Although presence can only be poetically revealed in its mode of absence, the poetic subject accepts his agonizing mortal condition now. He consents to live in "ce gouffre," this dialectical threshold between presence and absence. And in this new, more mature spiritual state of being, the "doute," that "autel vide" of the poetic task that was so foregrounded in the Dark Nights of *Hier régnant désert*, admits some light here, and is thus also a dawning ("aube") struck through with sunlight ("rayonnement"). Bonnefoy's hope, his spiritual salvation, is found within this paradox, this threshold.

"Dialogue" can thus be read as a harmonization between the poet's mortal anguish ("Angoisse") and his desire for the transcendent. This theme comes most explicitly to the fore in the poem "Sur une pietà de Tintoret," whose title alludes to the Italian painter Tintoretto's paintings depicting Mary holding the dead body of Jesus Christ after it was brought down from the cross. I here cite the poem in its entirety (P-247):

> Jamais douleur
> Ne fut plus élégante que dans ces grilles
> Noires, que dévora le soleil. Et jamais
> Élégance ne fut plus cause spirituelle,
> Un feu double, debout sur les grilles du soir.
>
> Ici,
> Un grand espoir fut peintre. Oh, qui est plus réel
> Du chagrin désirant ou de l'image peinte ?
> Le désir déchira le voile de l'image,
> L'image donna vie à l'exsangue désir.

The *Pietà* of Tintoretto is a source of inspiration for the poet, who finds a powerful "élégance" in the painting. Once again, Bonnefoy is making use of Christian motifs for his own ontological and spiritual purposes, for the image of Christ's dead body brought down from the cross is used to indicate the immanence of the earth, rather than any kind of transcendent or otherworldly ascension, for the latter is present neither in the

poem nor in any of Tintoretto's *Pietà* paintings.[107] Christian imagery is thus evoked in a more esoteric reading of the myth of Christ, one that sees the Kingdom of Heaven as being entirely in this world below. This will become a fairly common poetological move for Bonnefoy, as Michael Brophy notes in analyzing Bonnefoy's later collection *Ce qui fut sans lumière*: "Bonnefoy se permet de renverser l'ordre biblique, d'inverser son message en récupérant avec audace ses modèles, ses récits" (62). Nevertheless, the poetry of Bonnefoy does share certain commonalities with more orthodox Christianity. Like Tintoretto, a Renaissance painter whose works were almost exclusively of religious subjects, Bonnefoy finds a certain beauty in the suffering Christ; and it is suffering ("Angoisse," to once again cite the title of the final section of *Pierre écrite*) that will inform his poetry and become part and parcel of his "cause spirituelle." His poetry is born of the suffering inherent in desire, and is in a constant state of regeneration: "Le désir déchira le voile de l'image, / L'image donna vie à l'exsangue désir." The desire of an awakened, lucid consciousness is never utterly satisfied by the image, which is a substitution of reality, and so it destroys it. But on the verge of despair, at that moment where desire has almost lost its force and energy ("exsangue"), the image returns to reanimate the poet's desire, and the cycle can begin again.[108] This is the central dialectic of Bonnefoy's poetry, its "feu double." In other words, the image of transcendence must necessarily give way to a transcending of the image—with a spiritually lucid poet, the act of creation must simultaneously be an act of destruction.[109] Anguish cannot be separated from desire, for our desire for transcendence is only calmed in the moment of its own rupture.

5. The Act and Time of Poetry: Bonnefoy's New *Ars Poetica*

As we have seen, Bonnefoy, in the 63 pages of poetry that comprise *Pierre écrite*, creates images time and again only to reshape them on the following page, only to destroy them and create new ones in their place. Over the course of this work, he repeatedly gives certain key terms—"stone," "bread," "tree," etc.—new and unexpected connotations, until the signified (*signifié* in the Saussurian sense of the word) is entirely

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[107] A typical and well-known example of Tintoretto's *Pietà* paintings can be found here (accessed on 27 Feb. 2016): http://www.jacopotintoretto.org/Descent-from-the-Cross-(Pieta)-c.-1559.html.

[108] Bonnefoy's choice of the word "exsangue" ("bloodless" or "pale") is not coincidental here, for it is the image that is the potential carrier of transcendence, that can take us beyond this mortal world.

[109] There is a very strong parallel, as I have already noted, between the image and the concept in Bonnefoy's poetry, and a critique of one necessarily implies a critique of the other. Yvon Inizan, in his recent book on Bonnefoy and Paul Ricœur, provides the following observations about the image in Bonnefoy's poetry, remarks that can be extended to include conceptual language as a whole: "Car, même si l'image détourne du monde sensible, il n'est guère permis, explique ce dernier [Bonnefoy], d'échapper à l'image. C'est dans l'image qu'il faut manifester les limites de l'image: cette *tension*, héritage de la poésie dialectique kierkegaardienne, est indépassable" (139-140).

destabilized through a lengthy *intra*textual poetic process, wherein each poem enters into a complex relationship with every other poem in the collection. This jarring of the signified-signifier relationship itself implies a larger-scale critique of otherworldly transcendence, for, by subverting the idealizing (that is, conceptualizing) power of language, the lengthy path of poetry brings the poetic subject (and the reader) back to a more immediate relationship with the world. This intratextual process of designification and deconceptualization is part and parcel of that second aspect of presence, that is, of presence as critique. As opposed to the more cataphatic approaches at presence (conceived of as a moment of eternity or plenitude) that we have examined, this aspect of critique represents a more apophatic method. "Dans l'espérance de la présence, on ne 'signifie' pas, on laisse une lumière se désenchevêtrer des significations qui l'occultent." (I-251). Once again, this suspicious view of conceptual language is the clearest common denominator between Heidegger's thoughts on language and Bonnefoy's. I would further note that the length of the poetic path in *Pierre écrite*—that is, its dense 63 pages of poetry—is necessary to modulate the poetic subject's desire. Presence cannot simply be evoked, it must be arduously acquired through a lengthy poetic process, as Daniel Leuwers notes: "La présence, pour Bonnefoy, advient au terme d'une lutte sans merci, et d'une lutte contre soi. Elle n'est jamais donnée, elle doit être acquise, et les failles qui la révèlent font partie intégrante d'un parcours dont les difficultés sont à la mesure de la fièvre désirante" (62). In a certain sense (in its second aspect), presence *is* this process.

Only at the end of this path in *Pierre écrite* does Bonnefoy finally give explicit expression to his ars poetica, as we can see in the collection's final poem, "Art de la poésie," cited here in its entirety (P-249):

> Dragué fut le regard hors de cette nuit.
> Immobilisées et séchées les mains.
> On a réconcilié la fièvre. On a dit au cœur
> D'être le cœur. Il y avait un démon dans ces veines
> Qui s'est enfui en criant.
> Il y avait dans la bouche une voix morne sanglante
> Qui a été lavée et rappelée.[110]

Here, Bonnefoy conceives poetry as a process of purification. Our "gaze" [*regard*] onto the world has been "dredged" [*dragué*], our perception cleansed, by the deconceptualizing operations of this lengthy poetic path.[111] This poetry began in the unreal night of conceptual language, in "L'Eté de nuit," yet it is outside this night

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[110] *Poèmes*, p. 249. Here is my English translation of "Art of Poetry": "The gaze was dredged outside this night. / The hands stilled and dried. / The fever was calmed. The heart was told / To be the heart. In these veins there was a demon / That fled screaming. / In the mouth there was a bloody mournful voice / That was cleansed and recalled."

[111] Richard Pevear's English translation loses this sense of purification by translating "dragué" as "dragged up" (Bonnefoy, *Poems*, 59); Susanna Lang captures this sense of cleansing by translating the word as "dredged" (Bonnefoy, *Words in Stone*, 131).

("hors de cette nuit") that perception has been purified. And with this purification, the "fever" of an otherworldly transcendence has now been calmed, a fever that Bonnefoy calls his "fever of non-existence" ("fièvre d'inexister") in "L'Eté de nuit" (P-198). Desire has now been simplified, it has been brought back to earth, as it were, and the poetic voice can consent to the simple act of love within this mortal world ("On a dit au cœur / D'être le cœur"). The "demon" is the embodiment of this otherworldly desire, this fever. The entire collection *Pierre écrite* is now cast as a slow expulsion of this demon, indeed, as the demon's own crying out: "There was a demon in these veins / That fled screaming." The poetic consciousness now fully realizes that the supposed angel of the unreal Garden of "L'Eté de nuit" was in fact a demon, an "ange déchu, leurrant par mélancolie la conscience" (E-16). It was this fallen angel that tempted the poet with the desire of otherworldly transcendence. But at the same time, it was the appearance of this demon that allowed the poetic conscious access to a more earthly presence, a certain immanence. The fever was "essential" and necessary, from Bonnefoy's idiosyncratic point of view, for its flames are necessary for the purification of consciousness.[112] Bonnefoy's comments in an interview from 1972 shed further light on this figure of the demon (E-17):

> Au fond de l'image, vous le voyez, de quoi l'arracher au démon, de quoi l'incarner, de quoi la rendre divine. Et quant à la poésie, je tendais, et je tends toujours, à en proposer une conception dialectique, où dans un premier mouvement rêveur elle se donnerait à l'image, mais pour critiquer celle-ci ensuite, au nom de l'incarnation, pour la simplifier, l'universaliser, pour finir par l'identifier aux données simples de l'existence.

This critique of the poetic image goes hand in hand with Bonnefoy's critique of conceptual language. Both image and concept, before they can solidify into any sort of formal perfection, must be destroyed and re-formed—for formal perfection is the mark of the unreal. In the final poem of *Pierre écrite*, the lack of formal perfection is most clearly evident in the extreme metrical irregularity of the lines: the seven verses range from seven to thirteen syllables in length, which stands in stark contrast to the four immaculate alexandrines that comprise the final poem of *Hier régnant désert*. Moreover, Bonnefoy's comments also lead us to read this lengthy poetic process as a process of deifying the demon, as a process of incarnation. As Bonnefoy remarks farther on in the same interview, God is not dead, but rather "still to be born" (E-46).[113]

Again, the purification of this poetic voice that is asserted in "Art de la poésie" requires the lengthy poetic process that preceded that specific poem. For if the idealizing potential in language is indeed a temptation, then the temporal aspect of this poetry is the remedy to that fever. The length of this poetry is necessary for Bonnefoy's

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[112] A short prose text from 1959 entitled *Dévotion*, which can be found in Bonnefoy's collection *Poèmes*, and which immediately precedes *Pierre écrite*, includes the following dedication in its very last paragraph (or stanza): "A cette voix consumée par une fièvre essentielle" (P-181).
[113] "Dieu est à naître."

attempt to liberate words from their habitual hold in the conceptual network of instrumental language, which demands long series of strange and paradoxical images. This poetry's length also points to its one and only undeniably *real* feature, its temporality or temporal presence, a point that Bonnefoy himself makes in his own critical writings (I-132):

> Voici cette poésie qui aura été notre destin. Car, entre-temps, nous aurons vieilli. L'acte de la parole aura eu lieu dans la même durée de nos autres actes. Il nous aura donné telle vie plutôt que telle autre, dans le danger du poème et les contradictions de l'exil.

We can once again discern that other aspect of Bonnefoy's poetic presence, namely, the lengthy act of the poetry itself, here coupled implicitly with the act of reading (through the use of the first-person plural). Bonnefoy's poetry demands this temporal journey of the reader, one that makes this poetry's critique of a conceptual perception of the world possible. Furthermore, the potential salvation this poetry offers is not that of the poet alone, but is also available to the reader, for the act of reading has the potential to shift the reader's consciousness as well. The key word here is "entre-temps" ("in the meantime"), for it is this *entre-temps* of the poetic-spiritual journey that can simplify our relationship to the external world, in much the same way that meditation can, by loosening the hold that certain concepts have over us and teaching us a certain "sagesse de vivre" (P-219).[114] Indeed, this slow poetic process of deconceptualization in Bonnefoy's work parallels that of even the most "basic" Buddhist meditation, such as *anapanasati*, or awareness of the breath, for even our most basic perceptual apparatuses involve concepts on a subconscious level, which Culadasa refers to as "the conceptual 'veneer' that overlays everything we perceive" (224). Culadasa notes the following in reference to meditation on the sensations of the breath: "When we start meditating, our experience of the breath is mostly conceptual, although we don't know it at the time. In fact, during the early Stages, we're hardly aware of the actual breath sensations, just enough to trigger the arising of concepts related to the breath. These concepts ('inhaling,' 'pause,' 'exhaling') are our real objects of attention" (ibid.). The conceptual perception of the world is traditionally referred to as the "initial appearance" (*parikamma-nimitta* in the Pali language) of the meditation object, whereas the more direct non-conceptual perception of it is referred to as the "acquired appearance" (*uggaha-nimitta*), since it is acquired through lengthy meditative practice.[115] Along these lines, presence, for Bonnefoy, is thus not to be viewed solely as

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[114] To return to the framework of Buddhist thought, and the best-known Theravada map of stages of insight in particular, this new phase of Bonnefoy's poetry, with its wisdom and momentary calming of desire, most closely corresponds to the stage known as "Equanimity," which immediately follows the so-called Dark Night stages. Here, desire is still present (*arahatship* or Buddha-hood is still a long way off), yet the poet has come to a certain acceptance of his desire. Clearly, something significant has occurred within poetic consciousness here.

[115] Aldous Huxley notes a similar phenomenon occurring under the influence of mescaline, and relates perceptual experience under the influence of mescaline to the

an instantaneous mystical encounter with the world, but also as a lengthy process that can bring the reader closer to that mystical encounter.[116] Bonnefoy conceives of poetry as a path, as a means of approach "vers plus de conscience" (I-131), that is, towards a simplified and more direct encounter with the world. It is a means of inaugurating, in the poetic subject and the reader, "the non-conceptual clairvoyance that our consciousness needs" (AP-12). This is Bonnefoy's spiritual path, and he invites the reader to join him.[117]

This faith in the powers of art will remain with Bonnefoy. To drive this point home, I here cite a few lines from his 1966 essay "Proximité du visage," which discusses the work of Raoul Ubac (a painter, photographer, and sculptor who Bonnefoy collaborated with on a project that was preliminary to *Pierre écrite*[118]), and which also serves to bring together both the instantaneous aspect and the temporal aspect of poetic presence (I-312): "C'est comme une ombre *qui passe*. Et d'un coup c'est donc un instant, c'est-à-dire un lieu, qui se signifie. Un évènement est représenté. Dans l'intemporel la durée se glisse, le hasard se profile – l'existence a laissé ses empreintes énigmatiques dans le limon de la vie." Bonnefoy conceives of his own poetry in precisely the same way. Each moment of presence is an instant that has passed (or is passing), yet it is also an instant that produces a change in our consciousness, that reveals a deeper level of reality to us than the merely conceptual: "Et pourtant, au-delà de cette occasion manquée, nous ne sommes plus les mêmes, nous ne sommes plus aussi pauvres, il nous demeure un espoir" (I-125). The time of this poetry—the collection of such instants—constitutes the spiritual process itself. This poetic process allows the poet, and perhaps the reader too, to overcome what Bonnefoy views as the modern Nietzschean nihilism of a dead god, as well as the naïve Platonic desire for an otherworldly transcendence. Over the course of the 63 pages that comprise *Pierre écrite*, the demon of the poetic consciousness is slowly deified, and the poetic voice is purified of that desire for transcendence: "Il y avait dans la bouche une voix morne sanglante / Qui a été lavée et rappelée." And yet the poetic task is never fully accomplished. The incarnation of this angelic yet earthly voice at the end of the collection reveals its own absence. Although the voice has indeed been cleansed ("lavée") and recalled

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perception of a child: "Visual impressions are greatly intensified and the eye recovers some of the perceptual innocence of child-hood, when the sensum was not immediately and automatically subordinated to the concept" (9-10).

[116] The length of this process—that is to say, the passage of time—is itself dramatized within the collection, for the unreal poetic voyage of *Pierre écrite* begins in "mai" (P-186) before ultimately moving on to the "début d'octobre" (P-237).

[117] This temporal act of poetry is still apparent—and very movingly so—in Bonnefoy's *Les Planches courbes*, a collection published in 2001, when Bonnefoy was 78 years of age: "Des années ont passé, c'est presque une vie / Qu'aura duré ce chant, mon bien unique" (58).

[118] Bonnefoy worked with Ubac on a 1958 project entitled *Pierre écrite. Ardoises taillées par Raoul Ubac*. That book contains several poems that would reappear seven years later in the definitive version of *Pierre écrite*.

("rappelée"), the new divine song does not begin, for *Pierre écrite* ends with this moment of recall, which is followed only by the silence of the white page. The immanence of the earth *can* indeed be revealed, but only in this moment of presence, which must itself give way to absence, to memory (the other sense of "rappelée," namely, that of remembrance).[119]

6. Conclusion: An Opening onto Future Poetry

Ten years will pass between *Pierre écrite* and Bonnefoy's next collection of poetry, *Dans le leurre du seuil* (1975). And while many formal and metrical aspects of his poetry change with the new collection, his commitment to the lengthy spiritual process of poetry does not.[120] Furthermore, the "demon" of his poetry, that temptation of an otherworldly transcendence, remains, although a level of spiritual lucidity that was not present at the outset of *Pierre écrite* is now evident. The poetic voice that is finally "cleansed and recalled" at the end of *Pierre écrite* finds itself, at the outset of Bonnefoy's subsequent collection of poetry, once again grappling with the demons of oneiric, otherworldly transcendence. I cite the very first verses of *Dans le leurre du seuil*: "Mais non, toujours / D'un déploiement de l'aile de l'impossible / Tu t'éveilles, avec un cri, / Du lieu qui n'est qu'un rêve" (P-253, v. 1-4). And the lengthy approach to presence, the spiritual process of poetic critique, begins anew. Just a few verses later, we read the following: "Et tu te lèves une éternelle fois / Dans cet été qui t'obsède. / A nouveau ce bruit d'un ailleurs, proche, lointain" (v. 8-10). The unreal summer, the obsessive desire for something *beyond* the limits of our mortality, does not disappear with the calming of the fever at the end of *Pierre écrite*. That demon—or angel—will continue to be present, in one form or another, throughout Bonnefoy's poetic career. Rooted as it is in language, with its inherently conceptual nature, Bonnefoy's spiritual path is a path without a final endpoint, for working within language implies the lure of the concept and the image, in opposition to a simpler and more immediate perception of the world.[121]

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[119] John E. Jackson briefly relates this poem to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, and to the journey of Leontes in particular (*La Question du moi* 299). It should also be noted that Ronald Gérard Giguère, in his monograph on Bonnefoy, explicitly links the motif of absence—and death—with the notion of "anguish" ("angoisse") in the final section of *Pierre écrite* (101-104).

[120] *Dans le leurre du seuil* comprises some 81 pages of poetry, and is thus of a similar length to his three preceding collections. On the formal level, this collection is distinguished first by the prevalence of much shorter verses (in terms of number of syllables), and second by the absence of any short individual poems (now, the individual poems, if one can still call them that, continue for pages without any page breaks, lending an even greater sense of continuity and formal cohesion to the collection).

[121] In his monograph on Bonnefoy, Concetta Cavallini fittingly refers to language as Bonnefoy's "necessary enemy" ("cet ennemi nécessaire," p. 11).

Pierre écrite is thus a decisive moment in Bonnefoy's poetic and spiritual path. For it is with this collection that he finally overcomes the doubts and darkness that dominate *Hier régnant désert*, yet without falling back into the idealizations of death that dominate *Douve* and Bonnefoy's early Surrealist poetry. It is also in *Pierre écrite* that Bonnefoy clearly defines—between the lines, as it were—his poetry as a spiritual practice, and he has yet to waver from this practice of poetry. Here, he finally accepts the paradoxical nature of his poetic task, and finds a certain salvation within it, thereby claiming his own space as a poet. The philosopher and phenomenologist Jean-Luc Nancy, discussing Bonnefoy's work, puts it quite astutely: "la poésie est toujours une catégorie métaphysique, ontothéologique. Tandis que le vers est simplement athée, ou plutôt athéologique" (50). This dialectic is the threshold of Bonnefoy's poetics, a threshold that he follows on his path towards a reconciliation with his own mortality. Poetry, as he writes near the end of *Pierre écrite*, is a "feu double" (P-247), both angel and demon, presence and absence. It is here, at this paradoxical spiritual crossroads, that Bonnefoy's uprooted poetry takes root, and finds its strongest resonances.

Chapter Three

The Struggle for Arab Culture: On Adonis' Critical Thought and Poetry

I would insist that the speech act, as a rite of institution, is one whose contexts are never fully determined in advance, and that the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center of a politics of hegemony, one that offers an unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking.

- Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech* (161)

Is He who creates as he who does not create? Will you not remember?

- The Quran, Sura 16 ("The Bee"), verse 17[122]

Although Adonis' poetry, like Bonnefoy's, can be viewed as spiritual practice in its own right, Adonis' very different cultural context has a massive impact on the modes of that practice. Bonnefoy writes within a culture that has already been subject to a so-called hermeneutics of suspicion, beneath a cultural sky that has already witnessed the death of God, and indeed, his poetry can be read as an attempt to recuperate a sense of the sacred from that metaphysical void without falling back into the dogmatism of orthodox religion. Adonis, on the other hand, is writing within a largely Islamic cultural context, and within an Arabic language that is largely informed by the textual apparatus of Islam. While Bonnefoy is able to write almost exclusively on the more "basic" level of the bare concept in order to combat and transform our relationship to conceptual language as a whole, Adonis must also work on the cultural level, i.e., with the metaphysical resonances of Islamic terminology—this is the necessary starting point for the spiritual practice of his poetry, one that is simultaneously a cultural practice. The two poets use similar techniques in their work (in particular the long poem, which allows for a complex intratextual web across individual poems), and both attempt to enact certain spiritual transformations by voiding the linguistic systems that the reader brings to the poetry, but the spiritual

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[122] This English citation is from A.J. Arberry's translation, *The Koran Interpreted* (288). The original text reads: *a-fa-man yakhlaqu ka-man lā yakhlaqu, a-fa-lā tadhkurūna?*

thrusts of their respective poetry are quite different. A realm of unitary spiritual experience subtends both of their works, yet for Adonis, access to that realm cannot avoid an engagement with Islam, the proverbial "elephant in the room" as far as spirituality is concerned. A clearing of the conceptual ground can only happen with a revaluation of specific Islamic concepts. This path of revaluation and destruction, this breaking down of dogma through the mode of poetry, forms the core of Adonis' spiritual practice.

This is very different from what we have just seen in Bonnefoy's mature poetics. Indeed, with its emphasis on destruction and violent imagery, wherein any image evoked is almost immediately negated, Adonis' poetry is much closer to Bonnefoy's *Douve* than to the more developed spiritual path of *Pierre écrite*. This difference can, at least in part, be explained in cultural terms. The French poet is able to assume that his implied reader possesses a large degree of individuality and agency. Adonis, however, does not believe he can make the same assumption with his implied Arab reader, whom he views as lacking in agency and as a captive to the cultural edifice of Islam—a fact that becomes abundantly clear when one examines his critical writings. His poetry thus takes on more of a didactic element, and indeed he repeatedly casts his poetic alter ego Mihyar as a new kind of prophet, one who will teach the unenlightened masses a doctrine of immanence rather than transcendence. In Bonnefoy's mature work, there is a certain humility vis-à-vis both the implied reader and language itself. He does not write to teach, but rather to work through his own arduous spiritual process, taking the reader with him on that journey. Furthermore, in *Pierre écrite* he confronts both the temptations and the limits of language head-on, and ultimately comes to accept them without falling back into the despair of the Dark Night—he continues to write poetry, and forcefully claims his own unique poetic space, but with humility that is lacking in the poetry of Adonis, at least at this point in his career. While Bonnefoy uses language to go beyond the conceptual, Adonis uses language more for the purpose of destroying what he views as dominant Islamic concepts. Due to the specific cultural context of the Arab world, Adonis' poetry is an effort to break down dogma, and as such it remains very much within a conceptual or cognitive level. Indeed, language appears to be the unifying element that permits Adonis to refer to Arab culture as a whole. As we shall see from an analysis of both his critical writings and his poetry, it is language, in Adonis' view, that determines the possible parameters of our thought. Therefore, all of those who share the standardized Arabic language also share these possible parameters or boundaries.[123] Where Bonnefoy seeks to go beyond conceptual language, Adonis seeks instead to neutralize it.

In the present chapter as well as the one that follows it I will be making use of his seminal 1961 collection *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* to examine the mechanisms of his poetry that allow for such a clearing of the conceptual ground. Viewing his poetry through the lens of a via negativa spiritual practice of destruction allows for fruitful new readings of Adonis' work. In that work, he takes up Bonnefoy's articulation of

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[123] Due to space constraints, I must leave out the important questions of dialects and illiteracy.

unitary experience as a lengthy process of intratextual deconceptualization to enact a certain transvaluation of what he views as mainstream (largely Sunni) Islamic values. As with Bonnefoy, Adonis' poetry simultaneously involves a critique of otherworldly transcendence. Although I will not be making any kind of conventional "influence" argument that would place Bonnefoy in a superior position to Adonis, the latter was clearly very familiar with Bonnefoy's writings. Adonis translated a large portion of Bonnefoy's poetry into Arabic, and he wrote his first major collection (*Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*) while spending a year (1960-1961) abroad in Paris. Yet despite their many similarities, the emphasis in Adonis' poetry is not on the spiritual transformation of the poetic subject (as is the case with Bonnefoy), but rather exclusively on the spiritual-cultural transformation of the implied reader of that poetry. With its strong didactic element, which was not present in Bonnefoy's poetry, Adonis' poetry suggests that the poetic subject is already in a spiritually "elevated" place, a realm of fertile creativity that only becomes possible once the shackles of dogmatic, orthodox thinking have been cast off. Adonis thus casts himself (or his poetic alter-ego Mihyar) not so much as someone seeking spiritual liberation, but rather as someone who is already liberated, and is now seeking to liberate others. His poetry attempts to tempt the reader away from the "known," from the canonical texts of orthodox (read: Sunni) Islam and toward a much more slippery view of truth. It is an ambitious attempt to redefine the spirit of Arab culture as a whole.

Yet before turning to his innovative spiritual poetry, we must first briefly consider the main thrusts of Adonis' critical writings, and in particular his views on Arab culture and the role of poetry and art within it. Following this, I will begin my analysis of his poetry, introducing the groundbreaking collection *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*, and taking a first look at the melange of inter- and intra-textual practices that this 268-page collection contains, and how these constitute a key aspect of Adonis attempted spiritual revolution, his revaluation of Islamic values. The final chapter of this dissertation will then deepen and expand this examination of *Songs of Mihyar* as a form of spiritual practice by taking a more sustained look at its intertextual mechanisms within the context of a single dense poem.

1. Innovation and Traditionalism: On Adonis' Critical Writings

For Adonis, spirituality is as much a cultural issue as an ontological one. As early as 1959, he writes pejoratively of the "traditionalist mind" (*al-dhihn al-taqlīdī*) (Z-9) that, in his view, dominates Arab society.[124] The word *taqlīd* is often translated as "tradition" or "customs," and implies an uncritical acceptance as well as an unquestioning

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[124] The abbreviation "Z-" refers to Adonis' book *Zaman al-shiʿr*. He writes, earlier in the same paragraph, of the "dominating concepts" (*al-mafhūmāt al-sāʾida*) that 'New Poetry' (*al-shiʿr al-jadīda*) overcomes. And, some ten years later, in his 1970 text "How Revolutionary Poetry Works," he writes of the "inherited traditionalist culture" (*al-thaqāfa al-taqlīdiyya al-mawrūtha*) (Z-122).

imitation of the past.[125] Two years later, he states unequivocally that "the men in our countries are bound to the past" (Z-225). This pejorative diagnosis of "tradition" or "traditionalism" will pervade Adonis' writings on Arab culture. Yet in his earlier writings, such ideas are put forth in a somewhat simplistic, constative or descriptive mode, that is: they are asserted as simple facts, and only very little—if any—evidence is given to support them.

Adonis' descriptive arguments begin to take on a greater degree of complexity in 1974, however, with the publication of the first volume of his massive three-volume dissertation, a detailed analysis of the origins of the dominant Arab culture, the Arab *Leitkultur*.[126] The title of his dissertation indicates the conceptual framework within which Adonis carries out his arguments: *The Static and the Dynamic: A Study of Conformity and Innovation on the Part of the Arabs.* Adonis' description of the Arab culture that has, in his view, dominated since the early days of Islam is complex, and not all of its many facets can be mentioned here. Yet one aspect of the static *Leitkultur* is particularly central, namely the phenomenon that Adonis frequently refers to as "pastism" (*al-māḍawiyya*). This is described as a broad and general Arab mentality; it is a favorable cultural orientation towards the authorities of the past, and notably the religious authorities. Adonis defines pastism as "the clinging to what is known and the refusal— even the fear—of the unknown" (Th-28[127]). Pastism is linked specifically to Islam in Adonis' dissertation. "The society based on revelation is, at its core, a society of imitation [*taqlīd*]," he writes (Th-39). In this respect, the early Islamic texts, and also the established interpretations of these texts, represent "the known." They constitute the foundation of what Adonis calls "the religious Islamic vision" (Th-20), i.e., the dominant discourse that succeeds in marginalizing all those who find themselves outside of it. It is this discourse that considers the Koran to be the "most correct knowledge" (*al-ʿilm al-*

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[125] In the same paragraph, Adonis also refers to *al-taqlīdiyya*, which is perhaps best translated as "traditionalism."

[126] I am borrowing the term *Leitkultur*—or "dominant culture"—from the Syrian-born sociologist Bassam Tibi, who coined it in his 1998 book *Europa ohne Identität?*, albeit in a very different context, for Tibi's work focuses on the European *Leitkultur*. With regards to constative and/or descriptive utterances, I am following J.L. Austin's comments in his *How to Do Things with Words*, where he contrasts these utterances with performatives. Austin does not provide a strict definition of "constative utterances" (which he believes is a more general term than "descriptive utterances"). Indeed, he remarks on the diffculty of maintaining a strict dichotomy between the constative/descriptive and the performative realms (Austin 150), and also notes that some utterances are both descriptive and performative (83). All the same, he does assert that in general constative utterances tend to be (but are not always) true or false, whereas performatives tend to be happy or unhappy (or felicitous/unfelicitous). In other words, the performative *does* something, whereas the constative simply *says* or *states* something (133).

[127] The abbreviation "Th-" refers to Volume One of Adonis' dissertation, *Al-thābit wa-ʾl-mutaḥawwil: baḥth fī ʾl-ittibāʿ wa-ʾl-ibdāʿ ʿinda ʾl-ʿarab* (Vol. 1: al-uṣūl).

aṣaḥḥ) (Th-65). If the Koran, in other words, is the only established "truth" and also the most perfect embodiment of language, then all linguistic utterances that come after it are mere attempts to approach this past perfection. The present *Leitkultur* thus becomes "fixed" or "static" through this extreme emphasis on the past—hence the word "pastism."

In a similar manner to Bonnefoy's establishing an opposition between immobility and movement, Adonis establishes—in the very title of his dissertation—an opposition between "the static" (*al-thābit*) and "the dynamic" (*al-mutaḥawwil*), with his own work naturally positioned firmly on the side of the latter. This dynamic tendency is equated with *al-ibdā'*, i.e., "innovation" or "creativity" as opposed to *al-ittibā'* ("conformity"), and it is this open-ended creativity that is part and parcel of true spiritual experience for Adonis. Together with its critique of the static tendency in Arab history, Adonis' dissertation is interested primarily in recuperating an Arab history of dynamism. And although I cannot discuss Adonis' lengthy rewriting of Arab literary history in any depth here, it should be noted that Sufi thinkers and poets play a very prominent role within that new history, and represent the primary innovative current within Islam. Indeed, Adonis would later go on to devote a whole book to Sufism, entitled *Sufism and Surrealism*, wherein he equates Sufism with the dynamic tendency in the Arab world: "In terms of [Sufism's] literature, it is an innovative movement [...]. / Sufism is distinctive in that, in its search for the absolute, it resorts to poetry when it wishes to express its most profound feelings" (Adonis, 2005, p. 17). As Muhsin J. Musawi notes in his book *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition*, "Although Sufism has its own registers, its innate resistance to formality and limits, along with its ultimate rift with orthodoxy are appealing to modern poets. Adonis wrote poetry in a neo-Sufi vein, as did others from the old generation and the new" (116).[128] For Adonis, innovation and spirituality go hand in hand, as both represent a journey into the unknown, and away from pre-existing structures of power and knowledge. This coupling of creativity/innovation and spirituality is a hallmark of Adonis' critical writings, and one of the few constants across all of his diverse works. It is the lens through which he both writes and reads the writing of others, as can be seen from the following citation from his 1992 essay "Rimbaud the Mystic" ("Rimbaud Mystique," written in French), which also points to the realm of unitary spiritual experience that subtends all of Adonis' own poetry: "Rimbaud et les mystiques n'enseignent pas la vérité des choses, mais nous aident à la decouvrir; c'est une vérité mouvante et non pas statique, qu'il faudra interpréter continuellement afin qu'elle reste constamment

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[128] In a later part of his book, Musawi makes the following observations: "Sufism of the first generation in the eighth century may not offer poetic patterns for subsequent transgression or transposition, but its language and mode are transgressive in the first place. Its burgeoning into a discourse that belies standardization sets the ground for deviational poetics and easily offers its power therefore to modernist experimentation" (260). Although he does not cite Adonis specifically here, he is essentially following Adonis' arguments about Sufism to the letter.

vivante. De même pour l'univers: il n'a pas été donné à l'homme qu'il le fige dans une connaissance bien déterminé, mais pour qu'il le réinterprète toujours" (*Prière* 287-288).

It should briefly be noted that the pastist paradigm itself entails a certain *Leitkultur*, because it implies a *certain* past, i.e., the past seen through traditionalist Islamic eyes. It is thus a view of history that attempts to dominate all others and extend itself into the present. In other words, it is a discourse, a mode of discursive violence. Yet in its own view, this dominant discourse is not merely one possible take on history, but rather history itself. Religion, as Adonis notes in the second volume of his dissertation, "does not have a history, it is history" (Adonis 1977 p. 206).[129]

This dominant discourse is clearly not to be understood as a disembodied linguistic entity. Rather, it is the constitutive element of the single and unified *Leitkultur*, and in this sense it is very difficult to draw a conceptual boundary between "discourse" and "culture." The dominant Arab discourse is the formulation of a unified view of culture, and thus determines the parameters within which culture is thought. As Adonis writes, "the Arab-Islamic culture that has dominated [...] is a unity of view and practice, it is a specific means of thought, and a specific means of behavior, and it is a specific content. And this means that religion is integrated or merged into cultural and social phenomena to the point that it is not possible to place the exact border that separates them from one other" (Th-59). In other words, the traditionalist religious discourse does not merely pervade Arab culture, it also constitutes that culture. I use the term "religious discourse" here—and not "religion" in itself—because Adonis is careful to distinguish between religion per se and how religion is interpreted and implemented on the societal level. Moreover, he further tempers his argument by stating that he's not referring to every single aspect of Arab society, but rather to the mentality that has "dominated" therein, as embodied by the factions in positions of power (Th-31). One prominent example that Adonis gives is the implementation of *sharīʿa* law, which he views as being nothing other than an extension of this dominant mentality into virtually all aspects of social life (Th-45). For Adonis, *sharīʿa* is the very embodiment of the static, of laws that are not based on the changing human condition but rather on texts that were set down over a millennium ago.[130] By keeping such examples in mind, it becomes easier to understand how Adonis can so sweepingly condemn the Arab *Leitkultur* as "a culture based on prescription and prohibition. Or in a word: a single static culture" (Th-109).

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[129] For further elaboration of traditionalist views of history, see p. 80 and especially pp. 92/3 of the first volume of Adonis' dissertation (1974). It should also be noted that Adonis generally equates traditionalism with mainstream Sunni visions of Islam, and not with their Shiite counterparts. This distinction will become important in the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation.

[130] Adonis' overly generalized and ahistorical characterization of *sharīʿa* is questionable at best, for it ignores the incredible complexity of the issue and the many factors that contributed to the development of the *sharīʿa* over time. The *sharīʿa* is not a static set of unchanging laws, but rather a flexible entity open to interpretation and revision, and one that has taken on various forms in the course of the history of the Islamic world.

One aspect of this prohibitive discourse is particularly important to Adonis: namely, what he views as the Islamic prohibition on *creation*. This prohibition is already found implicitly in the rhetorical question from the Quran that I have taken as the epigraph for this chapter: "Is He who creates as he who does not create?" The implied answer is "no," of course. The Koran does not here actually *prohibit* creation, but rather states very simply that only God creates because only God has the power to create. Man cannot truly create.[131] Within the framework of the dominant discourse, the poet's task is thus simply to imitate the past, whether in terms of form or content, and not to be innovative or creative.[132] Adonis actively revolts against this injunction against creation or innovation in both his critical and poetic writings. From my reading of his poetry as a spiritual practice in and of itself, his implied position becomes the following: If the inherent nature of the Godhead is creative, and if the spiritual path is ultimately about realizing one's own divinity, one's own ultimate identity with that Godhead, then creation/innovation is an inherent part of the spiritual path.

This notion of revolution or revolt (*thawra*) or refusal (*rafḍ*) is one of Adonis' chief concerns in both his critical writings and his poetry: the simple act of rejecting or refusing that dominant Arab culture that was described in the previous section.[133] Adonis calls for Arab poets to "question, doubt, and refuse this culture with its divine religious origins, as Nietzsche (for example) and others did in Europe with regards to Christianity" (Z-41).[134] Nietzsche in particular is evoked remarkably often by Adonis, and this is hardly a coincidence, as Adonis' critical writings can perhaps most succinctly be described as a radical revaluation (*Umwerthung*) of traditionalist Islamic values.[135] These writings represent a revolt against the cultural past and have a clear didactic element: "The men in our countries are bound to the past. We teach them to break the reins and bolt" (Z-225).

Yet while Adonis rejects the static mentality that privileges the past over the present and future, he does not reject the past in its entirety. One of the constitutive elements of any culture is that culture's take on the past, the way it views its intellectual and political histories. But, as Adonis writes, "there is the past and then there is the past."[136] He seeks to retrieve what he considers the "vital" or life-affirming elements of Arab cultural history (Z-238) that are opposed to *taqlīd*, that traditionalist

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[131] The remarks in this paragraph closely follow Adonis' numerous discussions of creation. It should be noted, however, that the issue of creation in Islam is extraordinarily complex, and certainly cannot be reduced to the above analysis.

[132] In the first volume of his dissertation (1974), Adonis argues that the form to be here adopted is that of pre-Islamic poetry, whereas the content is that of Islam.

[133] I will discuss the various resonances of this term—*rafḍ*—in some detail in the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation.

[134] From the essay *Al-shiʿr al-ʿarabī wa-mushkilāt al-tajdīd*, in the book *Zaman al-shiʿr*.

[135] Later in the present chapter, I will discuss the notion of *Umwerthung* in some detail, in relation to intertextuality in particular.

[136] This phrase appears in both the 1961 letter to Yūsuf al-Khāl (Z-239) and the 1971 essay *Shajarun tasharu qarba al-insān* (Z-167).

and imitative mode of thought that Adonis equates with death in its negative aspect.[137] His critical project is a rethinking of Arab cultural history outside the bounds of the traditionalist religious discourse. It involves a conscious selection of the past. "There is more than one origin of Arab culture," he writes (Th-32/3)[138], and Adonis is vehement in seeking out and asserting the *other* origins of this culture. "We have our own Arab past," he writes to Yūsuf al-Khāl in 1961, and continues with the following (Z-239):

> We do not seek this cultural past in al-Ghazālī and Aḥmad Shawqī and the like, but rather in Imrū al-Qays, Abū Nuwās, Abū Tammām, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, al-Mutanabbī, al-Maʿarrī, al-Ḥallāj, al-Rāzī, Ibn al-Rāwandī, Shiblī Shumayyil, Faraḥ Anṭūn, and hundreds of other creative minds from our Arab heritage who transformed, refused, and rebelled against the familiar and the inherited, the ordinary and the traditional, and who created and innovated and made contributions. So let us finish what they started.

These, then, are some of the names that form a critical counter-history, a history that Adonis sees as his own, one which he first posits and into which he then inscribes himself as a poet. Adonis provides us with an Arab history seen through a different perspective, one that places supreme worth on innovation (*ibdāʿ*) and creation, as well as on the concomitant mystical and spiritual experience of the unknown, as opposed to the preexisting cultural "known" as represented by Sunni dogma (Sufi figures, for example, feature prominently in almost all of Adonis' recuperations of Arab cultural history).

"Creation" is here diametrically opposed to imitation, to any unquestioning or uncritical inheritance. "We are the ones who create and do not inherit," Adonis writes in an early declamatory text (Z-228). Yet of course, there is still a certain kind of inheritance at play here, a recollection of the "past innovative traces" (Th-104) of Arab culture. These traces do not provide examples of fixed or static values that the present age should follow, but rather testify to man's spiritual greatness, to his inherent nature as a creator. In reinterpreting Arab cultural history, Adonis explicitly creates an inheritance that is his own. Yet that which is inherited is not a set of fixed values, but rather the determination and courage to create/innovation and thus to revolt against the repressive dominant culture. The innovative or revolutionary tendency is the element that binds this "history" together, a history that is nothing other than a constant stepping into the unknown, a constant overcoming of itself.[139]

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[137] For the equation of traditionalism with death, see Z-168 as well as Th-34. With regards to the notion of vitality in cultural history, I would note that once again a very Nietzschean register is being evoked by Adonis here, one that perhaps finds its strongest resonance in Nietzsche's *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (*On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*).

[138] *aṣl al-thaqāfa al-ʿarabiyya laysa wāḥidan bal kathīr.*

[139] As Adonis writes one page earlier (Th-103), "vital civilization is not a single act of forming [*takwīnan wāḥidan*], but rather continual reforming [*iʿādat takwīn mustamirra*]."

Throughout all of these arguments, a very clear distinction is maintained between the "static" and "dynamic" elements of culture, i.e., between traditionalism on the one hand and innovation on the other. Yet how exactly do these two elements interact with one another? Adonis asserts that in pre-Islamic society, the dynamic existed alongside the static, and that this society thus "contained the seeds" of a dialectical relationship between the two (Th-101).[140] In his view, such a dialectic would have been the productive and "natural" (Th-27) development of Arab culture or society—and it should be noted that Adonis has clearly used Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the basis for this argument.[141] All the same, the nature of this dialectic is very different from that of Hegel's. Adonis explicitly states that his dialectic is *not* one of negation, but rather one where the two terms "complete" or "complement" (*yukmil*) (Th-113) each other, one of "openness and cooperation" (*al-infitāḥ wa-'l-tafāʿul*) (Th-270). Yet an important thing to note here is that the static/dynamic dialectic *is* itself dynamic, as it involves a constant overcoming of anything that attempts to establish itself as fixed or static.[142] In other words—and this is my interpretation, not something Adonis explicitly acknowledges—although static elements do indeed form one side of this dialectic, they seem to be entirely subjected to the dynamic process that is the dialectic itself. As such, I would argue that in this ideal scenario the static/dynamic relationship would *not* be a dialectic of "cooperation" (as Adonis claims), but would rather entail the complete dominance of the static by the dynamic. Indeed, it is hard to envision how two such inherently opposing elements could possibly have a cooperative or complementary relationship. Rather, a large degree of tolerance on the part of the dominating element would seem to be the most one could hope for here.

The "seeds" of this dialectic, however, never came to fruition. There was no cooperation; there was no complementary relationship between the static and the dynamic. Rather, Adonis sees the early period of Islam as one where all factions held absolutely to their own views, a situation which marks the entrance of "violence into the structure of Islamic life" (Th-270).[143] That which should have been a cooperative dialectic instead became a violent struggle. The battle between the static and the dynamic involved "defamation and oppression, imprisonment and murder" (Th-27),

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[140] Adonis goes on to claim that the dynamic was able to exist due to the fact that the Bedouin tribes were not unified (Th-102).

[141] Indeed, the very first paragraph of the preface to the dissertation by one of Adonis' advisors invokes Hegel's monumental work, and asks what an Arab *Phenomenology of Spirit* would look like (Th-10).

[142] Cf. Th-113, where the dynamic is itself referred to as a dialectic.

[143] This is evident, to name the most prominent example, in the struggle over the succession of the Prophet Muhammad, which resulted in the bloody death of Ali and the Sunni-Shiite schism. With regards to this, Adonis, who himself has an Alawite background (the Alawites are a sect of Shia), views the Shia as the more "dynamic" tendency within Islam, whereas mainstream Sunni Islam is "static." This led to his very controversial praising of the 1979 (Shiite) Islamic Revolution in Iran. For a brief discussion of this, see Atif Y. Faddul's book *The Poetics of T.S. Eliot and Adunis*, p. 111.

until the innovative was thwarted and the dialectic finally died. Now, it's clear from this citation that raw, physical violence is at stake here: murder and imprisonment are both obvious forms of violence against the physical body, and the death of al-Ḥallāj—which Adonis takes up quite strongly in his poetry[144]—is one prominent example of this. Yet another mode of violence is also involved: Adonis writes of "defamation" (*tashhīr*), which is nothing other than discursive violence, injurious speech. For example, the dynamic current was dubbed *bidʻa* (Th-26), a word that bears connotations of "innovation" (*ibdāʻ*)—yet not in any positive sense, but rather in the very pejorative sense of "heresy" or "heterodoxy," i.e., departure from a pre-established norm. The term functions as a stigma. It brands people as outlaws, as moral outcasts, and thereby reinforces the dominant position of the static over the dynamic.

This combination of discursive violence and physical violence leads to the complete marginalization of any attempted innovation within Arab culture—to the "victory" (*intiṣār*) (Th-26) of the static over the dynamic, a victory that, in Adonis' view, has yet to be overturned in Arab society. That is not say that there have been no innovators in the Arab world since the early days of Islam. There *have* been some. Yet these isolated pockets of resistance and revolt have not been powerful enough to overthrow the static pastist paradigm, to change what Adonis refers to as "the structure of the Arab mind" (Th-26) and what I would prefer to call "the dominant discourse." I prefer this designation because I consider such general psychologizing on the part of Adonis to be harmful to arguments that are otherwise intriguing, and because I believe making the distinction between language per se and discourse is a methodological necessity when discussing both Adonis' critical writings and his poetry. I should here note that the notion of "discourse" (in Foucault's sense of the word[145]) does not play a prominent role in Adonis' writings—Adonis tends to refer to language in general, rather than specific discourse.[146] Furthermore, it should be stressed that Adonis' idiosyncratic and reductive framework is itself a mode of injurious speech, and that by employing such facile and binary labels as "static" and "dynamic" (when applied to diverse historical trends and complex thinkers[147]) Adonis is applying the very same defamatory method that he accuses others of applying. This also includes the use of such pejorative terms as "imitative" and "conformist." That is to say, Adonis does not acknowledge that a very clear polemical strain dominates his dissertation (and by

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[144]See, for example, his poem "Elegy for al-Ḥallāj" in *Aghānī mihyār al-dimashqī* (M-235).

[145] See, for example, p. 12 of *L'ordre du discours*: "[...] le discours n'est pas simplement ce qui traduit les luttes ou les systèmes de domination, mais ce pour quoi, ce par quoi on lutte, le pouvoir dont on cherche à s'emparer." For the distinction between discourse and language, see Foucault's *L'archéologie du savoir*, p. 39.

[146] Once again, language is the unifying element that permits Adonis to refer to Arab culture as a whole, since language determines the possible parameters of our thought. Those who share the standardized Arab language also share these possible parameters or boundaries. This is in stark contrast to Bonnefoy's mature views on language.

[147] For example, Al-Ghazali, who Adonis lumps into the "static" category despite his very complex—and often extremely nuanced—ideas and views.

"polemical" I mean "discursively violent"[148]), and instead prefers to describe that voluminous work as a "phenomenological historiography of Arab culture" (Th-24). Nevertheless, although the static/dynamic opposition is somewhat simplistic and reductive, and although it certainly fails to take into account a large number of important issues (and no economic ones whatsoever, as Adonis himself admits), this framework still provides an intriguing view of Arab cultural history.

One question remains unanswered, one that is particularly important given the deep parallel that I have established between spirituality and creation/innovation in Adonis' work: What exactly does it mean to *create*, or to *innovate*, in Adonis' view? First, Adonis, throughout his critical writings, frequently couples the notion of innovation with that of a more spiritual perception of the world; he notes the following in his book *Sufism and Surrealism* (117): "Thus we see that in the Sufi aesthetic, there is something that compels man to go forward, to go beyond the limits that restrain him, to go beyond the known. As [the Sufi] moves forward, he must constantly renew himself, so that he will remain an eternal presence, eternally ready to advance towards the unknown." And as with Bonnefoy, the creative-spiritual act is one that primarily occurs within language. "We cannot create a revolutionary Arab culture without revolutionary language," Adonis writes in 1970 (Z-131), and I would argue that this revolutionary language is an aspect of the clearing of the ground that is part and parcel of Adonis' spiritual practice. Indeed, one of the consequences of the static's "victory" over the dynamic is linguistic, or rather semantic. The problem lies in the separation between meaning and utterance, and more specifically in the general belief that meaning precedes utterance (utterance in the Saussurian sense of the word *parole*). Speech is seen as being subservient to meaning. That is to say: meaning, and with it 'truth', is believed to be something static (i.e., unchanging and unchangeable) that subtends all utterances and to which all utterances either do or do not conform (Th-29)—a situation remarkably similar to the one that Bonnefoy decries with regard to Platonism.

Adonis sees figurative language—*majāz*, in Arabic—as the prime means to combat this traditionalist view of language, for the very simple reason that figurative language cannot be judged as either true or false. *Majāz* does not point to or describe a predetermined content or referent, but rather operates in a realm where the categories of true and false simply do not hold. "Figurative language is overcoming," he notes succinctly in his book *Al-shi'riyya al-'arabiyya* (75),[149] and is constantly contrasted with descriptive language (*waṣf*). As Adonis asserts, "Description closes language, *majāz*

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[148] Indeed, in Foucault's view, discourse itself can be understood as a form of violence: "Il faut concevoir le discours comme une violence que nous faisons aux choses, en tout cas comme une pratique que nous leur imposons; et c'est dans cette pratique que les événements du discours trouvent le principe de leur régularité" (Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, p. 55).
[149] The Arabic reads: *fa-'l-majāz tajāwuz*. Please note that this book is not to be confused with his *Introduction to Arab Poetics.*

opens it up" (Th-107).[150] In my reading of Adonis, *majāz* is the gateway to spiritual experience within language—hence, the supreme role of poetry in inaugurating a new Arabic culture. Indeed, in his book *Sufism and Surrealism*, Adonis explicitly links figurative language with a certain innovation on the part of the reader (120): "Figurative language naturally demands a dynamic of reading, which will complement its dynamism, since reading, like figurative language, is constantly innovative."

Now, as we have seen, Adonis' dissertation is an impressive critique of the Islamic discourse that dominates Arab society, yet it is a critique that remains within the realm of ordinary descriptive and prescriptive language—as indeed it must, insofar as it presents itself as a work of academic scholarship. *Majāz*, on the other hand, is a revolt against the very mode of the dominant discourse, namely the binary true/false opposition. It is "a battleground for semantic contradictions" (Adonis, *Al-shiʻriyya al-ʻarabiyya* 75),[151] that is to say: it is a mode of language wherein contradictory truths or meanings are often created, and one that thus implicitly deconstructs the dominant discourse. There is no static truth or meaning that precedes the figurative utterance—rather, the utterance provides its own meaning. In my reading, this clearing of the ground is an integral aspect of Adonis' spiritual process, which hinges on an embrace of the unknown.

As the creator of such incendiary language, it is the poet who has the potential to revolutionize the dominant discourse—or, as Adonis would put it, to revolutionize language itself. As he writes in a short 1970 text with the title "How Does Revolutionary Poetry Work?"[152]: "[...] the role of the revolutionary poet is to explode the forms of the old system, culturally. That is, his role is to work on the deconstruction and destruction of the old cultural structure for the sake of establishing a revolutionary cultural structure" (Z-123). Insofar as it calls into question the system of meaning and truth that subtends the dominant religious discourse, modern poetry, in Adonis' view, emerges as one of the key battlegrounds for Arab culture. His first major work of poetry, and arguably his most influential, the 1961 collection *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene,* is perhaps the clearest example of this, and it is aspects of this seminal work that I will be examining in the remainder of this chapter, as well as the remainder of this dissertation.

2. On Intertextuality and *Umwerthung*: A First Look at *Mihyar*

"Look back, Orpheus, learn to walk in the world" (M-102).[153] These words from Adonis' *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* (hereafter cited as *Mihyar*), a collection considered

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[150] It is primarily through the *image* that figurative language operates, where the image is not seen as description but rather as an instance of creation.

[151] The Arabic of this citation reads: "*majāl li-ṣirāʻ al-tanāquḍāt al-dalāliyya.*"

[152] The title, *Kayfa yafʻalu al-shiʻr al-thawrī?* could also be translated as "What Does Revolutionary Poetry Do?"

[153] The abbreviation "M-" refers to the first Arabic edition of *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* (*Aghānī mihyār al-dimashqī*, 1961). This particular line is from the opening prose poem (entitled "Psalm") of the collection's third section or chapter (entitled "The

by many to be the apex of modernist Arabic poetry, provide a glimpse not only into the remarkable intertextual mechanisms that are one of the hallmarks of Adonis' poetry, but also into the theory of intertextuality implicit in that poetry. As intertextuality is a core aspect of my entire reading of Adonis' poetry as spiritual practice, it is necessary to provide some discussion of the term before moving into more in-depth readings of the poetry (Chapter Four will also offer a sustained intertextual reading of Adonis' poetry). At first glance, the above allusion to Orpheus might seem to be in line with early theories of intertextuality. Following Chana Kronfeld's arguments in the third chapter of her book *The Full Severity of Compassion*, I would note that the term "intertextuality" was first defined by Julia Kristeva in 1969 as "a mosaic of quotations" (Kristeva 37), and was then expanded in scope by Roland Barthes' assertion in 1973 that "every text is an intertext" (Rabau 59). Although such models of intertextuality do effectively level off hitherto diachronic and canon-oriented views of literature into synchronicity, they do so at the expense of authorial agency. Moreover, this radical leveling of all texts into intertexts makes meaningful critical observations about both allusion and citation extremely difficult.[154] As Gérard Genette has pointed out, some works are more, or more explicitly—and I would add, more *consciously*—intertextual than others (Genette, *Palimpsestes*, 20), and this is clearly the case with Adonis' own poetry. I will therefore chart a middle course, one that views the author as an agent actively engaging with the texts of the past in an attempt to (re)constitute her- or himself as a poetic subject, and one that allows for the possibility (though certainly does not imply the inevitability) of the reader/listener[155] being implicated in this process. This poetry can thus also be read as an attempt to inaugurate a certain agency on the part of the reader—it is this creative agency that is necessary for a questioning of the religious tenets of the past, and that can allow for more authentic creative-spiritual experience to emerge.

Dead God"). All English translations from this work are my revisions from an unpublished English translation by myself and Ivan S. Eubanks: I have here attempted to hew as closely as possible to the meanings of the original Arabic text, often abandoning some of the more poetic moments of our English translation in the process.
[154] See the third chapter of Kronfeld's book for a more detailed look at this issue. I would add that Michael Riffaterre proposes an even more radical notion of intertextuality in his 1979 *La Production du texte*—and in particular in the book's second chapter—where he vigorously argues against attempts to link the poetic text to external referents in the real world: "La sémantique du poème est caractérisée par le bricolage dont parle Lévi-Strauss: elle repose entièrement sur des mots arrangés à l'avance, sur des groupes préfabriqués, dont le sens ne tient pas aux choses, mais à leur rôle dans un système de signifiants" (43-44). This approach, however, while perhaps quite malleable for analyzing the work of certain Symbolist poets, seems remarkably ineffectual when dealing with poetry that contains clear allusions to texts or historical events.
[155] I will henceforth refer only to "the reader" instead of "the reader/listener." I do this for the sake of brevity, fully aware that orality is a key component of many of the texts under discussion in this chapter.

As the above citation ("Look back, Orpheus, learn to walk in the world") demonstrates, Adonis' own intertextual mechanisms are much more than mere allusions, and this is part and parcel of what Muhsin J. Musawi has called Adonis' ability "to manipulate heritage and use its sources in an Eliotesque manner" (56). The myth of Orpheus is called to the reader's mind, yet it is simultaneously resignified. As the story goes, upon the death of his wife Eurydice, Orpheus travels to the underworld and plays a song so beautiful that the gods themselves—Hades and Persephone, that is—are moved to pity. They grant his request that Eurydice rejoin him in the land of the living, but on one condition: that he should walk in front of Eurydice and not look back at her until they both reach the world of the living. Orpheus turns around a moment too soon, however, forgetting that Eurydice is a few steps behind him, and Orpheus is condemned to live the rest of his life without the one he loves. The poetic voice in Adonis' line, however, directly challenges the divine injunction, and the evocation of Orpheus in particular—the poet and musician par excellence—links the notion of poetry with that of insurrection and dissent. Furthermore, the use of the second-person imperative transposes the reader to Orpheus'—and, in my view, also the poet's—position. The injunction to "look back" (literally, "look behind you") is extended from the purely spatial realm into the temporal one, as the reader qua Orpheus is told to reconsider the edicts of the past, and indeed to disobey the gods and instead find the divinity immanent within one's own self. This call for an active critical engagement with one's past is central to Adonis' implicit theory of intertextuality. Paradoxically, the poetic voice invokes and thus acknowledges the authority of the past—whether considered as that of the gods or as the textual authority of the myth of Orpheus itself—only to undermine this authority, and thus transform the original text.[156] Taking up Chana Kronfeld's terminology in her own discussion of intertextuality, I will refer to this intertextual operation as *bilateral*, as it involves a two-way operation: the source text (here, the myth of Orpheus) informing the modern text (here, *Mihyar*), and the modern text enacting a radical re-reading or transformation of the source text.[157] This willingness to step beyond the "known" story from the past and into a radically unknown present, demonstrates a key mechanism of the spiritual practice of this poetry.

This transformation of the source text entails a possible transformation of the implied reader's relationship to that text, and it is here that both the performative aspect of Adonis' poetry and its insurrectionary potential come to the fore. Although Adonis, along with several of his poet and intellectual contemporaries,[158] sought to broadly define "Arabness" in the 1950s and 1960s by expanding its boundaries to include many civilizations around the Mediterranean cultural realm, the allusion to

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[156] A further and quite obvious paradox is the use of an injunction against obeying injunctions.

[157] Chana Kronfeld uses the term "radical, bi-lateral biblical allusion" when discussing the intertextual poetics of Yehuda Amichai (47).

[158] For example, Khalīl Ḥāwī, Yūsuf al-Khāl, Nāzik al-Malā'ika, and Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, to name just a few.

Orpheus remains a foreign—if recognizable—one for many Arab readers. It is through a more specific mode of intertextuality—intertextuality that mobilizes key texts, motifs, and rhetorical devices from both the Quran and Islamic cultural history—that Adonis' poetry finds its most potent iconoclastic force, and hence clears the ground for a different kind of spiritual practice than the one offered by mainstream Sunni Islam, or any religious system that foregrounds the transcendent over the immanent: once again, for Adonis, "God" is within, not without. In the latter part of this chapter, I will take an initial look at some of these intertextual mechanisms, and at how intertextuality and intratextuality go hand in hand in Adonis' poetry.

Implicit at every stage of my argument is the view that Adonis' overarching intertextual poetics is itself an intertextual reworking of Friedrich Nietzsche's central notion of "Umwerthung," i.e., the revaluation (or transvaluation) of values, which can itself be read as a form of bilateral intertextuality. Adonis has acknowledged—and indeed advertised—his affinities with Nietzsche on numerous occasions. A particularly prominent example can be found on the back cover of the German translation of *Mihyar*, where the following citation by Adonis is given, which associates Nietzsche with the possibility of spiritual rebirth: "Islamic culture needs a Nietzsche, someone who would just as ruthlessly and rigorously destroy the static principles of Arab-Islamic culture and reveal new principles for a spiritual and intellectual renaissance" (Adonis *Gesänge*[159]). Moreover, in another interview with Stefan Weidner, Adonis directly links the figure of Mihyar to that of Nietzsche's Zarathustra (Weidner *Und sehnen* 150). The German critic and translator Stefan Weidner thus seems justified when he makes the unequivocal claim that in *Mihyar*, Adonis undertakes a "revaluation [Umwertung] of all (Islamic) values" (142). Yet the term "Umwerthung" remains undefined and untheorized in Weidner's insightful book, perhaps because Nietzsche himself seems to use it in multiple ways.[160] Daniel W. Conway's proposal regarding the translation of *Umwerthung* reveals two of the dominant interpretations of the term: "Perhaps we should take advantage of the ambiguity of *Umwerthung* and employ the term *revaluation* to describe any reversal of existing values, while reserving the term *transvaluation* for the originary act of creating new values" (182). The first aspect of *Umwerthung* thus entails a revaluation of past values—for example, the revaluation of the notion of "pity" (*Mitleid*) in the fourth book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—and in this sense it is a quintessentially intertextual process. The second aspect of *Umwerthung* is somewhat harder to define, precisely because it involves, in my reading of it, an open-ended spiritual process of creation that eschews all fixity, and helps one step more firmly into the spiritual realm of the unknown. "Creation" here is not *ex nihilo*, but rather a result of the initial revaluation, for the initial revaluation inaugurates the never-fully-accomplished process of "value" creation, a process that constantly turns back upon

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[159] This citation is from an interview by Stefan Weidner with Adonis. Unfortunately, the book does not list when or where said interview occurred.

[160] Nietzsche's original spelling was *Umwerthung*, a spelling that I will follow. Certain authors, including Weidner, have modernized the spelling by removing the letter *h* (i.e., *Umwertung*).

itself to critique its own creations.[161] I would therefore strongly argue against any strict separation of these two aspects of *Umwerthung.* Manuel Dries offers one of the most astute and convincing frameworks for thinking about *Umwerthung* when he states that

> any constructive transvaluation project requires a more complex framework that can accommodate both (i) the skeptical liquefaction of any 'false' (simplifying) ontological and epistemological *Gleichsetzungen* [equations] and (ii) the creative 'fixing' and living with sets of values that yield existential projects to be affirmed. This results in a world no longer taken on faith as 'given' but understood [...] as both given to us and constructed-created by us and neither simply given nor simply constructed-created. (35)

For the sake of simplicity, and following the majority of Nietzsche's present-day commentators and translators, I will use the "revaluation" to refer to *Umwerthung,* but with the caveat that it not only entails a reversal of existing values, but also, in my reading, the inauguration of a certain spiritual process, a process that both Nietzsche and Adonis (in his critical writings) implicitly subsume under the notion of "creation" or "innovation."[162] This is a productive framework for my analysis not least because, as Thomas Brobjer writes, "the revaluation theme seems [...] to go beyond the individual and to contain a large social or cultural aspect" (22). This extension from the personal or individual realm to the more collective domain of "culture," broadly defined, is a key commonality in the works of both Nietzsche and Adonis, and is one aspect of Adonis' work that clearly sets him apart from Bonnefoy (who tends to remain in a more basic ontological realm).[163]

My readings of various aspects of Adonis' poetry, both in the present chapter and the following one, will simultaneously demonstrate that this poetry is a remarkably complex instantiation of what Judith Butler has referred to as "insurrectionary speech" (163), and more specifically, a destabilizing response to

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[161] As such, it is not unlike the common practice of *neti neti* ("not this, not this") in Buddhist meditation, whereby the practitioner examines everything that arises within awareness (thoughts, sensations, etc.) in order to realize that none of it actually represents her or his true self. This apophatic process of seeing through the illusion of a separate self allows for a deeper knowledge or truth to emerge.

[162] *Beyond Good and Evil* was the first published work wherein Nietzsche used the term *Umwerthung,* and both R.J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufman render it as "revaluation" in their translations.

[163] The critical leap from the individual level to the collective, however, remains a problematic one in the works of both Nietzsche and Adonis. Also, I should note that the above discussion of *Umwerthung* is by no means exhaustive. A host of critics have written on this term, and many different interpretations of it have emerged, each focusing on different works by Nietzsche (most prominently, *The Antichrist* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*). George de Huszar's understanding of this term (which in no way contradicts my own) as "the philosophical expression of the problem of attaining health" (269) is one of the more fascinating ones, in my view.

injurious Quranic interpellation.[164] Butler's theory of the "subversive resignification" (157) of injurious speech can itself be read as a post-structuralist reworking of Nietzsche's *Umwerthung* within the specific context of hate speech, as it involves both an intertextual engagement with past utterances (as Chana Kronfeld has demonstrated[165]) and an unsettling and open-ended turn toward the future, and thus closely parallels the two-fold aspect of *Umwerthung.* Indeed, Butler evokes the term "revaluation" in the introduction to her book *Excitable Speech* (14):

> The revaluation of terms such as "queer" suggest that speech can be "returned" to its speaker in a different form, that it can be cited against its originary purposes, and perform a reversal of effects. More generally, then, this suggests that the changeable power of such terms marks a kind of discursive performativity that is not a discrete series of speech acts, but a ritual chain of resignifications whose origin and end remain unfixed and unfixable. In this sense, an "act" is not a momentary happening, but a certain nexus of temporal horizons, the condensation of an iterability that exceeds the moment it occasions.

It is important to note that both Butler's and Nietzsche's implicit theories of intertextuality include a notion of agency, one that is central to Adonis' own poetics. By considering this poetry as a speech act in its own right and as a poetic reply to implicit Quranic interpellation, I will tease out, following Butler's revision of both Louis Althusser and J.L. Austin, the potential perlocutionary effects of *Mihyar*, thereby demonstrating the complex performative nature of these intertextual mechanisms. By challenging the spiritual-religious "knowns" of the Arab *Leitkultur*, Adonis' poetry represents a certain stepping into the unknown. I would argue that this creative process attempts to bring about nothing less than wholesale spiritual transformation on the part of the reader.

The preceding discussion of intertextuality and revaluation paves the way for an analysis of the main poetic mechanisms of Adonis' *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*, and how they relate to the spiritual path of that poetry. Not only is intertextuality a constitutive aspect of this early poetry by Adonis, it also plays a crucial role in the revaluation of what he views as dominant Islamic values and in pushing back against an imitative culture of "pastism" in favor of a more open-ended view of culture. As such, the poetry of *Mihyar* is very much in line with the pronouncements on Arab culture that he makes over a decade later in his dissertation. Yet, as we shall see both in the present chapter and the following one, this poetry—through its destabilizing evocations of seemingly stable cultural and linguistic signifiers—implicitly calls into question the very possibility of ever successfully establishing the dichotomies that

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[164] Butler defines insurrectionary speech as "the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change" (163).

[165] See pp. 183-186 of Kronfeld's book *The Full Severity of Passion: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, where she argues that Butler's theory of hate speech is modeled on Jewish traditions of radical intertextuality.

underlie Adonis' dissertation. In this sense, the intertextual practices that are the hallmark of *Mihyar* prefigure Adonis' later theorization of Arab culture while simultaneously transgressing the polemic boundaries of that theorization.

3. What's In a Name? On Mihyar the Damascene

As the ambiguous title "Songs of Mihyar the Damascene" suggests, this poetry can be read both as songs *about* Mihyar and as songs *by* him. The first and most immediate question that pertains to the title of this collection is largely an intertextual one: Who is Mihyar, and where does his name come from? Muhsin al-Musawi relates the name back to its clear-cut historical predecessor, the Persian poet Mihyar al-Daylamī (who wrote in Arabic), noting the following (99):

> Adopting Mihyar al-Daylamī's (d. 428/1037) first name for a mask, the poet [Adonis] identified in part with Mihyar who changed names at a certain time in his life. At the hands of the renowned poet and descendant of the Prophet, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Mihyar, otherwise Marzawayh, became a convert to Islam in 394 H / 1004 CE. Through his master, he was not only acquainted with Shī 'ism, but also with chancery skills. Although copying his master and emulating his skills, Mihyar excelled in poetry and wrote one of the best elegies lamenting the death of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī. Adonis's deliberate partial use speaks for his ambivalence in respect to both his 'Alawite lineage and his broad and unlimited vision and poetics.

Although I would hesitate to apply the term "mask" to the enigmatic poetic figure of Mihyar, insofar as "mask" would seem to presuppose some stable entity beneath it (in al-Musawi's argument, the poet himself, Adonis)—it would perhaps be slightly more accurate to refer to Mihyar as Adonis' poetic alter ego—al-Musawi makes some very important points here. It should be noted that Adonis himself has always professed that there is no link between his Mihyar the Damascene and Mihyar the Daylamite, preferring to point out the clear links between his Mihyar and Nietzsche's figure of Zarathustra.[166] And indeed, from a thematic point of view, it seems strange that Adonis would select a convert to Shiite Islam as the namesake for his iconoclastic poetic alter ego. Yet a linguistic kinship between the two poet-Mihyars—the Daylamite and the Damascene—clearly exists. While I agree with al-Musawi that Adonis' use of this name reveals his ambivalence toward his own Shiite heritage,[167] I would like to suggest a

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[166] For example, in an interview with Stefan Weidner, Adonis notes the following (while strangely referring to himself in the third peson): "There is no name relation between Mihyar the Damascene and the medieval figure Mihyar from Daylam. Adonis' Mihyar is more closely related to Nietzsche's Zarathustra or other symbolic literary figures" (Weidner 2005, p. 190).

[167] In his critical writings, Adonis reserves the vast majority of his criticism for Sunni Islam, which he so often equates with orthodoxy and rigid traditionalism. He is somewhat less antagonistic toward Shiite beliefs, a fact most prominently evident from his initial support of the Shiite revolution in Iran in 1979.

further possibility here, for the clear disparity between the historical figure and Adonis' poetic alter ego finds a parallel in the self-proclaimed central work of that German author whom Adonis constantly cites as one of his primary literary and philosophical precursors, namely: in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*

The disparity between the historical Zarathustra (better known in the West as Zoroaster) and Nietzsche's figure has been well documented,[168] and Nietzsche himself offers an explanation for this disparity in his later book *Ecce Homo*:

> What the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth, the mouth of the first immoralist: for what constitutes the tremendous historical uniqueness of that Persian is just the opposite of this. Zarathustra was the first to consider the fight of good and evil the very wheel in the machinery of things: the transposition of morality into the metaphysical realms as a force, cause, and end in itself... Zarathustra created this most calamitous error, morality, consequently, he must also be the first to recognize it.... (cited in Higgins, p. 46)

In the mouth of Nietzsche, the prophet Zarathustra turns away from his historically moralistic teachings to journey, in Nietzsche's famous formulation, beyond good and evil. The personal transformation of a figure such as Zarathustra thus becomes a metaphor for Nietzsche's overarching project of a revaluation of all values.[169] Adonis' choice of poetic namesake can be read in a similar light. In taking up the name "Mihyar," he is un-converting a convert to Islam, sending him back into so-called "paganism"; and indeed, in the very first verse poem of Adonis' seminal work, the poetic voice announces Mihyar's arrival as a "pagan spear" (M-15). And just as Nietzsche takes the (presumably) Persian[170] Zarathustra out of his cultural context, Adonis takes the Persian Mihyar out of his native province of Daylam (modern-day Gilan) and places him squarely and consciously in Damascus, the capital of Adonis' own native country, albeit one he himself emigrated from (to Beirut) in 1956.

Furthermore, both names—Zarathustra and Mihyar—are significant from an etymological point of view, albeit in very different ways. The etymology of the Avestan name Zarathustra is disputed, but it is almost universally accepted that the latter half of the name derives from the Old Iranian *ushtra*, meaning "camel"; while the most commonly accepted explanation takes the first half of the name to mean "golden," and the name "Zarathustra" thus comes to mean "golden camel." This name thus not only comprises and transforms the ancient moralistic prophet figure known as Zarathustra, but also (and somewhat more subtly) the one animal that Nietzsche, in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, associates with being laden with morality. The transformation of man into

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[168] Cf., for example, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nietzsche-and-persia.

[169] It should, however, be noted that the primary target of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is not Zoroastrianism, but rather Christianity. The book is in constant dialogue with the Bible (both the Old and New Testaments, but especially the latter).

[170] Although his origins are not entirely certain, the historical Zarathustra was most likely a Persian. In any case, in the passage quoted above, Nietzsche seems to assume Zarathustra's Persian origins as a fact.

something beyond himself is narrated within Nietzsche's self-proclaimed central work as a metaphorical transformation from the morality-laden camel into the idealized child-figure who is not dominated by any pre-conceived values, and who exists beyond all preexisting moral values.[171] Zarathustra's process of "self-overcoming" ("Selbstüberwindung") thus takes on a new dimension here, as he must quite literally overcome the morality contained—doubly—within his name.[172]

For the Arabic reader, the name "Mihyar" (or rather, *mihyār*, in its correct transliteration) in and of itself contains no clear meaning, but the form or pattern of this noun is clear: *mifʿāl*, which is often referred to in English grammars of Arabic as the "noun of instrumentality," as in the derivation of the noun *misbāh*, "lamp," from the verb *ṣabaḥa*, "to be radiant."[173] A derivation of this sort for the noun *mihyār* would require that a Form I Arabic verb with the root *hāʾ-yāʾ-rāʾ* exist, which is not the case. However, a Form II verb from this root does exist, *hayyara*, meaning "to hurl down, topple, tear down, detroy, demolish" (Wehr 1222).[174] In this manner, the name *mihyār*, while having no explicit meaning of its own, still suggests the notion of destruction (of values, of God, of metaphysical certainties), a notion central to both Adonis' and Nietzsche's work, and one clearly linked to the apophatic path toward union with the divine, in conjunction with the more "negative" aspect of the revaluation of values.[175] The grammatical pattern of the name, furthermore, suggests that the figure of Mihyar himself will be the instrument of this destruction. The very name "Mihyar" thus indicates that a certain spritual practice can be found in this work, albeit one that is quite different from that of Bonnefoy's later poetry, and one that is much more didactic—or rather prophetic—in nature. As with Nietzsche's Zarathustra, it is the figure of Mihyar that both announces and embodies this new spiritual mode of being.

In addition to the structural parallel with Nietzsche's choice of the name "Zarathustra," I would argue that Adonis' choice of the name "Mihyar" also contains two further subtle and interconnected allusions to Nietzsche's work. The first is that the historical poet Mihyar the Daylamite was in fact born a Zoroastrian, a religion he gave up only fairly late in his life. Adonis' "conversion" of Mihyar from Islam to a more

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[171] The intermediate stage in this transformative process is the lion. Also, it should be noted that a whole host of similarities exist between Mihyar and Zarathustra (as two poetic figures), and that this section only scratches the surface of this deep poetic kinship. A detailed comparison of the two figures could be the subject of a separate dissertation.

[172] See, for example, the chapter entitled "Von der Selbst-Überwindung" ("On Self-Overcoming") in Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*.

[173] See, for example, Thackston p. 230.

[174] It should be noted that a similar—but not identical—root provides us with the Form I verb *hāra* (from the root *hāʾ-wāw-rā*, which has virtually the same meaning as *hayyara*. It is from this other root that Arabic derives the common noun *inhiyār* ("collapse")—a verb form of this noun, *yanhār*, appears in the collection *Mihyar* (M-30).

[175] Nietzsche's famous phrase "philosophizing with a hammer" is perhaps his most famous formulation of this destruction.

elemental[176] and immediate form of spirituality simultaneously "returns" him to Zoroastrianism—but to the transmoral Zoroastrianism of Nietzsche, and not the dualistic religion of ancient times. Second, from a purely historical-linguistic point of view, it should be noted that the name Mihyar, while containing subtle resonances in the Arabic language, is no more Arabic than Zarathustra is German, for Mihyar the Daylamite was not an Arab but a Persian; and the Persian language offers us a further possible etymology of his name, one that by no means contradicts or negates Mihyar's potential as an instrument of destruction. In her book on Adonis (parts of which were written in French), the Polish literary critic Krystyna Skarżyńska-Bocheńska convincingly argues that the name Mihyar is, historically, derived from the name Mithra (176), the Zoroastrian divinity of covenants, testaments, contracts, oaths, and the like—a derivation that is entirely logical given the fact that, as I have noted, Mihyar the Daylamite was born a Zoroastrian. The name Mihyar thus serves, yet again, as an intertextual marker to Zoroastrianism, both to that of Nietzsche and his figure of Zarathustra/Zoroaster, and to the divinity Mithra—two figures that Adonis frequently echoes and points toward (from the very outset of the book) in his poetic constitution of Mihyar.[177]

While the connection with Zarathustra primarily reveals the more negative or apophatic aspect of Adonis' poetry as spiritual practice (in that Mihyar comes to destroy the known in favor of the unknown), the connection with Mithra hints at a more positive or cataphatic aspect. Mithra, as a divinity of contract, is someone who cannot be deceived, and who sees all things. As we read in the refrain in the "Mihr Yasht" ("Hymn to Mithra") from the *Khorda Avesta* (*Book of Common Prayer*), Mithra is "the lord of wide pastures, who is truth-speaking, a chief in assemblies, with a thousand ears, well-shapen, with a thousand eyes, high, with full knowledge, strong, sleepless, and ever-awake" (verse 7).[178] And indeed, Adonis' collection seems to go out of its way to invite comparison to Mithra. To briefly cite just two of the earlier and most clear-cut examples from the collection, Mihyar is said to be "filled with eyes" in the very first text of the collection, the prose poem entitled "Psalm" (M-14); and then there is the poem "The New Testament, "or "the New Covenant" (*Al-'ahd al-jadīd*) a bit later in the first section, wherein Mihyar announces a new kind of bond or contract between divinity and humanity (M-27). Yet Mihyar is no transcendent divinity, nor is he advocating a return to Persian Zoroastrianism. Although, as a pagan prophet of sorts,

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[176] In the second text of *Mihyar,* "He Is Not a Star," which is also the first non-prose text in the collection, Mihyar comes "like a pagan spear" (M-15) and is associated with the earth and the stones (by the end of the book's first section, Mihyar will be strongly associated with all of the main elements).

[177] Stefan Weidner lists a whole host of Mihyar's "divine" attributes in his essay "The Divinity of the Profane: The Representations of the Divine in the Poetry of Adûnîs" (pp. 211-218).

[178] Cited from the following online source: http://www.avesta.org/ka/yt10sbe.htm. It should also be noted that a cult of Mithraic mysteries persisted in the Roman Empire until late in the fourth century C.E.

he sees all things just like Mithra does, Mihyar is calling for a return not to a known past, but rather to a state of radical unknowing. "He is filled with eyes, but confusion is his homeland," we read in "Psalm" (M-14). This qualification of his all-seeing nature is important, and the word in Arabic for "confusion" is ḥayra, a term common in Sufi texts that could also be translated as "divine unknowing" or "the state of unknowing that leads one to the divine." This state of unknowing, of being unmoored from preexisting values and concepts, *is* itself the spiritual state of union with divinity. Mihyar is a guiding figure for the reader, one that Adonis hopes will take the reader on a spiritual journey deeper and deeper into these mysteries of existence. If one can even speak of a goal in this endless spiritual path, then that state of unknowing is surely it. And as with Bonnefoy's poetry, while that state of unknowing or "presence"[179] is always there before us, a lengthy poetic process is simultaneously necessary to access it on deeper and deeper levels. Mihyar is the fiery poetic figure that blazes that spiritual trail.

All of these intertextual aspects of the name "Mihyar" are present, in a sense, every time the name is evoked in the collection. But there is also an intratextual aspect to the name that I would like to point out here, one that begins to emerge very early on in the collection, and which becomes clearer and stronger as the reader progresses through its 268 pages. It should first be noted that my use of the term "intratextuality" in connection with *Mihyar* implies that the collection represents a unity of sorts, i.e., more than simply a grouping of individual and unrelated poems. As its title suggests, *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* is constituted by a certain unity, one that is paradoxically centered on the fragmented and far-from-unitary figure of Mihyar, a figure who, at one point speaking in the first person, goes so far as to proclaim: "I have no limits" (*lā ḥadda lī*, M-67).[180] The poetry of *Mihyar*, then, is characterized by a certain dissonant unity centered on the enigmatic figure of Mihyar, which serves to disturb and disrupt boundaries rather than unify.[181] In this sense, it transcends the dichotomies that Adonis is unable to avoid in his critical writings. While the figure of Mihyar clearly has very strong resonances with Nietzsche's Zarathustra, as I have been arguing, the persistent motifs of destruction and death also reveal a deep parallel with Bonnefoy's figure of Douve, who, like Mihyar, is repeatedly formed, destroyed, and re-formed.

In the third poem of *Mihyar*, entitled "Mihyar is King" (*malikun mihyār*, M-16), Adonis begins to weave a web of associations with the name Mihyar through the mechanism of strong rhyme, and in particular the phoneme *–ār*. This serves to further emphasize many of the points I have been making about the figure of Mihyar and his prophetic role in the spiritual process of the reader. In the very first two verses of this

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[179] It should be noted that a poem from the collection's second section bears the title "Presence" (*al-ḥuḍūr*), although, characteristically for Adonis, even that state of "presence" is linked intimately with fire and destruction: "I kindle the fire of presence," we read at the outset of that poem (M-65).

[180] This verse is also the title of the poem. It could also, in a more politically-oriented translation, be rendered as "I have no borders."

[181] As such, both Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and Bonnefoy's *Douve* can be considered precursors to *Mihyar*.

poem, a rhyme is immediately set up between *mihyār* and *nār*, or "fire," serving to emphasize the negative or apophatic element of this spiritual path, as well as Mihyar's connection to Zarathustra (who was, in Persia, closely associated with the element of fire).[182] And in the final stanza of this poem, *mihyār* is rhymed with *asrār*, "secrets" or "mysteries," which hints at the more positive or cataphatic aspect of this spiritual poetry. Such strong rhymes serve to create a web of associations with the name "Mihyar," so that "fire" (for example) becomes intricately bound up with Mihyar even when "fire" is not mentioned in a poem. This web of associations becomes increasingly complex as the reader progresses through the collection. By the end of the first of the collection's seven sections, all of the following rhymes have been established, becoming inextricably bound of with the name "Mihyar" (which also occurs a large number of times throughout the section, and is frequently rhymed with the following terms): *nār* ("fire," M-16, 22, 31), *asrār* ("secrets" or "mysteries," M-16, 30), *maḥār* ("seashells," M-23), *biḥār* ("seas," M-23, 34, 36), *ḥijār* ("stones," M-25), *yanhār* ("collapsing," M-30), *yaḥār* ("to be in divine unknowing," M-32), *ghubār* ("dust" or "dirt," M-32, 36), *amṭār* ("rains," M-34), and *nahār* ("day," M-35, 36, 37)—and these are just the terms that emerge in the book's first section. Here, Mihyar emerges not only as an elemental figure—one very bound up with the raw materials of this world—but also as a figure of contradictions (both sea and fire, for example) and mysteries, one who challenges the notion of ever establishing any "known" ground to stand on. Similarly to Douve, he embodies the ever-changing flux of existence, and stands in stark contrast to any fixed or preestablished transcendental truths.[183]

4. A Case Study of Intratextuality in *Mihyar*

We can now take an initial look at Adonis' collection to examine the intratextual mechanisms of that poetry—these mechanisms are one of the most striking structural similarities between Adonis' poetry as a whole and the work of Bonnefoy. In short, in *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* Adonis takes up Bonnefoy's articulation of presence as a lengthy process of intratextual deconceptualization to enact a Nietzschean transvaluation of what he views as mainstream (largely Sunni) Islamic values. As with Bonnefoy's work, Adonis' poetry simultaneously involves a critique of otherworldly transcendence, yet Adonis adds a new layer to Bonnefoy's intratextual poetics by coupling it with an overtly Nietzschean transvaluation of values via extremely subtle (and often not-so-subtle) intertextual Qur'anic allusions (that also serve to further emphasize the anti-transcendent thrust of this poetry). This particular case study of the intratextual mechanisms of *Mihyar* begins with the first stanza of the poem "The Shell" (*Al-ṣadafa*, M-123):

Were you afraid? Change your vanquished face,

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[182] This association is made even more strongly through internal rhyme in the opening line of the poem "Mihyar's Face" from the book's first section, where we read "*wajhu mihyār nār*" ("Mihyar's face is fire," M-31).

[183] 'Ādil Ḍāhir emphasizes this lack of terra firma throughout his monograph on Adonis entitled *Adūnīs aw al-ithm al-hīrāqlīṭī* ("Adonis or Heraclitian Sin").

> Satan, my carriage above the stars.
> I don't fear the mute path,
> I am a simoom wind.

The simoom (Arabic *samūm*) is a violently hot and dust-filled wind; and according to the Quran, it was this wind created the race of the Jinn. In the Quran's *Sūrat al-ḥijr* ("The Rocky Tract"), we read: "We created man from sounding clay, from mud molded into shape; / And the Jinn race, We had created before, from the fire of a simoom" (Q 15:26-27).[184] The word *samūm* can be found in a host of other Arabic texts, and is by no means a prominent intertextual marker to the Qur'an. Yet I would argue that there is a clear case of allusion here. For, the Qur'anic verses just cited are followed immediately by the story of Iblis—Satan—refusing to bow down to man, and we know from another Quranic verse (Q 18:50) that Iblis himself was one of the Jinn. We now have the first three elements of an intra- and intertextual collage: a *samūm* wind, *jinn*, and the Devil himself.

This picture becomes more complex if we consider these elements alongside the intratextual nature of Adonis' poetry itself, for *Mihyar* is no simple collection of autonomous poems, but rather a complex mosaic wherein all poems are in dialogue with one another, where every poem colors the reader's perception of every other poem, and where many key terms acquire new significations via their varied uses throughout the book. In other words, as I have already argued in reference to Bonnefoy's work, new layers of interpretation are revealed when each poem is considered in its intratextual context rather than simply in isolation. The first stanza of the poem "The New Testament" (*Al-ʿahd al-jadīd*) illustrates this point (M-27):

> He doesn't speak this language,
> He doesn't know the voice of the wilderness.
> An oracle of stone lethargy
> Laden with distant tongues.

This stanza may at first seem like a strange choice for my argument, as there is no direct reference to *samūm*, Jinn, or Satan, yet a closer analysis reveals its salience. The word translated as "oracle" is *kāhin*, that is, a soothsayer. This word occurs exactly twice in the Quran, both times in close connection to poets—and I would note that the poetic figure of Mihyar is both *kahin* and poet in the text just cited (in the second stanza of this poem, we see him "bestowing his poetry on downcast winds"). In sura 69 of the Quran, we read: "This is the word of an honored messenger; / It is not the word of a poet—how little you believe — / Nor is it the word of a soothsayer [*kāhin*]" (Q 69:40-42). And in sura 52, oracles are linked explicitly to the notion of madness, or insanity: "You shall remind them [of God's message], for by your Lord's grace you are neither a soothsayer [*kāhin*] nor one insane [*majnūn*]. / They (the people) may say: 'He is a poet, let us wait for his death.' / Then you should say: 'Go ahead and wait, and I will wait with

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[184] I will henceforth use the abbreviation "Q" to indicate the Quran when citing the text. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Quran are my modifications or composites from both the Abdallah Yousuf Ali translation (*The Glorious Quran*) and the A.J. Arberry translation (*The Koran Interpreted*).

you'" (Q 52:29-31). It is the root of this word *majnūn*, meaning "insane" or "mad," that I would like to focus on here. Although the notion of madness has occasionally had "positive" valences across the history of Western literature, its valence in the Quran is consistently negative.[185] In the example above from sura 52, it is used to label those producing textual competitors to the Quran, i.e., the soothsayers and the poets—and indeed, the text of the Quran goes to great lengths to distinguish itself from those of both poets and soothsayers (though the Quran bears strong structural and rhythmic similaritites to the works of the latter group). And this is where, via both inter- and intratextual mechanisms, this poem connects with the verse from the poem "The Shell," for *jim nūn nūn* is the common linguistic root of both *jinn* (evil spirits) and *junūn* ("madness") or *majnūn* ("mad"), where the base passive form of the verb—*junna*—means "to be mad or possessed." Moreover, madness is itself a central term in *Mihyar*. No less than two of *Mihyar*'s poems contain the word in their titles: "The Winds of Madness" (*riyāḥ al-junūn*, M-131) and "The Bliss of Madness" (*ghibtat al-junūn*, M-153). But whereas the term is exclusively negative in the Quran, it has uniquely positive connotations in *Mihyar*. "I prayed for madness to guide us," we read in the poem "Prayer" (*ṣalāh*, M-111). And in the prose text "Psalm" (*mazmūr*) that opens the fifth section of the book, we find: "O madness, my master, my messiah" (M-168). Indeed, Mihyar, addressing the book's readers directly, notes that he "brought you the winds of madness" (M-131). The transvaluation of the specifically Quranic articulations of madness can perhaps be seen in these last three citations when considered on their own. Yet one of the most impressive aspects of Adonis' poetry is the skill with which he embeds such iconoclastic lines within a subtle inter- and intratextual mosaic, thereby slowly re-signifying the terms, implicitly challenging the absolute authority of Islam's central text (and indeed, that of any text asserting dogmatic truth claims). In my view, this amounts to nothing less than an extraordinary inter- and intratextual and defense of poetry as a spiritual path, for it is the "mad" poet as prophet who dares to challenge the purported supremacy (both aesthetic and spiritual) of the Quran, as well as its claims to an otherworldly transcendence.[186]

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[185] I would note the linking of madness and prophecy in Western Romantic literature, as well as the productive role that madness (in close connection with the irrational) plays in French Surrealist literature.

[186] In his book *Sufism and Surrealism*, Adonis notes the following about the relationship between madness and poetry in Sufism (86): "… the rule of love must oppose the rule of reason. If, as Ibn Arabi says, speech is a mark of reason and silence a mark of ardent love, then the relationship between madness and speech is discernible—for madness starts when the lover is no longer able to speak, that is, when speech betrays him. Thus the moment of the brief encounter between madness and speech—between madness, which speaks, and speech, which becomes mad—is the moment of expression, or the moment of poetry par excellence, and it is a rare moment."

It is a new type of prophecy—or rather anti-prophecy[187]—that Adonis announces in his poetry, and his process of deconstructing and challenging Quranic claims to truth relies largely on the same kinds of intratextual mechanisms that underpin Bonnefoy's similarly lengthy collections. This intratextual complexity is also the hallmark of Adonis' later work, and he takes it to even greater lengths in some of his subsequent collections, most notably his 1977 collection *Singulars* (*Mufrad bi-ṣīghat al-jamʿa*) and in his three-volume series *The Book* (*Al-Kitāb*, 1995-2002). Yet *Mihyar* represents his first sustained use of this technique, and it is for that reason, among others, that this work is considered such a watershed moment for modernist Arab poetry. I have only made one brief intratextual case study here, but many others are possible. The 200-plus poems of *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* are in constant interaction with one another, calling forwards and backwards, echoing, reinforcing, and at times even challenging one another in an attempt to undo any solid epistemological ground that the Arab reader might have. This poetry—through sustained rhymes and subtle repetitions that serve to destabilize seemingly stable cultural and linguistic signifiers—implicitly calls into question the very possibility of ever successfully establishing the dichotomies that underlie so many of Adonis' critical writings, and in particular his three-volume study of Arabic-Islamic culture, *The Static and the Dynamic*. The intratextual and intertextual practices that are the hallmarks of *Mihyar* thus prefigure Adonis' later theorization of Arab culture while simultaneously transgressing the polemic boundaries of that theorization. As such, they wage a struggle for Arab culture, and their intratextual complexity attempts to clear the reader's spiritual ground by inviting that reader into a space of radical openness and constant change.[188]

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[187] The very first non-prose poem of *Mihyar* opens with the verse, "He is not a star, he is not a prophetic inspiration" ("*laysa najman laysa īḥāʾa nabbī*").

[188] The spiritual "invitation" of this poetry is a violent one, as can be seen from the collection's eighth poem, entitled "An Invitation to Death," which simultaneously offers a harsh condemnation of the situation of the Arab world as a whole. I cite the poem in its entirety here: "Mihyar strikes us / He burns the husk of life within us / Our patience and docile features, // Land of ours, bride of God and tyrants, / Surrender to ruin and terror— / Surrender to the fire" (M-22). Here, the verb *istaslama* ("surrender"), so intricately associated with Islam, is turned against itself, and the invitation is to surrender to the mortality and immanence of our own earth, rather than to any transcendent God or "tyrant." And much like Bonnefoy's early poetry in *Douve*, the collection *Mihyar* ends with a series of potent evocations of death: the seventh and final section is entitled "Death Restored" [*al-mawt al-maʿād*], and all of its poems are elegies.

Chapter Four

Shaddad's Reply: The Intertextual Spiritual Practice of *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*

Mit euren Werthen und Worten von Gut und Böse übt ihr Gewalt, ihr Werthschätzenden: und dies ist eure verborgene Liebe und eurer Seele Glänzen, Zittern und Überwallen. / Aber eine stärkere Gewalt wächst aus euren Werthen und eine neue Überwindung: an der zerbricht Ei und Eierschale. / Und wer ein Schöpfer sein muss im Guten und Bösen: wahrlich, der muss ein Vernichter erst sein und Werthe zerbrechen. / Also gehört das höchste Böse zur höchsten Güte: diese aber ist die schöpferische.

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, "Von der Selbst-Überwindung" (95).[189]

Il y avait qu'il fallait détruire et détruire et détruire,
Il y avait que le salut n'est qu'à ce prix.

- Yves Bonnefoy, *Hier régnant désert* (P-139)

In the preceding chapter, I provided an overview of Adonis' thought, as well as a first look at both the intratextual and the intertextual mechanisms of Adonis' collection *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*, relating all of it to the spiritual and cultural revolution that Adonis hopes to bring about through the vehicle of poetry. Now, in this final chapter of my dissertation, I will add a new layer to that analysis by examining a single poem from *Mihyar* in great depth, as a case study, citing it as a further instantiation of the insurrectionary spiritual practice of this poetry—namely, the path of negation that I have already discussed, the clearing of the epistemological ground of the implied reader. I will demonstrate just how thoroughly Adonis' poetry accomplishes this by examining the intertextual mechanisms of one its more allusive texts, namely, the poem entitled "Shaddad." As I have already discussed, intertextuality plays a crucial

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[189] R.J. Hollingdale uses "power" to translate *Gewalt*, a word that is normally rendered as "violence." His translation, which is from the chapter entitled "On Self-Overcoming," reads: "You exert power [violence] with your doctrines of good and evil, you assessors of values; and this is your hidden love and the glittering, trembling, and overflowing of your souls. / But a mightier power [violence] and a new overcoming grow from out your values: egg and egg-shell break against them. / And he who has to be a creator in good and evil, truly, has first to be a destroyer and break values. / Thus the greatest evil belongs with the greatest good; this, however, is the creative good" (Nietzsche 1969, p. 139).

role in the revaluation of what Adonis views as dominant Islamic values and in pushing back against an imitative culture of "pastism" in favor of a more open-ended view of culture—one that, in my reading of this poetry, allows for deeper spiritual experience to come into play. It is through a very specific mode of intertextuality—intertextuality that mobilizes key texts, motifs, and rhetorical devices from both the Quran and Islamic cultural history—that Adonis' poetry accomplishes this most impressively. Through a sustained close reading, we will see how, in very concrete ways, this poem represents a radical rewriting of the epistemological "known" so as to step into the unknown, into that creativity and innovation (*ibdāʿ*) that is, in my interpretation of this poetry, part and parcel of spiritual experience for Adonis. The poem entitled "Shaddad," which is the centerpiece of the present chapter, is crucial to this discussion of intertextuality both because it reveals many of the intertextual mechanisms that are the hallmark of *Mihyar* and because it is the only poem in the entire collection that directly cites the Quran, a citation that is itself included in the title of the fourth section of the book, *Iram dhāti 'l-ʿimād*, or "Iram of the Pillars." Yet before I proceed to an analysis of the specific content and form of this poem, it is necessary to examine in some detail the myths that form the backdrop to this poem.

1. Shaddad and the ʿĀd: Permutations of a Myth

In the Quran, the ʿĀd people of Iram—whose legendary leader was claimed by some to be Shaddad,[190] son of ʿĀd, of the line of Noah, although Shaddad himself is never mentioned in the Quran—are cited (alongside the people of Thamūd, the Pharaoh of Egypt, and others) as a cautionary tale against excessive pride and the failure to heed the truth of God: "Did you not see how the Lord dealt with the ʿĀd / of Iram of the pillars [*irami dhāti 'l-ʿimād*] / The like of which was never created in all the land?" we read in the sura "The Dawn" (Q 89:6-8).[191] Their arrogance and refusal to believe in Allah as the one God was their undoing. In an archetypal Quranic punishment story, Hūd, one of the five Arab prophets mentioned in the Quran, warns the ʿĀd—his own people—to repent and to stop associating other gods with the one supreme God (Q 11:50-55). Yet they do not heed Hūd's warning, and the fate of the mighty ʿĀd people is spelled out, among other places, in the sura "The Moon": "The ʿĀd rejected [the truth/warnings of God], so my punishment and warning to them was great. / We sent a furious wind against them on a day of enduring disaster / Plucking out men as if they were roots of palm trees torn from the ground" (Q 54:18-20). The word that Abdallah Yousuf Ali translates here as "rejected" is the Form II transitive verb *kadhdhabat*, which comes from the root *k-dh-b* ("to lie") and literally means either to accuse someone of

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[190] The correct transliteration of this name is "Shaddād," but I will hereafter refer to it as "Shaddad" for the sake of simplicity.

[191] In this particular citation, Abdallah Yousuf Ali's translation entitled *The Glorious Quran* adds the clarifying parenthetical "the city of" with reference to Iram—we will see later in this section that there was actually some debate about the nature (and, in particular, the size) of Iram.

lying or to reject something (as a lie).[192] This verb is found in all of the punishment stories of the Quran,[193] and its use is worthy of mention here as it serves to emphasize the unique truth that God lays claim to in the Quran through His intermediary Muhammad.[194]

But who exactly were the ʿĀd? In an economy of expression typical of its punishment stories, the Quran provides few details about the nature of this people. It is impossible to determine any definitive "original" myth, for as Jaroslav Stetkevych points out with regard to the parallel myth of the punished Thamūd people (16),

> This myth, or legend, as it is recorded in the various extant texts, is, however, no longer easily datable to the age of pure oral lore before the advent of Islam, for it is to be assumed that along the centuries that led up to its collection and redaction it has undergone its own evolution not only as mythopoeia but also as a hermeneutic tool at the service of the qurʾanic text.[195]

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[192] A.J. Arberry, in his *The Koran Interpreted*, translates it as "cries lies"; while this is an elegant solution, it loses the transitive sense of the verb, and smooths over the fact that the Arabic original is conspicuously lacking a direct object.

[193] Cf. David Marshall's article "Punishment Stories" in the *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān* (hereafter EQ), as well as his book *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers.*

[194] Indeed, God not only lays claim to truth but actually embodies it—it is no coincidence that "the truth" (*al-ḥaqq*) is one of God's names. Although the concept of truth is a multivalent one in the Quran, an integral part of this truth is clearly belief and submission to God, and in particular to His revelation. The opening verses of the sura entitled "Muhammad" make this abundantly clear: "Those who do righteous deeds and believe in what is sent down to Muhammad—and it is the truth from their lord—He will acquit them of their evil deeds and dispose their minds aright. / This is because those who disbelieve follow falsehood, and those who believe follow the truth from their Lord" (Q 47:2-3; *The Koran Interpreted*).

[195] As with the Quranic references to the destroyed people of Thamūd, almost all Quranic references to the ʿĀd occur in early Meccan suras, which are, as Jaroslav Stetkevych has pointed out, of a "much more strongly mythopoeically swayed inspiration" (15). I would also note the close textual coupling of Thamūd and ʿĀd in both the Quran and later "Stories of the Prophets" (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*) literature, where the two are very often (more often than not) cited in quick succession. There is frequently even a deliberate narrative transition from one legend to the other, as in one version of the story by the unknown author al-Kisāʾī, translated by W.M. Thackston: "Kaʿb al-Aḥbār said: After God destroyed the people of Ad, Thamud inhabited the land" (117). The story cited by Jan Knappert in his *Islamic Legends* has a similar transition: "Nothing stays the same. The ʿAdites have gone, no one knows if anyone of that proud nation is still alive. New peoples move into old lands like new birds nestling in old trees. It was the turn of the Thamudites to plough the patient earth" (66). The tales in Knappert's volume are taken from a wide array of sources, which he unfortunately does not list in any detail (so that it is impossible to know what

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Yet by considering the Quranic text together with subsequent evocations of this legend, the contours of two separate yet closely intertwined mythological traditions can be detected, though it is impossible to say whether these two traditions were indeed entirely distinct in the pre-Islamic period.

The first and slightly more "mythological" (or fantastical) of these two traditions centers on the figure of Shaddad, king of the 'Ād people, and it is clearly this tradition that Adonis primarily has in mind in his poem. Although there are many variations on this story, the general contours of it can be found in al-Tha'labī's (d. 427/1035) *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (translated by William M. Brinner as *Lives of the Prophets*, though the latter part of the title literally translates as "Stories of the Prophets"), which is itself very close to the story contained within the much later Calcutta II manuscript of the *1001 Nights*. This work by al-Tha'labī is a compilation of tales surrounding the lives of biblical and pre-Islamic prophets, and is one of the best-known examples of a genre that bears the same name (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*) and that stresses the edifying nature of the tales of these prophets.[196] In this more mythological version of the legend, the pre-Islamic 'Ād are powerful giants among men, and their king Shaddad is said to have lived for no less than 700 years and to have subjugated all the peoples of the world. Yet upon reading about Paradise in the ancient books, Shaddad decides to build his own city to rival it. That city was called Iram, and was said to be located in the deserts of (or near) the Ḥaḍramawt region (modern-day Yemen), and at the time of the city's building the land was said to be lush and full of springs.[197] The story narrates that it took 300 hundred years to build Iram, with metals and precious stones being brought from all over the world for its construction. In al-Tha'labī's account, a traveler named 'Abd Allāh b. Qilāba, who supposedly stumbled upon the empty city in the days of the Umayyad caliph Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān while looking for some lost camels, describes the city as follows (Eng 238, Ara 109):

the sources for his version of the 'Ād people are). Finally, I should note that Adonis himself takes up the myth of the Thamūd in his lengthy 1976 poem entitled *Qaṣīdat thamūd* ("The Ode of Thamūd"), a work that also references the figure of Mihyar (*Kitāb al-qaṣā'id al-khams* 15).

[196] In his *Encyclopedia of Islam* (hereafter *EI*) article on *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Tilman Nagel notes that al-Tha'labī's is the first known work of this kind to separate the legends from historiography, and that his narratives are based primarily on *tafsīr* literature (i.e., Quranic commentaries), which included legendary material. For a more detailed consideration of this genre, see Nagel's dissertation, *Die Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā': ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte*, as well as Muḥammad Khalafallāh's book *Al-fann al-qiṣaṣī fī 'l-qur'ān al-karīm.*

[197] Others claim that the city was located somewhere in the so-called "Empty Quarter" of the Arabian Peninsula, but do not specify the Ḥaḍramawt region. The city has also often been said to have magical properties, such as being invisible, or moving from place to place within the Empty Quarter of the Arabian peninsula. An alternate name for it is Ubar. Surprisingly, al-Kisā'ī's *Stories of the Prophets*, which contains a host of very odd and fantastical stories, does not include any reference to Shaddad.

He opened one of the gates; and behold, he was in a city the likes of which no one has ever seen. There were castles built in the air supported underneath by pillars of topaz and sapphire, with chambers on top of each castle built of gold, silver, pearl, sapphire, and chrysolite. Each gate of those castles had panels like the panels of the gate of that city, of fresh aloe-wood, with sapphires arrayed on them. The floors of the castles were covered with pearls and pellets of musk and saffron.

The Quranic invocation of "Iram of the Pillars" is thus a reference to the city's opulence in the form of its many pillars, as Ka'b al-Aḥbār relates to the caliph Mu'āwiya upon being questioned about that city: "God named the city Iram of the Pillars, because of the pillars of sapphire and chrysolite beneath it. There is no other city of sapphire and chrysolite in the world. For that reason He said, 'The like of which was not created in the lands'" (Eng 242, Ara 111).[198] Yet as Shaddad was traveling with many of his people to go live in the city he had built, "God sent upon him and upon all who were with him a noisy punishment from Heaven, and it destroyed all of them—not one of them remained" (Eng 242-3, Ara 111).

Interestingly, al-Tha'labī's account of Iram and Shaddad makes no reference whatsoever to the prophet Hūd, whose own story al-Tha'labī recounts separately, even though Hūd is clearly evoked in the Quran as a pre-Islamic prophet who warned and admonished the 'Ād (I will detail his own separate story below). Nor does al-Tha'labī make any attempt to explain this discrepancy. I would therefore argue that there are in fact two main competing legends regarding the 'Ād people, legends that are alternately collapsed or kept separate in different texts. The version included in Jan Knappert's book of translations entitled *Islamic Legends*, which contains a great deal of commonalities with al-Tha'labī's version, does the former. In this version, which bears the title "The Secret City," Hūd tells Shaddad that he can have a thousand palaces in Paradise if he forsakes this world, whereupon Shaddad replies, "I do not have to wait till I die, I can get all that here and now" (165). This is, of course, followed by God's destruction of Shaddad and his people.

Yet al-Tha'labī himself keeps the more extravagant story of Shaddad separate from the somewhat tamer one of the prophet Hūd, and a host of later writers follow his lead. Al-Tha'labī's version leaves out the Quranic reference to "Iram of the pillars" as well as any mention of Shaddad, and instead focuses on the figure of the prophet Hūd and his warnings to the 'Ād people and their eponymous leader. Yet here too, the 'Ād are said to be giant men from the Arabian peninsula (though they by no means rule the entire world),[199] and they too are chastised for their excessive attachment to the world

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[198] Ka'b al-Aḥbār claims to have his knowledge of the city from "the Torah" (ibid.), yet no reference to Iram or anything closely resembling Iram is to be found therein.

[199] They are listed as being between 60 and 100 cubits tall, and they were said to live on the "piled up sands" (*raml 'ālij*) "between Oman and Ḥaḍramawt" (Eng 105, Ara 46-7). It should be noted that the Quran itself makes reference to their large stature (Q 7:69), and that al-Tha'labī cites this reference: "Remember, He [God] made you successors after the people of Noah, and gave you greater increase in your stature" (Eng 105, Ara

below, with the Quran (Q 26:128-130) being cited as support for this latter point: "You build on every hill monuments in vain. And erect palaces, that you may live forever, and when you apply force become tyrannical" (Eng 106, Ara 47). Yet this is where the two legends of the 'Ād diverge. In this other version, the idolatry of the 'Ād is emphasized, and Hūd, as is recounted in the Quran, admonishes them for this and calls on them to worship the one true God. When they refuse to do so, God sends a drought to them, which in al-Tha'labī's version is said to last three years. The 'Ād finally send a delegation to Mecca to pray to God for rain, but it is too late, and God instead sends them a cloud that brings a wind that destroys all the people save the faithful among them.[200]

Beyond the presence or absence of the figures of Shaddad and Hūd, the two principle legends concerning the 'Ād people differ in two further key respects: the presence of absence of a legendary city entitled Iram, and the presence or absence of a drought sent by God to punish the 'Ād. This divergence of the legends does not simply appear to be the result of embellishments by Islamic story-compilers (*quṣṣāṣ*) and Quranic commentators. Rather, I would argue that the divergence is contained within the Quran itself, for the Quran clearly makes reference to a legendary city of the 'Ād called Iram (*irama dhāti 'l-'imād* – Q 89:7), and also appears to allude to a drought that had afflicted the 'Ād people: Hūd promises the 'Ād that God will bring them "abundant rain" (*midrāran* – Q 11:52) if only they worship Him.[201] The discrepancy between these two references concerning the 'Ād people is very difficult to explain unless one considers the possibility that I have been suggesting: namely, that two separate, and possibly competing, legends concerning the 'Ād were present prior to the Quran's composition, and that the Quran incorporated elements of both of these legends into its text. Furthermore, like the text of al-Tha'labī, the Quran makes no attempt to reconcile the two competing legends. Rather, it de-emphasizes their narrative elements for the sake of foregrounding the aspect of divine punishment common to both.[202]

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47). Roberto Tottoli, in his introduction to the Arabic edition of the Andalusian al-Ṭarafī's *Stories of the Prophets* (p. 55), notes the heights that various classical authors attribute to the 'Ād, which range from 12 to 500 cubits.

[200] I will come back to some more specific parts of this legend at a later stage in this chapter, in conjunction with Adonis' rewriting of it.

[201] Oddly, al-Tha'labī does not cite this reference to rain in his description of the drought (al-Ṭarafī, on the other hand, does make mention of it).

[202] Jaroslav Stetkevych, in his impressive study of the parallel myth of the Thamūd, notes that the pre-Islamic poetry of Imrū al-Qays contains a reference to both the Thamūd and the 'Ād which relates only the "the fierceness of their destruction" (51). These verses read: "No, I swear by God, nothing will join us / To Banū Jusham, our maternal clan, / Till the hyenas visit a field of death / Like that of the Thamūd or of Iram!" (ibid.) It is, of course, impossible to know whether these lines were indeed from the pre-Islamic period or whether they were the addition of early Islamic compilers of this poetry. Abdallah Yousuf Ali's commentary to his translation of the Quran (Q 7:65) asserts that the Thamūd were also known as "the second 'Ād" (*The Glorious Quran* 338),

Yet not all compilers of "Stories of the Prophets" accepted the Quran's apparent allusions to two contradictory versions of the 'Ād legend. In his own (hitherto untranslated) *Stories of the Prophets*, the Andalusian author Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī (387-454/997-1062), who lived at the same time as al-Thaʿlabī, leaves out all direct mention of Shaddad, and notes that Iram was merely a *balda* or "small town" and not a mighty city, and that anyone who claims the latter is "distorting" (*shabbahū*) the situation (60). He then goes on to assert that the designation "of the pillars" simply refers to their physical strength (*maʿnā dhāti 'l-ʿimādi dhātu 'l-quwwati* – p. 61), before narrating a contracted version of the "Hūd" story (as opposed to the "Shaddad" one). The renowned 14th-century historian and traditionist Ibn Kathīr (700-774/1300-1373), in his own *Stories of the Prophets*, follows al-Ṭarafī's lead. Like al-Ṭarafī, he attempts both to explain away the apparent discrepancy in the Quran and to de-emphasize the more fantastical aspects of the stories. Ibn Kathīr collapses the two competing legends of the 'Ād as well, but with a slightly different explanation: he notes, at the outset of his account of the prophet Hūd, that "the 'Ād people were said to live in huge tents with large pillars" (*al-khiyām dhawāti 'l-aʿmida 'l-ḍikhām* – Eng 81, Ara 120); and that the claim that Iram is a city that magically moves from place to place is utterly baseless (ibid.). The assertion that the "pillars" of Iram were nothing more than large tent poles allows Ibn Kathīr to remove many fantastical elements, thereby making the story more credible to readers. He thus proceeds to recount the tale of the prophet Hūd more-or-less as it appears in al-Thaʿlabī, without making any direct reference to Shaddad. Yet it is evident that this other version of the legend was still in circulation, for Ibn Kathīr repeats his point about the tent poles at a later junction of the story (Eng 95, Ara 131), and follows al-Ṭarafī in acknowledging the competing version of the story: "Those who claim that Iram was a city of gold and silver, and that it moved from one place to another, they claim so without any evidence" (ibid.). Both al-Ṭarafī's and Ibn Kathīr's accounts thus represent bold interventions into the narrative of the 'Ād, ones that attempt to sterilize it, in effect, and to kill off the figure of Shaddad. Yet the legend of Shaddad evidently lived on, as can be seen most prominently in the story of Iram in the prominent Calcutta II edition of the *1001 Nights*.[203] The fact that later "respectable" Islamic thinkers such as Ibn Kathīr seek to do away with Shaddad while more "profane" texts such as the *1001 Nights* preserve this figure is no coincidence. It should, however, be noted that in all of the prominent classical versions of these tales, the 'Ād are consistently cited as a cautionary tale against excessive pride. While the content and emphasis of each specific version may change, the underlying moral foundation does not.

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following the destruction of the first 'Ād after they failed to heed Hūd's warnings. This notion of the Thamūd as a second 'Ād is found in many of the classical texts, including that of al-Ṭarafī (60).

[203] This story occurs between nights 276 and 279, which correspond to pages 141 to 147 of Vol. 2 of W.H. Macnaghten's Arabic edition, and to pages 898 to 903 of Vol. 1 of Lyons' English translation. The story is not present in the earlier Mahdi edition of the *Nights*.

This is the backdrop against which Adonis writes his poem "Shaddad." Adonis, in naming Shaddad, goes beyond merely alluding to a legend or simply selecting one version over another. In addition to evoking this legend's (or these legends') complex history, Adonis is simultaneously reclaiming its more mythological and fantastical elements from such "realist" thinkers as Ibn Kathīr. His poem thus marks an intervention into the legend's ongoing history (one that, incidentally, does not end with Adonis[204]), as well as an intervention into Islamic history more broadly construed. As he calls upon the various permutations of the legend of the 'Ād people, he simultaneously rewrites these legends, thereby revaluating their common moral underpinnings, and casting doubt upon the spiritual and epistemological ground of canonical Islamic narrative.

2. Quranic Intertextuality in "Shaddad": On *Iltifāt* and Other Devices

This contextualizing groundwork enables a more complete, and thus more nuanced, reading of Adonis' poem "Shaddad," which I cite here in its entirety (M-163/4):

> Shaddad has returned, [*'āda shaddādu 'ād*]
> So raise the banner of longing,
> Leave your refusal behind, a sign [*ishāra*]
> On these stones
> In the path of years—
> Do this in the name of the city of pillars. [*bismi dhāti 'l-'imād*]
>
> It is the home of rebels [*rāfiḍīn*]
> Who lead their desperate lives,
> They broke the amphorae's seal,
> And laughed at the threats
> And the bridges of peace,
>
> It is our land and only heritage,
> We are its sons, granted respite till the day of resurrection. [*al-munẓarīna li-yawmi 'l-qiyāma*]

Adonis' resignification of the villainous Shaddad and his haughty people is quite evident here. Again, this is the only poem in the entire 200-plus page collection of *Mihyar* that directly quotes the Quran (in its sixth verse, with the words *dhāti 'l-'imād*), quite a bold move even for a poet as incendiary as Adonis, and one that serves to foreground the intertextual nature of this poetry. Yet rather than falling into the trap of slinging slurs back at those currents of so-called traditionalist Islam to which he is opposed, as he so often does in his later dissertation, Adonis instead takes up the name of the villain and embraces it. In her analysis of hate speech, Judith Butler writes the

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[204] Four years after the publication of *Mihyar*, in 1965, the Palestinian poet Samīh al-Qāsim published his own, much lengthier, retelling of the legend in his seven-part collection entitled *Iram*.

following regarding this kind of discursive operation: "To take up the name that one is called is no simple submission to prior authority, for the name is already unmoored from prior context, and entered into the labor of self-definition. The word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that destroys the prior territory of its operation" (163). As this context makes clear, and as Chana Kronfeld has convincingly argued, Butler's theory of hate speech is implicitly one of intertextuality. To use Butler's framework, which is itself a reworking of Althusser's writing, an implicit interpellation of the 'Ād people is contained within the Quran, and in answering this interpellation Adonis attempts a resignification of the legends behind the 'Ād. Throughout *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*, Adonis takes up many of the pejorative labels cast at those figures whom he views as spiritual-cultural innovators or revolutionaries and re-contextualizes them—clear attempts to reshape the dominant discourse by championing the values that it rejects, and therefby to unmoor the readers from their formerly solid epistemological ground, implicating them in the radical spiritual act of creation. The poem "Shaddad" provides a superb example of this inherently intertextual process, and of the connection between bilateral intertextuality and transvaluation.

Intertextuality functions on a variety of levels in this poem. In addition to citation, Adonis mimics Quranic allusion by referring, as the Quran does, to a well-known cultural legend (i.e., that of Shaddad and the 'Ād) without any further explanation—the implied reader, in other words, is one who will already understand the allusion, and who will appreciate its sacrilegious nature. Adonis takes this intertextual mimicry of the Quran several steps further in this poem, however, by including a very subtle reference: "Leave your refusal behind, a sign (*ishāra*)," we read here, which echoes—though in this case does not directly cite—a verse from the sura "The Moon" concerning God's drowning the recalcitrant people of Noah, which immediately precedes the above-cited mention of the 'Ād people: "And We have left this [tale] as a sign [*āyah*], and are there any who will remember [*fa-hal min mudhdhakir*]?" (Q 54:15).[205] The sign, even though it is lexically altered, remains in Adonis' poetry, yet now it is left by the rebels and not by a transcendent God.[206] Furthermore, the notion of remembrance in the Quran—which occurs not only with reference to the people of Noah but also (just a few verses later) to the destruction of the 'Ād ("And We have made the Quran easy to remember, and are there any who will remember?" – Q 54:22), appears in "Shaddad" as well. Remembrance—or rather the return of a revalued past—is evoked by Adonis in the poem's first line, which plays upon the homonym '*ād*, which means "he returned" but also refers to the proper name

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[205] Ali's translation (in *The Glorious Quran*) reads this last word as *muddakir* instead of *mudhdhakir*, changing the meaning to "are there any who will receive admonition?" Yet Arberry's reading (in *The Koran Interpreted*) is almost certainly the correct one, as the word *dhikr* occurs repeatedly in connection with this idea.

[206] References to signs abound in the Quran, particularly in relationship to the various punishment stories. In Q 11:59 we read, "Such were the 'Ād people: They rejected the signs [*āyāt*] of their Lord..."

of the 'Ād people: *'āda shaddādu 'ād*, the line reads in Arabic. The revaluation of the clear Quranic message is further emphasized by a sonorous act of intertextuality, namely that of Adonis' poem mimicking and indeed replicating the rhyme between *'ād* and *'imād* ('pillars') that is present in the Quran (the above-cited Q 89:6-8), while adding *shaddād* as a further (internal) rhyme to this.

An even more subtle intertextual marker can be found if one looks at the poem as a whole, and in particular at the poem's use of a characteristically Quranic device that was the subject of much discussion by classical Arabic rhetoricians and grammarians. As M.A.S. Abdel Haleem notes, by the 3rd/9th century, figures such as al-Farrā' (d. 207/822), Abū 'Ubayda (d. 210/825), and Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) were discussing the frequent abrupt shifts in person within the Quran, for example from third-person narration to direct second-person address; but it was the classical poet and grammarian Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 296/909) who gave this rhetorical device its enduring name: *iltifāt*. Subsequent discussions of *iltifāt* in the circles of *balāgha* (Arabic rhetoric) use the term almost exclusively with this technical meaning in mind, which was itself derived from the term's more literal meaning of "turning" or "turning (one's face) toward."[207] As a rhetorical device, *iltifāt* was also employed by poets, and indeed the Abbasid grammarian and literary critic al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī (d. 392/1002) suggests the possibility of adding it to Ibn al-Mu'tazz's seminal list of the characteristics of *badī*—or innovative—poetry.[208] However, its use in classical poetry seems much less varied than its use in the Quran, and is generally limited to the poet shifting between the first and second (and occasionally third) persons when referring to himself or herself. *Iltifāt* in the Quran, however, covers a wide range of possibilities, many of which serve the purpose of drawing the implied reader farther into the text. One such example comes from the aforementioned Sura 54 ("The Moon"), where the people of Pharaoh are, like those of 'Ād, cited as a cautionary tale: "And *We* have made the Quran easy to remember, and are there any who will remember? / The warnings came also to the people of Pharaoh. / *They* rejected all Our signs, so We seized them with the seizing of One mighty, Omnipotent. / Are *your* [pl.] unbelievers better than those? Or have *you* [pl.] an immunity in the scrolls?" (Q 54:40-3, my emphasis). Such variations in person—from the first-person plural (the "We" of God) to the third-person plural ("they," "the people of Pharaoh"), and then to the second-person plural ("your") in a move that serves to tightly link the people of Pharaoh with the first listeners of this text (presumably the pagans of Quraysh, in this particular early Meccan sura)—was dubbed

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[207] For a discussion of the use, origins, and development of the term *iltifāt*, see M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's article "Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes: 'Iltifāt and Related Features in the Qur'ān." Among other things, he notes that the term originally appeared to denote a type of parenthesis, namely the "turning aside in speech to talk about something before continuing with the original subject," but that this meaning subsequently disappeared (409).

[208] This suggestion stems from al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī's work *Al-wasāṭa bayn al-mutanabbī wa-khuṣūmih*. For more on this, see Kamal Abu Deeb's chapter on "Literary Criticism" (and in particular p. 378) in '*Abbasid Belles-Lettres.*

shajā'at al-'arabiyya, or "the daring of the Arabic language" by the Abbasid rhetorician and critic Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637/1239).[209] After noting that that this "daring" is quite uncommon in poetry, Abdel Haleem gives a compelling explanation for the extremely varied use of *iltifāt* in the Quran (430):

> The limits of a Qur'ānic verse are different from those of an ordinary sentence and many encompass a number of sentences, with different persons, with Allāh at the centre of the situation with access to all, speaking from the viewpoint of various aspects of His Godhead about the various persons/things or talking to them from their multiple viewpoints—this can hardly be expected in poetry.

Abdel Haleem astutely observes that the shifting of perspective inherent in *iltifāt* implies a certain divine omniscience. And in a distinctly Nietzschean move, the poetic voice of "Shaddad" implicitly assumes this divine omniscience for itself by mobilizing *iltifāt* to great effect within the poem, thereby subverting the transcendent divine authority of the Quran, and opening a space for a more immanent or mystic experience of "divinity." The poem begins in the descriptive third-person singular mode ("Shaddad has returned") before switching immediately to the second-person plural imperative ("So raise the banner of longing, / Leave your refusal behind, a sign"), a move that draws the implied readers very quickly into the poem. Moreover, as can be seen time and again in the Quran, the use of the plural also implies a certain community. In the case of "Shaddad," this is a community of rebels, a community whose uniting principle is not divine authority but rather the refusal of such authority, as embodied by the poetic figure of Shaddad. The next shift in person occurs at the outset of the second stanza: "It [the city of the pillars] is the home of rebels / Who lead their desperate lives, / They broke the amphorae's seals." One would expect such a shift to the third-person plural to create a degree of distance in the poem, yet the opposite is in fact the case here. The word translated as "rebels" is in fact *rāfiḍīn*, or "refusers," which creates a clear lexical link to the third verse of the poem ("Leave your refusal [*rafḍ*] behind, a sign"). If the second-person plural represents an implied community of presumably contemporary readers, and the third-person plural represents the historical community of the 'Ād, then this mobilization of *iltifāt* coupled with the repetition of the Arabic root for "refusal" serves to merge these two apparently disparate communities, a merging that is further emphasized by the use of the present tense in verse 8 ("Who *lead* their desperate lives"). This fusion of past and present, of third and second persons, culminates in the poem's short final stanza: "It [the city of the pillars] is our land and our only heritage, / We are its sons, granted respite until the day of resurrection." Here, the first-person plural not only explicitly spells out the links between the people of 'Ād and the readers ("We are its sons"), but also includes the poetic voice within this community of rebels against transcendent authority, thereby fully accepting the more earthly authority of Shaddad and further emphasizing the poem's revaluation of the

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[209] The Arabic citation can be found on page 171 of Ibn al-Athīr's *Al-mathal al-sā'ir*, a work that contains a detailed discussion of the various types of *iltifāt* (see pages 170 to 191). See also Abdel Haleem p. 408 for this particular reference.

Quranic narrative—and later Islamic narratives—of the 'Ād people and their punishment.

As this poem is one of the *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*, the most obvious interpretation would be that Adonis' poetic alter ego of Mihyar is, at the outset, speaking *of* Shaddad in the third person. According to this account, the poetic voice would be Mihyar's alone, and the eponymous Shaddad would simply be the topic of the poem. But the subtle yet evident mimicry of the traditionally Quranic device of *iltifāt* suggests another interpretive possibility. The frequent occurrences in the Quran of the voice of God referring to Himself in the third person singular ("He" or "Allah") suggests that the first verse of "Shaddad" ("Shaddad has returned") could also be read as Shaddad speaking of himself, and thereby laying claim to an authority that is, at the very least, on par with that of the transcendent divine authority. This authority is then mobilized with the imperative of the second verse ("So raise the banner of longing"), which represents nothing other than a direct challenge to the divine injunction that the prophet Hūd delivered to the 'Ād: "O my people, worship God, for you have no god but Him" (Q 7:65). This interpretation does not entirely preclude the more obvious one—that of the poetic persona Mihyar speaking about Shaddad—if Shaddad is considered to be one of Mihyar's many mythic/poetic/historical manifestations.[210] The fact that the words *mihyār* and *shaddād* are metrical equivalents reinforces this interpretation, and the two figures can even be said to share a certain geographical affinity. Although, as I have explained, most of the prominent narratives claim that the many-pillared city of Iram was located somewhere in modern-day Yemen—a view further supported by the fact that an ancient shrine to the prophet Hūd is located there, near the cavern known as Bir Barhūt[211]—Stefan Weidner, in the commentary to his German translation of *Mihyar*, points out a separate tradition wherein "the city of the pillars" is identified with Damascus. Weidner writes: "The identification of Iram with Damascus is made easier through the fact—also known to the Arabs—that Damascus was called *Aram* while under Aramaic rule" (Adonis 1998, 183).[212] This provides yet another subtle intertextual aspect to the poem, as the poetic figure of

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[210] These manifestations include Odysseus, Orpheus, Gilgamesh, Mithra, Sindbad, Noah, Jesus, al-Hallāj, and many others besides.

[211] This shrine has long been an important Muslim pilgrimage site. For a complete discussion of the possibility of a historical figure named Hūd, see R.J. Seargeant's article "Hūd and Other Pre-Islamic Prophets of Ḥaḍramawt." Sergeant notes, among other things, the apparent existence of a pre-Islamic cult of Hūd.

[212] Weidner himself does not provide sources regarding the identification of Iram with Damascus. However, Paul M. Cobb, in his entry on "Hūd" in the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, notes that the 4th/10th century grammarian Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rabaʿī claimed that Damascus was the location of Hūd's tomb in the work *Kitāb faḍāʾil al-shām wa-dimashq*. Other works point to Mecca, Palestine, Baghdad, and Alexandria as possible locations of the tomb (see also p. 54 of Roberto Tottoli's introduction to his Arabic edition of al-Ṭarafī's *Stories of the Prophets*).

Mihyar is indeed a Damascene, and serves to further the (con)fusion of Mihyar and Shaddad within the space of the text.

Along these lines, the final shift to the first-person plural at the end of the poem ("It is *our* land and *our* only heritage / *We* are its sons awaiting the day of resurrection") can also be read as Shaddad reuniting with his people and reaffirming his heritage, reclaiming the legendary Iram of the Pillars for his own. Furthermore, the poem's use of the first-person plural here implicates the reader in this transgressive and anti-authoritarian act. As we can see, Adonis uses the Quranic device of *iltifāt* in this poem neither for purposes of admonition (as in the Quran) nor to further the Quran's transcendent teachings in any way, but rather to subvert those teachings and include the reader in the process of refusal and revaluation, thereby opening up a space for spiritual experience and its concomitant creativity.

3. On Histories of Refusal

On the one hand, the notion of refusal can be said to be akin to what Nietzsche famously refers to as *philosophizing with a hammer*, i.e., the destruction of ancient idols and values in the name of a radically new and more open vision of culture.[213] Yet the very voicing of the concept of refusal within the space of this poem can also be read as a challenge to injurious speech, for this concept has its own history within the Islamic context. Grammatically, the term *rāfiḍa* (plural: *rawāfiḍ*) is a collective form of the word *rāfiḍ*, whose genitive plural *rāfiḍīn* (literally, "refusers") appears in the poem's seventh verse ("It is the home of rebels/refusers"). Beyond the collective property of *rāfiḍah*, the two terms are semantically identical: they are active participles denoting people who refuse or reject something. As Etan Kohlberg notes the *Enyclopedia of Islam*, the exact origins of the term *rāfiḍa*, which dates back to at least the early second/eighth century, are disputed, but one particularly prominent account relates it to the Kufans who supported Zayd b. ʿAlī's (d. 122/740) abortive revolt against the Umayyad caliph Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 125/743): many of these Kufan supporters demanded that Zayd reject and condemn the authority and conduct of the first two Islamic caliphs, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, the immediate successors to Muhammad; and when Zayd refused to do so, these supporters deserted him. As the term also has the secondary meaning of "deserter," Kohlberg notes that it is "variously said to recall the desertion of Zayd [by his Kufan supporters], the rejection of the first two caliphs [by these same Kufans], or both."[214] In his entry on "Heresy" in the *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān,* Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi also attributes the original use of this term to the Zaydī Shia (whose sect arose as a result of Zayd's failed revolt) against the Imāmī Shia of Kufa who deserted Zayd:

> The Imāmī Shīʿites *(imāmiyya qaṭʿiyya)* later known as Twelver Shīʿites *(ithnā ʿashariyya),* were identified by the non-qurʾānic term *rāfiḍa* (pl.

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[213] I am referring to the alternate title that Nietzsche gave his book *Twilight of the Idols*, namely: "How to Philosophize with a Hammer" (*Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*).

[214] Once again, see Kohlberg's article "al-Rāfiḍa" in the *Enyclopedia of Islam.* The more limited sense of the term therefore applies only to those Shia who reject the first two caliphs.

rawāfiḍ, literally "those who throw back or refuse"), first by the Zaydī Shīʿites. The term may have been applied by the Zaydī Muʿtazilī Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir (d. ca. 210/825), who reacted strongly against the Imāmī Shīʿites of Kūfa since they refused to recognize (i.e. threw back) the legitimacy of the armed revolt of Zayd. It was later adopted by non-Shīʿites as a way to disparage the Shīʿī refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the three first caliphs.

Beyond these origins of the term, one thing is abundantly clear: in the context of Islamic history, *rāfiḍa* has long since become a disparaging term used by Sunni to denote more supposedly "extremist" Shia in particular, as well as all Shia more generally. The term has been used in the latter, broader sense by such prominent classical Sunni theologians as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), whose diatribes against the Shia (whom he refers to as *al-rawāfiḍ*) contain a remarkable degree of insult and vitriol.[215] This pejorative use of the term *rāfiḍa* to denote the Shia in general continues among many Sunnis today.[216]

Adonis, himself from a family of Shia, evokes the rich historical resonances of this root (*r-f-ḍ*) in "Shaddad."[217] In this case, however, the intertextual marker does not refer back to the Quran itself (for *rāfiḍa* is not a Quranic term), but rather calls up the complex Islamic history that came after it. By making use of the cognate *rāfiḍīn* rather than *rāfiḍa* (or its plural *rawāfiḍ*), the poetic voice avoids explicitly taking on the mantle of the Shia while still evoking their own history of injurious interpellation and the accusations of heresy or heretic innovation (*bidʿa*) that were leveled against them. Yet the refusal inherent in this poem, and indeed throughout *Mihyar*, is not simply heresy, but rather a stance that challenges and moves beyond the binary thinking implicit in the original injurious interpellation, thereby paving the way for a more non-dual perception of the world.[218] In other words, this poem contains a refusal to even accept the given meanings of the term "refusal" and its cognates. In this sense, to once evoke the work of Judith Butler, this poem (and much of *Mihyar*) represents the performative act that is insurrectionary speech, understood as "the necessary response to injurious

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[215] In the early part of his work *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabbawiyya* ("The Way of the Prophetic Sunna"), Ibn Taymiyya draws deep parallels between the Shia and the Jews, noting, among other things, that both deviate from the Qibla and neither pray correctly (17). He then goes on to assert that in some respects both the Jews and the Christians are superior to the Shia. Ibn Taymiyya, it should be noted, is a thinker that Adonis takes particular issue with in the first volume of his dissertation.

[216] The term is by no means a "fringe" designation. *Rāfiḍa* was used to designate Shia in Saudi Arabian school textbooks until 1993, but has since been removed (Prokop 81).

[217] Adonis' family are ʿAlawites, a sect of Shia. Although he does not identify himself as a Shiite, his sympathies toward the Shia are evident, not least in his initial support of the 1979 Iranian revolution.

[218] As Adonis notes in his book *Sufism and Surrealism*, "Dualism is what keeps man in ignorance, walling him in with individual, social and classical expressions, keeping him a stranger" (39).

language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change" (163). In "Shaddad," the refusal invoked is not merely that of denying the authority or legitimacy of certain caliphs. It is also the refusal to accept God's injurious interpellation of the people of ʿĀd and His injunction to submit to His will; and by extension, it includes the Nietzschean refusal to accept any monopoly—whether political, religious, or philosophical—on the truth. The poetic voice of "Shaddad" thus confirms the accusations of heresy while moving beyond the framework that thinks in binary terms such as "heretic" and "believer," thereby clearing the ground for broader possibilities of spiritual experience.

One final note on the complex history of *rāfiḍa* should be made here, namely that the term, as Etan Kohlberg notes, was already subject to a certain re-appropriation and reinterpretation by the Imāmī Shia (against whom the Zaydī Shia originally leveled the term) in early Islamic times (*EI*, "*Rāfiḍa*"):

> While Rāfiḍa was originally intended as a pejorative term, the Imāmīs soon turned it into an honorific. The traditionist al-Aʿmash quotes Djaʿfar al-Ṣādiḳ as explaining that it was bestowed on the Shīʿīs by God and is preserved in both the Torah and the Gospels. According to al-Ṣādiḳ, there were seventy men among the people of Pharaoh who rejected their master and chose to join Moses instead. God therefore called them Rāfiḍa, i.e. those who rejected evil, and ordered Moses to write this word, in the original Arabic, in the Torah. After Muḥammad's death, when most of the early adherents of Islam began to stray from the path of truth, only the Shīʿīs rejected evil. They thus became the successors of the original Rāfiḍa.

This appeal to the authority of the Torah and the Gospels and a supposed group of proto-*Rāfiḍa* who rejected Pharaoh and accepted Moses is in fact unfounded: neither the Torah nor the Gospels contain any reference to *rāfiḍa* (nor does the Quran). As Kohlberg has noted elsewhere, "this is not unusual, since the practice of citing real or—as in this case—spurious biblical passages to prove the validity of a particular doctrine was well-established among Sunnīs and Shīʿīs alike" (1979, p. 677). Kohlberg goes on to note that this transformation of the term was "entirely natural," for "once the Shīʿī leaders realized that they could not rid themselves of the term, they sought to turn it to their advantage" (678).

This re-appropriation of the term, however, differs significantly from that of Adonis in "Shaddad" and elsewhere in *Mihyar*. Although Adonis mobilizes the lengthy cultural history of this term and transposes it into onto the legend of Shaddad, his revaluation is one that refuses the actual premises of the injurious interpellation by refusing divine authority itself. The Imāmī Shia, on the other hand, take recourse to divine authority (in the form of the Torah and the Gospels) and simply change the grammatical object of refusal: they refuse or reject *evil*, not any divine or political authority, and the term thus becomes one of praise. This operation, like that of Adonis' poem, allows for an initially pejorative term to take on "positive" valences. Yet unlike Adonis' revaluation, it does nothing to strike at the roots of the binary thinking inherent in the original injurious interpellation. It remains subservient to a

transcendent view of truth contained within certain holy books, thereby remaining firmly within what Adonis would call "the known"—and thus outside the radical unknown territory that is the domain of spirituality and creativity.

4. Shaddad's War: On Threats and the *1001 Nights*

By daring to challenge one of the key moral imperatives that underpins both the Quran and Islam taken as a whole—namely, the acknowledgment that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is God's prophet—Adonis' poem "Shaddad" can also be read as a declaration of war: on God and the supposedly divine authority of the Quran in particular, and on all monotheistic claims to truth in general. In an even broader sense, *Mihyar* challenges all textual authorities even as it evokes them, thereby championing the right of the poet or thinker to revaluate the past for his or her own purposes. This individualistic thrust is part and parcel of the spiritual practice of this poetry, for spiritual experience is a largely individual enterprise—union with God, or access to higher states of consciousness, cannot simply be given to the individual by some higher authority; it must be arduously acquired through spiritual "work," and this poetry, by declaring war on the textual authorities that would lay claim to such terrain, represents a first and necessary step of that work. The figure of Mihyar qua Shaddad represents an idealized vision of a revolutionary creator who, like Nietzsche's poetic alter ego Zarathustra, is willing to question (religious, political, textual) authority and wage war with it. Indeed, the notion of war and violence is overtly thematized within the poem. The "banner of longing" (*rāyat al-ḥanīn*) that the poem's readers are told to raise in the second verse is Shaddad's standard, and Shaddad's return is that of a military general coming back to lead his troops, desperate and ragged as they may be, into battle. This poem can therefore be read as evoking revolutionary power, the power inherent in the refusal of authority's injurious interpellations.

Along these lines, we read in verse 9 that Shaddad's rebels "broke the amphorae's seal" (*kasarū khātama 'l-qamāqimi*), an act that is not devoid of symbolism. The word I have translated here as "amphorae" is *qamāqim*, which denotes broad bulgy bottles with long and narrow necks. The word is yet another one of this poem's intertextual markers (though not a Quranic one), for one of these bottles features in the prominent "Story of the Fisherman and the *'Ifrīt*" in the *1001 Nights*, as well as in popularly disseminated stories about Solomon. As the tale goes, a fisherman discovers a bottle (*qumqum*, the singular of *qamāqim*) with King Solomon's seal (*khātam*) on it, and when he manages to remove the seal a powerful demon known as an *'ifrīt* emerges, proclaiming "There is no god but the God of Solomon, His prophet" (Eng 22, Ara 23[219]). The demon had been trapped in the bottle for 1800 years, and as soon as he learns that Solomon is dead, he tries to kill the fisherman and revert to his wicked ways, but is tricked into returning to the bottle. Yet in the poem "Shaddad," the act of rupture is far removed from that of a simple and well-meaning fisherman. It is a conscious rewriting of the legend, and there is no suggestion in Adonis' poem that the demons will ever be

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[219] All page references to this story are from Vol. 1 of the Arabic text of the *1001 Nights* (and Vol. 1 of the English).

bottled up again. Breaking Solomon's seal thus signals the release of immense rebellious power, an activation of hitherto untapped spiritual and creative potential.

Although this reference to demons might seem to be something of an anomaly here—and indeed this verse stands out as the only one that remains unrhymed in the entire poem—this technique of juxtaposing multiple intertextual markers is characteristic of the poetry of *Mihyar*, whose allusions by no means focus solely on the Quran. The nature of allusion in *Mihyar*, wherein figures from the Islamic, Christian, and Judaic traditions are juxtaposed with jinn or figures such as Odysseus, Sindbad, or Gilgamesh, implies a certain leveling of the religious sphere into the mythic that itself devalues monotheistic truth claims.[220] Moreover, as the legend of Shaddad and the opulent Iram of the Pillars also features in prominent editions of the *1001 Nights*, and as references to the *Nights* abound in the poetry of *Mihyar*, the allusion to other parts of that famous collection of tales within the space of this poem is not quite as unexpected as it might at first seem.

The thematization of violence and impending war continues in the two subsequent verses: "and [they] laughed at the threats [*istahza'ū bi 'l-wa'īd*] / And the bridges of peace." The notion of ridicule—the laughing at threats—is an important one here, and once again a central Quranic motif is called up and inverted.[221] This ridicule can be read as an allusion to the prophet Hūd's warnings/threats to the 'Ād people prior to their destruction, and to the 'Ād's haughty response to him, a view furthered by the fact that one of the names for Judgment Day is in fact the day of the threat(s), *yawm al-wa'īd* (cf. Q 50:20). Indeed, the story of Hūd and the 'Ād is just one example among many of punishment tales in the Quran, the fundamental structure of which rarely varies. The sequence of events is generally as follows: (1) A messenger comes to a proud and powerful people and tells them to believe in God. (2) Those people reject and ridicule the messenger, who now finds himself in a desperate situation. (3) God destroys the people. The scholar David Marshall notes it is widely accepted that the punishment stories "reflect the experience of Muhammad at Mecca; the accounts of the

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[220] Adonis also frequently evokes the notion of paganism to emphasize his distance from all forms of monotheism. In the very first verse poem of *Mihyar* (entitled *laysa najman*, "He is Not a Star"), Mihyar is described as a "pagan spear" (*rumḥin wathanī*) (M-15). The reference to "stones" in "Shaddad" ("On these stones," verse 5 of the Arabic text) could also be read as a reference to paganism, if we follow Stefan Weidner's suggestion: "In the context of *Mihyar*, stone is first and foremost a pagan symbol [*ein heidnisches Symbol*] [...] with which the lyric I—or rather, the lyric protagonist—identifies himself" (*Und sehnen* 38).

[221] In his book *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, Toshihiko Izutsu notes the following concerning this term: "Istihza' or 'mockery' is the fundamental state of mind of those who deny the revealed Truth" (92). He then goes on to link it very closely to the verb *kadhdhaba* (to cry lies): "God tries to console in gentle, soothing words the Apostle who is now on the brink of utter despair on account of this ruthless *takdhīb* by the Meccan infidels, and assures him that he is not the only prophet to suffer this kind of terrible persecution, but, rather, such has ever been the destiny of all prophets" (93).

rejection of earlier messengers by their unbelieving people reflect the experience of Muhammad being rejected by his own unbelieving people at Mecca" (p. x). Muhammad's warnings to the people of Mecca thus parallel Hūd's admonitions to the 'Ād people. While "Shaddad" invokes the ridicule that the Quran claims was leveled at prophets such as Hūd and, by extension, Muhammad, the rebels' ridicule and defiance takes on a very different hue here. Through the revaluative operation of this poem, their ridicule of the threats sent by God is transformed from an act of ignorance and blindness to one of conscious and courageous rebellion. In the Islamic narrative, it is the prophet Hūd who speaks truth—God's truth—to the awesome power of the 'Ād. In Adonis' post-Quranic counter-narrative, it is Shaddad and his "desperate" people who now rise up from their destruction to speak their own truths to the new power, that of God and His messengers, while still acknowledging that they find themselves within the structures of this power. While the 'Ād people are, on the one hand, clearly rebelling against Hūd qua Muhammad, they are also, on the other hand, now in the very same desperate position that Muhammad once found himself in. As the content of the Prophet's message is rejected and revalued in "Shaddad," the poetic voice simultaneously enacts a structural mimicry of the role of the Prophet. This voice, which is both that of Shaddad and Mihyar, takes on the mantle of the Prophet Muhammad's desperation, thereby furthering the sacrilegious nature of the poem.[222]

Moreover, it should be noted that the very word for "threats" (*wa'īd*) in this poem points not only toward the Quran's label of Judgment Day as the "day of threats" (or: "the day of the threat"), but also toward the prominent version of the Shaddad legend found in the large Calcutta II manuscript of the *1001 Nights*.[223] Near the end of this tale, it is related that Shaddad b. 'Ād's son, Shaddad the younger, buried his father in a cave in Ḥaḍramawt and set at his father's head a gold tablet on which a few verses were inscribed. I here cite the first verses of the poem (the translation is modified from that of Malcolm C. Lyons): "Be warned, you who have been deceived by length of life. / I am Shaddad ibn 'Ād, lord of the strong castle, / A ruler of power, might and great strength. / All the world obeyed me, in fear of my might [*qahrī*] and threats [*wa'īdī*]" (Eng 902, Ara 146).[224] Adonis, in his poem, masterfully inverts the depicted power relationships by re-invoking the term *wa'īd* and transforming Shaddad from the originator of the threats to their mere recipient, and hence from villain to hero.

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[222] Muhammad is much more directly invoked as one of Mihyar's mythic manifestations in the poem "City of the Helpers," which I will discuss later in this chapter.

[223] The most important element here is not which specific edition of the *1001 Nights* Adonis had in mind when penning this line, but rather the fact that these tales formed—and continue to form—a part of a collective cultural memory to which Adonis is alluding, and which he is, furthermore, attempting to transform via his own poetic intervention.

[224] All page references to the story of Shaddad are from Vol. 2 of the Arabic text of the *1001 Nights*, and Vol. 1 of the English.

5. Resurrection as Insurrection: Shaddad's Cultural and Spiritual Uprising

This poem's thematization of war is merely the surface of an evident struggle over language itself, one that culminates in the poem's final words: "We are its sons, *granted respite till the day of resurrection*" [*al-munẓarīna li-yawmi 'l-qiyāma*]. *Yawm al-qiyāma* literally means "the day of resurrection" or "the day of rising up," though it is often translated more freely as Judgment Day. It is a clear intertextual marker in this poem, as it is the most commonly occurring designation in the Quran for the day in which humankind and all creatures will rise up and be judged before God: the term occurs no less than 70 times in the Quran, the vast majority of them in early Meccan suras, where references to punishment stories such as those of the 'Ād abound.[225] Belief in the resurrection is one of the central tenets of Islam, and indeed the 75th sura of the Quran is entitled *al-qiyāma.* The punishment for the wicked and the unbelievers on this day is entry to the fires of Hell, while the promise to the pious and God-fearing is entry into Paradise.

Alongside the clear appropriation of this Quranic term in "Shaddad," the final verse of the poem comprises two other specific allusions, both of which need to be noted before a complete analysis of this intertextual moment is possible. The first is a reference to the remainder of the above-cited poem attributed to Shaddad (and said to be found on his tombstone) in the *1001 Nights*, and in particular its final verse (Eng 903, Ara 146-7):

> Through the greatness of my power I held both east and west.
> We were summoned to the true way by a rightly guided man,
> But we did not obey and called out: 'Is there no refuge?'
> Then came a cry out of the far horizon;
> We were cut down as though we were a harvest field.
> Shut in our graves, we wait [*intaẓarnā*] for Judgment Day [*yawm al-wa'īd*].[226]

As we can see, the moral underpinning of this poem is very much in line with the Quranic narrative of the 'Ād. The final verse of Adonis' poem clearly echoes this one: both evoke Judgment Day, though in different lexical forms (*yawm al-qiyāma* vs. *yawm al-wa'īd*), and both bring in notions of waiting or deferral (*al-munẓarīn* and *intaẓarnā*, both from the same root in Arabic). Yet in the *1001 Nights*, the act of waiting for Judgment Day is an act of resignation, an acknowledgement by Shaddad that the arrogance implicit in his refusal of God's threats was unfounded, and that all his power has come to naught: In the legend, Shaddad knows that he is merely waiting for his entry into Hell and eternal punishment.

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[225] It should also be noted that this poem can be read as a reply to Ibn Taymiyya's own threat against the Shia (17): "the sword will be drawn against them [the *rawāfiḍ*] until Judgment Day [*yawm al-qiyāma*]. No flag will be raised for them..."

[226] It should be noted that al-Tha'labī's version of this poem, which is very similar to this one, does not include the final verse (Eng 145, Ara 113).

Adonis' poem, however, ends on a much more defiant note, and the intertextual marker *al-munẓarīn* is significant here. This is the passive participle of the Form IV verb *anẓara*, which means "to grant (someone) respite," and as Stefan Weidner notes in his brief interpretation of the end of this poem (2005, p. 32), it is an allusion to the Quranic sura entitled *al-ḥijr* and Iblīs' famous refusal to bow down before Adam. God curses him for this, whereupon Iblīs (who is more commonly known as Satan) says, "O my Lord, give me then respite [*anẓirnī*] until the day the dead are resurrected"; and God replies, "You are granted respite [*innaka min al-munẓarīn*] / Until Judgment Day [*yawmi 'l-waqti 'l-maʿlūm*]" (Q 15:36-8).[227] Weidner notes how the "we" of the poem thus takes the place of Satan, and writes the following regarding this allusion to Satan and Judgment Day: "The damnation of Satan is transferred to men, or at least to the refusers and the despairing [*die Verweigerer und die Verzweifelten*] among them, and thus appears as an identity-giving [*identitätstiftende*] *conditio humana*, a kind of *ex negativo*, or more precisely *ex diabolo*, chosenness" (33). Weidner's notion of a paradoxical diabolical chosenness is compelling, and the sacrilegious nature of assuming Satan as yet another one of Mihyar's manifestations is clear. I would add that the dual invocation of both the *1001 Nights* and the Quran in this verse serves to further the defiant aspect of the poem, for the ʿĀd (and with them the implied readers) are no longer "shut in their graves" as they were in the *1001 Nights*, but now seem bent on raising Shaddad's standard once more in defiance of the divine edicts, thereby claiming their own spiritual ground, as it were.

The eschatological allusion to *yawm al-qiyāma* in the final line of "Shaddad" is a remarkable example of Adonis waging an epistemic struggle over Quranic terminology itself. While the term on its own is not necessarily a disparaging one, the Quran's use of it contains an implicit injurious interpellation, for those such as Shaddad and Satan who refuse the premises of the Quran will find themselves judged and roundly punished. Adonis' poem seeks to counter this violent call with a semantic violence of his own, one made even more striking by the fact that he rhymes *qiyāma* with the word "peace" (*salāma*) from verse 11 ("and [they] laughed at the threats / and the bridges of peace"). While the poetic voice of "Shaddad" evokes the Quranic connotations of *yawm al-qiyāma*, it simultaneously broadens the potential semantic scope of the term, thereby transforming it into a much less "static" entity than Islamic traditions would seem to allow for. The question at stake here is: What is the nature of this resurrection, this rising up? Although one could view the end of "Shaddad" as a simple inversion of the Quranic term (as Weidner reads it),[228] or as an ironic reference to the term and the granting of respite, Adonis' poem allows for a further interpretation, one wherein the resurrection of Shaddad's followers implies not punishment but reward. Here, the ʿĀd will indeed gain admittance into heaven: not into the Paradise of the transcendent

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[227] This exchange appears in identical form in Q 38:79-81.

[228] Weidner's brief interpretation of the end of the poem limits itself to pointing out the Quranic allusion to Iblīs and claiming that the Quranic content is "merely revaluated" ("lediglich umgewertet," – *Und sehnen* 33), by which he appears to mean that the religious message is simply inverted.

Godhead, but rather into that earthly paradise called "Iram." Similarly to Bonnefoy's work, this poem can thus be read as championing a spiritual immanence as opposed to any kind of otherworldly transcendence. And indeed, the "bridges of peace" refer to the passage to heaven in the afterlife, so that the rebels of this poem reject not only their potential punishment, but also the promised reward to the faithful. While enacting a textual reappropriation of that many-pillared city that Shaddad famously built as a rival to God's Garden, the poem simultaneously thematizes a potential reclamation of Iram qua paradise by the 'Ād, their return from the dead to wage war with the Heavenly hordes of their transcendent injurious interpellator.[229] Adonis thus transforms the resignation inherent in the tale from the *1001 Nights* into hope, suggesting that Shaddad's rivalry with God is far from over. The ambiguous nature of the noun *qiyāma* is at play here, for it means both "resurrection" and "rising up" (in the sense of revolting or rebelling against someone).[230] *Yawm al-qiyāma* thus becomes a day of uprising *against* religious authority, rather than the day in which that authority exerts its mastery. I would argue that it can also be read as a day of spiritual resurrection, of rebirth, one that is made possible by refusing transcendent religious authority. Once again, this poem invokes textual authority only to undermine it, takes up the injurious interpellation only to resignify it and recontextualize it, which is precisely what Judith Butler refers to as "the political promise of the performative" (161). In this reading, the metaphysical content of the Quranic term is gutted, and the possibility of unmooring the term from its Islamic contexts emerges. As such, the operation of this poem permits a spiritual grounding of sorts, a move away from transcendent truths towards a more immanent mode of unknowing.

6. Excursus: On *Madīnat al-Anṣār* and Cultural Rebirth

Such semantic gutting of Islamic terminology is one of the hallmarks of the poetry of *Mihyar*, and I will briefly turn to another poem from *Mihyar* to provide a further—and particular telling—example of this. The following is a fairly literal translation of the entire first part of the two-part poem "The City of the Helpers" (*Madīnat al-anṣār*), from the first section of *Mihyar* (M-25):

> Welcome him, city of the helpers, [*madīnat al-anṣār*]
> With thorns, or welcome him with stones,
> And hang his hands

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[229] Almost all of the versions of this tale that I have consulted emphasize the paradisiac nature of Iram not only in terms of Shaddad's intentions (i.e., the fact that he wanted to build a rival to God's Paradise), but also in terms of the actual visual opulence of the city. In the *1001 Nights*, for example, the traveller who stumbles upon the empty city of Iram proclaims, "There is no doubt that this is the Paradise that we are promised in the next world" (Eng 899, Ara 142 – English translation modified). In al-Tha'labī's account, the traveler proclaims, "This is the Garden that God has described to His servants in this world. Praise be to God Who let me enter the Garden" (Eng 239, Ara 109).

[230] This other meaning is derived from the Form I verb *qāma 'alā*, whose meanings include rising up or revolting against someone.

> As an arch beneath which
> The tomb will pass, and crown his temples[231]
> With embers or tattoos—
>
> And let Mihyar burn.

The title of this poem—and its repetition in the first verse—is the key intertextual marker here. *Madīnat al-anṣār*, most literally translated as "city of the helpers" or "city of the partisans," is no neutral term in Islamic history. This phrase is a clear reference to the famous Hijra or Emigration of the Prophet Muhammad in the year 622 AD. Persecuted by the Quraysh pagans that controlled Mecca at that time, Muhammad fled to the oasis city that now bears the name Medina, where he received refuge.[232] Those inhabitants of Medina who supported Muhammad were called *al-anṣār*, a term that later came to designate all the Muslims of that city.[233] The poem's title, *Madīnat al-anṣār*, could thus also be translated as "Medina of the Anṣār." Yet the welcome that the poetic voice demands be given "him" (the pronoun, as we find out in the last verse, refers to Mihyar) is of a very different nature from the welcome that the Prophet Muhammad received in seventh-century Medina. This new voice calls upon the *anṣār* to burn Mihyar and stone him. This would seem to be an extremely iconoclastic re-telling of Islamic history, for there is little doubt that Muhammad's own life story is being evoked here. In this more obvious interpretation of the poem, Muhammad is seen as yet another one of Mihyar's many manifestations (which are, again, both mythic and historical, thereby blurring the boundaries between the two categories), and the poem thus becomes a transformation of Muhammad's life history. While it could be argued that the naming of Mihyar in the poem's final verse mitigates the sacrilegious nature of the poem by explicitly stating that this poem is in fact about Mihyar and not Muhammad,[234] I would argue that the possibility of a non-Islamic reading actually forms the iconoclastic core of this text. By evoking Muhammad, Adonis allows for a turn away from him, while simultaneously casting Mihyar as a new type of spiritual leader. Adonis seeks to gut the religious element here, to pull this Quranic term away from its most evident referent. As with the term *yawm al-qiyāma* in "Shaddad," the intertextual marker *madīnat al-anṣār*, while still Islamic, paradoxically becomes non-

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[231] The word I have translated as "his temples" (*sadghayh*) refers to parts of the head, not to temples of worship.

[232] Medina's original name was Yathrib.

[233] The designation *al-anṣār* was originally in opposition to that of *al-muhājirūn*, "the emigrants," i.e., those Muslims who emigrated from Mecca with Muhammad. *Al-anṣār* were also sometimes referred to as *anṣār al-nabī* ("the helpers of the Prophet").

[234] The fact that Adonis does not name Mihyar in "Shaddad" or in the poem "The New Noah" lends credence to the view that he deemed the act of naming crucial in this instance because Muhammad is the key intertextual figure of this poem. Indeed, only 12 poems in the entire 268-page collection actually name Mihyar, although it should be noted that the majority of these instances occur in the first section of *Mihyar*, to which "The City of the Helpers" belongs.

Islamic. For while the title of this poem could be read as "Medina of the Anṣar," it could also just as easily refer to any city (*madīna*) and any helpers (*anṣār*).[235] Adonis activates the non-Islamic potential of these two words, thereby allowing a more mythic interpretation of the poem, one that brings in the notion of death as a positive force that, similarly to in the work of Bonnefoy, moves one away from otherworldly transcendence and towards a mode of spiritual immanence. In this reading, Mihyar's death is akin to that of Christ, and is necessary for spiritual rebirth and regeneration. This reading is supported by the reference to "thorns" in the poem, and by fact that the poem at hand is immediately followed by the poem "The New Testament" (*al-'ahd al-jadīd*), which could also be translated as "The New Covenant," a poem whose title and contents suggest the possibility of a certain spiritual breakthrough. Adonis is fusing Islamic and Christian mythology here. His is also ironically rejecting the Islamic notion of community that is evoked by the title of the poem, *madīnat al-anṣār*, and replacing it with a kind of individual quest.

　　This brings us back to the term *yawm al-qiyāma*. By considering the context in which *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* was written, further interpretive possibilities of the "day of resurrection" evoked at the end of "Shaddad" become evident. Rather than "merely" being a challenge to the Quran, the poem can be read as evoking rebellion by any downtrodden people or communities against political authority, and this reading is supported by the frequent links between political and religious/textual authority that Adonis makes in his critical writings. This more general interpretation foregrounds one of the recurring themes in *Mihyar*, that of cultural-spiritual rebirth in the Arab world, as embodied both by a resurrected Shaddad and by the figures of Jesus, Adonis, and Phoenix that recur not only in the poetry of *Mihyar* but also in the works of a group of poets from this period (including Adonis) who came to be known as the Tammūzī poets, and whose poetry generally had a pan-Arab scope that was linked to political figures such as Antoun Saadeh in Syria/Lebanon and Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt. Within this literary-historical context and the political context of the early 1960s, the final verse of

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[235] This creates a quandary for translators of the poem. Should the Quranic content be highlighted to reveal all aspects of the poem, or should the poem's a-Quranic potential be preserved by making no reference whatsoever to Medina and Muhammad. In her French translation of *Mihyar*, Anne Wade Minkowski selects "The City of the Partisans" ("Ville des partisans") as the title of the poem, but does not point out the Islamic reference in the book's very short commentary (*Chants* 46), so the English reader has no idea about the sacrilegious content. Pedro Martínez Montávez's translates the title in the same way in Spanish ("La ciudad de los partidarios"), but also elects not to comment on or highlight the allusion (*Canciones* 39). The same is true of Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard' English translation, where the title is somewhat freely translated as "In the City of the Partisans" (*Mihyar of Damascus* 27). Khaled Mattawa leaves this poem out of his translation of Adonis' *Selected Poems*. Only Stefan Weidner's German translation, which includes a lengthy commentary, notes the Islamic reference, though he too translates the title as "City of the Partisans" (*Stadt der Mitstreiter*) (*Gesänge* 13, 178-9).

"Shaddad" signals an expectation of cultural-spiritual rebirth out of the ashes of a modern Arab wasteland.

The city of Iram in particular takes on new and multiple meanings here, and the aforementioned possible identification of Iram with Damascus is significant. As I noted earlier, the entire fourth section of *Mihyar*—of which "Shaddad" forms the final poem—is entitled "Iram of the Pillars," and contains no less than three direct references to Damascus, more than any of the other six sections of the collection. Just as the legendary city of Iram was destroyed by God, the modern-day Arab city embodied by Damascus has been, according to Adonis, wrecked by political authoritarianism and the restrictive frontiers of orthodox Islam. Indeed, this section of *Mihyar* contains some of the most scathing references to modern Arabic culture of the entire work. Our age is "the age of the golden boot" (M-148), for example. In the poem "Homeland" (*waṭan*), the poetic voice states that "In my lands all of us pray, all of us polish shoes," before—momentarily—repudiating Damascus as his home ("for these are my home, not Damascus," M-155). And in another poem, entitled "A Voice" (*ṣawt*), that homeland "walks lamely" and is "broken" and "bleeding resin" (M-157). The depiction of the present moment is a dire one here.

Yet this is only one side of the story. As Adonis notes in an interview, "For me, Damascus signifies Arabic culture in its blossoming as well as its backwardness. And also Arab politics, of course—with its tolerance as well as its oppression" (Weidner 2005 152-3). Indeed, in this entire section of *Mihyar*, Iram simultaneously represents the latent potential of Arab culture, embodied most evidently by the frequent references to rebirth and resurrection, a motif that is intimately bound up with death: "Something must be born, so I bore caverns in my skin for lightning and build nests," we read in the opening prose poem of the section, entitled "Psalm" (*mazmūr*, M-135), which is followed only a few verses later by the declaration, "Form worthy of our demise—advance" (M-136). The short poem "This May Be My County" (*Qad taṣīru bilādī*), which I here cite in its entirety, is a further example of this topos (M-152):

> I ascend, climbing the morning of my land,
> Climbing its rubble and summits;
> I rid myself of the weight of death within it,
> I emigrate
> In order to see it,
>
> For tomorrow this may be my country.

These verses, along with many others in this section, point toward the multivalent day of resurrection proclaimed in "Shaddad." Iram qua Damascus, while being the vision of a wrecked Arab city, thus simultaneously contains the promise for a better future, the potential for the city to rise up out of the ashes of its present situation.[236]

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[236] It should also be noted here that the reference to emigration in this poem ("I emigrate / In order to see it") could be read as a reference to the fact that Adonis wrote the greater part of *Mihyar* while living in Paris in 1960-1.

The poem "Shaddad" thus calls upon the reader to go back ['āda] and reconsider any number of cultural and historical figures, not merely Shaddad alone, but rather all those who, whether directly or indirectly, can be said to follow in his insurrectionary footsteps. To provide just one concrete example of this, I will return to al-Thaʿlabī's *Lives of the Prophets*, and in particular to the tale of the prophet Hūd and the ʿĀd people (which, again, al-Thaʿlabī keeps separate from that of Shaddad and the ʿĀd). Two rebellious figures feature prominently in this version of the tale as examples of particular arrogance: al-Khuljān, and Qayl b. ʿAnz. The former, as "chief and elder" (*raʾīsahum wa-kabīrahum*) of the ʿĀd at that time, meets a remarkable end (Eng 110, Ara 49). With the exception of a small delegation sent to Mecca to pray for rain, God's punishing wind kills all the ʿĀd who rejected Allah until only al-Khuljān is left of them. Hūd rebukes him one final time, saying, "Woe to you, al-Khuljān, accept Islam and be safe" (ibid.). Yet al-Khuljān, seeing angels in the sky, asks Hūd if God would grant him some of them as his own people. This arrogant question is the final straw, and God destroys him then and there. One other prominent member of the ʿĀd meets a similar end. Prior to the destruction of their cities, a delegation under the leadership of one Qayl b. ʿAnz had been sent to Mecca to pray for rain. Among these men was Murthid b. Saʿd, who had secretly converted to Islam and believed in Hūd's message. After they learn the fate of their people, God tells them that He will grant any request they have. Murthid chooses "piety and truthfulness," (Eng 111, Ara 49), and this is granted to him, and he survives. Qayl, however, takes a different path: "Qayl said: 'I choose that there should befall me what befell my people.' And he was told that means destruction. So he replied: 'I do not care. There is no sense that I survive my people.' Then he received the punishment that befell the ʿĀd, and he perished" (ibid.).

After reading "Shaddad"—which, again, does not directly evoke Qayl, al-Khuljān, or Murthid—these three figures nevertheless appear in a very different light. The revaluative operation of Adonis' poem leads the reader to reconsider (and indeed upturn) the clear moral imperative of this cautionary tale against arrogance and the refusal to submit to God. Qayl and al-Khuljān now become two heroic figures who knowingly choose death rather than surrender to God's will or submit to another's transcendent authority. Qayl's voluntarily taking on the fate of his people appears as a particularly courageous act in the face of tyrannical power that would hold a monopoly over spiritual experience. Conversely, Murthid can be read as someone who makes the politically expedient choice to abandon his own people, thereby becoming anything but a heroic figure. This implicit transformation of source texts is a core aspect of the bilateral intertextuality that is a hallmark of Adonis' poetry as spiritual practice. It is an attempt to instill a certain creative agency on the part of the reader.

7. Conclusion: On Arrogance

Implicit in the preceding section was a thematic revaluation of the prevalent Islamic notion of arrogance or pride, which can be considered diametrically opposed to the humble act of "submitting" (*islām*) to God's will. Arrogance as *takabbur* and/or *istikbār* (the latter of which is sometimes translated as insolence, and implies considering oneself greater than God) is a leitmotif in the Quran, wherein it is

embodied most notably by Iblīs' refusal to bow down before Adam—a further thread in our intertextual web, given the aforementioned reference to Iblīs at the end of the "Shaddad." The proto-Sufi poet al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), to whom Adonis includes an elegy in the final section of Mihyar (M-235), famously praised Iblīs' arrogance in his work *kitāb al-ṭawasīn*, claiming that it was a result of Iblīs' understanding of the divine nature of all things. Arrogance is also an integral aspect in the specific legend of the 'Ād people as presented in the Quran ("Now the 'Ād behaved arrogantly [*istakbarū*] against all truth [*bi-ghayri 'l-haqqi*]," Q 41:15), which spells out quite clearly that the fires of Hell will be the abode of the arrogant (Q 16:29, 39:60, 39:72, and 40:76). Furthermore, arrogance is also emphasized in the tales of Shaddad that served to contextualize the Quranic narrative. I once again cite al-Thaʿlabī (Eng 240, Ara 110):

> Now [Shaddad] was devoted to reading the ancient books, and every time he found the Garden mentioned therein, his soul urged him to create for himself its likeness in this world, thereby putting himself above God and blaspheming Him [*daʿathu nafsahu an yajʿala tilka 'l-ṣifah li-nafsihi fī 'l-dunyā 'aluwwan 'alā 'l-lāhi taʿālla wa-kufran*]. When the picture stood vividly before his eyes, he gave the order to build that city, which is Iram of the Pillars.

While the arrogance of those punished is a prominent feature of all the punishment stories found in the Quran, Shaddad's is unique in that it is embodied not merely in acts of oppression (as in the case of Pharaoh against the people of Moses) or disobedience (as in the case of Iblīs), but also—and indeed primarily—in an act of *creation*, in an attempt to appropriate what supposedly belongs only to the transcendent Godhead.[237] In his intertextual mimicry of the Quran, Adonis takes on the excessive pride of Shaddad and the 'Ād people as well as Shaddad's refusal to accept the spiritual act of *creation* as the sole domain of God. Indeed, it could be argued that the very process of revaluation necessary entails a certain level of "arrogance" because it implies the exercising of a powerful interpretive will.[238]

Although Adonis rejects this notion of the Quran's inimitability (*i'jāz al-qur'ān*) time and again in his critical writings, I would argue that his refusal of any transcendent aesthetic is most impressive and most iconoclastic in his poetry—not least because of the incredible compactness and density of this poem, which recalls that of many portions of the Quran. Adonis' poetry surpasses the rigid dichotomies of so many of his critical writings, for the complex nature of *Mihyar*'s intertextual practices could be said to complicate his argument that "Islam" in fact represents clarity and simplicity: his own evocations of texts from Islamic history reveal the

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[237] While the verb denoting "creation" here, *ja'ala*, is not the most common Quranic verb for the acts of creation attributed to God (that verb is *khalaqa*), it does occur frequently in the Quran as a synonym for *khalaqa*, for example in Q 6:1, 6:96, 21:30, and 40:64. For more on this, see Daniel Carl Peterson's article "Creation" in the *Encyclopedia of the Quran.*

[238] Furthermore, I would note that Nietzsche's writings in general represent masterful deployments of arrogance as a rhetorical device.

complexity of many of these source texts. As we have seen, every verse of "Shaddad" is laden with meaning, and requires immense effort on the part of the reader to unpeel its layers. By returning a voice to Shaddad and taking up the injurious appellations leveled at him, this poem attempts to implicate the reader in an insurrectionary—and inherently creative—spiritual process. This path of negation, which attempts to clear the epistemological ground that the Quran (according to Adonis) seeks to establish, encourages the reader to move into deeper and more "unknown" realms of perception through the subtle operations of this poetry. "Shaddad" reveals one of the goals not only of that poem considered on its own but indeed of the *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* as a whole: to sow the seeds of doubt and insurrection, as it were, and to change—even if only subconsciously—the reader's relationship to dominant textual, religious, and cultural authorities. It is no coincidence that the ever-changing figure of Mihyar is described as "filling life without being seen" [*yamla'u 'l-ḥayāta wa-lā yarāhu aḥadun*] in the very first text of this massive collection (M-14), and as "a song that visits us surreptitiously" [*ughniyyatan tazūrunā khilsatan*] in just the third verse poem of this book (M-17). Although Adonis himself often calls attention to the hoped-for effects of his poetry, the example of "Shaddad" reveals the impressive subtlety of many of the revaluative mechanisms of that poetry. This process of destruction—and the concomitant invitation for the reader to take up the act of creation—forms the core of the spiritual practice of Adonis' poetry, and has wide-reaching cultural connotations for readers from across the Arab world.

Conclusion

The impact that the work of Yves Bonnefoy and that of Adonis has had on their respective (trans-)national poetic landscapes has been immense. In this dissertation, I have attempted to demonstrate how the respective work of both these poets can be considered a form of spiritual practice, albeit in very different ways. These differences are largely due to the unique cultural contexts that each poet finds himself in. In the cultural context of Bonnefoy, who began his poetic career in earnest after the end of the Second World War, "God" had long ago been declared dead, and the burning question for him was: How to maintain any spirituality at all in this modern era? He was initially intrigued by the sense of the sacred that the Surrealists seemed to value so greatly, but quickly became disillusioned by what he considered the linguistic and philosophical naiveté of their work. His poetry became his spiritual practice, his way of eliciting the sacred and drawing the implied reader into that non-conceptual experience of presence. His path, as we have seen, was not without its obstacles, in particular the mournful Dark Night period that he passed through and vividly documented in his 1958 collection *Hier régnant désert*. But in his 1965 collection *Pierre écrite*, he overcomes that spiritual impasse, and fully comes into his own as a poet of presence. Through what I have been calling the long poem, Bonnefoy is able to present an entire spiritual process on the page, a lengthy labor that seeks to draw both the poetic subject and the reader into a realm of experience beyond the conceptual. This process, as I have shown, parallels that of certain Buddhist meditation practices, which also seek to draw the meditator into a realm where concepts lose their hold on the individual.

For Adonis, who follows Bonnefoy in writing lengthy and sustained collections of poetry, a different cultural context leads to a very different mode of poetry, though it too, I have argued, can be viewed as spiritual practice. Although the Arab world was beginning to undergo its own modernist movements in literature in the decades following the end of the Second World War, Adonis never loses his conviction that the concepts and cultural constructs of the Arab public as a whole are largely determined by the rigid conceptual boundaries of mainstream Islam. The transcendent God never died in the Arab world, and so his poetic project takes on a very different hue. Where Bonnefoy attributes a large degree of individual agency to the implied French reader, Adonis sees a clear lack of any such agency in the implied Arab reader. Bonnefoy's cultural circumstances allow him to move beyond—or attempt to move beyond—conceptual language itself in his poetry. For Adonis, even though a sense of the sacred clearly animates his poetry, the Arabic language, in his view, has too much conceptual baggage to allow for such a direct approach. Adonis must first break down the dogmatic structures of Islam and instantiate a creative agency on the part of his reader. In my reading of this poetry, it is precisely this destructive process—as well as the subsequent creativity—that constitutes Adonis' spiritual practice. Although Adonis himself does not emphasize the spiritual aspect of this, I believe that it is present throughout his poetry, and I have argued my case through the example of his seminal 1961 collection

Songs of Mihyar the Damascene. Where Bonnefoy presents himself, at least in his more mature poetry, as a humble spiritual writer going through his own internal spiritual process and grappling repeatedly with the limits of language, Adonis presents himself more as a pagan prophet of sorts who seeks to negate Islamic concepts and values (rather than moving beyond the concept entirely, as Bonnefoy does), and his poetry thus has a much more didactic tone. Indeed, Adonis seems to reject "humility" outright, for he equates it with the act of prostration before a transcendent God, and seeks instead to inaugurate a sense of active creative agency on the part of the implied reader.

Despite their clear differences, both writers share a deep mistrust of the transcendent, and a view of poetry as path—their long collections allow for a sustained intratextual working on the concept (whether the Islamic concept or simply the concept in and of itself), a lengthy spiritual process that is rooted firmly in the immanence of this world. Due to its nebulous nature, and due to the materialist and scientific attitude of the modern world, the realm of spirituality is often discounted or ignored in modern scholarship, as it is so difficult to pin down and define. While I have not attempted a single rigid definition of the spiritual realm in this dissertation, I have repeatedly pointed to the fact that spirituality begins where the conceptual ends. In my reading of Adonis, that space of radical unknowing is simultaneously a space of creative agency, one that is, in his view, desperately needed in the modern Arab world—by challenging the authority of the dominant Islamic conceptual framework, Adonis' poetry seeks to clear that spiritual ground. For Bonnefoy, when the concept loses its hold, a new realm of spiritual experience enters in, a mode of immanence that he frequently refers to as presence: this does not lead him to abandon language altogether, but rather to engage in poetry as a spiritual exercise, as an ongoing process of moving beyond the inherently transcendent concept. Considering the work of these two poets as a mode of spiritual practice in and of itself, I have sought to shed new light on this remarkable poetry, to offer fresh readings of their well-known work, and to open up new avenues of interpretation for future scholarship.

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