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Allegory and Event: Two ways of saying the salamander in Yves Bonnefoy

Layla Roesler

- 1 “Singularité irreprésentable, unicité du temps qui détourne le temps de son horizon, l'événement est, en ce sens, un signe du temps perdu¹”, indicated Gad Soussana during the Jacques Derrida seminar entitled “Dire l'événement, est-ce possible?” In counterpoint, we see Yves Bonnefoy writing in *L'Improbable*: “Quel souci y a-t-il dans le poème, sinon de nommer ce qui se perd? ²” His stated goal, and the task he assigns poetry are clear. And yet we can wonder whether that naming, that locating in language of those things which are by definition fleeting and evanescent can ever wholly suffice. For if poetry represents the attempt to retain the ephemeral, can event be considered as the object of such an attempt? Twelve years separate Yves Bonnefoy's first major collection of poetry, his 1953 *Du Mouvement et de l'Immobilité de Douve*, from his 1965 essay “La Poésie française et le principe d'identité.” This latter text, initially published in the *Revue d'esthétique*, was gathered with other essays in the 1967 collection *Un Rêve fait à Mantoue*. Despite the rather substantial amount of time that elapsed between these two texts, it is fascinating to note the persistence of a particular image that, transcending the generic boundaries which ordinarily separate poetry and prose, strikingly appears in both texts. This image, the singular and memorable image of the salamander, appears not only in the closing moments of *Douve*, but also in several sections of the essay. The importance of the image cannot be gainsaid. In a patient taxonomic study of the word patterns of Bonnefoy's early collections of poetry, Jérôme Thélot notes that the word ‘salamander’ appears no less than eight times in *Douve*³. It then ceases to occur in subsequent collections of poetry, only to reappear in the essay, where it is explicitly linked to no less than *présence*, that decisive term which encapsulates the *telos* conditioning much of Bonnefoy's writing and thought.
- 2 Beyond the conceptual significance of the salamander image as a figure for presence, I would like to suggest in this article that the recurrence of what appears to be an identical

image permeating two different categories of writing makes it a particularly appropriate trope to investigate the notion of event, along with the parallel question of how—and if—event can be constituted in writing. The obvious hypothesis engendered by the existence of two seemingly identical images in different texts suggests that they both point to a single referential event, with the corollary implication that material events serve as the basis for artistic creation. I believe, however, that in the case of the two Bonnefoyian texts, the problem is more complex, and resides in the difficulty of distinguishing the phenomenological appearance of event from its philosophical construction as event. Using the framework of contemporary reflections on the notion of event, I shall demonstrate that what we witness in the concatenation of the two Bonnefoyian texts is nothing less than the very description of how narrative structure can construct event. The process advances through several observable phases, from a postulated initial incident, to its integration into mental structures through narration, to its increasing symbolization in poetry, and finally to its constitution as significance-bearing event in the essay. And yet, before we can profitably integrate the Bonnefoyian image of the salamander into reflection of its potential as event, we must constitute some of the bases allowing us to identify the very notion of 'event' *per se*.

- 3 In part, the difficulty of the task lies in what appears to be the self-evident nature of the notion of event: almost anyone can give a definition of an event as “something that happens”. Closer examination indicates, however, that the term is laden with such inextricable definitional complexities that it is virtually impossible to characterize in an accurate and uncontroversial manner. Once we progress beyond the ‘ordinary’ definition, all manner of more theoretical responses exist, a number of analytical philosophers going even so far as to deny, philosophically speaking, the very existence of events⁴. More usefully, perhaps, for the current analysis, other less radical positions exist, with a number of philosophers conceding the ontological and metaphysical reality of events by postulating what amounts to rather technical descriptions of the notion of event. Thus philosopher Donald Davidson, has suggested several means of apprehending the notion of event, first by suggesting that “mental events are causally related to physical events⁵”, and then by postulating the identity and singularity of events: “no two events are identical, no event is ever identical with *another*⁶”, thus confirming the common intuitive understanding that because events are time-bound, they cannot both recur, and still remain identical only to themselves. These points will be of the utmost significance to our reading of the *double* existence of Bonnefoy’s salamander image, as will a more general philosophical description of events which distinguishes them from objects by describing the former as dynamic, while characterising the latter by their more static nature. This distinction is effectively drawn by P. M. S. Hacker, who states that “the *esse* of events is to take place, happen or occur, but not to exist⁷”. These characteristics are derived from the fact that one substantive difference that has been suggested between objects and event lies in the spatio-temporal boundaries assigned to each: objects tend to occupy bounded spaces, while the notion of event tends to describe entities that are temporally, rather than spatially delimited: “objects are immediately related to space, events are immediately related to time⁸”.
- 4 This spatio-temporal distinction between object and event is important to bear in mind, for a number of the structures and preoccupations that surface in Bonnefoy’s work seem to demonstrate the tenuousness of making such intransigent distinctions between space and time. In part, the blurring of distinctions takes place at the level of language, in the

ordinary way we talk about things and locate time-bounded occurrences. In another essay from *L'Improbable*, Bonnefoy writes “Un événement *a eu lieu*, [my underlining] le plus profond, un oiseau a chanté dans le ravin d’existence [...], mais déjà le temps nous a roulé dans ses plis, l’approche de l’instant est redevenu notre exil. Il y a eu un don [...] mais nous n’avons pas pu le saisir⁹”. Our common use of language indicates that in French, as in English, the event, in happening, takes place; it metaphorically occupies space. This taking (up) of place is particularly significant in the context of the strong adherence Bonnefoy demonstrates in *Douve* to the notion of space, seen in the trope of “place”, or “true place”: “Vrai lieu” is the name of the concluding section of *Douve*, and the last use of the salamander image occurs in a poem entitled “Lieu de la Salamandre” suggesting thus that closure can only be attained when the object has “found its place” and been integrated into it. Indeed, it has been argued by a number of critics that the entire trajectory described by the cycle of poems in *Douve* indicates that place is the objective toward which the whole collection tends¹⁰. In terms, thus, of analysing the salamander image as the constitution of event, it will be important not only to recognize Bonnefoy’s materialization through his poetry of one of the substantial theoretical paradoxes of event, namely the “placeness” of a non-object, but also the fact that the recurrence of the salamander image in the later essay indicates that the closure seemingly attained through place cannot be maintained.

- 5 Beyond this rather schematic description of the event as such, a number of contemporary thinkers have begun to address the philosophical ramifications of the notion of event that derive from a phenomenological standpoint. In terms of the applications of phenomenological notions to the Bonnefoyian texts under consideration, I would argue that there can hardly be any doubt but that the salamander episode –particularly as it occurs in the essay—can, and indeed must be read from the phenomenological perspective of disclosure, of the unveiling that reveals to the observing consciousness the inherent nature of things as they are themselves. However, Bonnefoy’s explicit reference, cited just above, to the notion of giving, of “don” in reference to the event of “the birdsong in the ravine of existence” suggests also that contemporary philosopher Jean-Luc Marion’s “phénoménologie du don” can provide a useful tool for understanding the Bonnefoyian text. Indeed, Marion’s vision of event expands upon the phenomenological revealing of the object as itself and suggests that, suddenness and gratuity are the fundamental characteristics of event and thus that event is spontaneously given by the moment, received, rather than constructed: “L’événement, je peux l’attendre (quoique le plus souvent il me surprenne), je peux m’en souvenir (ou l’oublier), mais je ne puis ni le faire, ni le produire, ni le provoquer¹¹”. Though Marion is careful to reverse the metaphysical primacy of causes over effects in his reading of event, and stress the importance that effect has upon the recognition of event, this capital point is made perhaps more clearly in Alain Badiou’s theory of event, which insists more radically upon the necessity of retroaction in the apprehension of the event as such:

D’ordinaire, on rejette l’événement dans l’empirie pure du ce-qui-advient, et on réserve la construction conceptuelle aux structures. Ma méthode est inverse. [...] C’est l’événement qui relève d’une construction du concept, au double sens qu’on ne peut le *penser* qu’en anticipant sa forme abstraite, et où on ne peut *l’avérer* que dans la rétroaction d’une pratique intervenante elle-même entièrement réfléchie.¹²

- 6 Badiou’s point will be crucial in structuring our reading of the multiple instantiations of the salamander image in Bonnefoy’s work, for it will confirm the importance of reading backward, from essay to poetry in order to more clearly see the construction of event.

Finally, it must be noted that the above theoretical reflections on the notion of event post-date by a significant margin the two Bonnefoyan texts under consideration and thus can have had no impact upon their genesis. Nevertheless, they enter into such immediate resonance with the salamander texts that they cannot but provide us with a highly useful theoretical framework for interpreting the multiple occurrences of the salamander image in poetry and essay.

- 7 A first step in examining Bonnefoy's texts with respect to the notion of event will be to demonstrate that in his praxis, texts can and do point outside of themselves to some form of identifiably referential reality that can be equated, if not with event, at least with some form of originating incident. Foucault develops the non-esse materiality of events in this direction when he specifies that "l'événement n'est ni substance ni accident, ni qualité ni processus; l'événement n'est pas de l'ordre des corps. Et pourtant, il n'est point immatériel; c'est toujours au niveau de la matérialité qu'il prend effet, qu'il est effet; il a son lieu et il consiste dans la relation, la coexistence, la dispersion, le recoupement, l'accumulation, la sélection d'éléments matériels¹³". The materiality and 'placeness' that Foucault assigns to event argues for granting it the potential for being an objective reality that is more than a pure mental construction transferred from an author's mind directly to writing. Naturally, the fact that such connections exist between events actually experienced by authors and the subsequent appearance of these events in writing is banal and commonplace, and has traditionally been the object of much critical attention. Along these lines, a number of Bonnefoy's most careful readers have pointed to the fact that even the most apparently obscure elements of Bonnefoy's poetry are consistently anchored in the personal existence of the poet:

Soulignons auparavant encore un point, capital pour la défense et illustration de la référence au sein de l'élocution poétique [...]: dans *Dévotion* par exemple, le grand poème de 1958 –et de l'aveu même d'Yves Bonnefoy–, il n'y a pas une mention, même apparemment non référencée, qui ne corresponde à un lieu du monde [...]; voilà qui introduit à la notion capitale de la connotation métonymique du signe, laquelle enracine le langage dans l'intimité des expériences vécues du poète.¹⁴

- 8 Née's point consolidates the hypothesis that the image of the salamander described in both texts can be read as inextricably connected to a moment of reality associated with the poet's material existence. This, in turn, taking into consideration Davidson's linking of mental and physical events, tends to confirm the hypothesis that it can be equated to event.
- 9 Nonetheless, confirming the validity of the suggestion that Bonnefoy's texts tend to have material anchoring points does not suffice. Our second step is thus to examine how this reality might gain entry into the texts. A number of thinkers have suggested that narration, taken in its most general sense of the mental mechanism used to apprehend an observed incident, is the only means for individuals to make sense of the things that happen to them. From a psychological perspective, it is suggested that "narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and human actions. [...] It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful¹⁵". This is a fruitful venue to understand Bonnefoy's texts, for the poet himself confirms the fact that some form of narration lies at the heart of all poetic production. "Tout poème," he remarks, "recèle en sa profondeur un récit, une fiction, aussi peu complexes soient-ils parfois: car la langue qui structure son univers ne peut que se déterminer en des êtres, en des objets, qui entretiennent entre eux des relations signifiantes, où paraît la loi même qui a présidée à la création¹⁶". Thus the poetic

instances, at least, of the salamander episode can be read as being predicated on a prior narration, insofar as the latter is itself defined as the mental apprehension and structuring of a real or virtual episode. More concretely, the notion of a narrative mode that subtends the poetic text is one that is materialized in the relation between Bonnefoy's 1949 novel *L'Ordalie*, and the genesis of certain sections of *Douve*. Only two chapters of this novel escaped destruction at Bonnefoy's own hands, and in a note accompanying the re-editing of the extant chapters of *L'Ordalie* Bonnefoy confirms the links between the two texts: "à peine *L'Ordalie* eut-elle été déchirée, certains passages achevèrent, par la grâce des mots continuant à chercher leur sens, et leur lieu, de se reclasser dans l'autre livre –*Du Mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve*, surtout dans sa quatrième partie, *L'Orangerie*¹⁷".

- 10 Several points are important to note: first, that the salamander image, so central to "L'Orangerie", does not appear in *L'Ordalie*, its absence in the novel thus substantiating the suggestion that the salamander encounter had a material existence lying beyond the bounds of fiction; second, that the criss-crossing of images and ideas between different genres occurring in the two salamander texts is not unique in Bonnefoy's work; and lastly, the idea that the impetus for the change of genres was, according to the poet, given by the words themselves, which "sought their place" in another form, a paradigm that is clearly repeated in the salamander texts. These issues substantiate Richard Vernier's very pertinent suggestion that, the distance separating the two Bonnefoyian texts, is simultaneously an "espace infranchissable [...] puisque l'auteur dut employer une autre forme, un autre 'genre'", while being at the same time an "espace parcouru de correspondances, les unes ténues (une intuition, une atmosphère), les autres (images, personnages, rythmes) s'imposant au contraire par une reconnaissance qui en abolit le vide¹⁸". I would argue the selfsame process of addressing unresolved images that governs the relation between *L'Ordalie* and "L'Orangerie" also structures the relationship between the salamander episodes of *Douve* and the later essay: "de mon côté du poème," writes Bonnefoy, "j'ai surtout l'expérience d'images qui me viennent obscures et qui le restent, et de contradictions que je n'arrive pas à lever". The notable difference between the two sets of texts is that where the transfer from the narrative to the poetic mode resulted in an increase in the symbolic value of the images that made the shift to "L'Orangerie", the transformation of the salamander image, is a trajectory that involves not just the final text, the essay, but all the poems as well.
- 11 But before broaching a description of the process of symbolization of the salamander, our third step will be to examine the particular characteristics of the two iterations of the salamander image and establish the close ties that connect the texts to each other. We saw earlier that from a philosophical perspective, events cannot logically be defined both as identical only to themselves and as recurring. It therefore follows that the greater the observable similarity between Bonnefoy's two salamander instances, the less the likelihood is that each text could describe a separate and independent episode. I will argue that the high level of similitude between the salamander episodes described in both poetry and essay speaks for the fact that both forms of writing draw upon the same substratum for their inspiration, and are expressions of a singular occurrence in the poet's existence. Within this context, what are the elements that allow us to adumbrate that the two salamander episodes from *Douve* and from "La Poésie française et le principe d'identité" are identical? In large part, *per* Vernier's suggestion above, the similitude lies in essentially lexical equivalences. Arguably, however, it also exists in the semantic

parallels between the two texts and in the function of the image within the economy of each text. Thus the strikingly high level of determination of the word salamander in the poems (it is the title or subject of no less than seven poems) parallels the fact that the image is associated with the capital notion of *présence* in the essay. From a lexical point of view, more conclusive, I would argue, than the actual occurrences of the word “salamander” in determining the identical origin is the remarkable number of syntactical groups that appear in identical configurations in both texts. In addition, it is also useful to remember Badiou's suggestion that event can only be attested retroactively. This is certainly the case for Bonnefoy's readers, for indeed, it is reading the essay, with its explicit evocation of presence that conditions our reading of the poetry. Following Badiou's retro-action, we will therefore define the relationship between poetry and essay by reading backward in time, from the essay back to the poems:

Et j'imaginerai, ou me rappellerai—on verra [...] que les deux notions s'équivalent—que j'entre un jour d'été dans une maison en ruine et vois soudain, sur le mur, une salamandre. Elle a été surprise, elle s'est effrayée et s'immobilise. Et moi aussi, arraché à ma rêverie, je suis prêt à me laisser retenir. Je regarde la salamandre, je reconnais ses traits distinctifs, comme l'on dit,—je vois aussi ce cou étroit, cette face grise, ce cœur qui bat doucement.¹⁹

- 12 This act of physical perception leads, says the poet, to three possible reactions. The first consists in remaining « à la surface de la rencontre » by simply registering and classifying the information, “a salamander” before turning away. The second, intensifies the act of classification by focusing on « l'analyse qui en fait de plus en plus *une* salamandre, c'est-à-dire un objet de science, une réalité structurée par ma raison et pénétrée de langage. » This second possibility leads, in the intensity of its misplaced focus, to a frightening dislocation of the self; it leads to no longer seeing anything in the salamander but “un faisceau effrayant d'énigmes”, and is a form of perception that Bonnefoy calls *la mauvaise présence*. Finally, a third possibility is available to the observer, and that is the stated central object of Bonnefoy's poetic enterprise:

car voici la troisième voie: et que, par un acte toujours soudain, ce réel qui se dissociait, s'extériorisait, se *rassemble*, et cette fois dans une surabondance où je suis pris et sauvé. [...] Disons—bien que cette expérience soit peu dicible—qu'elle s'est dévoilée, devenue ou redevenue *la salamandre* [...] [T]ous les aspects, coagulations de visible, se sont dissous en tant que figures particulières, sont tombés comme les écailles d'une mue dans la connaissance, *ont découvert le corps de l'indissociable*. [...] J'appellerai cette unité rétablie [...] *la présence*.²⁰ [italics in text]

- 13 Without unnecessarily belabouring the point, I would suggest that it is almost impossible not to read in Bonnefoy's lexical choices and semantic trajectory (“dévoilée”, “découvert”, “redevenue”, “présence”, “tombée comme des écailles dans une mue de la connaissance”), a subtext of Heideggerian disclosure, and through it, an affiliation with the various philosophies of presence that also subtend, as we saw above, the thinking of Marion and Badiou. Indeed, the construction of the episode fits seamlessly into the paradigms that structure the various definitions of event we have seen. Thus the first reaction described by Bonnefoy is one of open acceptance, “je suis prêt à me laisser retenir.” This, coupled with the fact that the poet describes himself as the passive object of an action incurred by the experience itself, “arraché à ma rêverie” coincides perfectly with Marion's suggestion that the event cannot be produced; that the ipseity of the event is given precisely by the reflexive nature of its appearance in the present tense, in the autonomy of the “se donner” that characterises it²¹. This kinship, coupled with the explicit centrality of the term *présence* in Bonnefoy's thought, and the fact that the essay

explicitly associates the salamander image with the notion of presence forces us to re-examine the anterior poetic texts in the light of this term. In the first poem of the Salamander cycle, we read:

Une salamandre fuit sur le mur. Sa douce tête
d'homme répand la mort de l'été. « Je veux m'abîmer
en toi, vie étroite, crie Douve. Eclair vide, cours sur mes lèvres, pénètre-moi !' »²²

- 14 The third poem of the cycle expands the description of the event into what might be read as its logical progression from flight into stillness:

[...] Salamandre
surprise, tu demeures immobile.
Ayant vécu l'instant où la chair la plus proche se mue
en connaissance.²³

- 15 And finally, “Le Lieu de la salamandre” constitutes the point of articulation between poem and essay. Condensing a number of the themes broached in the previous poems, it projects them explicitly into the allegorical dimension suggested by mythological qualities associated with the image of the salamander itself.

La salamandre surprise s'immobilise
Et feint la mort.
Tel est le premier pas de la conscience dans les pierres,
Le mythe le plus pur,
Un grand feu traversé, qui est esprit.
La salamandre était à mi-hauteur
Du mur, dans la clarté de nos fenêtres.
Son regard n'était que pierre,
Mais je voyais son cœur battre éternel.
O ma complice et ma pensée, allégorie
De tout ce qui est pur,
Que j'aime qui resserre ainsi dans son silence
La seule force de joie.²⁴

- 16 The plethora of identical images and syntactical expressions that conjoin poetry and essay is indisputable, and tends to confirm the notion we saw above of “words seeking their place” in another form of writing. Arguably, such high levels of parallelism makes it virtually impossible to uphold the idea that the salamander poems and sections of the essay could refer to the two different episodes of the poet's existence.

- 17 Based, thus, on the seemingly incontrovertible suggestion that poems and essay refer to a single incident, our next concern will be to examine how the treatment of this singular episode begins the construction of the event *per* event through the increasing symbolisation of the salamander image. To return momentarily to elementary definitions, at its most basic instance, an event is defined as something that happens or is thought of as happening. This double possibility of event as real or virtual is significant, for although the object of the preceding pages has been to suggest the existence of some identifiable “salamander episode” in the lived experience of the poet, in many ways, the physical reality of the episode hardly matters. One strong indication of the secondary importance of reality in constructing event, is the significant fact that Bonnefoy opens the fourth section of the essay with the words “j'imaginerai, ou me rappellerai,” and explicitly equates the two expressions: “on verra que les deux notions s'équivalent”. That which is real is thus put on same plane of existence as that which is created virtually through the imagination, thus suggesting that the external reality of the event is absorbed into the inner experience of the event as experienced by the consciousness.

Bonnefoy's position here seems to dovetail neatly with Badiou's suggestion that the perception of event is a reflexive gesture that must necessarily derive from a prior mental construction of event as event ("on ne peut le penser qu'en anticipant sa forme abstraite"), which brings us to the question of how an incident, whether real or imagined, transforms into a trope and thence into event. We have seen in the essay, that the salamander becomes indissociable from a unified whole that Bonnefoy describes as an epiphenomenological experience of presence. And though Bonnefoy insists on the fact that the encounter allows his consciousness to be "saved", to become aware of itself as integrated into a larger whole, at the same time there can be no doubt but that the salamander, *qua* salamander, having served as catalyst for the conscious realization, is subsumed in the experience. This process of metamorphosis, of becoming an increasingly abstract figure is, I would argue, the defining characteristic of the salamander image, and is at work from the very beginning of the salamander poem cycle all the way through to the essay.

- 18 Two intricately enmeshed vectors furnish the impetus for the conversion of the hypothesised real encounter into the creation of a trope: its absorption both into an increasingly structured linguistic paradigm, as well as into myth. It is extremely difficult to determine whether one factor precedes the other in the constitution of the poems, but for the purpose of analysis, we will begin with the linguistic axis. From a purely formal perspective, the first four poems of the Salamander cycle are prose poems, but the untitled salamander poem that follows is in verse, as is the "Lieu" poem. This latter poem begins with a five-line stanza, which is regularised over the three subsequent stanzas into four lines. I would suggest that what we see throughout the course of the poems is a visible shift from un-mediated to a mediated experience as the salamander image is increasingly acquired into language. The process initiates in the Salamander cycle, where Bonnefoy's use of prose, his use of the indefinite article "une salamandre" coupled with the present tense description of the actions, as well as his repeated recourse to direct address all indicate, I would argue, an attempt to transcribe into language what strives to be a reiteration of a direct encounter. Over the course of the "Orangerie" section, however, and culminating in the "Vrai lieu" poem, this unmediated encounter is increasingly absorbed into a poetic paradigm. The increasingly formal structure of the poems into lines and stanzas, along with the overwhelming recourse to alexandrines and other regular meters parallels the increasingly formal structuring of the narrative into coded linguistic structures whose apogee, linguistically speaking, is doubtless the allegorising of the salamander. For the first time, the reference to the salamander event in "Lieu" gives way to the imperfect tense: it is the recollection of the mythic resonance of the event that allows the salamander to become allegory and thus acquire a greater meaning that can be shared and transmitted, as in the salamander passage of the essay. Myth, therefore, is bound with language in the giving of meaning to event.
- 19 Finally, as concerns its mythological dimension, there can be no doubt but that the salamander image is girded with a mythological aura. In his mediaeval *Bestiaire*, Pierre de Beauvais describes it in the following manner: "Cette bête ressemble à un lézard, et son corps est coloré de nombreuses couleurs."²⁵ Other contemporary chroniclers refer to the salamander colour as "bigarrée" or "très vive"²⁶. Now the fact that de Beauvais's physically accurate description is in disjunction with the description Bonnefoy gives of the creature ('face grise', 'cou étroit', 'tête d'homme') leads us to ponder whether the reality of the Bonnefoy episode does not perhaps rather describe an encounter with the

ordinary lizards that are so prevalent in certain portions of France. If so, Bonnefoy's choice of narrating his experience along a mythological axis is significant, for myth, undeniably, is more a cultural construction rooted outside individual consciousness, than a personal experience. But the entry of myth into the poem cycle is crucial, for it activates the transformation that leads outward from a real event into a paradigm that can first be rendered into language, and then through the allegorising of the image, into the conceptual description of presence. The primary mythological attribute of the salamander is, of course, its capacity to go through fire and remain unharmed. By correlation, thus, the salamander is associated in Christian iconology with purity, which, by its double iteration, indicates that it is precisely the pivot around which the salamander image in the "Lieu" poem uses the agency of mental construction to go from myth into allegory: "le mythe le plus pur" goes through "ma pensée" and becomes "allégorie de tout ce qui est pur". Bonnefoy himself is pertinently aware of the symbolical path that event must take in order to become *useful* for others; without this step, event remains ineluctably linked to personal existence and cannot but have limited value: "Pour que se reforment les symboles, j'ai à méditer les événements de mon existence où ce qu'ils enseignent s'est révélé de soi-même, à mi-chemin entre ma particularité et les constantes de toute vie"²⁷.

- 20 Only now that we have seen the elements that preceded it, can we perceive clearly the function of the salamander passage of the essay. The transformation of event into allegory that we observed over the course of the poetry seems to indicate conclusively that the phenomenological experience of event cannot be maintained as such in language. The poetic preamble was necessary: using the tools of myth and words, it absorbed a real or imagined event into language, gradually expanding the individual, personal dimension of an isolated event toward an allegorical dimension. But allegory can never be more than *allos* and *agorein*, a way of saying differently, a trope. The fact that the essay follows the poetic texts in time indicates that, in the long run, even the possibility of finding a "true place" for that experience has failed. The essay thus tackles the quest to use what remains of the event constituted in poetry, re-inscribing it in the philosophical construction that creates event retroactively, and links it to a notion of the potential usefulness of event in showing the possibility of presence. Each of the three possibilities presented by the essay are the exact representation of a possible reaction to experience. The first possibility is to ignore it, "poursuivre ma promenade", with the result that because there is no mental acceptance of the giving of the phenomenon, no event is created. The second is to over-determine the experience by forcing it into linguistic structures, causing it to become "pénétré de langage"; again, this approach cannot be assimilated to event because there is no phenomenological revelation of the thing in the experience. Finally, the third experience, placed explicitly under the sign of suddenness, of spontaneity, "un acte toujours soudain", is described as the true creation of event and the only possible approach of presence.
- 21 To conclude succinctly, thus, the above analysis has shown the notion of event and the various means of theorizing it can be read as explicitly inscribed into practice of Bonnefoy's writing. If the overall ambition of his work is to show presence, the description, at least of this presence, seems to pass through a subterranean reflection on event.

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NOTES

1. Gad Soussana, Alexis Nouss, Jacques Derrida, *Dire l'événement, est-ce possible ?*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2001, p.10.
2. Yves Bonnefoy, *L'Improbable et autres essais*, Paris: Gallimard, 1980, p. 101.
3. Jérôme Thelot, *Poétique d'Yves Bonnefoy*, Geneve : Librairie Droz, 1983, p. 141.
4. See, among others, Terence Horgan's article, "The Case Against Events" wherein he concludes from his analysis of the sentences needed to describe them that, "there is no apparent theoretical need to posit events [and] the most reasonable course is to invoke theoretical parsimony and deny the existence of events" (47).
5. Davidson, « Thinking Causes » in *Mental Causation* (eds. J. Heil & A. Mele), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 3.
6. Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1980, p.163. See, especially, "The Individuation of Events," and "Events as Particulars."

7. P.M.S Hacker, "Events, Ontology and Grammar," in *Philosophy*, Vol. 57, no. 222 (Oct, 1982), pp. 477-486.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 480.
9. Bonnefoy, « L'Acte et le lieu de la poésie », *op.cit.* p. 124.
10. See, for instance, Alex Argyros, « The Topography of Presence: Bonnefoy and the Spatialization of Poetry », in *Orbis Litterarum*, vol. 41, 1986, pp. 244-264
11. Jean-Luc Marion, *Etant donné*, Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, p. 226.
12. Alain Badiou, *L'Etre et l'événement*, Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1988, p. 199.
13. Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du Discours*, Paris : Gallimard, 1971, p. 59.
14. Patrick Née, *Rhétorique profonde d'Yves Bonnefoy*, Paris : Hermann (Collection Savoir), 2004, p. 7. See also Bonnefoy's « Lettre à Howard Nostrand » (in Richard Vernier, *Les Mots comme le ciel*) where the poet provides what amounts to an annotated list of the images that appear in his work, explaining their physical and emotional reality for him.
15. Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 11.
16. Yves Bonnefoy, *Leçon Inaugurale: La Présence et l'image*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1983, p. 35.
17. Yves Bonnefoy, *L'Ordealie*, in *Récits en Rêve*, Paris : Mercure de France, 1987, p. 251.
18. Richard Vernier, *Yves Bonnefoy, ou les mots comme le ciel*, Tübingen : Gunter Narr Verlag ; Paris : Ed J-M Place, 1985, p. 37.
19. Yves Bonnefoy, *Improbable*, *op.cit.*, p. 248.
20. *Ibid.* p.250.
21. Marion, *op.cit.*, p. 233.
22. Bonnefoy, *Poèmes*, *op.cit.*, 96.
23. *Ibid.* p.98.
24. *Ibid.*, p.111.
25. Pierre de Beauvais, *Bestiaires*, Paris: Stock, 1980, p.55.
26. *Ibid.*, Guillaume Clerc de Normandie, p.111 ; Brunetto Latini, p. 186.
27. *Entretiens sur la poésie*, Neuchâtel : Editions de la Baconnière, 1981, p.22.

ABSTRACTS

This paper addresses the notion of event through the prism of Yves Bonnefoy's salamander trope. This arresting image is all the more memorable because it crosses the boundaries of generic separations, appearing both in an essay as well as in an early poetry collection. The fact that an identical image should be reiterated in such formally disparate structures seems to point insistently to its reality as a material event. I argue that juxtaposing the two texts reveals both a narration recounting an event and, simultaneously, the ordering of possibilities leading to its recognition as event.

L'article examine l'idée d'événement à travers la figure de la salamandre dans l'œuvre d'Yves Bonnefoy. L'image, saisissante en elle-même, est rendue plus significative encore par le fait qu'elle franchit les frontières séparant habituellement les genres littéraires. Son apparition à la fois dans un essai et dans un cycle de poèmes tend à l'ancrer dans la réalité d'un événement vécu. Nous proposons de voir dans la juxtaposition des deux textes non seulement une narration qui

prend l'événement vécu en charge, mais l'agencement même des possibilités permettant de reconnaître l'événement comme tel.

El artículo examina la idea del acontecimiento a través de la figura de la salamandra en la obra de Yves Bonnefoy. La imagen, sorprendente en sí misma, se vuelve más significativa aún debido al hecho de que cruza las fronteras que separan generalmente los géneros literarios. Su presencia tanto en un ensayo como en un ciclo de poemas tiende a situarla en la realidad de un acontecimiento vivido. En la yuxtaposición de los dos textos proponemos ver no sólo una narración que asume el acontecimiento vivido, sino también la disposición misma de las posibilidades que permiten reconocer al acontecimiento como tal.

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