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「帶著地方遠颺」：伊夫·博納富瓦的詩意空間

“He Takes His Place Forward on the Ship:”

Poetic Space of Yves Bonnefoy



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## 中文摘要

本論文以加斯東·巴舍拉於《空間詩學》中的論述為主，探討法國當代詩人伊夫·博納富瓦的晚期四本詩集《雪的開始與結束》、《彎曲的船板》、《長錨鏈》與《當下時刻》中所呈現的詩意空間；在此架構中，我不僅呈現博納富瓦自身詩學的不斷革新，也加以論證此詩意空間的延展與動態建構，實是詩人自身的存有之展。

我假設此詩意空間為各物質、場所、事件與情感的集合體，它有其深度及厚度，同時因詩人之想像主體的活動而有其動能；在詩人以不同詩意象回歸特定母題時，此架構中的物質特性、乃至詩人情感皆不斷更新，連帶也調動此詩意空間之不斷建構與形變。本論文雖以巴舍拉論述作主調，但要強調的是巴舍拉是以幸福空間為研究主幹，相比之下，博納富瓦的空間詩學所處理與涵蓋的空間型態要來的更加廣泛，其中不乏空乏、靜滯、或敵意空間。因此，本論文可視為巴舍拉空間研究之另一切入。

本論文主要三章節，分別以「空間之誘惑」、「空間內冒險」、「於廣袤中建立信心」為論述主軸。第一章分析《雪的開始與結束》（1991），前半著重詩人如何在詩及散文中建立空間感、並在地方與空間的經驗中來回置換；後半以巴舍拉的動態想像，論述「雪」意象的動態性及詩意。第二章以《彎曲的船板》（2001）為分析對象，以石頭、水、家屋、船等詩意象的雙重性帶出巴舍拉想像哲學的動態辯證，說明詩人的力量意志如何在靜滯空間、無空間、甚至是敵意空間中前行；我辯證此動能即是此詩意空間不斷形變的根本原力。第三章分析兩詩集，《長錨鏈》（2008）與《當下時刻》（2011），強調詩人對自己詩學恆持的信心；此章節著重想像主體與客體間的相互關係，與詩人詩學中所呈現的「回歸」，以帶出此詩意空間之動態形塑與詩人的存在實為不可劃分、且呈相互辯證與消長之關係。

關鍵詞：伊夫·博納富瓦、《雪的開始與結束》、《彎曲的船板》、《長錨鏈》、《當下時刻》、詩意空間、加斯東·巴舍拉、想像、動態辯證、詩意象

## Abstract

This thesis explores four of contemporary French poet Yves Bonnefoy's (1923-2016) late writings *Beginning and End of The Snow* (1989), *The Curved Planks* (2001), *The Anchor's Long Chain* (2008), and *The Present Hour* (2011) to demonstrate the constructing process of the poet's poetic space through the reading of Gaston Bachelard's theoretical discourse proposed in *The Poetics of Space* (1958). By closely examining these four volumes, I not only demonstrate Bonnefoy's evolving attitude toward his poetics but also indicate plainly how such poetic space is made possible.

I propose that this poetic space is a collective unity of distinctive matters, events, places, and sensations; it possesses its verticality and profundity, meanwhile is capable of shaping and reshaping itself with the subject's imaginative faculty: the poet's returning to particular poetic themes along with his different stances have endlessly renewed this poetic space, bringing about its endless formations. Though my proposed structure of poetic space has its roots in Bachelard's discourse on space's poetics, the two are not entirely identical; Bonnefoy's poetic space exceeds Bachelard's in the poet's inclusion of positive and negative spaces, spaces that are and are not.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, each has its particular theme to pursue, namely temptation, venture, and confidence. Chapter One probes into 1991 volume *Beginning and End of The Snow* to demonstrate the transformation of Bonnefoy's placial and spatial experiences from geographically concrete to poetic and imaginative; with Bachelard's discourse on dynamic imagination, I demonstrate how Bonnefoy contours his poetic space with plentiful performances of the snow image. Chapter Two continues the discussion of imagination's dynamism with Bonnefoy's 2001 volume *The Curved Planks*, focusing particularly on its workings in negative and even hostile contexts to show how poetic space still possesses its potential to grow and expand. Chapter Three examines *The Anchor's Long*

*Chain* (2008) and *The Present Hour* (2011) to present the dialectical relationship between imagining subject and the imagined image, and how the two co-constitute the immensity which points to the depth of the being. I see the dialectical co-constitution of the two as the completion of Bonnefoy's poetic space: it constitutes the roundness of this structure in which the poet ceaselessly returns to and dwells.

Keywords: Yves Bonnefoy, poetic space, *Beginning and End of The Snow*, *The Curved Planks*, *The Anchor's Long Chain*, *The Present Hour*, Gaston Bachelard, imagination, dynamic dialectics, poetic image

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## Abbreviations

### Texts by Gaston Bachelard

*AD* = *Air and Dream: An essay on the Imagination of the Movement.*

*ER* = *Earth and Reveries of Will: An essay on the Imagination of the Matter*

*PIR* = *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*

*PS* = *The Poetics of Space*

*WD* = *Water and Dream: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*



### Texts by Yves Bonnefoy

*APP* = *The Act and the Place of Poetry*

*CP* = *The Curved Planks*

*EP* = *Early Poems: 1947-1959*

*PH* = *The Present Hour*

*SS* = *Second Simplicity: New Poetry and Prose, 1991-2011*

## INTRODUCTION

*“You have navigated with raging soul far from the paternal home, passing beyond the sea’s double rocks, and you now inhabit a foreign land.”*

—*MEDEA*, Euripides

*“We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.”*

— *Four Quarters*, T. S. Eliot

I am curious about place and space.

When referring to a specific locale or the position of an object, the word *place* is used; when speaking of an undefined distance between two objective ends, or an image that implies open, immense, or uncertain, then *space* is employed. Surely the terms would have multiple applications in different domains, I am much more interested in the overall philosophical or humanistic geographical contemplation on such terms, such as how placial and spatial experiences are formed, and what are their influences on the subject. Jeff Malpas targets on how place, with his understanding of such a term through the topological inquiry into Heidegger, already implies different forms of relationships:

Place ... establishes relations of inside and outside—relations that are directly tied to the essential connection between place and boundary or limit. To be located is to be within, to be somehow enclosed, but in a way that at the same time opens up, that makes possible. Already this indicates some of the directions in which any

thinking of place must move—toward ideas of opening and closing, of concealing and revealing, of focus and horizon, of finitude and “transcendence,” of limit and possibility, of mutual relationality and coconstitution. (*Heidegger and the Thinking of Place 2*)

These shifting qualities, Malpas further claims, constitute the “philosophical centrality” shared by place; they also closely relate to Heidegger’s idea of “being-in-the-world”, the idea that is “essentially a focus on place and placedness” (2). On the other hand, Gaston Bachelard provides his poetic readings of different places and spaces in *The Poetics of Space*; he states clearly that “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (27). Inspired by the two philosophers’ contemplation on place and space, my foremost interest in this thesis is as follows: What constitutes this home, and how are we homed? I intend to probe into the concept of place and space from word *home* as a noun and even as a verb, namely to find the home-like qualities in our placial and spatial experiences, and to demonstrate how such homeliness provide the subject the feeling of comfort and security.

Yves Bonnefoy’s poetry seems to be a perfect illustration for all the pondering of place and space, and, significantly, of the relationship between the subject and the external world. Bonnefoy’s poetry, which will be explained later in a much detailed way, roots almost in the existential philosophy: a highly Heideggerian orientation which is transparent in the poet’s preference for words like absence, presence, and being-in-the-world. This already implies a certain gesture and worldview of Bonnefoy, which also foreshadows and partly explains the poet’s yearning for a true place. The gesture displayed by Bonnefoy is also significant in my later interpretation. The poet surely cares for his involvement in the world, and he does not, despite the many temptations and frustrations his desire for other places brought him, give up hope. As Whiteman observes, “[i]t is entirely characteristic of Bonnefoy’s late style to be so optimistic about life, to transmute a vivid image of aging into something fresh and

prospective” (463). Bonnefoy’s poetry as an analyzed object is chosen out of my personal preference: I always have a passion for poetry, and I am particularly fond of the ambivalence in Bonnefoy’s works, of being linguistically simple yet contextually obscure or philosophically profound. Through the repetitive reading of Bonnefoy’s prose and verse, I feel the need and responsibility to respond to all these ponderings on which I often find myself dwelling: How the poet confronts or constructs place and space? How do place and space function on the subject in return? What does poetry offer in this structuring?

Starting with the above inquiries, the central question I intend to answer in the thesis is the following: How does Yves Bonnefoy construct his poetic space, within which he comfortably dwells and is homed? Following this central question, I intend to pursue two aspects of sub-questions, namely, the establishing process of poetic space, and the poet’s attitude toward such structuring. For instance, when it comes to the formation of poetic space, I question: What matters and spatial archetypes constitute this poetic space? What forces advance such a structure meanwhile keeping its dynamism of expansion and growth? How does this poetic space endure its numerous transformations in the process of expansion, yet maintain also its form? How does this poetic space resonate with the poet’s inner voice, and why is it regarded eventually as a manifestation of the poet’s very being? To answer such an aspect of questions on how poetic space is structured, another trajectory of diving into the poet’s shifting attitude of poetry and his yearning for other places through different writing processes is also needed. This raises questions on how Bonnefoy deals with spatial themes in different periods of his life: How does the poet confront different places and space? How does he interact with or respond to the potentiality, and even the improbability, granted by different spaces he encountered? How do that reflections help achieve space in their poetic context, which further fortifies Bonnefoy’s poetic space as a whole, collective unit? By answering these two aspects of questions, I advance my argument and eventually reach my central concern of what poetic space is, how it is constructed, and how the poet finds himself

homed in such a structure as well as on his contentment. By probing into poetic space of Bonnefoy along with the close examination on the poet's response and philosophical discourses on place and space, I also find possible answers to my previous ponderings.

### **I. Yves Bonnefoy: The Successor of Nineteenth-Century French Poetry**

Born in Tours, France, Yves Bonnefoy (1923-2016) has been undeniably the most influential and recognizable Francophone poets since World War II, whose works have received much appreciation from general readers and critics alike. Being a productive writer, in the span of sixty years of writing career Bonnefoy had explored beauty through poems, prose, and even essays, from many disciplines. Following his symbolist predecessors like Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), and Paul Valéry (1871-1945), Yves Bonnefoy's poetry and prose perplex yet also satisfy his readers. In his twenties, Bonnefoy was shortly bedazzled and related to Surrealists in Paris between 1945 and 1947; the poet, however, established his poetic frame with highly experimental and personal work *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve* (*On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, 1953), the one that considerably stirred the literary circle and had put Bonnefoy to the front line of remarkable young French poets after the tradition set by nineteenth-century symbolists. Bonnefoy was elected to the Collège de France in 1981 to the seat left empty after the death of Roland Barthes. He also won numerous literary awards and honors, and was greatly believed to be a potential winner for Nobel Prize.

Despite his prolific poetry collections and the attentive concern for the purpose, the act, and place of poetry as well as poetry traditions, Bonnefoy also demonstrated tremendous passion in disciplines like art studies and translation, striving to show the correlation between poetry and visual arts meanwhile reflecting on the problems of translation. The poet's

preference for art history proves to be shockingly extensive: the spectrum ranges from the Roman Baroque, Byzantine art, French Gothic fresco, to contemporary artists like Giacometti, Joan Miró and many others. Naughton had described the poet's interdisciplinary inquiries and particularly his interest in contemporary arts: many artists Bonnefoy wrote about had illustrated for his works, while in the poet's poetical lines the same "visual aspects" appeared (13). Bonnefoy had long been a prestigious translator of Leopardi, Petrarch, Donne, Keats, Yeats, and particularly Shakespeare: ten of Shakespeare's plays along with the sonnets and other longer poems were translated. Bonnefoy's translation of Shakespeare is generally perceived as the finest in the Francophone world. This experience of intense immersion with English poetry tradition had profoundly enriched Bonnefoy's poetic creation. Translated into thirty languages, Bonnefoy's works published in English include the complete works *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve* (1968), *In the Shadow's Light* (1991), *The Curved Planks* (2007), *Beginning and End of the Snow* (2012), *The Present Hour* (2013), *The Digamma* (2014), and *The Anchor's Long Chain* (2015); the collected collections *Poems: 1959-1975* (1985), *Early Poems: 1947-1959* (1991), and *Second Simplicity: New Poetry and Prose, 1991-2011* (2011); the collected prose works *Together Still* (2017) and just published *Prose* (2020); art criticism *Alberto Giacometti: A Biography of His Work* (1993) and *The Lure and the Truth of Painting: Selected Essays on Art* (1995). Major translators for Bonnefoy's works are Antony Rudolf, Beverley Bie Brahic, Emily Grosholz, Galway Kinnell, Hoyt Rogers, John T. Naughton, Richard Pevear, and Richard Stamelmann, most of whom are not only keen readers and friends of Bonnefoy but also themselves distinguished scholars and poets.

Ever since Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) published his experimental work *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) in 1857, French poetry in the late nineteenth century had turned the course of Post-Romanticism, naturalism, and realism to modernism and symbolism. With Baudelaire's audacious attempt "to achieve 'the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and rhyme,'" he tremendously broadened the spectrum of French

poetry: his prose poems “display an enormous range of tones, forms and structuring devices and they made available to his successors forms of experimentation which would decisively redirect theories and practices of the poetic” (Birkett 151). Paul Valéry (1871-1945) laid bare the importance of Baudelaire in the influential essay “The Place of Baudelaire” published in 1924, that certain pieces of Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), or Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) were heavily foreshadowed by the formal and inspirational qualities of Baudelaire’s poem: “[w]hile Verlaine and Rimbaud have continued from Baudelaire in the way of feeling and sensuousness, Mallarmé extended his influence in the realm of perfection and poetic purity” (211). The preference for linguistic accuracy appreciated by the former generations was now replaced by highly obscure and suggestive linguistic indications which, with the collaboration of freer versification and the appreciation of the musical nature of the verse, awaken the sentiments of the contemporary audience along with their perception of external and internal complexities. Such metrical flexibility was a necessary change of the time, since it made it “more responsive to the expression of the individual poet’s sense of place in the changing realities of nineteenth-century experience” (Birkett 173). The flame lighted by Baudelaire had therefore passed on to other symbolists’ precursors such as Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Valéry, and eventually to Yves Bonnefoy.

Bonnefoy in fact has written essays on his predecessors, such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry; he also published his profound reflections on Rimbaud’s life and poems in 1961 with the work *Arthur Rimbaud*, which is regarded as one of Rimbaud’s authoritative readings. These precedent poets are each significant in shaping Bonnefoy’s poetic characteristics and tendencies, along with his recognition of poetry’s role, function, and purposes as listed in the essay “The Act and the Place of Poetry.” According to Bonnefoy with the exemplification of the poem “The Swan,” Baudelaire has actualized the *act* of poetry in his creations, realizing poetry’s purpose and its involvement with the world:

For all around this wounded woman, and through the sympathy she arouses, the world—rather than being abolished as it once was, or proliferating senselessly as in picturesque poetry—suddenly opens onto the plight of all lost beings ... It is the *here and now*, our limitation; which poetry must ceaselessly rediscover in a pure and violent crisis of the feelings and of the mind. For this act which we expect of poetry, and which we finally achieved by the poet of *Les Fleurs du mal*, is primarily an act of love. (107)

Baudelaire possesses the ability to love, Bonnefoy claims. In his poetry, in his encounter with the exterior and his building of connections even in the transience, though Baudelaire speaks aloud the poverty of the world, “admit[ing] defeat ... and was always acting and thinking on the very verge of exhaustion and anguish,” still he “seems to glimpse a gleam of light and to identify the perishable object, in spite of its profound precariousness, with something precarious,” with the performative act of poetry, of love (108). Rimbaud, following the lead of Baudelaire, inspired the future generation of “know[ing] that poetry must be a means and not an end” (109). The brief reflections given by Bonnefoy has already implied the focus of his poetic pursuit, which is to establish a profound, keen interconnection between the other and the self, between the real and the abstract, between poetry and speech.

## II. Bonnefoy’s Poetics and Spatial Inclination

To see Bonnefoy as a faithful successor of symbolism would greatly simplify the situation; major social and political changes between the late nineteenth and twentieth century should also be counted in as decisive factors for Bonnefoy’s poetry characteristics. The most influential ones were the Surrealist movement occupying the inter-war years of France, and Existentialism. Serving as an emotional as well as a radical response to World



War I, Surrealist movement called for “unleashing desire and its forms of expression against the rationalist ideologies” which they thought would have “constrained or censored freedom;” surrealists believed such freedom “would enable a new fusion of the real and the imaginary, a surreality, to be created to transcend the system of oppositions and hierarchies which this discredited Western ideology sustained” (Birkett 243). Bonnefoy was shortly obsessed with the freedom and possibility Surrealism granted, which he once believed to be a realizable path for Rimbaud’s idea of *true life*. However, after gradual realization of the Surrealists’ fundamental contradiction of being “simultaneously hopeful and pessimistic, to act and to refuse,” Bonnefoy broke with the Surrealists in 1947 (Bonnefoy, “The Feeling of Transcendence” 136). According to Li Jianying, Surrealists had overemphasized the transcendental experience to the extent that they doubt the certainties of simple things. Transcendental qualities were, in Rimbaud’s poems, a means to rediscover the real; nonetheless, in Surrealists such feature overlapped and even formed the real (134). The difference between Surrealism and Rimbaud’s idea of how real life can be achieved was, Li Jianying claimed, the main factor in Bonnefoy’s break with Surrealists. After a temporary association with the movement, Bonnefoy launched his first poetry collection *Douve* (1953), following which he firmly established his poetics. What Rimbaud longed for was now shared by Bonnefoy, urging the poet to start his own quest for *true life* and even *true place*.

Existentialism was another decisive influence that shaped Bonnefoy’s poetry characters. Bonnefoy studied mathematics and philosophy instead of literature at the University of Poitiers; in his early fifties, he had “worked at the *Académie de Paris* and Studied Philosophy with Bachelard, Jean Wahl, and Hyppolite (on Hegel)” (Naughton 7). This experience “explain[ed] ... his predilection for a precise philosophical vocabulary” such as “Being-in-the-world,” “presence,” “plenitude,” and “immanence” (7) used in both essays and poems, which made him, as claimed by Aubyn, the “first existential poet” (118). In her work *Introduction to French Poetry*, under the catalog of “Poetry and Philosophy,” Shaw

made an analogy between Bonnefoy's 1958 essay "The Act and Place of Poetry" and Heidegger's negative theology, suggesting that "presence, or being, can only be seized in this world through the articulation of its absence, or withdrawal" (166). To understand being, "presence" became one of the central themes in Bonnefoy's poetics. Yet, to understand the idea is itself a challenging task since Bonnefoy explicitly demonstrates a struggle to conclude the idea "between Heidegger's (and Mallarmé's) 'nothingness' and Plotinus's notion of 'the One,'" according to Naughton:

It is clear that Bonnefoy is both profoundly aware of the principle of destruction of being, of emptiness and meaninglessness, of the void, and, at the same time, sensitive to an ineffable and luminous, a fracturable unity. (7)

The realization of nothingness and the One, along with Bonnefoy's purposeful detour between the two, is responsible for a series of dynamic rivalry that predominates over his poetry. As Joseph Frank foreworded in *The Act and the Place of Poetry* (1989), Bonnefoy's poems "explores ... all the harrowing uncertainties of the human condition in its oscillation between hope and despair" (viii). Such ambivalence also penetrates the poet's dealing with spatial themes, himself being simultaneously driven to search for other places or cling to the here and now.

Naughton had noticed the wrestling between the two conditions in Bonnefoy's poems, along with the poet's obsession with elsewhere, or the search for the possible salvation poetry oriented:

And repeatedly this demon's lure will be in the direction Bonnefoy calls *excarnation*—that call away from the situation at hand, the dream of another, better world, the refusal of time and death, enclosure in formal systems. Salvation will

depend on the opposing principle of *incarnation*: the discovery and celebration—in spite of limitation and death—of the sacred in the hic-et-nunc. (11)

The words surely have theological denotations, yet they do not point toward the search of God; rather, Bonnefoy demonstrates his determination to find the divine in this world, this earth, as the poet “once wrote that ‘the really modern act ... is to want to establish a ‘divine’ life without God’” (10). Naughton later elaborates:

[Bonnefoy’s] deepest desire is to join the real, to find the simple order of life, and to convert the nostalgia for a better world or a transcendent deity into a celebration of earthly, mortal presences: “I would like to bring together,” he declared more than twenty years ago, “I would like almost to identify, poetry and hope.” (10)

Poetry, therefore, becomes the poet’s very device in search of such the “divine life:” it becomes a means for the poet to place the two desires, and a particular gesture to reunite the opposition; “it is toward a reconciliation, an ‘alliance’ of *l’ici et l’ailleurs*—the ‘here’ and the ‘there’—that Bonnefoy will strive” (Naughton 29). Bonnefoy’s early work, the highly autobiographical *L’Arrière-pays* (1972) describes exactly the ambivalence when facing the two yearnings of excarnation and incarnation, and the painful process in reconciling the two.

Much similar to his predecessor Rimbaud, Bonnefoy’s poetry demonstrates a strong yearning for *true life* and *true place*. The poet purposely invested a great number of “elemental words” such as water, wind, snow, fire, stone, tree, etc., to show his “long and patient contemplation of the concrete real, of the earth;” *true life* for Bonnefoy is to affirm the fact that “[t]he earth is our reality” (Naughton 3). What is meant by *true place*, to be precise, is a realization of *true life* through the manifestation of poetry: poetry seeks to reflect upon the essence of life, enabling people to contemplate their intimate relationship with life itself.

Poetry then visualizes and fulfills the fundamental eagerness of the poet's longing for a real place and life; it is itself a structure, a form of *true place* in which the reality of earth can be fulfilled. As early as in his first poetry collection *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve* (*On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, 1953), Bonnefoy had managed to exemplify the real through "the dialectical paradigm of being," of life and death, absence and presence (Stamelman 46). This attempt becomes more or less a fundamental concern that penetrates Bonnefoy's later works, as seen in *Hier régnaient deserts* (*Yesterday's Empty Kingdom*, 1958), *Pierre écrite* (*Written Stone*, 1958), and *Dans le leurre du seuil* (*The Lure of the Threshold*, 1975). What Bonnefoy envisions of real life and place is a certain positioning of poetry in between the worlds, and the poet seems to be confident in accepting their various appearances.

Walter Albert had made clear Bonnefoy's poetic structure and its relation to the poet's yearning for real life and place. What Bonnefoy tried to achieve with his first three poetry collections, Albert claimed, is "to build an edifice," which is "not an independent structure, but a part of an evolving, cyclical concept ... a place in which the poetic identity can endure" (590-91). To be precise, as this poetic structure continues to grow and expand in later writings of Bonnefoy, it becomes the visualization of the poet's faith in poetry. Bonnefoy's oeuvre is where the poet anchors his poetic being.

### **III. Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of this thesis is to present the structuring process of Bonnefoy's poetic space with the close readings of his four late works published between 1991 and 2011, aiming to build with such examination an evolving character of Bonnefoy's poetics. The reason in so doing as well as my choice of Bonnefoy, despite my personal interest as previously stated, results mainly from the lack of related literature. Bonnefoy is

unquestionably recognized and greatly revered by Francophone readers; yet, shockingly enough, the poet is rarely valued in Taiwan. No related academic output regarding Bonnefoy is found; even till now only one translation of Bonnefoy is obtainable in Taiwan, translated by Taiwanese poet Kuei-Sian Li [李魁賢] with his selection of twenty poems published by Guei Guan company in 2002. Though seven of Bonnefoy's poetry have been published in China, they are still unattractive to Taiwanese readers due to the employment of language which is the simplified Chinese. The most valuable resources to be found at the moment is the one translated by Li-Chuan Chen [陳力川] published by Oxford University Press in Hong Kong in 2014. The reasons for its usefulness are multifold: written in traditional Chinese, the context is much more acquainted to Taiwanese readers; it too provide a broader range of spectrum of Bonnefoy's poetics with its collecting poems and prose from *Pierre écrite* (*Written Stone*, 1958) to *L'Heure présente* (*The Present Hour*, 2011).

Another reason for the insufficiency of the study of Bonnefoy's late poetics results greatly from the unobtainability of the translation: Bonnefoy's late works had not been fully translated until the publishing of the anthology *Second Simplicity: New Poetry and Prose, 1991-2011* translated by Hoyt Rogers and published by Yale University in 2011. Due to this reason, even though there had been abundant journal articles on Bonnefoy in western academia, they were limited to study Bonnefoy's early works. On the other hand, even the book publication in English on the poet is comparatively low, and they too focus only the early work. The most fundamental and essential one, *The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy*, is written by John Naughton published by The University of Chicago Press in 1984 in which the early four volumes (*Douve*, *Hier régnant desert*, *Pierre écrite*, and *Dans le leurre du seuil*) were explicitly examined with the abundant reference to Bonnefoy's own remarks. The recent publications include Jennifer Reek's *A Poetics of Church: Reading and Writing Sacred Spaces of Poetic Dwelling* (2017) and Emily McLaughlin's *Yves Bonnefoy and Jean-Luc Nancy: Ontological Performance* (May, 2020), both examine Bonnefoy with the comparison

with other thinkers: the former puts Bonnefoy's works in the lens of Cixous' feminine writing (*écriture féminine*), the later probes into Bonnefoy's late writings (*Dans le leurre du seuil*, *Début et fin de la neige*, and *Les Planches courbes*) with the philosophical discourse of Jean-Luc Nancy. Though McLaughlin's interpretation will surely be helpful for my analysis in Bonnefoy's late works, by the time I was composing my thesis her work had not yet published. To conclude, by systematically examine Bonnefoy's late writings and build in them an evolving feature of the poet's poetic, I not only present the gradual structuring of poetic space but also set my research apart from theirs. Regarding the underestimation of Bonnefoy in Taiwan, the most urgent and significant purpose this thesis endeavors to achieve is to introduce Bonnefoy's poems as well as poetics to Taiwanese audience, with the hopes that this thesis would arouse the reader's interest to further advance the future research on Bonnefoy.

#### **i. Methodology and Hypothesis**

Considering the poet's poetic characteristics as previously mentioned, it is almost unavoidable for anyone who studies Bonnefoy to shy away from the theme of "presence" and its working in Bonnefoy's works. My thesis too covers the topic of presence only through another trajectory: unlike many scholars who saw the poetic feature of Bonnefoy's dialectical oscillation between oppositional pairs as a means to express presence, I see it as a certain movement that energizes the formation and reformation of Bonnefoy's poetic space. With my illustration of how poetic space is established I too prove the existence of the poet's presence. To delineate this poetic space, the foremost methodology this thesis inclines is the exceptionally close readings of Bonnefoy's poems and prose, sometimes even through French, to better show how the poet gives the poetic details to the encountered placial and spatial experiences. Since these experiences of place and space are founded to the great

extent on the poet's real, geographical crossings, Gaston Bachelard's discourse on imagination, dynamism, and dialectics shown mostly in *The Poetics of Space* serves as a theoretical frame to this thesis to demonstrate the particular uplift of Bonnefoy's experience of geographical place and space to that of imaginative and poetic.

Though Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* is the most cited works to which this thesis clings, other early works of his are also cited to enrich his theoretical discourse. The reason for the need of Bachelard's theory in interpreting Bonnefoy is multifold: apart from the importance of Bachelard's dynamic discourse on imaginative openings to help rationalize the idea of poetic space, his poetic understanding as well as reading of the primitive house also bears high similarities to Bonnefoy's ways of structuring his poetic space. To illustrate, the childhood house is seen by Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* "as a primal space that acts as a first world or a first universe that then frames our understandings of all the spaces outside," described by Cresswell (24). Bachelard chose the image of the childhood house to be the foundation of his poetic discourse due to its centrality as well as profundity. Such an image completes its fullness and perplexity: the house's interior is composed of spatial partitions with different functions and implications, such as the stairs of positive and descending features and the attic or the cellar storing the menace of the house. With the multiple characteristics aggregated and merged into a single image, the house becomes the literary tool for Bachelard to exemplify the depth of human beings' mind.

In Bachelard, the life of the mind is given form in the places and spaces in which human beings dwell and those places themselves shape and influence human memories, feelings and thoughts. In this way, the spaces of inner and outer—of mind and world—are transformed one into the other as inner space is externalised and outer space brought within. (Malpas, *Place and Experience* 5)

To describe the poetics of this house, Bachelard investigates different places such as corners, miniature, attic, drawers, wardrobes, shells, etc., to illustrate that the house is an accumulation of memories, affection, and imaginations; it is also the congregation of different, primitive values of human beings, and is indeed the oneiric house that revitalize our capacity for dreaming as well as imagining. True to what Malpas described as “inner space [made] externalised and outer space brought within,” the house indeed reflects the being’s imagining ability as well as the depth with its continuous exchange of inner and outer. This poetic imagining of the house, in Bachelard’s discourse, truly manifests being.

My proposed structure of poetic space greatly finds its root in Bachelard’s imaginings of the house; the two are not exactly identical, though. I propose that this poetic space is a collective unity of different matters and places, or to borrow Martin Heidegger’s saying, a collective construction with distinctive buildings. The structure of poetic space is first shaped by the poet’s preferences for places and spaces, then motivated and energized by the poet’s particular employment of imagination. Bonnefoy’s poetic opening of places and spaces are similar to Bachelard’s, yet the poet takes a step further by including even the imaginings in negative contexts. The co-workings of imagination in both positive and negative context have given the greater spatial potential as well as the transformative ability to Bonnefoy’s poetic space, advancing even its formation, deformation, and even reformation. Through this process, the poetic space shapes its form, and by shaping its form it gradually becomes: it becomes the very manifestation of the poet’s imagining depth and being. Moving from subject to object, the imagining being to the imagined places and spaces, the poetic space is indeed an evolving structure which corresponds to the poet’s evolving attitude toward his poetics. Since the construction of this poetic space sprouts primarily on the poet’s own creative mind, with its manifestation of the poet’s being it too returns to itself meanwhile fulfilling “the idea of closure” which is “part of [Bonnefoy’s] quest for centrality, for the *true place*” (Naughton 35). Such an idea of closure and returning to itself accords with what



Bachelard termed as *roundness*, “being at once established in its roundness and developing in it” (Bachelard, *PS* 255).

## ii. Proposed Structure of Chapters

Apart from Introduction and Conclusion, this thesis is divided into three major chapters to show an evolving structuring of Bonnefoy’s poetic space. Each chapter has a distinctive theme to pursue, namely temptations, venture, and confidence: they reflect respectively Bonnefoy’s particular stance and changing attitude in his late years when exploring different places and spaces. English translations used in this thesis are *Second Simplicity: New Poetry and Prose, 1991-2011* (2011), *The Anchor’s Long Chain* (2006), and *The Present Hour* (2013). Major translators are Hoyt Rogers and Beverley Bie Brahic.

Chapter One examines Bonnefoy’s 1991 collection *Beginning and End of the Snow*, probing first into geographical experiences of place and space the poet encounters, then moving on with Bachelard’s lens of dynamic imagination and poetic image to further present their imaginative opening of poetic space. The space presented in this poetry collection is, I argue, a temptation for Bonnefoy: it not only explores the real landscape of and the walking experience in the snowy Williamstown but also, with the overall-prevailing snow image, blurs the boundary between internal and external world. Since the space presented in this volume possesses the ability to alter and extend, fanning out even to multiple plains of the geographical, historical, mental, psychological, and imaginary, it is essentially luring, abundant in its numerous possibilities to swell. At the current phase, I present how Bonnefoy captures its tempting character with the movement of snow and how the poet contours the poetic space.

Chapter Two continues the idea of poetic space by looking into Bonnefoy’s 2001 poetry volume *The Curved Planks*. Following the previous discourse of Bachelard’s

imagination, this chapter particularly emphasizes the duality of the imagination's working to stress the dynamism embedded even in a negative context. The chapter first focuses on the negative imaginings of the placeless space and the deserted house to present in them the possible poetic openings which is dynamic. I then turn to particular poetic images of stones and the boat to delineate the spatial growth and positiveness, which too imply the poet's poetic stance and will in venturing into the places/spaces that seem inert or hostile. Even though the presented textual spaces are fundamentally pessimistic, the poet illustrates how one can still audaciously and fearlessly venture with his/her active imaginings. In Chapter One only the positive working of imagination is introduced, whereas in this volume it is the salient wrestling of oppositions such as positive and negative imaginings that solidifies and further fortifies the structure of poetic space with its intrinsic momentum.

Chapter Three delves into two poetry collections *The Anchor's Long Chain* (2008) and *The Present Hour* (2011) to demonstrate the poet's confidence in poetry, and how the poet resides in his poetic creation. Since I see Bonnefoy's poetic space as the manifestation of the poet's being, I present in this chapter how the relationship between the inner and outer as well as the imagining subject and the imagined object reconcile, which lead collectively to the depth of the being. The first section demonstrates the reconciliation of oppositions to indicate from such convergence the depth of the imagining being. The convergence, however, does not suggest the annihilation of the differences but the dynamic correlations instead. Based on Bachelard's discourse on dialectics as well as the exchange between outer and inner, I illustrate how the poet, despite his intrinsic turbulences to search outwardly, is still capable of keeping his confidence with relentless returning to his center. Such is the homecoming of Bonnefoy; with that returning he also ensures the roundness and completion of his poetic space. Indeed, this poetic space is the ultimate home for Bonnefoy which, with its embodiment of the poet's evolving attitudes toward and faith in poetry, anchors his soul.

## Chapter One: Temptation

### *Beginning and End of the Snow, 1991*

Originally published in 1991, Yves Bonnefoy's *Début et Fin de la Neige* (*Beginning and End of the Snow*) was first partially selected and translated into English in the collective work of Bonnefoy *Second Simplicity: New Poetry and Prose 1991-2011* by Hoyt Rogers in 2011, in which twelve poems were introduced. A year later, in 2012, a complete translation of this volume was brought to light by Emily Grosholz. Consisting of two parts, this volume introduces the phenomenon of snow with all its imaginative correlations and philosophical inspiration by series of snow poems, while the other section consists of a longer prose poem "Where the Arrow Falls" that narrates an allegorical event of a person losing his direction in life and also the connection to words. Bonnefoy was inspired extensively during his winter walks in a forest near Williamstown, Massachusetts, where at the time he was invited as a visiting professor. Being both physically and mentally engaged with the external world, Bonnefoy was bedazzled by the ample performances that snow achieves, along with its imaginative and transformative potentiality. The particular phenomenon of snow's various movements of falling, shifting, and scattering were employed as disparate co-relations, ranging from "the shifting, inchoate motions inherent in the movement of imagination and dream," to "the human impulse to internalize the moment in a breathless swirl of words that then necessarily dissolve" (Signorelli-Pappas 70). In this volume, with the overall immersion of snow's physical performance and imaginative associations, Bonnefoy proposes how space is an expanding and a tempting object, penetrating even to multiple plains of the concrete and the abstract, the real and the imaginary, and the external and the internal; with such an extensional quality, Bonnefoy contours a poetic space that comes to full closure in later volumes: the structure with potential kinetic quality, and collective unity of different matters, sensations, and spatial features. To pursue the idea of how space expands and is given poetic

qualities, the investigation of this volume is divided into two major parts, namely, the experiencing of place and space, and the imaginative opening of poetics of space by snow's various performances.

### 1.1 Experiencing Place and Space

The sense of space is perceived through the comparison with the place, the two “require each other for definition” (Tuan 6). In such saying, if space is experienced to be free, immense, and undifferentiated, then place brings about feeling of attachment, fixation, and belongingness. Place, according to Tuan, “is a concretion of value;” whereas space “is given by the ability to move” (12). Movement, in this context, brings about the transition from place to space. The interchangeability between place and space is illustrated by Tuan with the shape of a triangle and Warner Brown's theorizing space through the walking of a maze. The triangle, according to Tuan, is “at first ‘space,’ a blurred image. Recognizing the triangle requires the prior identification of corners—that is, places” (17). The corner functions crucially: it is a concrete, identifiable object, upon which the concept of space is designated. A maze, on the other hand, suggests a correlational connection between place and space. The entrance stands as a centrality, beyond which is space. Tuan explains: “[t]he integration of space is an incremental process during which the appropriate movements for the entrance and the exit, and for the intermediate localities, continue to expand until they are contiguous” (72). As a person ventures forth in the maze and gradually recognizes the landmarks, the particular experience is bestowed on these encountered localities: “[w]hat begins as undifferentiated space ends as a single object-situation or place” (72).

In fact, Tuan's illustration of place and space not only applies to the discipline of human geography but suits the most general understanding. Based on Oxford English Dictionary's illustration, space denotes either time of duration or area of extension; in

whatever circumstance, it is explained as the distance in between two definitive points, events, or objects. Place, on the other hand, is used in a more specific, particular, or definitive context. Tuan also gives his demonstration that time has a particular function in man's understanding of place and space, which can be taken as the further illustration of OED's statement that space has temporal elements. Tuan claims, for instance, that in the flow or motion of time, "place is pause," and space as continuity (198). To be more precise, since place is understood as a center of values to which one is attracted, place is "time made visible, or ... memorial to times past" (179). The following sub-sections sequentially examine the sense structuring of place, and the interchangeability of place and space in Bonnefoy's works to better understand how the experience of the external world is placialized or spatialized, and how the poet persistently crossing the boundary of placial and spatial experiences through the employment of imagination as well as literary techniques.

### 1.1.1 Sense Structuring

As previously mentioned, the place is related to the familiarization and the concretization of value; contrary to space which is seen "as an open arena of action and movement," place "is about stopping and resting and becoming involved" (Cresswell 20). To be involved with the external world, or to concretize the fleeting experience, the working of sensory organs is fundamental. "The senses are geographical," Rodaway claims, "they contribute to orientation in space, an awareness of spatial relationships and an appreciation of the specific qualities of different places;" the effect created by senses are also timeless, "both currently experienced and removed in time" (37). Indeed, senses lead to the establishment of geographical understanding, and very often the spatializing of our experience is multi-sensual, involving a cooperative performance of different senses in hierarchical sequence. However, "[a] certain sense may appear to play a dominant role in characterising a specific

experience and other senses may appear to be subservient” (Rodaway 36). In Bonnefoy’s case, it is vision that principally spatializes the geographical experience.

Bonnefoy has no difficulty describing the bedazzled phenomenon of snow’s movement with his self-sufficient vocabularies. These descriptive, visual words are divided into three categories based on their referential, spatial context. The most basic one points simply to the formation of snow, delineating the process of bits of dirt being carried off by the wind, colliding and binding each other when the air temperature reaches proper demand and falling eventually onto the ground due to the weight. Phrases such as “Snowing / Unravels from the sky” (SS 5), “this / Flake that alights on my hand” (SS 9), and “Snow / You’ve stopped giving, / Stopped arriving” (SS 21) are used by the poet to describe this straightforward, vertical movement. Another subdivision deals with the potential performance of snow driven by outer forces, presumably wind, resulting in the mischievous route of seemingly “lost: it wanders off, / Spins around, and then comes back” (SS 23), or “flakes that swarm and weave / Until they bind” (SS 29). Snow in such a performance widens its potential: it not only is vertical-oriented but self-rotates, creating in itself an even larger spatial capacity which also sinuates snow’s agency. The third category displays an overall covering of snow with its prevailing whiteness, “[s]nowflakes whirl, blurring the line / Between the outside and the inside” (SS 33), or through more aggressive and intrusive indication, “the snow had triumphed there” (SS 27). Since to see is to understand, seeing “is a selective and creative process in which environmental stimuli are organized into flowing structures that provide signs meaningful to the purposive organism” (Tuan 10). Bonnefoy’s various descriptions of snow are indeed an intentional performance, aiming to further delineate snow’s metaphorical potential in opening up multiple spaces, particularly the ones that are identified as poetics in Bachelard’s discourse. Such poetic opening of poetic space(s) will be thoroughly discussed in section two.

### 1.1.2 The Interchangeability of Place and Space

With the visual structuring of place, this section continues to explore how the overall placial and special experience is established with the reading of Bonnefoy's snow poems, and how the two experiences constantly replace each other in a single work. In "First Snowfall," for instance, the narrator's interaction with the external, observed object is revealed in a lucid and tranquil environment.

First snowfall, early this morning. Ochre and green

Take refuge under the trees.

The second batch, toward noon. No color's left

But the needles shed by pines,

Falling even thicker than the snow.

Then, toward evening,

Light's scale comes to rest.

Shadows and dreams weigh the same.

With a toe, a puff of wind

Writes a word outside the world. (SS 3)

Consisting of four stanzas, the poem is fairly persistent with its descriptive emphasis on the landscape's changing appearances through different periods till the last two lines—the action makes its appearance through the absence of its performer, toeing the snow to swirl. The first three stanzas cover varied effects made by a snowfall of different times, early this morning,

toward noon, and toward evening. The landscape beneath which the snow descend should be identical, yet Bonnefoy visions the variation in such a monotone. During the first snowfall, snow does not cover every life form, and it particularly spares the color of “ochre and green” to discover (3). Then arrives “[t]he second batch” which falls even harder, concealing all and leaving “[n]o color’s left / But the needles shed by pines / Falling even thicker than the snow” (3). The sense of place is established through the assemblage of objects that occupy or accumulate and is further experienced through the optic organ. The third snowfall arrives when the night descends, yet no clue of its appearance is displayed, only the same-weighted “shadows and dreams” (3) are found. Since in darkness man’s “visual geography is far more impoverished” (Rodaway 117), the referential points are lost, and the familiar becomes strange, turning the former recognizable place into an undifferentiated space over which darkness prevailed. With the particular mentioning of a dream, a form of mental activities, Bonnefoy intentionally brings in human interference to the picturesque landscape, meanwhile raising the tension between the activity of man and nature as seen in the final stanza (“With a toe, a puff of wind / Writes a word outside the world”). The immobile snow along with the serene landscape is intruded by the subjective, impulsive action, leading to the imaginary space to open up.

The transitional process from place to space is also referred to in “A bit of Water” by defamiliarizing snow.

I long to grant eternity  
To this flake  
That alights on my hand,  
By making my life, my warmth,  
My past, my present days  
Into a moment: the boundless



Moment of now.

But already it's no more  
Than a bit of water, lost in the fog  
Of bodies moving through snow. (SS 9)

The first stanza depicts a sense of place by the fixation of accumulative sensations and values. This fixation starts with a fairly concrete context, of the I-narrator sees the flake alighting on his hand as a form of eternity, which is consisted of “the boundless moment of now” (9). The time denotation in understanding place and space is mentioned beforehand with Tuan’s illustration. Since the I-narrator yearns for condensation of his past to be manifested into this particular moment of the snowflake that alights, the sequence of time is made spatialized through this snowflake, which creates in itself a sense of place. Such a placial structuring is also visible in the poetic form: since in the seven-line stanza only a single, independent sentence is introduced, it is, formally, a rendition of concreteness. Yet again, with the physical change of water being brought to light in the second stanza, the once concretized place is reduced to an undifferentiated space: this particular flake is “no more / Than a bit of water,” and is “lost” (9). The value bestowed on this unique experience of alighting is defamiliarized, manifested in the flake’s diminishing process of turning into water and in its loss of placial particularity with the deprivation of the deixis *this*. Clearly enough, the congregation and dispersion of place and space are seen throughout by the sharp contrast (with “eternity” and “the boundless moment” contrast with “no more than”) and the physical change of snow (from “flake” to “water”).

“Just Before Dawn ...” illustrates the similar, transitional correlation between place and space. Importantly, space in this poem is greatly emphasized by its imaginary potentiality and is even viewed as an entity that invites and includes.

Just before dawn

I look through the window: the snow

Must have stopped. A swath of blue,

Gleaming in front of the trees,

Laps at the walls of night.

I go outside,

Picking my way down the wooden steps,

Caked high with the new-fallen snow.

My ankles are ringed by the piercing chill;

It seems to clarify the mind,

Which starts to hear the silence of things.

I wonder if the chipmunk,

Our simple neighbor, is still asleep—

Or has he already left

The tangled woodpile by the sill

To rove through the crackling cold?

I notice tiny tracks before the door. (SS 19)

The sense of place is structured mainly on the sensory organ and the corporeal engagement of the I-narrator with the external world. Four particular phrases (“I look through,” “I go outside,” “I wonder,” “I notice”) stand out as the I-narrator’s subjective, voluntary gesture which leads further to the shaping of an overall placial and spatial experience. First, a distinction of interior and outer is brought to light with the I-narrator’s outward gaze (“Je

regarde”), upon which a spatial experience also starts to frame. Since “[s]eeing has the effect of putting a distance between self and object,” the distance created in between marks exactly how the sense of space takes its shape (Tuan 146). Following this visual spatializing, the I-narrator sets out (“Je sors”) to actively engage with the surroundings; with that participation, the undifferentiated space has become place since it is now made thoroughly familiar to the narrator (Tuan 73). The next subjective gesture, “I wonder,” however, demonstrates the oscillation between placial and spatial experience, and it starts with a rather concrete reference: “the chipmunk, / Our simple neighbor” (19). Although the creature’s possible behaviors is merely speculation, they are still concretized providing sufficient visual (“tangled woodpile,” “rove through”) and tactile-and-auditory-combined (“crackling cold”) details. These aspects of concretization have constituted the placial character. Yet, they might be given spatial quality as well since the chipmunk’s exact performance remains unknown and is only the speculation of the narrator (“is still asleep— / Or has he already left ...?”). Such uncertainty is the feature of space: it “lies open ... suggests the future and invites action” (Tuan 54). After the placial-spatial co-constitution, the line ends with the concrete place again with the claim “I notice” (“Je vois”). The simultaneous placial / spatial structuring of the final stanza is also formally displayed: it first begins with the interrogative sentence which consisted of five enjambed lines, then ends abruptly with a single declarative and end-stopped line (“I notice tiny tracks before the door”). Even in such a closed statement, however, the unexpected “tracks” are still found to render the closure provocative.

Importantly, this poem also brings about Bonnefoy’s humanistic listen and care that will continue appearing in his later works. It is obvious that in the first and the second stanza, only the performance of the speaker is noticed; however, with the coldness that “seems to clarify the mind,” the speaker starts to hear, and the chipmunk appears (19). The affirmation made in the second stanza (“to hear the silence of things”) is fundamentally important: it not only welcomes and invites the exchange of the self and the otherness, but also celebrates the

intertwining of different life forms and relationships. Immediately followed is the interaction made between the two species, man and the chipmunk; the tracks that lead to multiple places (if being trodden, experienced, and familiarized) and spaces (if being unrecognized and untouched) are also brought to light because of such an encounter. In another word, it might be said that owing to the speaker's care for the surrounding natures, the harmonious space that includes and welcomes all the species appears.

## 1.2 Imaginative Opening of Poetics of Space

In this section I continue discussing place and space by focusing on their poetic qualities through the theoretical lens of Gaston Bachelard, emphasizing mostly on the imagination and its intrinsic mobility to further bring out how Bonnefoy imaginatively transforms and opens up his poetics of space. The transformation from the geographical experienced place and space to that of poetic requires an individual's creative, associative power and the most intimate sensibility. What poetics suggest, according to Kearney, is

a two-way process: we are made by material images that we remake in our turn. We are inhabited by deep imaginings—visual and verbal, auditory and tactile—that we reinhabit in our own unique way. Poetics is about hearing and feeling as well as crafting and sharpening. It is the double play of re-creation. (*PS* xix)

This approach to poetics along with its re-creating aspect has brought in multiple topics of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* this thesis explores, such as the working of poetic image and its newness and novelty, the associative reading of these images, and a particular dynamism brought by such an interaction that refreshes our understanding of the familiar. Throughout the process, the imagination plays a decisive role due to its tendency to invite or

open up: it enables the transmutation from the geographical experience of place and space to the imaginary experience of space, one that is creatively and subjectively constructed. This particular shift is essential in analyzing Bonnefoy's poetics since the poet's employment of poetic images very often represents his particular stance on poetry, which too reveals his subjective depth of being an imaginative, active subject who constructs his home-like structure to secure his poetic being as we shall discuss in Chapter Three. The purpose of the present stage is to generally delineate the transformation from the geographical to the imaginative by probing into Bachelard's discourse on imagination and mobility, the imaginary opening of snow's metaphors, and the tentative structuring of poetic space with snow's overall immersion.

### 1.2.1 Bachelard's Imagination and Mobility

Bachelard's passion for the dynamism of imagination had inaugurated since his early studies on elemental analysis; particularly in *Water and Dream* (*L'eau et les rêves*, 1942) and *Air and Dream* (*L'air et les songes*, 1943), Bachelard illustrated clearly the working of imagination as well as its intrinsic, kinetic quality which was later developed in *The Poetics of Space* (*La poétique de l'espace*, 1958). Imagination for Bachelard is "to realize the unrealized potential of the world," the performance of *opening up* (PS xx). In *Water and Dream*, the imagination is said to orient toward two directions: the external and the internal. It either gains its "impetus from novelty ... tak[ing] pleasure in the picturesque, the varied, and the unexpected," or it "plumbs the depth of being ... seek[ing] to find there both the primitive and the eternal" (1). Bachelard then mentioned two ideas of imagination: the *formal* and the *material*. The formal imagination deals with the formal structuring of the image, including their various patterns and concepts, while the material imagination, also the one valued by Bachelard, probes into images "that stem *directly from matter*" to discover their

projective quality working on the subject, cultivating in the recipients “an open imagination” with the working of two values: *deepening* and *elevating* (1-2). To illustrate, deepening suggests an inward exploration of the possible essence, or a permanent prototype of an image, meanwhile elevating is a gesture of transcendence, of “forming images which go beyond reality, which *sing* reality” (16). Apart from clinging to Plato’s idea of seeing imagination as “a mimetic act of mirroring, representing, copying,” or to Kant and other romanticists’ idea as “a productive force;” Bachelard, however, sees the reciprocity between two axes: “imagination was at once receptive and creative—an acoustic of listening *and* an art of participation. The two functions, passive and active, were inseparable” (Kearney, *PS* xx). The receptive ability is crucial in bringing about the spatial aspect embedded in the imagination: it not only builds a mutual relationship between the observing subject and the perceived object but also denotes “a psychic ‘elsewhere’ and a place of human habitation” (Thiboutot and Martinez 10). Such a primitive and intimate experience of the dwelling experience of humankind is what Bachelard focused on in *The Poetics of Space*; it is also the focalization of the present research which will be further illustrated in Chapter Three.

As mentioned earlier, imagination is intrinsically built with the dynamism to open up. “[B]y virtue of its freshness and its own peculiar activity, [the imagination] can make what is familiar into what is strange,” Bachelard claims, “[w]ith a single poetic detail, the imagination confronts us with a new world” (*PS* 152-53). To be more precise and consistent with Bachelard’s theoretical context, what sprouts the imagination’s working is “a single poetic detail,” a poetic image. Not all of the images in the poetry is taken as “poetic,” however; it requires the specific functioning of the image on the being to literally poeticize the image. Bachelard had long noticed the differences between common images and the ones that affect in *Air and Dream*. The regular or common images are “stereotypes that have already become well defined ... a conventional touch that ... have lost their imaginative power;” whereas the literary images (Bachelard would use the term *poetic image* later in *The*

*Poetics of Space*) “add hope to a feeling, a special vigor to our decision to be a person, even have a tonic effect on our physique” (2). The idea was sharpened in *The Poetics of Space*, in which Bachelard illustrates that “[t]he poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche,” which points at the most intimate vibrations of our interior (*PS* 1). The poetic image, intrinsically related to the imagination, is dynamic; it not only structures the recipients’ ways of observing the external world but further encourages the imagining subject to perceive his/her own depth. For Bachelard, poetic images “are not just vision, but the cosmos itself as it expands and amplifies from the minute to the magnified” (Kearney, *PS* xxv). Thanks to the partial expansion and way of establishing relationships with the external, a “concordance of world immensity with intimate depth of being” is founded (*PS* 207). With its novelty, poetic images continue reshaping the former experience by speaking *in us* through our persistent encounters with the world. Snow’s imaginative performances and its copious opening of poetic space are presented as follows.

### 1.2.2 Snow Image and Its Poetics

To begin, the associative quality of snow image is immediately seen in the short poem “It’s like ...” with both its title and the content:

It’s like a phrase with lots of mute *e*’s.

You feel you only owe them

Shadows of metaphors.

When the snow falls thicker,

It’s like

Hands pushing other hands away

But playing with the fingers they refuse. (SS 15)

Although the poem begins with a false subject (“It’s like”) and an indefinable description, the reference to which the description denotes is implied in the following line (“When the snow falls thicker”). The poem indeed contains two layers of simile, each helps to better spatialize the performance of snow. The first layer is explicitly demonstrated in the second and third stanza, in which the heavy snow is visualized as circuitous and mischievous. The second layer refers to the simile made at the beginning of the poem, of how snow resembles “a phrase with lots of mute *e*’s” (15); in such descriptive sentence, a sensory mechanism is being raised to contribute to a meaning-making process, and it too directs the reader’s attention to the metaphorical opening of snow’s performance. The possible way for comprehending or rationalizing the mute sound, a potentially perceived object, is through association, and, as Bachelard puts it, through the “consideration of the *onset of the image* in an individual consciousness” (PS 4). Since only the “shadow of metaphors” is needed, the narrator brings in the importance of accepting the image’s variational quality, instead of reducing their diversity by conceptualization. A mute object is therefore heard and sensed if the images are in a state of growth. Such is a cognitive process illustrated by Bonnefoy with the exemplification of metaphors. It is worthy of consideration that even in a seemingly negative context (“*mute e*’s,” “*shadow of metaphors*,” “hands *pushing* other hands *away*,” and “playing with the fingers they *refuse*,” emphasis added), a spatial positiveness is gained: spaces of different adumbrations are ultimately “playing” together, indicating a co-shared bound and values, even though their denotations have not yet actualized.

The noticeable metaphor in this volume is fundamentally the snow-word analogy as seen from the last stanza of the previously examined poem “First Snowfall...;” this analogy not only displays co-shared qualities of the two matters but also presupposes certain



structuring of both the actual, linguistic space and the imaginative, poetic space. Such a direct encounter is narrated in “Summer Again.”

I walk on, through the snow. I’ve closed  
My eyes, but the light knows how to breach  
My porous lids. And I perceive  
That in my words it’s still the snow  
That eddies, thickens, shears apart.

Snow,

Letter we find again and unfold:

The ink has paled, and the bleached-out marks  
Betray an awkwardness of mind  
That makes their lucid shadows just a muddle.

We try to read, but we can’t grasp who this is  
In our memory who’s taking such an interest  
In ourselves, except it’s still summer; and we see  
The leaves behind the snowflakes, where the heat  
Still rises from the absent ground like mist. (SS 13)

Countless messages are given in this relatively short poem, delineating the speaker’s deepening awareness of the word’s unachievability and the self-world relationship. The first and second stanzas depict how the sensual experience of snow overlaps the production of words, juxtaposing the erratic course of snow and the arbitrary or chaotic qualities of words to indicate the betrayal of mind and “lucid shadows just a muddle” (SS 13). Ultimately, the

uncontrollable words result even in a total collapse of the cognitive process and every space-time mode, “the seasons are superimposed,” and the summer leaves run parallel to the snowflakes (SS xiv). The implosion of time becomes one of the motifs Bonnefoy constantly returns not only in this volume but also in *The Curved Planks* as demonstrated explicitly in “Rain Falls on the Ravine” and “The House Where I was Born.” Although time is not a focus in this study, this illustration of “timelessness” still possesses a spatial capacity with its all-inclusive characteristic.

Despite the generally pessimistic tone this poem seemingly implies (“[t]he ink has *paled*,” “the *bleached-out* marks,” “an *awkwardness* of mind,” “makes their lucid shadows just a *muddle*,” “the *absent* ground like *mist*,” emphasis added), there remains still the working of particular light that “knows how to breach / my porous lids” (SS 13). The light functions significantly throughout the poem as a sign of recognition and faith: “[i]t exists in and of itself in the first stanza,” Prevots notes, “yet reappears in the second and third stanzas subtly transformed” (60) as seen in “the bleached-out marks” and “the heat / Still rises” (SS 13). Another feature of this poem is Bonnefoy’s purposeful uplifting of the poem from an individual experience to a collectively shared encounter, bringing “a healing, processual, intersubjective exchange” (Prevots 55); such a transition is presented in “the movement from ‘I’ to ‘we’ that implies the universal nature of this search” (Prevots 60). The establishment of an individual’s spatial experience through the subjective, corporeal performance (“I walk on,” “I’ve closed / My eyes,” “I perceive”) changes to a universal lesson that is either a realization of the unreliability of words and memories (“we find again and unfold,” “we can’t grasp”), or a faith regained in a co-shared environment (“we see / The leaves”) where hope and despair are both present (“the heat / Still rises from the absent ground like mist”).

The tension brought by snow-word analogy is further advanced in “The Torches.” This poem is similar to “Summer Again” for overlapped themes, yet the snow image is further explored in its paralleling with fire-related images, and in its reference to a process of

creative writing. The poem differs from the previous one in its focalization on the construction of mental activities by adding parenthesis, and its unanswered uncertainty of words.

Snow

You've stopped giving,

Stopped arriving:

Now you wait in silence with your gift.

We don't accept it yet. But through the night,

Through the windows that dripped with mist,

We sensed your sheen

Along the vast tabletop.

Snow, still immaculate, our path

To all that is: we take these torches

From limbs that are bowed down

As though expectantly.

One by one, their flames have flared and died,

Just as when desire achieves its dreams. (Often,

At the turning point when all might come aright,

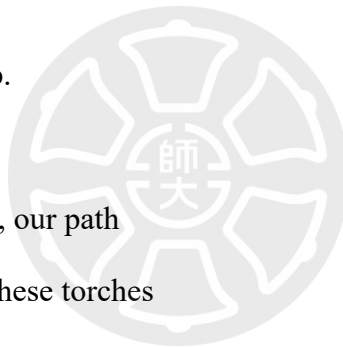
The sky's reflection ebbs from our mirrors,

Room by room.) Snow, touch

These torches again, light them

In the chill of this dawn. Your flurries

Already storm them with their brighter,



Carefree fire. Despite the longing in our memory,  
And fever in our speech, our words

Should move as snowflakes move:  
Not seeking other words,  
But only drawing near them, passing by.  
And if one should brush another, so they join,  
Your light will still sow our briefness —  
Scattering what we've written, once the task is done.

(My eyes follow a snowflake where it dawdles;  
I could look at it forever.  
Another one alights on the palm of my hand.  
A slower flake seems lost: it wanders off,  
Spins around, and then comes back. Do we mean  
A word, another word we might invent,  
Could redeem the world? But we don't know  
If we hear this word, or only dream it.) (SS 21-23)

The poem starts with a geographical exploration of the speaker walking down the path led by the light of the torches and snow's reflectivity. The first stanza explains a sheer encounter between human activities and natural phenomena. A gesture of non-involvement is proposed by snow with its silent gift of overall coverage of landscape, which is not valued until its sheen is perceived unexpectedly. Such an attitude of non-involvement is crucial in interpreting the metaphorical layer of this poem which centers on a creative writing process

and the formation of ideas. Fire and snow are two dominant images throughout the lines: the former can be interpreted as countless, whimsical thoughts and the latter visualized as words that help concretize or frame the ideas. Relating to changeable ideas, fire in this poem is purposely presented in various, transformative forms: its physical feature of the flame and the radiation of heat and light are purposely associated with the individual's desire to create, capture, and conceptualize the external world. This conceptualization, however, is problematic, for it brings the creativity to a stop and kills off the essence of things ("their flames have flared and died, / Just as when desire achieves its dreams").

Bonnefoy is unquestionably cautious about language and the conceptual thinking: words for the poet "carry the danger of fixity, of the confines of the conceptual and the limitations of reduction to a single structure or meaning" (Genova 144); conceptualization, as Bonnefoy sees it, has "a bad tendency ... to close discussion down, to reduce to the schematic and to produce an ideology existing in negation of our full relation to what is" (Crucefix 10). However, Bonnefoy understands well that the employment of words and concepts is inescapable, and he sees them as "merely a tool we use to give form to a place where we can dwell" (Crucefix 10). To avoid conceptualization, Bonnefoy proposes in this poem an adventitious reading and handling of the things perceived. Even if the fire is recognized ("the *longing* in our memory, / And *fever* in our speech;" emphasis added), it "Should move as snowflakes move: / Not seeking other words, / But only drawing near them, passing by" (SS 23). This performance unravels the "brighter, / Carefree fire" that had "already storm[ed]" (SS 21), bringing about the larger spatial potentiality for creative writing: it acknowledges a never-ending writing process with words' arbitrariness ("Scattering what we've written, once the task is done") which is rich in its abundance, and leads eventually "[t]o all that is" (SS 21).

The mischievous route of words' creation is once again mentioned in the last two stanzas put in the parenthesis: the first one focuses on an individual experience of snow

("my" and "I"), while the later shifts back to the collective experience ("we") and question again the problem of representation with a direct question ("Do we mean / A word, another word we might invent, / Could redeem the world?") Interestingly, the parenthesis not only introduces and summarizes an overall tension of the poem, it also, by oscillating between affirmation and doubt, unfolds particular mental space ("we don't know / If we hear this word, or only dream it"). Unlike the former poems that demonstrate their spatial extension with the working of images, this poem goes much deeper in terms of its reflexivity: it demonstrates different levels of cognition with transformative images, and it pursues the "light" regardless of difficulties. Importantly, the poem ends unanswered; the parenthesis also attempts to silence such an asking. The speaker shows no hurry in clarifying, and is preoccupied with dawdling snow, claiming that s/he "could look at it forever" (SS 23).

Prevots in his essay has exemplified the uncertainty *Snow* volumes possesses:

Like the snow falling softly in layers only to eventually melt away, the poems that make up *Debut et fin de la neige* add slight degrees of nuance to questions that can never quite be answered. The speaker intends for the poems to bring light, yet knows perfectly well that they cannot constitute a world unto themselves. (59)

Since the title of the volume already hints that only the "beginning" and "end" of snow are noticed, "the text can offer only a series of brief passages ... rather than attempts at definitive, absolute statements." (Prevots 60). By so doing, the poetic performance of snow is not confined to a single meaning but is open, always, to multiple explanations. This accords dearly with Bachelard that "in dynamic poetry, things are not what they are, but what they are becoming" (WD 47).

### 1.2.3 The Outlining of Poetic Space

In the introduction to the *Second Simplicity*, Hoyt Rogers described poems in *Beginning and End of the Snow* as “wend[ing] their way through new geography, an amplified interior” (xiii). The previously examined poems already demonstrate such a transition from sensual, corporeal experience to the imaginary, showing how “elements of outer world fuse indeterminately with inner cognition, memory, and dreams” (Poe 157). In this section, two poems are specifically examined for their attempt on presenting an overall immersion of the snow image as well as the profound contemplation on different spaces Bonnefoy purposely structures and makes juxtaposed. These spaces, accompanied by the dynamism rising from the subjective, corporeal observation and the physical, imaginary movements of snow, constitute a network of space that ceaselessly fans out due to their mutual encouragements. This network of space, however, is not a homogeneous but heterogeneous one. In its growth, this network of space is given with poetic quality and is gradually growing into the collective poetic space that will be further structured and finalized in Bonnefoy’s later poetry collections, as we will examine in Chapters Two and Three.

The crossing of multiple spaces is vividly seen in “The Only Rose,” in which the geographical, architectural, aesthetic, and timeless space are intertwined. According to Poe, what Bonnefoy studies “in the snow [is] the exterior beauty of High Renaissance church of San Biagio outside the Italian town of Montepulciano” (Poe 161). The poem is divided into four sections with various length and stanza components. Sections I and II begin with the geographical experience of surroundings, paralleling with the speaker’s aesthetic contemplations on Italian architecture and his undisguised compliment (“only they / Come close to this perfection, to this absence;” “their earthly / Architect had fathered forth in stone / The centuries’ desire;” “O builders / Not of a place but of hope regained;” SS 31, 33). During the speaker’s structuring of placial experiences, the snow is vividly seen in both the

foreground and the background, taking over the entire visual realm with its seemingly autonomous movements (“Through snowflakes, I catch sight of facades;” “And I keep peering, avidly, at masses / That the snow halfway conceals;” “But snow piles up in their hollows;” *SS* 31). Demonstrated by the last four lines of section II and the entire section III is the similar implosion of time found in “Summer Again,” in which the bees and summer are unfurled in the whirling snow:

...

But snow piles up in their hollows;

Edging close to the lowest shelf,

I topple a bit of its light.

And suddenly, here’s the meadow

When I was ten, buzzing with bees:

And in my hands—are these flowers now,

Or shadows? Honey almost, or snow?

III

I move forward under the archway of a door.

Snowflakes whirl, blurring the line

Between the outside and the inside of this room

Where lamps are lit—themselves

A kind of snow, flickering

High or low amid this night:

As though I’d reached another threshold.

And beyond it is that same humming of bees



In the sound of the snow. What they said,  
The unnumbered bees of summer, seems  
Reflected by the lamps, and without end.

And how I'd love to run,  
As in the bee-loud days, kicking  
The pliant ball; for it may be  
That I'm sleeping now, and dreaming, and following  
Those childhood paths. (SS 33-35)

A series of temporalized spaces are prompted by the speaker's toppling of snow, the accumulative matter that seems to collect memories of the past or arouse the functioning of imaginary faculty. The speaker in such a circumstance would see suddenly the meadow of his childhood paralleling exactly with this Italian structure, and he loses the ability to differentiate if it is the summer flower or snow that he holds. As the speaker steps into the church where he previously admired, snow continues disintegrating the interior and exterior spaces ("Snowflakes whirl, blurring the line / Between the outside and the inside of this room") to the degree that even the speaker is fully aware of its transformative quality ("As though I'd reached another threshold"). Such a metamorphosis of snow is continuous and endless ("seems / reflected by the lamp, and without end"), and it serves as a medium for leading the speaker to various paths in different circumstances ("it may be / That I'm sleeping now, and dreaming, and following / Those childhood path").

In section IV, the speaker returns to the place where he encounters facades, with the snow image ("hardened snow") reminding him "one of the architectural shapes of the poet's Renaissance 'friends' (Poe 161):

... O my friends,  
Alberti, Brunelleschi, Sangallo—  
I did not betray you: all the same, I move forward.  
The purest form is still the shape  
That mist inhabits, and dissolves.  
Trampled snow is the only rose. (SS 35)

Apparently, by speaking to these Renaissance figures and to illustrate his ponderings on form, shape, and even the implied content, Bonnefoy also amplifies his spaces onto the ones of historical and aesthetic. In the interview with Hoyt Rogers, Bonnefoy sees this poem as a reflection on how beauty can be “a two-edged sword:”

As this poem reminds us, for finite, ephemeral beings such as ourselves, pure forms harbor a dangerous temptation: they accentuate our yearning for the absolute—for limitlessness, for immortality. They encourage us to deny the here and now, to neglect the fullness of presence. (“Yves Bonnefoy: A Conversation with Hoyt Rogers,” retrieved from the internet)

Bonnefoy’s alert for such a temptation is obvious when the speaker juxtaposes the idea of perfection and absence in section I; it is now made even plainer in section IV with the speaker’s purposeful comparison between the “purest form” and the mist. Based on these claims, the speaker demonstrates his break with the Italian architects by the firm declaration: “I move forward” (“j'avance”) (SS 35). The poetic line is also divided into small sections with punctuations to further demonstrate the break of the sound, then metaphorically the break with the form. The poem ends with the speaker’s returning to, or rediscovery of, the present with the reaffirmation that “[t]rampled snow is the only rose” (35).

“Hopkins Forest” continues the theme of snow’s overall immersion, and how it aggressively prevails over multiple spaces. The poem consists of five stanzas with poetic lines 10, 10, 13, 16, 16, dealing respectively with a particular temporal or spatial frame. The first and second stanzas delineate respectively the outdoor and indoor experiences: the former recounts the speaker’s activities in the forest, the latter refers to the speaker’s reading of as well as encountering with words and symbols.

I had gone out  
To draw water from the well, down by the trees:  
And how I stood in the presence of another sky.  
The constellations of a moment past had fled.  
The firmament was three-quarters blank,  
And here deepest black reigned alone.  
But to the left, on the horizon,  
Mingled with a canopy of oaks,  
Reddish stars clustered  
Like a bonfire, even trailing smoke.

I went back inside;  
I open the book  
On the table again. Page after page,  
Symbols I couldn’t decipher:  
Shapes lumped together, vaguely serial,  
But meaningless. And underneath,  
A white abyss,  
As if the something we call spirit

Were falling ... noiseless as snow.

I turned the pages anyway. (SS 25)

The sense of space is settled down thanks to the concrete objects and places mentioned. The forest is a familiarized place since the speaker is fairly acquainted with its geographical location; there remains, however, an expansionary quality that this particular place shares when the speaker looks towards the horizon ("But to the left, on the horizon"), which might lead to its transformation to become "trailing" space. The indoor placial experience, on the other hand, is concretized by the speaker's opening of the book and the reading of it, yet is later given spatial quality with the speaker's confrontation with the abstract and the unfamiliar ("Symbols I couldn't decipher: / Shapes lumped together, vaguely serial, / But meaningless").

The third stanza shifts back to the temporal fracture of "[m]any years before, at daybreak on a train / Between Princeton Junction and Newark" (SS 25), which delineates a lingering memory of a non-arrival journey, and the unexpected encounter with the representational figure, Baudelaire:

...

And next to me, suddenly,

In a newspaper someone unfolded:

Baudelaire. A huge photograph,

An entire page, like the sky that empties

When the world comes to an end,

Consenting to the disarray of words. (SS 27)

Although Baudelaire is recognized as a representational figure, this encounter of Baudelaire's

picture on a train, however, is actually an experienced event, as illustrated by Poe:

Bonnefoy himself explains in his preface: “Hopkins Forest is a real place, as my walks in that forest were real.” “But the portrait of Baudelaire,” in the second part of the poem, “was also real. I really saw the open newspaper with his enormous picture, for a moment, on the train.” And even “if I dreamed that instant, Baudelaire has the same reality as Hopkins Forest, and so he is written into the poem.” (160)

Bonnefoy’s statement has made it clear that it is always based on the visible and the real that he weaves in the abstract and the metaphorical. Baudelaire’s picture, in this regard, unfolds the tension of multiple worlds: the figure stands for modernity and newness, which is in sharp contrast with the natural forest and all its affiliated, primitive activities as mentioned in the first stanza (“To draw water from the well”). Though the conflict and even the anxiety brought by words are seen in lines, which is fiercely expressed as “Du monde dévasté par le langage” (“from a world / Language has laid waste,” *SS* 27), Bonnefoy frees the poem from its former dichotomy between descriptions of the natural world and the highly symbolic figure by the thorough, spatial occupation of snow:

...

But soon the snow had triumphed there,  
In many of the signs we glean—by an apparent  
Contradiction—from a world  
Language has laid waste.  
It seemed the war of those two principles  
Was winding down; it seemed  
Their double radiance was fusing now:

That the lips of the wound would close.  
Driving gusts buried every hue beneath a cold  
Mass of white. But on a distant roof,  
Or painted board propped against a fence,  
Here and there a color still appeared ... (SS 27)

Being a redemptive and productive object, the snow not only saves the world from its former devastation and brings the space that once stopped (“When the world comes to an end, / Consenting to the disarray of words”) to grow again, but also encourages the inter-exchangeability of separate domains, of the newness and oldness, of things happened and things wished, and of contents and forms. Even in this complete whiteness, a color appears, indicated by the spatial deixis “here and there.” Such is a space-making of snow: it brings the former nostalgia to close while unfolding other variations to form.

In the final stanza, the geographically experienced forest has become penetrative, inscribing perpetually on every subjective experiences, emotions, and memory.

I truly owe a lot to Hopkins Forest.  
On my horizon, I keep it where the seen  
Retreats to the unseen, trembling  
In the final depths of blue.  
I listen to its sounds through other sounds.  
Sometimes, in summer, my feet  
Nudge dead leaves from former years,  
Pale in the shade of oaks  
Grown too thick among the rocks ...  
I stop. The ground seems to open

On infinity. The leaves are slowly  
Falling there, or rising up and down:  
No difference now, no rustle but the light  
Whisper of flakes that swarm and weave  
Until they bind. And then I see the other sky again;  
I enter the whirling snow. (SS 29)

The forest remains eternally visible despite the apparent alternation of seasons or the narrator's present location, and is engraved profoundly on the speaker's mental landscape ("On my horizon, I keep it where the seen / retreats to the unseen"). The single, geographically concrete place has become an omnipresent space ("seems to open / On infinity") which insists to be perpetually transformative: a dynamic and vivacious space that welcomes both the growth of the natural environment and the activities of man. The forest is also a space of concrete reality, since "our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind" (Tuan 18). The fusion of worlds is made clear in Bonnefoy's employment of three reflexive verbs when describing the movements of snowflakes: "Se multiplient, se rapprochent, se nouent" ("flakes that swarm and weave / Until they bind" SS 28). The final end-stopped line "I enter the whirling snow" demonstrates not only the co-shared environment of man and nature but also the speaker's voluntarily engagement with the external world (SS 29).

From the visible to the invisible, external to the internal, then back again, the forest grows and becomes an immense plain that resonates with the poet's sensory and imaginative faculty. The poet is an imagining being: with the associative, receptive, creative power embedded in imagination, Bonnefoy illustrates for the readers how poetic space can be contoured and extended. As Stroud introduced in *Water and Dream*, "[i]n the zone of active imagination, where man is a thinking, willing being, an openness is retained;" it is the place

where “we can retrace, reclaim, retrieve, relive, and even transform experience in our imaginative selves” (viii). The place that Bonnefoy once experienced has obtained its poetics with the poet’s every voluntarily return. In such infusion and the overall, spatial immersion, the poet and space(s) are one. Such an active and redemptive gesture echoes back to Bonnefoy’s humanistic listen and care revealed in “Just Before Dawn....” Such voluntary entering and acceptance also foreshadow Bonnefoy’s fearless exploration and venturing into the interior space and placeless space as discovered in Chapter Two.





## Chapter Two: Venture

### *The Curved Planks, 2001*

In comparison with *Beginning and End of the Snow*, in which space is presented as an overall and tempting theme rich in its potential to fan out to multiple spheres, *Les Planches courbes* (*The Curved Planks*, 2001) takes a rather different route which dives even deeper in spaces of the placeless and the most interior, from nine stone poems that embody the voice of the dead along with various forms of absence, the title prose poem that speaks the fundamental loss of man, to the autobiographical verse sequence “The House Where I was Born” which probes into the most personal and intense moment of the haunting past. What Bonnefoy audaciously presents with these two spaces, the placeless and the interior, is the will of the imagining being as well as the determination to venture and rediscover hope even in the context of negation or even denial. In this chapter I would like to further develop Bachelard’s discourse on the working of imagination’s duality, particularly its employing and imaginative opening in negative situations. In such static, paralyzed, or even hostile textual spaces illustrated by Bonnefoy, I argue that there still remains an active and rather positive aspect which is intrinsically inherent, and will energize the former immobile space. The title itself already foreshadows this dominant relationship of rivalry; the planks that used to be straight and stiff are curved by outer forces, in this regard the poet’s creative ability, and with this alteration of shape it also orients the imagining subject as well as the reader toward the novel understanding of how spatial potentiality is maintained even in a hostile environment.

The volume distinguishes itself from previous volumes with Bonnefoy’s bold exploration of different themes, genres, and styles. The predominant motifs in this work are stones of distinctive readings (the rocks or the tombstones), water in different forms (rain, surging waves, tranquil water, flooding water), broken branches, boats in various status (motionless, idle, or sinking), Greek goddess Ceres, and the child. In his foreword to *The*

*Curved Planks* Richard Howard had already mentioned the oppositional characteristics embedded in this work with the recurring Ceres figure, whose presence, as he sees, progressing Bonnefoy's poetics: "who marks and monumentalizes these poems ... who gathers up the broken parts and pieces, unnamable at first and eventually recognizable as *the new growth, the new year, the new hope*" (xvi, emphasis added). Though the goddess may seem indifferent or even frightening in some occasions, she indeed plays one of the emblematic roles for demonstrating Bonnefoy's persistent determination in searching of hope. In fact, the goddess is only one of many examples of how space in its seemingly static or hostile state still possesses its positiveness and growth. To better examine the wrestling between static and dynamic oppositions and co-constitution throughout this work, and to better understand how the images are made motivated with the employment of imagination, a further inquiry to Bachelard's discourse on the imagination's duality is needed. Unlike the previous chapter in which imagination is solely examined in a fairly positive context with a single poetic image, this chapter investigates into images of the stone, house, water, and boat, focusing particularly on how them, with the function of imagination, mobilize spaces that seem to come to a complete stop. Two sections are proposed to reach the goal: the first is to further Bachelard's discourse on dynamic imagination proposed in Chapter One, only this time concentrates on how its dynamism is gained while being put in a negative textual environment such as the placeless space and the deserted house; the second section displays the advancement of poetic image such as stones and the boat to further present the poet's subjective will as well as his audacious attempt of venturing forth.

## 2.1 Imagining the Ambivalences

This section aims to present the polymorphous manifestation of the working of imagination by examining images put in the context of negation and denials. Since Bachelard

frequently talks about imagination in a comparatively optimistic tone, it is often mistaken to be solely positive due to its characteristics to open up, invite, and generate; it is also tightly connected to the images that appeal and attract. Even Bachelard had confessed that the spaces explored in *The Poetics of Space* are limited to “felicitous space” and the “eulogized space,” “the space we love;” he speaks in an explicit manner that “hostile space is hardly mentioned in these pages,” and that “[f]or the present, we shall consider the images that *attract*” (19-20).

Yet, if one examines carefully the composition of the house, of its attic or cellar, are they not surprised by seeing the embedded insinuation of darkness and fear? Chiu had offered us possible inquiry into Bachelard’s preference for the spaces that attract, implying that huts, cellars, nests, and shells are the exact imagining of spaces of hostile, ruined, or deserted despite their eulogized characteristics (93). Chiu further stated that the felicitous space is just another manifestation of hostile space. Bachelard, on the other hand, had given his recognition in *Earth and Reveries of Repose* (1948) before *The Poetics of Space* was published, in which he confessed bluntly: “we would have to acknowledge as well, at times, some very odd retreats; a closet, a space beneath the stairs, an old wood shed may indicate suggestive lines for a psychology of confined life” (*PIR* 152). Bachelard might on some occasions value the particular characteristics over the others, but he never disregards the duality simultaneously embedded in the functioning of imagination as well as the negative dimension in a single poetic image. In his early publications of elemental analysis, the imagery of positive and negative often come in pairs. For instance, the water is presented as clear waters, deep/dormant/dead waters, purifying waters, or violent waters, the air as ascending but also falling, and the earthen matter as simultaneously hard and soft. By probing into many phases of a single matter, Bachelard urges us to notice the “profound and lasting ambivalences ... bound up in them” (*WD* 11). “Matter that does not provide the opportunity for a psychological ambivalence cannot find a *poetic double* which allows endless transpositions,” Bachelard states, “[f]or the material element to engage the whole soul, there

must be a *dual participation* of desire and fear, a participation of good and evil, a peaceful participation of black and white” (*WD* 11-12). The oppositional pairs need the companion of each other to complete the working of imagination; their co-workings, ultimately, constitutes what Bachelard describes the *dynamic poetry* as he examines Edgar Allen Poe’s poems in *Water and Dreams*, or the *dynamic dialectics* when he illustrates the primitive, prototypical “houses” of nests and shells in *The Poetics of Space*.

### 2.1.1 Bonnefoy’s Imaginings of Passivity

The overall space presented in *The Curved Planks* is intriguingly similar yet also different from that presented in *Beginning and End of the Snow*. What has manifested through snow poems is the monotonous landscape: its polymorphous varieties being concealed from the pervasive snow, which falls relentlessly and simultaneously onto the winter land of New England to the summer landscape of Provence. In this volume, however, what remains is the rugged space that man must confront: the archetypal earth abounds in its primordial rock, the memorial tombstones, the soft rain, the violent surge, the deserted house, the broken branch, the swaying ship, and the homeless child. The overall-constituted landscape in this volume is, as it apparently seems, abundant in its vitality and multitudinous variety: here and there, on the earth “the tree frogs / Sounded hoarse” (*CP* 7), the hoopoes sometimes “[f]ly forever from under the roof / Of the empty Barn” (*CP* 33), or take their “heavy flight / In the hollow of the rocks” (*CP* 45), birds “[s]creeching, squabbling, / Wheeling apart” (*CP* 37), and doves are seen “in the elsewhere / Of their cooing” (*CP* 53); stones “quickly / Redeemed by the grass” (*CP* 51) that similarly cover the fanned-out path; a child is “laughing, barefoot / In the dry leaves” (*CP* 23), or seen “playing / With too many dreams” (*CP* 61), or “happy / With so much light” (*CP* 75). If examined carefully, however, the illustrated diversity of the landscape abounds only with its redundancy of hollowness,

desolation, blind expenditure. A space that extends, yet arrives no destination; a space that, according to Rogers, is “[c]omposite and fluid, superimposed and interlaced,” creating in itself “a place so vast that it is placeless—though possessed of an undeniable reality” (*CP* 196). Indeed, this is the earth “who came to us / Eyes closed / As though to ask / For a guiding hand,” with the nine stone poems scattering on and standing upright in between this placeless space hum still the eternal sound of the dead (*CP* 41).

Yet, similar to Bachelard’s material imagination of duality, in the arranged context of hostility we might as well find the potential working of particular positiveness. What I intend to present is Bonnefoy’s endeavor to make lucid the underlying tension mantled by the earlier snow and now the placeless surface, laying bare the interweaving predicament as well as the equal promise granted for man. For that purpose, I first isolate the image of placeless suffused with stones and different forms of waters, along with the image of the uncordial, deserted house to discuss Bonnefoy’s employment of imagination in passivity. The following investigations will be mostly on targeting the “ambivalences” the imagination brought about; although the positive readings of the agitation are occasionally mentioned, they will be further elaborated with Bachelard’s dynamic dialectics and the demonstration of the subjective will in section two.

### **2.1.2 The Placeless Space**

A three-stanza poem “Rain Falls on the Ravine” is pivotal to the volume in both its adherence to and the break with the former snow poems: it clings to the similar construction of placial and spatial experience, meanwhile unfolding another dimension of space which is on the surface static yet full of tension. Its title already confines a grand space to a limited locale and event, of the rain that falls on the ravine.

I

Rain falls on the ravine, on the world.

Hoopoes alighting on our barn

Crown wandering columns of smoke.

Dawn, consent to us once more today.

I hear the first wasp

Already rousing in the warmth

Of the fog that seals this path

Where a few puddles shine. The wasp searches

In peace, invisible. I could believe

That I am here, that I listen; but its hum

Deepens only in my mind. The path

Beneath my feet is no longer the path,

Only my dream

Of the wasp, the hoopoes, the fog.

I liked setting out at dawn. Time lay asleep

In the embers, forehead pressed against the ashes.

In the room upstairs the shadows' ebb

Uncovered our bodies, breathing in peace. (*CP* 65)

In section I, the placial concretization is given through the alignment of objects which arouse sensuous workings of the speaker, from an overall, visual rendering of the rain to the attentive hearing of the natural world. Yet the concreteness is soon disintegrated into an oneiric state with the metaphorical change of water from the rain to the “fog that seals this

path” (*CP* 65). The former acquaintances along with their unique performances (“Hoopoes alighting on our barn,” “the first wasp / Already rousing in the warmth,” and “The wasp searches in / Peace”) are put in doubts and further deprived of their subjective, active state: what they become are static and merely descriptive, “Only my dream / Of the wasp, the hoopoes, the fog” (*CP* 65). The second stanza is almost seen enjambed lines throughout, except lines twelve and fourteen which are end-stopped: the effect of a fast reading pace has created in this particular stanza a consistent, unifying sound space that is different from its precedent and the following stanza. The dream-like fragment continues in the third stanza, in which time is made paralyzed (“Time lay asleep / In the embers”) and the unrecognizable water seems to drench the corporeal function (“the shadows’ ebb / Uncovered our bodies”). Throughout the section are seen stative verbs (“I *hear*,” “I could *believe*,” “I *am* here,” “I *listen*,” “I *liked* setting out,” emphasis added) which, with their quality to reflect on the subjective state instead of giving continuous action, already foreshadow a space that is deprived of movements.

Section II follows the sequence of time. Other than the rain at dawn which happened during the dormancy of the world, it emphasizes the tensional state of morning rain that is essentially vivacious due to the heavy employment of dynamic verbs throughout:

## II

Rain of summer mornings, plashing  
Unforgettably, like a first chill  
On the windowpane of dream.  
The sleeper, parting from himself  
In this rain that pelted the world,  
Asked with naked hands for the other body,  
Still asleep, and for its heat.

(Squalls slap the roof tiles,  
The room thrusts ahead by fits and starts  
In the surging swell of light.  
The storm  
Has invaded the sky, lightning  
Cracks with a loud shout  
And the riches of the thunderbolt pour out.) (*CP 67*)

Serving as a keynote throughout, the first stanza of this section not only helps locate the exact time frame and the participants of the event but also inaugurates a state of discrepancy. The fierceness of rain is indicated in the very beginning with both the verb and the sensation it arouses (“plashing / Unforgettably, like a first chill”). To resonate with the previous section, this morning rain continues paralyzing the world with its pelting, bidding the sleeper to search “for the other body” and “for its heat” despite the former ashes (*CP 67*). Being put in such a tempestuous circumstance, the sleeper chooses a surprisingly indifferent stance: he sleeps, and with that voluntary ignorance is able to “part from” the rain that prevails (*CP 67*). The potential tension becomes much more visible in the following stanza put in the parenthesis, in which more dynamic and much intense verbs are introduced to demonstrate rain’s thorough pervasiveness that even other objects are made moving (“Squalls slap the roof tiles,” “the room thrusts ahead,” “the surging swell of light,” “The storm / Has invaded the sky, lightning / Cracks,” “the thunderbolt pour out”). Yet, being consistent to the strategy Bonnefoy often employed of paralleling oppositional pairs to show the ambivalence throughout the volume, such anxiety is put in the parenthesis to intentionally degrade and even silence the disturbances.

Then comes the final section as the tension previously created between humankind and



the world is made inwardly and metaphorically to indicate possible openings of space, which too adheres to the central thinking of Bonnefoy's poetics, that through the absence presence is gained. Importantly, this section also declares essential tension that continues to penetrate the rest of the poems, which also foreshadows the mental, psychological space the poet desires to explore.

### III

I get up and see that our boat

Has veered in the night.

The fire has died down.

The chill pushes the sky with a flick of its oar.

The water's surface is light alone.

But underneath? Faded tree-trunks,

Boughs entangled like a dream, stones

With eyes the rapid stream has closed

And the smile in the sand's embrace. (*CP* 69)

The opening stanza immediately shows a departure from its precedents. By the subjective movement "I get up" ("Je me lève") the speaker awakens from the former motionless state and is fully conscious of spatial alterations and potentials: the boat "has veered the night" and the chill of the die down fire, despite its already-perished state, "pushes the sky" (*CP* 67). Clearly enough, the whole section depicts a highly metaphorical moment which finds no reference to the world previously described. The boat, for instance, is unquestionably the emblem of Bonnefoy's poetic stance with its intrinsic motion of departing, swinging, and berthing: the fact of its changing position during the night has made clear that even in the

dimmiest hour can the poet adjust the course to fit his poetic need, which is to rediscover the veiled memories and to dive into the abstract spaces, be them mental or psychological. The second stanza of section III has made clear such inquiry. Various concrete matters are proposed, namely water, faded tree trunks, boughs, stones, and sand to secure the sense of place, as we previously mentioned when examined snow poems; yet what have accompanied them are the similar abstractions that readers find hard to locate. For instance, similes are heavily employed to elevate the placial experience to that of spatial (“The water’s surface is light alone” and “Boughs entangled like a dream”); the abstractions are obviously made with the things they compared, namely light and dream. The final two lines, with the appearance of human features, have made the context even more obscure. The static and dream-like atmosphere this final lines create also purposively reminds the reader of the narrator’s confession made in section I, when he/she acknowledges the inability to identify the real (“The path / Beneath my feet is no longer the path, / Only my dream”).

The better characterization of Bonnefoy’s delineation of placeless and static space is manifested in a series of nine stone poems all titled “A Stone” (“Une pierre”): each is short in length, containing only two or three stanzas with seven to twelve lines. The Francophone audience will grasp the ambiguity instantly since the original word *pierre* means both a rock and a tombstone; such an interplay is manipulated in poems and thus is essential to the interpretations as well. The stone as generally perceived is a solid and earthly matter on which time performs: from a crystal, a fragment, or animal bones, it undergoes a series of lengthy, qualitative change utilizing compression, (de)formation, cooling, melting, or congregation to become a rock. This physical forming of a stone corresponds to how Bonnefoy structures his stone poems. Often the poet will start with a rather definite situation, a place that is properly narrated, whether it be a detailed room, a path devoured by grass, or the indoor activities of sleeping and reading; then the poetic lines flow from the concrete to the abstract, then to the undifferentiated, placeless space. Such a process of spatial

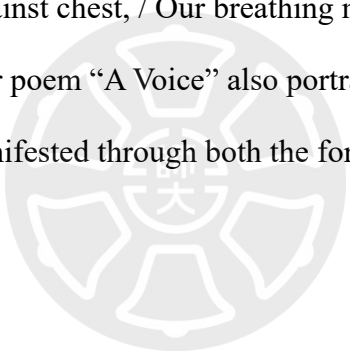
aggregation and dispersion is the manifestation of the physical forming of stone. The content of the poems, on the other hand, alludes to the second layer *pierre* implies, a tombstone that mourns for the absence and the loss. Themes such as ignorance, regrets, unreachability, and weariness are interlaced, constituting a forlorn, nowhere place where the only remnants are blurred epitaphs speaking of the things past. The two layers of functioning are exemplified in the following poem:

A mysterious haste urged us on.  
We went in, we opened  
The shutters, we recognized the table, the hearth,  
The bed; the star was growing larger in the window,  
We heard the voice that wants us to love  
At summer's crest  
Like dolphins playing in their sea without a shore.

Unknowing, let us sleep. Chest against chest,  
Our breathing mingled, hand in hand without dreams. (CP 19)

A concretized and definite place is fixed with the speaker's subjective recognition of the interior decorations; the heavy employment of end-stopped lines also functions as an interior partition, rendering the continuous, integral space to its independent sections of the shutter, the table, the hearth, the bed, and the window where the "we" community dawdle. The interior observation, however, is interrupted by the sound, which gives rise to the oscillation between the spatial extension and limitation: the former located place is made dispersed with the borderless imagination in the form of a simile ("Like dolphins playing in their sea without a shore"), yet such a spatial growth comes to a sudden halt with the

speaker's declaration of their subjective inability ("Unknowing, let us sleep"). Despite such a fluctuation, there also implies a strong sense of ignorance founded at the very first line of the poem, "[a] mysterious haste urged us on" (CP 19). Though the speaker has demonstrated the collective subjectivity throughout the whole placial/spatial discovery ("we went in," "we opened," "we recognized," "we heard"), it is still conspicuously that their activeness is "urged" by an unnamable, "mysterious haste," and they too display a blind willingness to be ignorant and "unknowing;" similar to "dolphins playing in their sea without a shore," they sleep "without dreams" (CP 69). Importantly, Bonnefoy makes this piece as a shared experience with a first plural pronoun *we*, suggesting explicitly that this state of ignorance and loss is not confined to individuals, but a sort of communal experience exchanged by and between its members ("Chest against chest, / Our breathing mingled, hand in hand"). The following four lines from another poem "A Voice" also portray the collectively shared experience of double denials manifested through both the form and the content:



All that, my friend,  
Is how we live, tying  
Yesterday, our illusion,  
To tomorrow, our shades. (CP 45)

Not only the sound and the textual spaces are torn to pieces but also the content and the mental space the lines conveyed is covered by deep despair. The time period mentioned in these lines are merely yesterday and tomorrow, none of which gives hope to the we community but only "illusion" and "shades;" the present is lost, as well as all the possibilities and potentials it grants humankind (CP 45).

This shared experience continues in another stone poem yet with Bonnefoy's taking different narrative angle, the second plural pronoun *they*, to emphasize the bystander's

indifference to man's existence and their mundane struggles.

They lived in the time when words were poor.  
In rhythms undone, meaning pulsed no longer.  
Smoke billowed up and shrouded the flame.  
They feared that joy would not surprise them again.

They slept and slept, distressed by the world.  
Memories passed through their sleep  
Like boats in the fog, stoking their fires  
Before they head upstream.

They woke. But the grass had already turned black.  
Let wind be their water, and shadow their bread,  
Unknowing and silence their ring.  
An armful of night all their fire on earth. (*CP* 49)

Any referring spaces, whether in terms of the poetic form and content or the metaphorical level of the signifier and the signified, are forced to come to their cease. As fiercely demonstrated by the end-stopped lines in the first stanza, each line is the completion of its own, and thus a resolute break from the previously existing space. Human beings sleep to shy away from the world and its various forms of lack: they desire to retrieve their vitality through the transitory night ("stoking their fires"), yet only wake up to face the world with its unchanging hostility fed with the hollow wind and shadow ("the grass had already turned black"). Being devoid of a verb and thus an incomplete semantic structure, the final line of the poem, "[a]n armful of night all their fire on earth" (*CP* 49), delineates the lack precisely.

What had adumbrated by this line are twofold consequences, namely a lack of motion and the undefined correlations between the things described. Such unclarity indicates an impasse toward which man moves: an inert space shrouded by smoke and flame, as line three in the first stanza suggests, and is eventually silenced by darkness since what has left for humankind is the night: the fire that never light (“An armful of night all their fire on earth”).

The central image of placeless-ness is found in the title prose poem “The Curved Planks” with its depiction of a nameless boy’s requesting for home. In his conversation with the ferryman, the boy hears words like “father” and “home” for the first time; to be homed, the boy begs the ferryman to become his father, for which he is refused, and is asked by the ferryman “to forget all words” (*CP* 145). The ferryman is often referred to as “the giant” in the story, a modifier used not only in his first appearance (“the giant loomed there, motionless”) but also when he decides to take the boy to cross the river:

The giant bent down and scooped him [the boy] up in his enormous hands. After setting him on his shoulders, he stood up and climbed down into the boat. It gave way a little under his weight ... In a sudden movement, the boy embraced the ferryman’s neck, and let out a sign. Now the giant was able to grasp the pole with two hands; he pulled it out of the mud, and the boat slipped away from the shore. The water rushed more loudly under the glimmering, in the shadows. (*CP* 143)

The ferryman seems to be deprived of human characteristics while acquiring his spatial extensity, being previously described as “loomed,” “motionless,” and now “enormous” (*CP* 142-143). In comparison with such corporeal ambivalences is the boy’s intrinsic unrootedness: nameless, fatherless, and homeless. With the ferryman’s performance of “scooping up,” the boy seems to be temporarily framed and placed; the boy’s clinging to the ferryman’s neck further approves of this bilateral reliance and mutual trust as the two leave the shore and face

the similar threat posed by the rushing water (*CP* 143).

However, as the prose proceeds, the boat where the boy and the ferryman sat is capsized

as water keeps pouring in over the sides. Currents swirl through the hull, reaching the giant's thighs. In his huge legs he senses that the curved planks are giving way. Even so the boat does not founder; instead it seems to melt into the night. The man is swimming now, with the little boy still clinging to his neck. "Don't be afraid," he says. "The river isn't very wide. We'll get there soon."

"Oh please, be my father! Be my home!"

"You have to forget all that," the giant answers under his breath. "You have to forget those words. You have to forget all words."

He clasps the small leg—immense already—in his hand again, and with his free arms he swims in the limitless space of clashing currents, of yawning abysses, of stars. (*CP* 145)

In such an urgent circumstance in which the temporary protection, the boat, seems to be transient and illusive, the shore unreachable, and the water "pouring over in over the sides," the alliance between the ferryman and the boy, however, does not fracture: the boy still clings tightly to the ferryman's neck, and the ferryman, as an exchange, "clasps the small leg" of the boy's (*CP* 145). The figure of the ferryman is already introduced by Bonnefoy in his 1975 poetry volume *Dans le leurre du seuil* (*In the Lure of the Threshold*). Commented by Kane on this 1975 work, the river

is the real threshold. It is a river without a bed, flowing everywhere and nowhere, crossed by a ferryman who tells us nothing. His presence is, as always, a menace as

well as a promise ... It is a dangerous game, this dialogue with the ferryman, for we cannot know if he is anything other than a projection of ourselves. (443)

The ferryman illustrated in “The Curved Planks” is similarly intriguing because of such a conflicting characteristic, appearing as threatening when loomed motionless, yet also equivalently promising for carrying the boy and providing him comfort when the two swimming for the shore.

Confirmed by Rogers from his communication with the poet, Bonnefoy “is deliberately referring to the venerable legend of St. Christopher, who forded a river carrying the Christ Child on his shoulders. ‘Here as in the legend of St. Christopher,’ the author [Bonnefoy] commented, ‘it is the child who is divine’” (*CP* 199). Here the reversible element appears again, in which the unrooted, nameless child becomes the child of divine, embodying Bonnefoy’s revival of faith in humanity regardless of the predestined fate. Indeed, the reason why Bonnefoy adds a biblical allusion to this title prose is to demonstrate the benevolence engraved on the spirits of humankind. In the year of 2008, a Portuguese visual artist Paula Rego, with whom Bonnefoy had long craved for collaborating but vainly, chose the prose “The Curved Planks” as the model of her six etchings shown in an exhibition in Nîmes. Bonnefoy later left his reflections on the etchings, along with his rereading of the prose inspired by Rego’s artistic work. The poet speaks in a bold directness, that “what emerges ... is hope, in its purest form;” despite the darkness and despair, “we want to believe in another shore” (“The Curved Planks, Dear Paula, a postscript, and a note on Paula Rego,” retrieved from the internet).

In the essay that deals with the issue of loss and its connection to the landscape in the works of Yves Bonnefoy and Philippe Jaccottet, Stamelman speaks of Bonnefoy’s poetics as “envision[ing] a necessary coexistence between life and death, a co-presence of emptiness and plenitude” (31). In an inevitable state of absence and loss shared by these stone poems,



Bonnefoy still weaves in the sophisticatedly arranged positiveness that sheds light on such a paralyzing context, as I have previously revealed through the interaction between the ferryman and the child illustrated in “The Curved Planks.” Though the working of dynamism and the poetic faith will be thoroughly discussed in the second half of this chapter, the potentials to break away from former states as well as the slow yet steady gesture of starting anew can still be glimpsed from the following poems. In one of the “A Stone” poems, for instance, the potential, spatial positiveness is perceived through the contrast between the stanzas:

No more paths for us, nothing but unscythed grass.

No more ford to cross, nothing but mud.

No more bed laid out, nothing but stones

And shadows embracing through us.

Still this night is bright,

As we desired our death might be.

It whitens the trees, they expand.

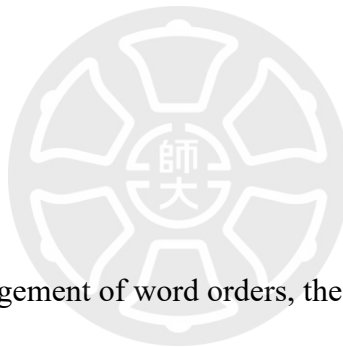
Their foliage: sand, then foam.

Day is breaking, even beyond time. (*CP* 31)

The first stanza depicts just another placeless space in which all spatial references are lost; the succeeding stanza, however, deviates from its precedent in both the form and the content. Clearly, we have two disparate textual spaces. To begin, the refraining phrase “No more” and “nothing but” is employed in the first three lines of the first stanza to ensure the continuous rhythm and the overall syntactic structure, which, significantly, also arouses the reader’s focus of the fundamental limitation and negation embedded in this narrative space. The

second stanza contrasts with the former one with its description of an exterior, omnipotent force that, regardless of the former denial, resolutely performs: the brightness of night “whitens the trees, they expand,” bringing forth the breaking of the day “even beyond time” (*CP* 31). Such an overall arriving is resolute and positive, and it is in fact the demonstration of the will: with the help of its firm and constructive character it fractures the previously mentioned inert and hostile space by bringing the light in (“Day is breaking, even beyond time”). This positive pervasiveness as well as performance actually appears early, in the first poem “Tree Frogs, at Evening” that opens the entire volume:

Our hands full or not:  
The same abundance.  
Our eyes open or shut,  
The same light. (*CP* 7)



From the poet’s intentional arrangement of word orders, the light as a presence that prevails (“The same light”) is enough to suffice humankind (“The same abundance”) leaving in whatever circumstances, be them deficient or excessive. By drawing the reader’s attention to the fundamental working of the images meanwhile carefully delineating the most minute and often neglected details, Bonnefoy presents the potential dynamism underlying the stone-like structure.

The unfastening of the stony landscape continues in “Passer-by, these are Words...,” a poem which narrates an anonymous passerby crossing the graveyard along with his/her encounter with the dead:

Passer-by, these are words. But instead of reading  
I want you to listen: to this frail

Voice like that of letters eaten by grass.

Lend an ear, hear first of all the happy bee

Foraging in our almost rubbed-out names.

...

Then know an ever fainter sound, and let it be

The endless murmuring of all our shades.

Their whisper rises from beneath the stones

To fuse into a single heat with that blind

Light you are as yet, who can still gaze.

Listen carefully, if you will. Silence is a threshold

Where, unfelt, a twig is breaking in your hand

As you try to disengage

A name upon a stone:

And so our absent names untangle your alarms.

And for you who now move on, pensively,

Here becomes there without ceasing to be. (*CP* 59)

The employment of pronouns such as *I*, *our*, *their*, and *you* have indicated the coexistence of disparate spaces in this poem. Inferring from the context, the I-narrator recognizes him/herself as part of the perished community whose presence already becomes a bygone past (“our almost rubbed-out names,” “our shades,” “our absent names”), which stand in sharp contrast with the passerby who is still capable of perceiving the external world in

terms of seeing, hearing, and touching (“who can still gaze”). Interestingly, it is the community of the deceased that, with their intrinsic immobility, progresses the entire poem: their agency is revealed through their ceaseless requiring of the passerby to listen attentively (“I want you to listen,” “Lend an ear, hear,” “Listen simply, if you will”), and by so doing unravels the different layers of sound (“the happy bees,” “an even fainter sound,” and “silence”) which ensures the passerby’s potentially receptive ability to the revelation of multiple spaces as well as their ultimate mingling and mutual, spatial transformation (“Here becomes there without ceasing to be”) (*CP* 59). By listening even to silence, the passerby crosses a threshold, and is granted the ability to hear and feel the natural vibration (“a twig is breaking in your hand”), and to care and approach voluntarily even the community of the deceased by showing the desire to know (“As you try to disengage / A name upon a stone”). Then in the final stanza, the two distinctive worlds of “you” and “our” mingle, continuing their mutual workings and transformations even under the passerby’s unawareness, since the “absent names” of the we community already “untangle your alarm” (*CP* 59). The divided spaces gradually “fuse into a single” unit as the exchange between the living and the dead is made explicitly comprehensive and without end, as the end line suggests: “Here becomes there without ceasing to be” (*CP* 59). What begins as indifferent and immobile obtains its growth through the spatial expansion and endless transformation; the space of disparate “here” and “there” has converted to “here becomes there.”

### **2.1.3 The Childhood House**

This section probes into another dimension of the seemingly static yet transformative poetic image of the deserted childhood house. The house image is essentially significant: not only does it foreshadow a probable answer to Bonnefoy’s personal poetic quest, but also, with its importantly poetic implications given in Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*, has the

ontological effect on the imagining subject. “Our soul is an abode,” Bachelard says, “[a]nd by remembering the ‘houses’ and ‘rooms,’ we learn to ‘abide’ within ourselves ... the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them” (*PS* 21). Since Bachelard already acknowledged that in *The Poetics of Space* only the “eulogized space” was depicted, Bonnefoy’s manifestation of the childhood house’s menace can be seen as fortifying the undiscussed phases of Bachelard’s house image. The analysis of this sophisticated, lengthy poem “The House where I was Born” follows the presented formal sequence to show the winding yet progressive process of the subjective recognition of the childhood house and the dweller lived within; in such an interpretation, similar to the spatial positiveness put in the placeless context as previously examined, the pessimistic as well as the optimistic imaginings of the house are simultaneously juxtaposed. In a total of twelve sections, 271 lines, Bonnefoy demonstrates numerous returns to the house in which the I-narrator was born, each time with subtle variations: the first three sections begin with a similar refrain “I woke: the house where I was born” to give a detailed illustration of the interior (*CP* 115, 117); the following in-between sections are fragmentary memories from other times, then, in sections VIII and X the refrain reappears yet deviates from its former structure, distinctively “I open my eyes: / This is the house where I was born, / Surely the one that was and nothing more” and “Life, then: and once again / A house where I was born” (*CP* 129, 131). These refrains function as watersheds throughout, indicating the psychological development of the subject and the focus of succeeding sections. For instance, from sections IV to VII are seen interlaced memories and dreams; section IX demonstrates the narrator’s rediscovering and the recognition of the house after a long, passive denial; sections XI and XII reestablish the value of the house with the narrator’s active exploration, which too presents the metamorphosis of the house from limited and definite (“*the* house where I was born,” emphasis added) to indefinite and universal (“*A* house where I was born,” emphasis added). Observed from this initial, rough segment of the house’s transformation, the image of the house is indeed multifold and

complex in both its forming and deforming.

To begin, the topological details are given in sections I and II with the careful illustration of interior objects; both the outside and inside view of the house are outlined through the narrator's observation and actual walking from room to room. Contrasting to this concrete, detail-given, physical structure is the apparent anxiety which, embodied by various forms of water such as wave, soft rain, and rapid stream, floods and swallows throughout the sections:

## I

I woke: the house where I was born.  
Spume battered the rock. Not a bird;  
Only wind, closing and opening the wave.  
The horizon all around smelled of ash,  
As though somewhere beyond the hills  
A fire was devouring a universe. I went  
Into the side room: the table had been set.

...

Water was already flooding the room.  
I turned the knob; the door wouldn't give.  
I almost heard them on that far-off shore —  
Children laughing in high grass. Others  
Laughing, always others, in their joy.

## II

I woke: the house where I was born.  
Rain was falling softly in all the rooms.

I went from room to room, looking  
At the water as it sparkled on the mirrors  
Piled up everywhere—some shattered, others  
Even tucked between the furniture and walls.  
...  
Here the only thing we ever own is dream:  
Though we reach out, our hand can never cross  
The rapid stream where memories recede. (*CP* 115, 117)

The exterior landscape of the house is devastated by the deprivation of visual vivacity (“Not a bird;” “The horizon all around smelled of ash”), leaving only the desolate impression “[a]s though ... / A fire was devouring a universe” (*CP* 115). The narrator walks inside the house for the shelter only to discover the similarly devastating flooding and, when he attempts to escape, the defense of the house (“the door wouldn’t give”). Being rejected by the house in the first place, the narrator is unable to explore this childhood place further; such spatial denial is even emphasized by the final depiction of the narrator’s hearing “[c]hildren laughing in high grass,” by how he/she stands as a bystander and realizes the immense spaces in between his isolation and communal delight (“I almost hear them on that far-off shore,” “Others / Laughing, always others, in their joy”). The narrator returns to the house again in section II, only to discover rain “falling softly in all the rooms” (*CP* 115). According to Bachelard, “water helps the imagination in its task of de-objectifying and assimilating” through “grouping images and dissolving substance;” what water achieves is to emancipate the poetic quality from objects with its embedded fluidity, to “contribute a type of syntax, a continual linking up movement of images that frees a reverie bound to objects” (*WD* 12). Indeed, the similar grouping of objects is achieved through water’s working under Bonnefoy’s poetic descriptions: water ensures not only the consistency of spatial structuring

of images but also the imaginative dynamism throughout. Since rain does not fall in the interior house, the water flooded the lines is highly metaphorical, a hidden narrative—memories of the past—that conceals from sight (“Though we reach out, our hand can never cross / The rapid stream where memories recede”). Importantly, the water illustrated here does not cease its occupation even with its disappearance: whether in an oneiric scene of the curved planks stumbling in the surging waves in section V, or the surreal shipwreck outlined in section XI, the water continues its threatening and pervasive working.

In section III, the narrator finds himself standing “on the threshold,” a noticeable and highly symbolic word in Bonnefoy’s poetics, between “two large figures:” one “an old woman, evil and stooped,” “the other ... radiant as a lamp” (*CP* 117). The figures are identified as the goddess Ceres in different phases, presumably before and after she finds her lost child. The two phases of the goddess represent also the narrator’s leaping between different time-space, along with his future alteration of attitude when rediscovering the value of the house. Standing on the threshold that differentiates past and present, mirage and reality, concrete, geographical place and immense, mental space, the narrator sets out to collect the long-lost memories in the succeeding section by “gather[ing] up / An armful of branches and leaves” which are “bristled with snags, / Throbbing hopes, points, and cries” (*CP* 119). The subjective, voluntarily entering the past is directly shown in section V:

V

... I get up,

I walk through the house from room to room,

And now the rooms are numberless.

I hear voices shouting behind the doors.

I’m distressed by these torments that pound

At the decrepit doorjambs. I hurry by.



The night drags on. Fear weighs me down.  
I enter a room crowded with desks.  
Look, I am told. This classroom was yours.  
Look at the wall. Those were your first images.  
Look, there's the tree, and there's the yelping dog.  
And this map that yellows on the wall,  
This slow discoloring of names and shapes,  
These rivers, these mountains that disappear  
In the whiteness invading language:  
This was your only book. Isis—  
The plaster wall peeling in this room—  
Has never had, will never have  
Anything else to open up to you  
Or close to you again. (CP 121, 123)

The numberless rooms are the projection of the narrator's mental spaces separated by partitions of time. "Space compressed time," Bachelard states, within which each particular fragment of memory is stored and placed (*PS* 30). From the narrator's perception of the sound blocked behind the doors ("I'm distressed by these torments that pound") and his unwillingness to enter ("I hurry by"), these securely placed memories are the ones that haunt, rendering the overall space of the childhood house hostile. Reluctantly, the narrator still enters one of the rooms that reveals one of the central conflicts the following sections desperate to solve, namely the father-son relationship. This room is well organized owing to the thorough employment of spatial deixis ("*This* classroom," "*Those* were your first images," "*there's* the tree," "*there's* the yelping dog," "*this* map," "*this* slow discoloring of names and shapes," "*these* rivers," "*these* mountains," "*this* was your only book," "*this*

room,” emphasis added); with the contents along with the distances these demonstrative pronouns imply, the room is simultaneously finite yet infinite, familiar yet also strange. Near the end of the section, the goddess Isis who is recognized by her ability to protect and love the child appears, forecasting the father-son relationship in sections VII and VIII.

The father figure appears in three fragments in section VII, the first two are memories indicated by the past tense, while the third one is a postponed confession the narrator wished to dedicate to his father with the verb tense simple present. In the memory, the father was first spotted in the garden, “stood motionless. Where he was looking, / Or at what, I could not tell—outside everything. / Stooped as he already was, he lifted his gaze / Toward the unachieved, or the impossible” (*CP* 125). The amorphous gaze of the father is never understood by the child even till now, as the narrator confesses: “[w]ho he was, who he had been in the light: / I did not know, I still do not know” (*CP* 125). The alienation is further depicted when the son saw his father “slowly walking forward” to work, with “so much tiredness / Weighing down his gestures of former days;” whereas the child “was strolling with some classmates / In the afternoon, timeless as yet” (*CP* 125, 127). The difference between the father and the son, in which the former seemed withered in his fatigue whereas the later stayed complete ignorant of such weariness and only squandered his abundance (“timeless as yet”), has further dramatize the failure of their relationship. Desiring to reconcile with his father when returning to this childhood house, the narrator then depicts an image of the father playing cards with the son, a scene perceived “[a]s something of a sign, something that might nourish— / What, being a child, he cannot know—some kind of hope” (*CP* 127). Yet, since the whole reflection is put in the parenthesis as the unknown confession, this hope is never found or realized. The intimate feelings derived from this father-son relationship has proliferated to the extent that the narrator finds it difficult to bear and reach: “always they well up again, / And tell their truth” (*CP* 127).

Such a relationship continues to occupy the narrative in section VIII, in which the

suspension of the house comes to the fore and further announces its stop:

## VIII

I open my eyes:

This is the house where I was born,

Surely the one that was and nothing more.

The same small dining room looks out

On a peach tree that never grows. (*CP* 129)

This is the house bereaves of extensional possibilities and spatial flexibility (“the one that was and nothing more”); the interior layout looks the same, even the peach tree planted in the garden ceases its growth. This static moment, however, is simultaneously magical, as the whole scene is presented with the narrator’s seeing the child (could be his other self) observing the parents who sit “in front of the window, face to face” from the garden; watching from afar, the child “[k]now[s] that life can be born from these words” (*CP* 129). The spatial shift is implicitly formed as the narrator bravely confront the past with this gaze, along with his acceptance of all its promises and turndown.

The value of the house meets its watershed and is further transformed in section VIII. By reexamining the father-son relationship through multiple angles, the narrator slowly yet steadily accepts the relationship as it is with the lucid claim: “I only need to recognize and love / What had returned from the depths of my life,” which is “[a] long lost place of here and now” (*CP* 131). The realization to some extent relieves the narrator’s pressure resulted from the kinship, which further reshapes the narrator’s realization of the childhood house; since the house is already identified as “the house we have lost,” the narrator determines to embrace its state of becoming which resembles “words / That only seem to speak of something else” (*CP* 133). The house that previously described has become indefinite and truly numberless from

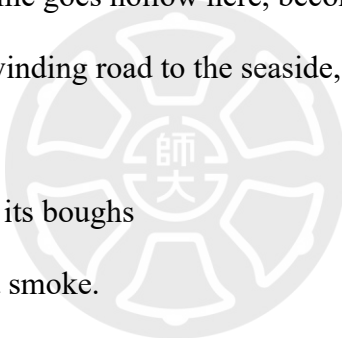
section X; the proliferation of the house, in return, also helps rebuilt the father-son relationship by the narrator's frank confession: "How I loved those days of ours" (*CP* 133). Though the intimate reflection is still put in the parenthesis, it still proves to be a tremendous shift considering the narrator's first encounter with the house's hostility in beginning sections:

(I was almost awake,  
How I loved those days of ours, preserved  
The way a river slows, already caught  
In the resounding arches of the sea.  
They moved with the majesty of simple things.  
They moved with the majesty of simple things.  
Vast sails, the sails of all that is, agreed to lift  
Our fragile human life aboard the ship  
That the mountains wrapped around us.  
O memory,  
Their luffing silence decked the sound  
Our voices made, like water on stones.  
No doubt on the horizon would be death:  
But milky as that shade where beaches end,  
At evening, when the children still touch bottom  
Into the sea, laughing in tranquil waters, and still play.) (*CP* 133)

The influence memory on life is similar to how the river gradually erodes the cliff and creates out the sea arches; such impact, however subtle and slow, will always find their presences in their endless (de)formation ("In the resounding arches of the sea"). The whole seaside view is

imbued with realization and serenity; although the narrator sees clearly the omnipresence of death, he still unravels in such a threatening termination the fertility of life (“No doubt on the horizon would be death: But milky as that shade where beaches end”). The symbolic water that fiercely demonstrates its presences in the opening also becomes “tranquil” where children laugh and play. This tranquility resulted from the reconciliation with the past memories has significantly stabilized the inner mental state of the narrator; it too urges the narrator to “start out again” (“Et je repars”) to refound the childhood house.

The final two sections, XI and XII, can be regarded as the manifestation of Bonnefoy’s entering into another space, one that is simultaneously immense and intimate, divergent and cohesive, human but also divine. The geographical shift is clearly given: the narrator now walks on the landscape “where time goes hollow here, becomes / Eternal water surging in the foam” (*CP* 133). Following the winding road to the seaside, the narrator witnesses



A black candelabra, all its boughs  
Engulfed in flames and smoke.  
What can we do? people cry out on every side.  
Shouldn’t we help the voyagers out there  
Who’re asking us for berth? Yes, darkness shouts.  
And then I see how swimmers in the night  
Race toward the ship with one hand raised  
Above the stormy swells, holding the lamps  
That stream with colored pennants. (*CP* 135)

This timeless space where the wreck took place might be one of the polymorphs of *a* house: through the event of life and death, saving and being saved, Bonnefoy demonstrates a house that is open to all human beings on earth through the exchange of human benevolence and

shared love (“then I see how swimmers in the night / Race toward the ship ... holding the lamps”). Here the childhood house clearly breaks away from its geographical concreteness with the poet’s purposeful uplifting of the content to that of universal; the house is becoming abstract, a vision as well as the idealized vessel that desires to place not only the poet’s own expectation of home but that of humankind (“Shouldn’t we help the voyagers out there / Who’re asking us for berth?”).

The metamorphosis of the house is clearly given in the final section, which, continuing the wreck theme, prompts the narrator to rethink the desire and need to return to this house which is now, similar to the boy in “The Curved Planks,” “immense already” (*CP* 145):

## XII

Beauty and truth. But tall waves crash  
On cries that still persist. The voice of hope,  
Above the din—how can we make it heard?  
How can growing old become rebirth?  
How can the house be opened from within,  
So death will not turn out the child  
Who asked for a native place?

Now I understand: it was Ceres  
Who sought shelter on the night  
Someone was knocking at the door.  
Outside her beauty suddenly flared—  
Her light and her desire too, her need  
To slake her thirst with the cup of hope:  
She might still find that child again,

Even if lost ...

We must pity Ceres, not mock her—and so  
Must meet at crossroads in deepest night,  
Call out athwart our words, even with no reply:  
And make our voice, no matter how obscure,  
Love Ceres at last, who suffers and seeks. (*CP* 135, 137)

In this final section, Ceres makes her appearance again in a much vivid description; similar to the house that has gone through series of deformations to ultimately become the house that “opened from within” (*CP* 135), Ceres too is immersed in the apparent determination and confidence (“her beauty suddenly flared— / Her light and her desire too, her need / To slake her thirst with the cup of hope”) which is entirely different from her impression made in section I (“Yet she had to come in, the *faceless* one,” emphasis added). As I previously mentioned, Ceres can be taken as the narrator’s double owing to the reason that her search for the lost child bears high similarity to the narrator’s reestablishment of the value of the house. Since the narrator already understands the transformative quality the house possesses, Ceres too transforms her image to a positive whose search manifests the will of humankind. By saying that the house must “be opened from within,” the true value of the house is ultimately clear: it is Bonnefoy’s poetic space made visualized. The search for the house, on the other hand, proves the poet’s own struggle for making his poetic space approachable and imaginable. With both passive and active imaginings of its malice as well as promises, Bonnefoy demonstrates the fanning out of the house from a single definitive object to a collective unit; he too delineates the multiplicity of poetic space with the proliferation of the house.

## 2.2 Poetic Advancing of the Images

The purpose of the previous section is to give an overall examination of how imagination functions and continues opening up multiple spaces with its pessimistic imaginings, which is to show spatial positiveness or growth even in the negative, textual spaces. In this section, I intend to present in a detailed way how spatial positiveness is achieved with the focalization on a single poetic image, namely the stone and the boat; to pursue that purpose, I need Bachelard's related discourse on *dynamic dialectics* presented in *The Poetics of Space* to better examine the literary techniques Bonnefoy employed in his work. As discovered, Bonnefoy would often demonstrate the spatial tension resulted from simultaneously paralleling the oppositional pairs, creating in both a single poem and the entire work particular tension. For instance, the poet would heavily use punctuations, refrains, enjambed and end-stopped lines to show the break or continuity of the rhythm and the content; he would too use the identical, recurring image whose meanings varied under different circumstances to indicate the tension throughout, such as the similarly forlorn yet divine child in "The Curved Planks." The tension created out of the rivalry between oppositional pairs is, as I see it, crucial in motivating the space that is previously regarded as placeless, inert, and completely immobile. It is indeed a particular momentum that helps shape this poetic space of Bonnefoy's. To further explore the topic, I first look into Bachelard's discourse on *dynamic dialectics* to provide a possible explanation for the dynamism created out of the opposite, I then examine two particular images, the stone and the boat, to further prove how Bonnefoy illustrates the positive imaginings with the negative textual evidences, and how the poetic image further demonstrate the poet's will to imagine and venture



### 2.2.1 Bachelard's Idea of Dialectics

Proposed in *The Poetics of Space* under the chapters' headings of "Nests," "Shells," "Corners," and "Miniatures," the word *dialectics* is heavily employed by Bachelard when discussing these transformative house images, to see in them, such as the images of nests and shells with the creature's action of "huddle[ing] up to itself, takes to cover, hides away, lies snug, concealed," the primitiveness in man (*PS* 112). In many literary examples of nests, Bachelard exemplifies how the dynamism arises from the state of withdrawal discovering from Jules Michelet's notes which give the first illustration of the bird's building and shaping its nest from within; the look of the nest thus resembles the bird's appearance. What Michelet suggested through this observation is, according to Bachelard, "a house built by and for the body, taking form from the inside, like a shell, in an intimacy that works physically;" truly, it is the image of "the dynamism of a strange withdrawal, which is active and in a state of constant renewal" (*PS* 121-122). As for a shell, its dynamism is interestingly embedded in its particular design since "[e]verything about a creature that comes out of a shell is dialectical" (*PS* 128). For instance, the contrary actions of the visible and the invisible, exposure and concealment are simultaneously seen in this particular abode; much aggressive, physical appearance which involves a spatial expansion is when "[a] creature that hides and 'withdraws into its shell' is preparing 'a way out'" (*PS* 131). What Bachelard revealed through these two images is the *oneiric house* of man, in which "the dreamer is seized by convictions of a refuge in which life is concentrated, prepared, and transformed" (*PS* 139). These are the primitive houses that store the reverie of man, which also, with their positiveness, emancipate the dreamer's life from its former bounds to celebrate its true vitality.

After imagining the animal dwellings, Bachelard restores the spatial exploration of various houses to the domain of man, of corners and miniatures of the regular house. The

image of corner is viewed as a rarity in literary works due to its inherent misapprehension “of a certain negativism,” illustrated by Bachelard, “in many respects, a corner that is ‘lived in’ tends to reject and restrain, even to hide, life. The corner becomes a negation of the Universe” (*PS* 155-156). Relating to this corner image is often an individual’s excessive silence and solitude, which with its stillness has further confirmed the primal characteristic of man, namely immobility. Since the body already regards itself to be “well hidden ... in a corner” thanks to the corporeal immobile, “an imaginary room rises up” immediately to exemplify man’s dreaming capacity (*PS* 156). Thus are the dialectics of this corner image: the dreaming being becomes active once realizes he/she is hidden in a relatively rigid place, or the mind soars while the body remains still. Bachelard latter concludes the previous images of nests, shells, and corners with the discussion of miniature to provide collective and overall pondering. One of the decisive factors to enter and perceive the world of miniature is, again, through the liberation of the imagination, a particular working that magnifies the minute and renews the world which brings a forest out of a meadow and a thicket a tuft of grass (*PS* 179). Echoing both to the imaginative opening proposed in Chapter One and now the dynamic dialectics, imagination indeed possesses “a suppleness so miraculously that the image can be said to represent the sum of the direction that enlarges and the direction that concentrates” (*PS* 188). Ultimately, in the world of miniatures, “disparate things become reconciled” (*PS* 190). <sup>3</sup>Although the reconciliation between disparate domains will not be discussed until Chapter Three, from the above illustrations of how imagination grants positive potentials to the dreamer we still understand perfectly its importance in revitalizing the former, obsolete spaces.

### **2.2.2 The Matter of Will: Throwing Stones**

In section one, the stone motif is either examined by its intrinsic, material

characteristics of primitive and stillness, or through the second layer of meanings, the tombstone, to address the fundamental predicament of man. Nevertheless, in some of the poems we examined there is still found a potential, spatial positiveness in the seemingly negative context through the assemblage of conflicting components. The purpose of this subsection is to further advance the previous readings on stone poems to present the third stage of stone's transmutation: one that is vivacious and active, and able to manifest the will of the imagining being. One of the nine stone poems is noticeable for its frankness in praising the power of imagination as well as its capability of revitalizing the former sensations:

Spare, bare, transfigurable: the things

In our rooms were simple as stones.

We loved the crevice in the wall, a bursting

Ear of grain that spilled out worlds.

Clouds, this evening,

The same as always, like thirst,

The same red dress, unfastened.

Imagine, passer-by,

Our new beginnings, our eagerness, our trust. (*CP* 13)

In the first stanza, the details of the room are magnified to the extent that they acquire certain space for themselves, like stones scattering on the ground; what occupy, to be precise, are things out of use, inadequate, simple, yet able to transmute ("Spare, bare, transfigurable"). The following poetic lines can be recognized as a demonstrative process on how things of exceptionally mediocre are given dynamic characters: the crack in the wall appears to be productive and fertile by its juxtaposition with the grain; the clouds and the dress in the

second stanza are brought up by their sameness (“The same as always”), yet within that repetitiveness are “thirst” and the status of being “unfastened” (*CP* 13). The dynamism not only appears in the content but also in the form, as the whole stanza is divided into little fragments with the heavy employment of punctuations and end-stopped lines; the repetitive words such as “the same” and “our,” on the other hand, ensures the consistency between the fragments. Two dynamic verbs “unfastened” and “imagine” are given special focus to infuse motion into the static, stone-like space, turning the ordinary (“The same as always”) to novelty (“our new beginnings”) where the desire and confidence potentially lies (“our eagerness, our trust”). Undeniably, the verb *imagine* proves to be the key factor that emancipates things from their previous, static states.

The stone image also penetrates the final section of the volume “Throwing Stones,” a section consists of three single-page prose respectively titled “Driving Faster,” “Driving Farther,” and “Throwing Stones.” These titles already foreshadow a gradual development of determination and dimly take-shape hope. “Driving Faster” recounts a particular moment of driving experience on the road that seems to pierce “straight toward” the horizon before dawn, at sunrise, and after sunset; however, the sunrise is but transitory, and soon after its flame “died out,” “again the great night loomed ahead, empty of stars” (*CP* 175). The prevailing conflict between space and time, the former being a “stony expanse” while the later transient and compressed, is purposely made by Bonnefoy to emphasize the fleeting joy when the light makes the faces recognizable: “in the car they could look at each other now” (*CP* 175). “Driving Farther” continues the theme, yet with two variations: the stony landscape appears not on the side of the road but is part of it, “the road itself had started getting rocky,” and the sun no longer stands for the anxious wait, for “[n]ight ruled the world from now on, with no conceivable end” (*CP* 177). The previous stone-related poems are collectively presented here with their all-pervasive presences: they not only physically occupy the entire surface but also attempt to paralyze the motion of the car.

Then the stone began to bulge, splitting the pavement; after that the outcrops thickened and expanded. The car had to jolt along these swollen veins as they broke into sharp points ... At times we had to clamber out and lift it to one side to skirt a rock barely visible in the dark, much larger and longer than we'd thought. (*CP 177*)

Even in such a rugged surface and hostile environment, the car continues functioning, “[d]riving anyway, driving ahead, since miraculously the engine never gave out” (*CP 177*). If the aim of the first prose is to demonstrate how man should “drive faster” to chase the final sunlight, the dim hope, then the image of the miraculous engine depicted here captures precisely humankind’s determination to venture even in the vacancy devoid of light: “Moving forward at any price, always moving forward” (*CP 177*).

This long drive stops at the third prose “Throwing Stones” in which passengers are seen throwing and pulling stones in the night, a vain, painful struggle that immediately finds its root in Sisyphus:

How far we would throw them now, throw them over there to that other side without a name, that abyss without a high or low, with no roaring waters, no star ...

Hands that were shredded soon. Bloody hands. Hands pushing roots aside, digging at the earth, gripping the rock that strained against our grasp. Blood crimsoned our faces too. But always we raised our eyes from the devastated ground toward other eyes, again with that laugh. (*CP 179*)

The purpose for such performances is absent, the determined course and the destination untold, and the labor itself the most excruciating. The performers, however, is well aware of

the futility of such a laborious process; the meeting of each other's eyes indicates the equivalent exchange within the community, which, with the laugh that immediately succeeds, even illustrates the willingness and confidence shared by humanity. Although such awareness of futile labor forces man to recognize their predicaments, it also, as Camus inspiringly suggested in "The Myth of Sisyphus," "crowns [their] victory" (109). Perhaps the final remarks by Camus are enough to address the confidence Bonnefoy left unsaid:

This universe henceforth without a master seems to him [Sisyphus] neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (111)

In *Earth and Reveries of Will* (1948), Bachelard has given different investigations on terrestrial matters; as always, he values the dynamism of the opposing features with the intention to search "their many hidden attractions, all their affective space concentrated in the interior" of material substances (6). The interrelationship between the imagined matter and the imagining subject is proposed through such a discussion. "The earthen objects we work return an echo of the inner forces we expend on them," Bachelard suggests, "[t]he moment we give it the full benefit of our dreams, working with matters awakens in us a narcissistic love of our own courage" (6). In *The Poetics of Space* Bachelard also illustrates the correlation between the two with the co-constitution of the human-house experience when facing the natural threat together. Bachelard delineates such discovery from a passage of Henri Bosco's *Malicroix*: when man is situated in a house which interior is completely silent regardless of the storm violently taking over the exterior, even the resident within is "seized with the sensation of something vast and deep and boundless," described by Bosco (PS 64). With this passage, Bachelard argues that the value owned by the house is infiltrated to man:

[F]aced with the bestial hostility of the storm and the hurricane, the house's virtue of protection and resistance are transposed into human virtues. The house acquires the physical and moral energy of a human body. It braces itself to receive the downpour, it girds its loins. (CP 67)

The alliance between the house and the resident within is established to withstand the force of the universe, a must-subsist hostility for man to retrieve the most intimacy of the human space. With this particular bond, the house image and the imagining subject perform a collaborative resistance, and, significantly, a collective will. Indeed, what has been presented through these scenes of "Throwing Stones" is the intertwined working of the imagined image and the imagining subject, which, in their collective bond, a united will is demonstrated: the values that stone possess have now enlivened man. Similar to the hardness of stone, the narrator and his companions who once trapped in a Sisyphus-dilemma proclaim their fortitude that will lead them to the ultimate, human victory. "[T]he imagination and the will," Bachelard concludes, "are in truth interdependent" (6); though their intertwined correlations will be further discussed in Chapter Three, we can surely glimpse at present how they can be inseparable from each other with the demonstration of stone image.

### **2.2.3 The Nautical Search: Venturing of the Boat**

Apart from stones, the boat image also aptly demonstrates the will of the imagining subject. The boat is foremost the carrier of hope: it indicates a passage from here to there, and it often ensures a promising, though unpredictable, immense space for the narrator to explore. For instance, in section five of the poem "The House Where I was Born," the narrator often dreamed himself lying on the hull of the boat with his "[e] yes and forehead pressed to the

curved planks / Where ... the river knocking:" a straightforward yearning for "a higher or less somber shore" (*CP* 121). Although the boat image may sometimes imply the raging water or violent seas, one that likely reminds the readers of the wreck happened in "The Curved Planks" or the final scene of "The House Where I was Born," it can still be seen as a poetic gesture that reveals Bonnefoy's faith in poetry. In one of the longer poems "In the Lure of Words," a transitional process of how the boat gradually finds its positiveness is depicted. At first, similar to stones or water image that often starts with negative illustrations, the boat appears to be dysfunctional, as "a wavering prow" turns "[t]oward open seas—and then began to drift / Below the clouds, a boat whose rower / Had forgotten, looking for other lights, / To dip his oar again into the night" (*CP* 95, 97). The similar confrontation arises from the juxtaposition of oppositions: the rower who is responsible for advancing or veering the boat is occupied by his own affairs ("looking for other lights"), leading to the drifting of the boat "perpetually without a shore" (*CP* 97). The lengthy yet aimless wander has put the first-person narrator *we* into a state of exhaustion and doubt:

... Hearing the sand  
That crunches under our prow, we do not know  
If we have reached for another shore, or still remain  
In the fevered folds of our earthly bed. We do not know  
If we make a landfall in another world; we do not know  
If hands reach out from that welcoming unknown  
To take the rope we toss them from our night. (*CP* 101).

Similar to the boat that loses all motion, the series of performances too indicate the immobility of the "we" community. To be clear, apart from the first line that gives the real description of their surrounding environment through the employment of dynamic verb



(“*Hearing the sand*”), all the other lines are merely the community’s speculation (“we do not know”) and are not necessarily applicable to the real circumstances. The element of oppositions again rises from their expectations of where the boat taking them to (“If we have reached for another shore, or still remain / In the fevered folds of our earthly bed”). Since the boat’s action proves to be nothing but whimsical ideas, the “we” community is left suspended just as the boat drifting in the sea.

Yet, just as the nature of the childhood house is recognized in the narrator’s confrontation with its menace, the boat also gradually reveals itself when the narrator starts to confront its intrinsic ambivalences:

The planks at the prow of the boat—curved  
So the mind will have a shape to bear the brunt  
Of the unthinkable, of the unknown—are coming loose.  
What do these creaks and splinters tell me now,  
Sundering the thoughts that hope had joined? (*CP* 103)

Although the boat appears still as an uncertain carrier due to its undefined, even hostile components (“these creaks and splinters ... / *Sundering* the thoughts that hope had joined,” emphasis added), it is still given primitive values due to the narrator’s recognition of as well as listening to its shape and sound. Similar to the house, the boat has undergone transformative process with the narrator’s subjective imagining working on it; such imaginative uplifting frees the boat from its previous wandering state, as “[t]he planks ... are coming loose” (*CP* 103). Then, with the narrator’s resolute statement “And yet a word remains, burning my lips” (*CP* 107) along with is later repeating salute to poetry, what the boat signified has finally become lucid:

O poetry,

...

I name you now, confident that memory  
Will teach its simple words to those who seek  
To make meaning be, despite the enigma;  
That on its ample pages it will trace  
Your single, multiple name ...

Your boats glides on, always dark,  
But with shadows gathered at the prow.  
They sing like settlers of former times,  
When at the end of a lengthy voyage  
Earth waxed larger in the foam,  
And a beacon shone.

If anything remains  
Beside the winds, the sea, the reef,  
I know that even at night you will still be  
The anchor dropped, the footsteps stumbling in the sand,  
The branches stacked, the spark  
Under sodden wood—and then, in the anxious wait  
For a wavering flame,  
The first word that ends the drawn-out silence,  
The first fire kindled in a lifeless world. (*CP* 107, 109, 111)

Indeed, the boat is one of the “single, multiple name” of poetry (*CP* 107), a “metaphor for [Bonnefofy’s] poetic awareness” (Rogers, *CP* 203). This poetic image embarks the proportional despair and aspiration: its duality lies in its adherence to the intrinsic motion of searching and berthing, or its conflicting features of staying goal-driven and idle. Even if it is sometimes perceived as obscure and perplex (“Your boats glides on, always dark, / But with shadows gathered at the prow), the narrator still audaciously proclaims its value through naming (“I name you now, confident ...”) and believes that it will reward the one who searches with its plenitude eventually (“Will teach its simple words to those who seek / To make meaning be”). Bonnefofy’s association of poetry with natural settings too indicate his poetics to be forever bonded by this earth he values (“Earth waxed larger in the foam, / And a beacon shone,” “Beside the winds, the sea, the reef,” “The branches stacked, the spark / Under sodden wood”).

Indeed, Bonnefofy’s attitude toward poetry has persistently innovated in this volume through the arrangement of conflicting elements that constantly recontours the poetic landscape: the ravine and the rugged surface is filled with nourishing water, the stones existing in complete stillness as epitaphs are made moving, and the water of violent surge manifests the humanitarian rescue. In Chapter One, we already understand that it is Bonnefofy’s employment of imagination that this poetic space is initially outlined; here the poet further displays his awareness of the working of imaginative power as well as the spatial growth by presenting to readers not only spaces that are attractive but also the ones that are unfriendly. By exemplifying how an individual image has its evolving, imaginative uplifting, Bonnefofy shows how it is capable of setting free the boundaries by “[bringing] us to an extreme situation beyond which we are afraid to venture” (Bachelard, *PS* 193). On the surface of *The Curved Planks* are indeed scattering stones that persistently “make creaking contortions” and transfigure (Bachelard, *PS* 195):

The stone where you see his weathered name

Was opening, forming a word. (CP 57)

By listening attentively to echoes of poetic images, and by imagining them to the extent that the imagining being's will is displayed, Bonnefoy presents to us how imagination works and continues shaping and fortifying his poetic space.



### Chapter Three: Confidence

#### *The Anchor's Long Chain (2008) and The Present Hour (2011)*

In the preceding chapters, I present how the poet's dealing with poetic images differ from time to time, which also influences the way Bonnefoy constructs his poetic surfaces. Contrasting to the former venturing into many spaces, *La Longue Chaîne de l'ancre (The Anchor's Long Chain, 2008)* and *L'Heure présente (The Present Hour, 2011)* display a comparatively motionless involvement in which Bonnefoy endeavors not to establish new territories but to reconcile with his inner thirst with a confident gesture and poetic maturity late in life. Both *The Anchor's Long Chain* and *The Present Hour* comprise prose and verse, which unprecedentedly include a sequence of sonnets consisting of two quatrains and two triplets. The former volume continues the nautical search in *The Curved Planks* through retrospective glances and reflections, attempting to seek, or build, possible places to anchor the poetic awareness; the later, on the other hand, looks back at former themes to demonstrate the poet's present renewal on his poetics. The two volumes are juxtaposed not only for their formal resemblances but also their manifestation of the poet's reflexive mind: composed in the quite late years of Bonnefoy, the two volumes recount what Brahic calls the "autobiographical elements point towards subliminal narratives" (*PH* 1), and a gesture of "a tranquil fearlessness—a trust in continuous renewal" as described by Rogers (*SS* xxix).

Emphasized in this chapter is Bonnefoy's negotiation with the self of the forever confronting conflicts rise between the inner and outer, which lead to the poet's further retrieving of the spatial and spiritual immensity: the poet would approach the places that once lured him with a better reflective mind, and he would see in their fixation a greater need to surpass, both geographically and intellectually; he would also concentrate on how the objects, whether imagined or merely perceived, co-constitute the interiority of the imagining, subjective self. Through exchange between as well as the reconciliation with the inner and

outer, humankind is “no longer shut up in his weight, the prisoner of his own being” (Bachelard, *PS* 212); the poetic space thus “*opens up and grows*” (Bachelard, *PS* 218). The two volumes, therefore, see a full closure of Bonnefoy’s poetic space, a construct in which the poet is able to place his imagining act, will, and self. This chapter is divided into two parts to better clarify my claims: the first section continues to explore the relationship between the poetic image and the subject along with their mutual working, the second one focuses on Bonnefoy’s reconciliation with the inner self, which too brings forth his poetic faith.

### 3.1 Dreaming the Immensity

In this section I intend to further discuss the interrelationship between the imagining subject and the imagined image, namely how the inner and the outer achieve their consistency, how they collaboratively perform the spatial malleability, and how they ultimately open up immensity that points to the depth of the dreaming being. Immensity, as Bachelard sees it, refers to the liberation of thoughts from former sensations; it is also a means to offer the possible working of imagination within the dialectics of large (immensity) and small (miniature) to further exemplify its contribution to the theory of poetics of space. What must be highlighted here is that the idea of sizes is never definite but relative, and is seen merely “as the two poles of a projection of images” (*PS* 22); such knowledge also makes clear that “the impression of immensity is in us, and not necessarily related to an object” (*PS* 22). With such a recognition, “since immensity is not an object,” Bachelard describes, “a phenomenology of immense would refer us directly to our imaging consciousness” (*PS* 202). The inquiry into images of immensity would immediately prompt the subject to “realize within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination” (*PS* 202). From the above deduction, we understand that the achievement of immensity is through changing one’s perception of the

exterior world and paying attention to one's ability (as well as potential) to imagine.

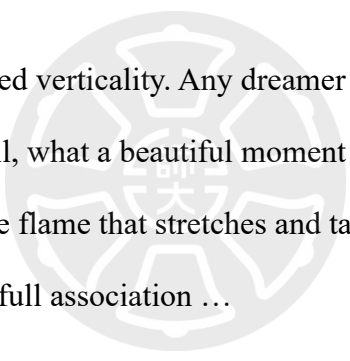
Ultimately, this imagining consciousness becomes the very reason responsible for an individual's mental liberation: "it flees the object nearby and right away it is far off, elsewhere, in the space of elsewhere" (*PS* 202). The spatial relativity immediately creates a sense of immensity, which, since such a consciousness is embedded in our very being, also renders humankind the being of grandeur, a "being that 'knows no bounds'" (*PS* 217). Even if a being becomes motionless or is physically confined to geographical places such as corners or rooms, he flees to elsewhere at once in his daydream. The flexible crossing of the exterior and the interior is therefore proposed since "immensity is within ourselves" (*PS* 202). To better explain the interrelationship between the inner and outer, the being and the image, I first turn to Bachelard's idea of *verticality* to imply their co-workings as well as the imagining depth of the being, then I closely examine Bonnefoy's poetic demonstrations in search of evidence for the convergence of inner and outer.

### 3.1.1 The Imagining Depth

The sense of immensity is the intimate effect co-constituted by the poetic images and the being, achieved only when the being is able to perceive the profundity of the image, of its verticality and its depth. The term *verticality* is employed with Bachelard's illustration of the house image first seen in *Earth and Reveries of Repose*; though the childhood house has long lost to its dweller, human being is still capable of returning to it by dreaming. "When one knows how to grant to all things their exact dream potential, one lives more fully in the oneiric house," Bachelard states, "[t]he oneiric house is a deeper theme than that of the house of our birth; it corresponds to a more profound need" (*PIR* 151). The word *verticality* is used in the first place since the house is physically, "vertically organized: its cellar firmly rooted in the earth, the ground floor for daily life, the upper floor for sleeping, and the attic near the

roof” (*PIR* 151). Unquestionably such the image of the childhood, oneiric house becomes the dominant theme in *The Poetics of Space*, symbolizing an “integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind” (*PS* 28); being purposefully depicted as a vertical and concentrated being, this primitive house too “appeals to our consciousness of verticality ... and centrality” (*PS* 39). The image of the house arouses the imagining depth of the subject, so to speak; the value of the house becomes that of human beings as well. This co-constitution is already revealed with the mutual development and transformation found in “The House Where I was Born” in *The Curved Planks*.

The most illustrative image concerning the interweaving depth of the image and the being is shown in Bachelard’s final, unfinished work *The Flame of a Candle* (1961):



The flame is an inhabited verticality. Any dreamer of flame knows that the flame is alive ... And what a full, what a beautiful moment when the candle burns well! What delicate life in the flame that stretches and tapers out! The value of life and dream then reach their full association ...

... One may well be interested in the inner swirls surrounding the wick, and see in the depth of the flame stirrings where shadow and light struggle. But every dreamer of flame lifts his dream toward the summit. It is there that fire becomes light. (*PIR* 160)

This candle image is, as Bachelard sees it, the prefiguration of “all the reveries of verticality” (*PIR* 160). The candle, with its shimmering, dim light speaks for the essential solitude of man. As Huang observes from this candle image, the solitude which often entails stillness cannot be simply taken as the feature of negation, but must be interpreted ontologically; from his understanding the solitude truly has the positive structuring on the spirit of humankind,



and that Bachelard indeed sees man's fullness in the candlelight's solitude (92-94). Although the man seems to be physically confined to the room, his imaginative mind frees him from his solitude. In his deep involvement and immersion in the candlelight and in the flame that flares at the peak, the man also "experience[s] a transcendence of being" (*PIR* 159).

### 3.1.2 The Convergence: "He Dreamed; He Set Sailed"

With the co-working of both the interior and the outer, the imagining being and the perceived, imagined object, the immensity is unquestionably achieved in the title poem "Ales Stenar" of *The Anchor's Long Chain*, a metaphorical verse consisting of two sections inspired by the prehistoric stone circle found near a cliff in southern Sweden. Being arranged to an oval shape resembling a ship with two particularly high stones erected at two ends as the prow and the stern, and with the burial chamber and remnants found underneath the surface, the stone ship is believed to be a tomb that ferries the deceased to their splendid voyage of death. Legend has it that buried underneath the stone ship is King Ale the Strong, a mythological figure from Sweden. The keynote of the entire poem is established in section I with the interlaced movements of a legendary boat and the poet's rumination:

I  
They say  
Boats appear in the sky;  
And from some of them,  
The anchor's long chain trails down  
To our hidden, fleeting earth.  
On our prairies, among our trees, the anchor hunts  
A place to moor—but soon, a higher will

Wrenches it loose.  
Elsewhere's ship does not want a here:  
Its horizon opens in some other dream.

Even so, it can happen:  
Maybe the anchor, heavier than usual,  
Drags near the ground, rumpling the trees.  
We almost see it catch on a church door,  
Under the arch where our hope fades away.  
Awkwardly, someone from that other world  
Clammers down the taut, lurching chain,  
To deliver his sky from our night.  
What anguish, as he works against the vault,  
Grappling with his strange iron hook...  
Why must something within us  
Lure the mind, in this crossing  
Our words attempt, unknowingly,  
To reach their other shore? (SS 147)

The whole section is, as seen from the last four lines of the second stanza, the whimsical glimpse of the narrator's imaginative mind; the very beginning of the poem ("they say") not only indicates the hearsay surrounds the stone ship but also aggravates and foreshadows the agitation aroused from within the speaker ("something within us / Lure the mind"). The need to inhabit a land is particularly visualized and embodied in the allegorical boat ("the anchor's long chain trails down / ... hunts / a place to moor"), implying man's attempt to get hold to particular concreteness (in this context the earth) which paradoxically

appears to be forever fleeting; when a place is thoroughly familiarized, however, man's desire of conquering other places bid him depart ("but soon, a higher will / Wrenches it loose"), and once again man is thrown into the abyss of placeless-ness to continue the futile, oneiric quest similar to a ship forever voyaging in anonymous seas ("Its horizon opens in some other dream"). Under the self-contradictory context of mooring and departing, the narrator, however, imagines the proximity of the achieved and the unachievable, of how the anchor nearly reaches out for religious comfort but fails ("We *almost* see it catch on a church door," emphasis added), and how the stranger "from that other world" manages to occupy a particular land yet relinquishes eventually in the ellipsis with the movement undone (SS 147). The section ends with the speaker's doubting of the tempting nature of humankind ("Why must something within us / Lure the mind"), alluding meanwhile to the previously made proximity and the boat image that is doomed to be buoyed up eternally in the shoreless sea.

Section II begins by questioning the purpose of constructing the stone ship with the examination of the Swedish legend: "What did he want, the prince of this land, / When he had so many tall stones / Raised upright on a cliff, to rhyme / The form of a ship?" (SS 149). The speaker then responds to the question, which sees the vitality of life sprouting from within with sophisticatedly arranged tension arose from the conflicting images.

... Maybe to depart  
One day, on this sea between world and sky—  
Though still faltering, almost in distress—  
And at last, perhaps to enter that port  
Some would seek in death, imagined  
As a life more intense, a glimmer of lights  
On the sweep of an empty coast.  
The vessel, the nave of his desire,

This prow in rock, this beautiful curved hull,  
Moves motionless. I try to read  
In immobility the going forth  
He printed on his dream ... (SS 149)

The sea serves as an intermediate passage between world and sky, thus the approachable and the unreached, life and death: it connects the polarity of here and there with its spatial malleability. The stone ship, on the other hand, bears the subjective will (“the vessel, the nave of his desire”) to wade in the sea even if in a state of confusion or undefined compulsion (“faltering, almost in distress”); its destination is the port named death, a realm ought to be desolate yet serves as a lighthouse, a recognizable place in the immense sea (“a glimmer of lights / On the sweep of an empty coast”). Despite the promises granted, along with all the imaginative movements oscillate in between, the boat of which the speaker envisioned remains motionless, being only the stone tomb on a cliff. The boat’s immobility lasts no longer once the the narrator unravels its embedded, oneiric quality, urging it again to conduct its imaginative performances (“I try to read / In immobility the going forth / He printed on his dream”).

The juxtaposed opposition continues till the end of the poem, in which the “immobile” speaker observing from here and now contrasts sharply to the “going forth” of the legendary prince in his most extreme immobility (sleep/death). Then, unexpectedly, the two layers of narrative interlaced despite their different spacetimes:

He dreamed; he set sail. But here, today,  
Before us and around us, there’s nothing  
But the sky of this world—clouds, rays of light;  
Then, on the stones that blacken and merge,

The thunder's arrow; and suddenly, the rain.  
Headlong, a downpour engulfs us, and now  
The steles shape a single presence, bursting  
Into view, there and there again—until it vanishes,  
Though the lightning still runs through them.

...

Later, turning back  
To the ship of rock, under skies  
Of summer morning once again  
(And what can we do but turn back,  
In this life where nothing stands still?) (SS 151, 153)

Till this moment, a locale for the whole poem becomes clear: the speaker is facing the stones, observing and contemplating; the weather in the meantime is intense, with clouds gathering, lightning striking, and rain pouring down. The “here” in which the speaker confronts is fierce and overwhelmed by natural forces, reminding the reader the placeless landscape described in *The Curved Planks*. Such a bleak and identical illustration is already given by the first three lines of the stanza with the words “but” and “nothing but;” the pessimism is further denoted by Bonnefoy’s employment of parenthesis in which another “but” and “nothing” are stressed (“And what can we do but turn back, / In this life where nothing stands still?”).

In the most depressing state where double negation is aligned, the speaker still sees something miraculous; a gift from nature, performing almost a miracle:

I see a big seabird alight  
On the stone meant for a prow: an instant  
Of the mystery, motionless and wordless,

A simple life can live. The bird looks off  
Into the distance; he listens, and hopes.  
He guides the ship on—and others, others  
Surround him with their cries; around him,  
Above him, they fade into the wake. (SS 153)

The message carried by this seabird image is multifold: it distracts the speaker's attention from the former hostility received from the external world; it embodies what Rogers proposed as "fraternal solidarity" between man and nature (SS xviii); its surveying gaze diminishes the distance between here and there, rendering the unattainable probable; the most fundamental one being its appearance which alludes to Bonnefoy's humanistic care of the chipmunk seen in *Beginning and End of the Snow*. Importantly, not only the worlds of man and nature interlaced but also the real and the legendary: the seabird's movement has awakened the prince, urging him to act in a most fearless and emblematic stance of veering the ship, "Il mène le navire" ("He guides the ship on," SS 153). Although the prince's activeness immediately diminishes with the line "they fade into the wake" reassuring his dreaming state, the message is still lucid: the greater, spatial immensity is no longer confined to the motion of the corporeal but through the emancipation of the imagining being.

What "Ales Stenar" demonstrates is the superimposition of multiplicity framed by the narrator's daydream state. The two characters, the narrator and the legendary prince, consistently resonate with each other in their doubling, both strive for a larger capacity for their subjective agency to consciously, purposefully, and actively engage with the world notwithstanding their physical inactiveness: the former being merely as an observer, and the later forever quiet in his death ("I try to read in immobility;" "He dreamed; he set sail"). Daydream manifests the working of the imagination which is so different from the nocturnal dreams; since it "produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any

other,” from the very moment of its functioning it immediately “transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity” (Bachelard, *PS* 201). The activity of the mind frees the condition of the body, which along liberates “all obligations of dimensions” including that of the spatial or geographical boundaries (*PS* 173). “Daydream is not geometrical,” Bachelard therefore concludes, “[t]he dreamer commits himself absolutely” (*PS* 185). With the thorough infiltration into the oneiric realm and let oneself be seized by the puniest image of the external world, one is fully aware of his/her capacity to dream: “by detaching me from my life, it transforms me into an imagining being” (*PS* 186). With the juxtaposition of different spacetimes, movements, status, and the doubling of two characters, the poem explains how dreaming subjects, both the prince and the narrator, breakthrough their confining state with the inbuilt agency. Though being physically confined, they still successfully acquire the spatial immensity as the two characters co-constitute a promising gesture: “he listens, and hopes” (*SS* 153).

The failure of acquiring the spatial capability through the daydream is given by Bonnefoy in one of the sonnet sequences “A Stone” which landscape reminds the reader of the ship stones displayed in “Ales Stenar.” The character of “he” still appears, yet unlike the former presence continuing sailing in his dream, this “he” is bereft of any potential for subjective transcendence.

He dreamed. He died. Where is his tomb?

Passer-by, if you venture these slopes,

Will you unearth the words he scrawled

On frost-split stone? Will you detect his voice

Below the insects’ rasp? With a careless tread,

Will you push his life even further down? (*SS* 209)

A sequence of questions is given without answers, each gradually enlarges the distance between the passerby and the “he” figure buried beneath the ground. Contrary to the observing narrator in “Ales Stenar” who bestows the poetics onto the stone tomb, the passerby depicted here neglects the possible, imaginative opening of the image, walking indifferently by (“With a careless tread”). Without the surveying gaze (“Will you unearth the words”) and the active mind (“Will you detect his voice”), the spatial potential perishes. Unlike the hope regained in the interaction between the observing and the observed in “Ales Stenar,” here the immobility of the “he” figure represents nothing but lethal (“He dreamed. He died”).

The image of immensity is also abundantly given in a prose “Remarks on the Horizon” which title already explains the purpose as well as the object of the prose. Bonnefoy begins his inquiry straightforwardly:

We always talk about it—or in it, we might say. When we make plans, when we love.

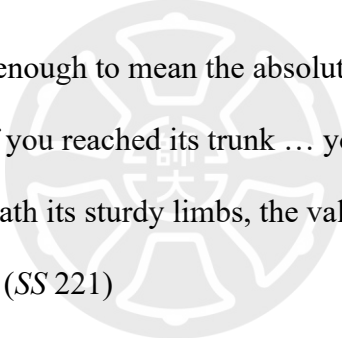
When we love: because loving a being, a path, a work, is seeing that this line over there, so far ahead ... is right here, just as well; that it crosses them over and over, like the surf when it slides back and forth on the sand, lifting the restless algae’s hidden life, dropping it again.

The line of over there, the line of right here: each throws the foam of the unconscious mind beneath our steps, the sparkling phrase that glides to the breaker’s crest—the wave swelling upward like a night, then crumbling to rise again. (SS 215)



Given the clues from these lines, the horizon for Bonnefoy might refer to a nexus between two relative ends, embedding in its implication the ability to collide, converge, or realign. As seen from the opposition of here and there, or the wave in its ongoing, conflicting movement (“slides back and forth,” “swelling upward...then crumbling to rise again”), the relative ends function not as a rivalry but a companion of proximity, one that used by Bonnefoy to encourage the reader to accept a space in between: “[w]hoever has thought of the horizon has no need of any god: he’s content with these distances” (SS 217).

Since the relation of two ends is nothing but relative, they are, to some extent, reversible, as illustrated in Bonnefoy’s discovery of the tall tree on a hill:



The tree was far away enough to mean the absolute, but close enough to seem like a point in this world. If you reached its trunk ... you would still have time to discover, from underneath its sturdy limbs, the valley unknown till this moment, and the familiar house. (SS 221)

The tree in this image stands metaphorically as the horizon the poet endeavors to describe: it functions as a precise place for convergence, “unit[ing] the two movements that concentrate and dilate” (Bachelard, *PS* 207). The tree also finds its familiarization in the observer when the later clings to it wholeheartedly; the intimacy exchanged between the seen and the perceived has triggered off the most primal value of man, rendering the tree trunk “the valley” and “the familiar house” (SS 221). The poet then speaks in a more straightforward manner: “[o]ver there, we’d probably find our country from over here” (SS 221). By humanizing the landscapes, constantly crossing over here and there to draw them closer, and “keep[ing] their hold on us for the rest of our lives,” the values granted to the place’s concreteness are rooted in the subjects. Bonnefoy eventually recognizes that “at last, the

horizon is with us. We touch it; we cross it at random, back and forth” (SS 225). Such an exclamation is the true awareness and also an ecstasy: it points to a nexus opened from within to contact with the external expanse, the awakening of the conscious being to attune to the phenomenological world. Similar to “the house opened from within” as demonstrated in Chapter Two, the inward horizon suggests also the power of the imaginative mind. A greater liberation arises, and “[i]n this activity of poetic spatiality that goes from deep intimacy to infinite extent,” Bachelard claims, “one feels grandeur welling up” (PS 218). The poetic opening within the imagining subject is the effect done by the horizon, which, concluded by Bonnefoy in the prose, also has its promising effect: “[h]orizon ... A word that would favor the landscape-painter among us, pledging him the future earth hopes for, and needs” (SS 225). With this final remark, Bonnefoy’s confidence in the horizon as well as the primitive, intimate feelings it arouses are clearly seen.



### 3.2 The Ultimate Dialectics

Here we need to reexamine the intertwined relationship between the subject and the imagined image, their co-workings, and the ontological effect the image has on the imagining subject. Shortly beforehand I use the term *immensity* proposed by Bachelard to illustrate the above aspects. It needs to clarify that the convergence in such a context does not necessarily suggest a united, dissolving process which brings a cease-fire to oppositional ends; the term is rather employed to demonstrate a rather harmonious and dynamic correlations. In fact, the aim of this section is to probe into this dynamic, dialectical correlation of inner and outer to further prove Bonnefoy’s relentless pursuit of his poetics. Being a loyal advocator for the dynamic imagination, Bachelard indeed values the importance of keeping the oppositions their flexibility, and is well aware of their distinctive characteristics. For instance, human beings are essentially an entity that constantly on the move: “[e]ntrapped in being, we shall

always have to come out of it, and when we are hardly outside of being, we always have to go back into it” (Bachelard, *PS* 229). This particular phenomenon of being is described by Bachelard as *a spiral*, which is “a number of invertible dynamisms” that make a person unknowing of himself “running toward the center or escaping” (*PS* 229). This explains the fundamental unsteadiness engraved on humankind’s performances. Importantly, this ultimate dialectic is one of the inborn characteristics of humankind and should not be recognized as a barrier to reach the being’s depth: the immensity or the profundity/verticality of the imagining subject can still be achieved through the imaginative faculty. In another word, it is exactly through the intrinsic, dynamic dialectic that a person retrieves his/her own center.

Bonnefoy’s poetry well presents this dynamic dialectic, resulting mainly from the poet’s intrinsic ambivalences such as the restless yearning for *true place* shortly discussed in Introduction. Though the desire proves to be unceasing, Bonnefoy’s attitude toward such an inner thrust is ever-evolving: he still clings to the belief of seeking true place where his poetics reside meanwhile being fully aware of its unachievability; he chooses to imagine, venture, and risk despite the often-futile results, and he indeed is content with the search. Such a developing stance of Bonnefoy is what this section attempts to delve into, which, I argue, could also well explain the poet’s poetic space as a full closure that embodies Bonnefoy’s being. In this section I first examine closely Bonnefoy’s prose and poems from two volumes to display the poet’s confrontation with his intrinsic turbulences, focusing mainly on the poet’s recognition of the yearning that lures, and then the poet’s persistent faith and confidence even in such conflicting circumstances. With the readings provided, I return to delineate Bonnefoy’s poetics, of how he believes poetry to *act* and *be*, to further illustrate the poetic center Bonnefoy clings, which too help explain my proposed hypothesis of equating Bonnefoy’s being as the manifestation of poetic space.

### 3.2.1 Recognizing the Lure: “Sail On, Disappoint Them”

A series of geographical-related prose and poem are presented here to demonstrate how Bonnefoy strives to reconcile with his inner urge by recognizing its lure. Through these poetic landscapes, Bonnefoy again gives his rumination on place and space meanwhile confronting the unachievability of his desire; by facing and accepting the inbuilt confinement of life along with all its predicaments, the poet reaches the agreement with himself as well as intrinsic turbulences. The subsequent prose “Leaving the Garden: A Variant” and poem “Ulysses Passes Ithaca” are selected in 2008 collection *The Anchor’s Long Chain*, both illustrate an imagined place with Bonnefoy’s intentionally relating to the biblical or mythological backdrops: the former being Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden, the later recounts Ulysses’ returning to Ithaca from twenty years of wandering.

In “Leaving the Garden: A Variant,” the whole setting of the locale is highly metaphorical: first the dense trees that balked the two beings, then “unfolds an expanse of gentle hills verdant with a tinge of gold” (SS 227), then “an otherwise deserted earth,” “the open threshold” (SS 229). The purposefully arranged associations have given anxiety to this described landscape, rendering it identical to the one presented in *The Curved Planks*, an undifferentiated, “clearly uninhabited” placeless space in which human beings are lost:

[t]he young woman stretched out her arm toward who knows where, toward a horizon. And then they set off again ... but even so, aren’t they still there? You could almost believe they’re motionless. (SS 227)

In a space devoid of reference points, even the time “still hasn’t begun” (SS 229). Four characters are introduced in the prose, respectively Adam, Eve, the I narrator, and the child whose voice and presence seen only by the narrator. Although Adam and Eve’s departure

from the Garden serves as the keynote, these two characters are somehow reduced to the background owing to their ignorance: in a place deprived of spatial and temporal dimensions, not only the two refuse to “give any of this a thought,” they also, voluntarily, “consent to wander off into the dark” (*SS* 229).

The lack of the couple finds its abundance in the I narrator, who stands in contrast with the two is fully conscious of the external world and is ready to be involved. With the unfinished sentence “[t]he imagination keeps insisting...” which begins the whole prose, the reader immediately realizes that, from the very start, the succeeding illustration of “[a] man and a woman [Adam and Eve]” are nothing but a whimsical creation of the narrator, subsidiary and unknowing (*SS* 227); the fact is actualized once again by the narrator in a much straightforward manner: “I look at these two beings I imagine” (*SS* 231). The narrator, therefore, is more of a dominant creator than a mere teller: he veers the reader’s attention from the backdrop of the two biblical characters as well as the landscape where “the greatest silence [once] prevailed” onto a mysterious sound that enchants him.

A sound. Which seemed to come from father off, but also from closer by, than all these random, uneventful noises ... Was it just a musical note, the echo of a little flute from distant plains? Was it a human voice? I listen. (*SS* 229, 231)

The act of listening is always worth pondering in Bonnefoy’s oeuvre: it is a redemptive as well as a humble gesture that displays the subject’s willingness to accept and to reach out, and here to build a connection between the self and the other. Contrary to the narrator’s curiosity, Adam and Eve remain “[n]onplussed—and maybe still doubtful” (*SS* 231). As the prose proceeds, the sound proves to be a boy who, strangely, proclaims his presence only in linguistic contexts of interrogative sentences, subjunctive moods, or future tenses particularly employed by the narrator. When hearing the noise in the bush, for instance, the narrator

assumes that it is a human being, “*as if* someone had been crouching” (SS 233, emphasis added). The narrator continues the speculation on this human figure with a sequence of unidentified descriptions:

... Someone *who'll* scurry off and lie down on the grass, *who'll* jump up and run again—but then *he'll* pause, think it over, and return ... *Is* he the voice that called from the other side of the visible, the little flute I heard dreaming there? *Yes*, only a child would prowl like that, naked and artless, in this solitary place.

And in fact, he does return ... *I know I'll* spot him several times more along the trail, eager to watch the man and woman—wanting to be seen, and yet afraid. (SS 233, emphasis added)

Since these grammatical structures are often used to arouse the uncertainty, assumption, or anticipation of the subject, the child might be interpreted emphatically to be the narrator's yearning for rationalizing the landscape, or, as what children usually function in Bonnefoy's late works, an emblem of hope.

Although the child's movements are prescribed, his state of being is but the narrator's imaginings similar to Adam and Eve's imagining flee, his sentiments and the failure of approaching the couple somehow haunt the narrator relentlessly. As previously examined, when the narrator describes the child's meeting with the couple on the road, he emphasizes the child's ambivalence whether to get near or remain his invisibility (“eager to watch the man and woman—wanting to be seen, and yet afraid”); the child's self-restriction obsesses the narrator, urging him to further scrutinize the child's motivation in so doing.

I think of the last time—after how many others, who can tell?—when the child

crept up to spy on them, ready to throw himself at their feet. He curbed his desire, but why? Did he understand it was there, right away, that everything would end? Is that what spurred his desire, so he renounced it with even greater grief, or darker joy, to rove through eternity once more? (*SS* 235)

These questions seemed to be randomly placed, yet their answers are already embedded in these inquiries. Children in the most general understanding are a status contrary to grownups, recognized often as credulous, innocent, and vital; in Bonnefoy's late writings, however, children are presented rather congruously with the shared feature of being delightful and weary, naïve and mature, abundant but also vacant in what have been inherently given to them as seen in "On the moss-stained ..." ("a child playing / With too many dreams," *CP* 61). The child presented in this prose also suffers from his dual inclination for inhabitation and departure ("rove through eternity once more"); although he might receive comforts and security from this human bond, the couple's presence also reminds the boy of his possible future, of seeing with indifferent mind and living with unrealized hope ("there, right away, that everything would end").

Recognizing this termination of letting oneself be forever confined to particular placial experience concretized by the values and intimacy felt within the human interactions and correlations, the child throws himself to the unknown ("spurred his desire ... to rove through eternity once more"). An implication of the narrator and the child's doubling is implicitly suggested since the ambivalent wrestling against one's desire is also mentioned by the narrator beforehand. The landscape abounds in silence was loved by the narrator, who yet confessed later that the serenity of the place "started to trouble me, as much as it treasured me before" (*SS* 231). Since the narrator, presumably the poet himself, is omnipotent in bestowing his active imaginings on this highly allegorical sketch, the characters presented can be to some extent regarded as the narrator's own projections. With the performances as well as

uncertainties clearly illustrated by the narrator, the child clearly doubles the narrator: the child's tentativeness serves similarly as the narrator's stance when facing the yearning. Bonnefoy indeed understands the tempting nature space possesses by saying that "[s]pace is such a lure" in a sonnet "San Biagio, at Montepulciano" (SS 207); it is also true that the poet would very often reveal his concern for such a futile quest as implied in this prose:

Will we ever reach what we long to grasp? I'm afraid not. A mysterious diffraction gets the best of us; and hard as we resist, our hand is pushed away from what we desired. (SS 233)

The recognition of the necessary failure ("Will we ever reach what we long to grasp? I'm afraid not") does not confine the poet from exploring, nor restricting his imagining act; on the contrary, the poet repeatedly demonstrates his determination to go through the trials, to test himself to the limit, and to proclaim his faith in such a quest.

In the sonnet "Ulysses Passes Ithaca," Bonnefoy provides another reflection on the place with his rewrite of Ulysses returning to his homeland.

What's the pile of rocks and sand? Ithaca...  
You know you'll find the bees, the ancient dog,  
The olive tree, the faithful wife. But look:  
The water glitters, black under your prow.

No, don't waste another glance: this coast  
Is just your threadbare kingdom. You won't  
Shake the hand of the man you are now—  
You who've lost all sorrow, and all hope.



Sail on, disappoint them. Let this island slip by,  
Off to port. For you, this other sea unrolls:  
Memory haunts the man who wants to die.

Speed ahead. From this day on, set your course  
For that low, huddled shore. There, in the foam,  
Plays the child that you once were, here. (SS 205)

The poem deploys with the narrator's persuasion of Ulysses to sail on, even if the king in such a home-bound journey is so close to his homeland Ithaca, a place thoroughly familiarized by the king with the values given ("you'll find the bees, the ancient dog, / The olive tree, the faithful wife"). In contrast with the king's presently unsteady stance on the ship, or, if put in a larger context, an undifferentiated, grand space of sea, Ithaca serves as the place of concentration of former memories and sentiments as well as the pause.

However, Ithaca is purposely defamiliarized as the poetic lines proceed; from a place of stability it gradually becomes the remnant of bygone values, and ultimately a barren land ("this coast / Is just your threadbare kingdom"). The reason for such defamiliarization comes exactly from the king's present identification with himself ("You who've lost all sorrow, and all hope") as well as the knowledge of the spatial potentials that sets him free from the bound to a fixed place ("The water *glitters*, black under your prow;" "For you, this *other sea unrolls*," emphasis added). In the traditional sonnet form, a sudden turn of the thought known as the volta is expected, which usually takes place in between the octave and the sestet of the Italian sonnet or before the final couplet of the Shakespearean sonnet. In this sonnet, however, Bonnefoy demonstrates not one, but two dramatic turns. After congregating and dispersing Ithaca's place-ness displayed in two quatrains, the subsequent triplets show double

turns of spatial attitude: first by the king's resolution of leaving the place ("Sail on, disappoint them. Let this island slip by, / Off to port") and then with the similar determination of seeing that place as destined to return to ("From this day on, set your course / For that low, huddled shore"). Ithaca, being put in such a dialectic imagining, has become one of the multiple, oneiric houses of Bonnefoy, in which "a profound need" is satisfied, as well as "the root, the bonds, the depth, the fathomlessness of dreams" (Bachelard, *PIR* 152).

### 3.2.2 Poetic Faith: "He Seemed Buoyed Up, Forever"

Bonnefoy's poetry, as I presented rather briefly in the Introduction, desires to cling to centrality, which alludes to the poet's search for the *true place*; yet, paradoxically, "the search for center leads to a process of decentering" (Naughton 35). Nonetheless, it is particularly due to this fluctuation and forever dialectics that render Bonnefoy's poetry a unity and a center. Importantly, Bonnefoy's evolving attitude toward placial and spatial lures also helps to fortify such a poetic center. I illustrate such an advance by examining three correlating sonnets "He Dismounts," "He Goes Off," and "He reaches the High Seas" in the poet's 2011 work *The Present Hour*; the development of subjective movements is quite clear even from the titles, that each of the poem recounts the present status of the leading character as well as his/her relative position in the place. Although the poems are presented here in a gradual, developing manner, it needs to be emphasized that each presented phase is a unique response to the poet's clinging to centrality.

"He Dismounts" narrates a rather fixed context of the here and now, along with the narrator's care for the earth. The recognition of one's predicament is explicitly mentioned in the very beginning of the second quatrain; such an interrogation, however, is shortly resolved by the narrator:

Happiness didn't much smile at me on this earth.  
Where am I going? In these mountains  
I seek silence, peace of heart. This is my country,  
I will not stray far from here now.

My heart? Does it go in peace towards its hour?  
See, this earth we love is in flower,  
It is spring: the earth is once more as if new ... (PH 46)

Importantly, the word *earth* appears three times in this sonnet, entailing Bonnefoy's self-affirmation of the earth's essential plenitude as well as the poet's appeal for readers to recognize the beauty that is at hand, in the here and now: "The earth *is*," Naughton implies, "Bonnefoy will never cease insisting upon it," that "[t]he earth is our reality" (3). By claiming the territory in one's rediscovering of the here and how ("This is my country, / I will not stray far"), one not only reaches a peaceful reconciliation with his interiority but, with such an immersion of one's intimacy, revitalize the outer landscape ("the earth is once more as if new").

In the next sonnet "He Goes off" the character continues his/her wander, the similar resolution demonstrated earlier in the poem "Ulysses Passes Ithaca" is now similarly revealed as the bystander "watched him depart" (PH 47). The character, being "[u]ncertain at first," shows his confidence in his endless pursuit of either taking the winding paths, "[t]hen taking this road, then that / And others, still others, into his night," or to venture into the grand, even vacant space:

Tall trees over there, thick, impenetrable,  
He walks on, immobile, we don't know

Whether he wants to venture into their other world.

Or if, like the sun whose work is done,

He drops his brushes, and goes to stretch out

In peace, on the stone slab of the evening sky. (*PH* 47)

The word *immobile* placed in the first triplet implicitly echoes back to the multifold, spatial development of King Ale in the title poem “Ales Stenar” of *The Anchor’s Long Chain*, in which death poses the ultimate confinement to the body, yet the imaginative act sets free the mind. The “he” character illustrated here might share the similar corporeal confinement since he departs along “into the night” and “into ... other world,” and is fundamentally “immobile” (*PH* 47). Considering that Bonnefoy was almost by the time the volume was published, the whole image can thus be interpreted, even biographically, as an aged man walks through his final days to the ultimate death. With the poet’s final imagining twist in seeing the man “go[ing] to stretch out / In peace” as if “the sun whose work is done,” we understand for certain that the character being described has no fear of this journey even though the character’s individual reflection is not given. By purposefully relating human beings’ ultimate death to daily routine (“like the sun whose work is done”), Bonnefoy too weakens the inner anxiety as well as the menace of the death.

Such a transcendence found its lucidity in “He Reaches the High Seas:”

He reaches the high seas. I remember

His prow, a face

With closed eyes, smiling. He seemed

Buoyed up, forever, by this mysterious

Movement of the stem, borne alone  
By dark forces, but desiring a shore  
He would not have known, nor wished to say  
Where, in the impenetrableness of his night. (*PH* 50)

The first quatrain immediately reveals the function of the two characters in this poem, the I narrator and the “he” figure: the former being an observer who narrates the “he” figure’s achievement (“He reaches the high seas”), while the “he” character functions as the double of the poet with his movement identical to the ultimate dialectics of Bonnefoy’s poetics.

Immediately in the first stanza we already sense the undeniable confidence suggested by the figurehead carved on the prow (“a face / With closed eyes, smiling”). Since the figurehead is seen to protect the ship from the damage caused by natural forces or as the emblem of the ship’s spirit, it too implies the sailor/“he” character’s fearlessness in venturing into raging seas. Indeed, the deliberate alignment of the poetic line has further insured that this smile actually indicates the “he” character’s state of mind since the two words are so closely placed (“With closed eyes, smiling. He seemed”). The second quatrain, on the other hand, delineates again man’s vain search and the strangely unresting desire (“borne alone / By dark forces”) in so doing. It is worth mentioning that in previous poems, such as the ones examined in the earlier sections or the boat image examined in “In the Lure of Words” in Chapter Two, the yearning for a place is never explicitly stated; this could be the poet’s first confession of the unachievability of such a craving. As the lines implied, it may be that the “he” character possesses no knowledge of this shore (“desiring a shore / He would not have known”), or he remains purposefully silent on its precise locale even though he does know its place (“... nor wished to say / Where”). The intrinsic conflict is outwardly shown as the “he” character

The character ultimately becomes part of the waves; he immerses contentedly in the forever kinetic performances of the ship (“He seemed / Buoyed up, forever, by this mysterious //

Movement of the stem”). Or, to explicitly put and to allude to the previous boat-poetry metonymy in “In the Lure of Words,” the poet follows wherever his poetic boat guides him to. In the end, the emphasis of the whole placial search lies not on arriving, but anticipating and accepting; the destination proves to be illusory, yet one is granted for experiencing various landscapes along the way. In such a distracting, winding path, however, the poet does not lose his center: he proves the depth of his being once more.

The opposing elements are not only visible in the late writings of Bonnefoy; on the contrary, they made their appearances in the very beginning of the poet’s writing career with *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve* (1953), which title already renders “its central experience ... dialectical” (Maurine 65). In Bonnefoy’s later volumes, particularly *In the Lure of the Threshold* (1975), the similar dialectical experience prevails again, manifesting the poet’s incessant anxiety for the image, form, and language; the poet, though, still has his unique way of dealing with the dialectical experiences, as explained by Starobinski with the illustration of the poem “The Scattered, the Invisibles” taken from this volume:

Words like the sky

Today,

Something which gathers, disperses.

Words like the sky

Infinite

And yet contained in this moment within the brief pool. (398)

Although the opposing elements are everywhere to be seen in this poem, Starobinski reminds the reader to focus on their inter-balance, on how pairs of opposition remain perfectly consistent through their divergence: the unity is retrieved through the arrangements of

juxtaposition of variation (398-399). Starobinski concludes that such balance is Bonnefoy's poetic demonstration of between-two-worlds. Indeed, through the employment of rival objects, Bonnefoy does not fear the threat to disperse the poetic content; on the contrary, he sees it as a strategy to retrieve or to better demonstrate the center of his poetry. The dialectics ultimately become the aggregation of the poet's poetic values, a dynamic center to which the poet's poetry returns.

### **3.2.3 Bonnefoy's Homecoming**

Places can be geographically delineated or spiritually, confidently inhabited; the former is presented in Bonnefoy's poetry with different encounters of disparate places and spaces, the later, to be precise, lies in the poet's particular stance on his poetics, such as the fearless gesture of venturing in Chapter Two and the confident, promising attitude given in Chapter Three. These performances have further fortified Bonnefoy's poetic structure, rendering it habitable and solid for placing the poet's poetic being: Bonnefoy's poetry is where he inhabits. In Heidegger's contemplation on Hölderlin's poem as well as the idea of poetic dwellings, he mentions that "poetry is what really lets us dwell;" since the performance of that dwelling requires a building to live in, "poetic creation, which lets us dwell," therefore, "is a kind of building" (213). Adhering to such an idea along with vivid, structural components, Bonnefoy's poetry too serves as a kind of building, the poetic space as I name it, in which the poet's poetic being resides. Considering Bonnefoy's approach to and even his faith in poetry, this poetic space is indeed the manifestation of the poet's belief in this earth.

Oftentimes, Bonnefoy would compare poetry to a structure, a place to live in, and particularly a place of religious context, which is a temple. In the essay "The Act and the Place of Poetry," Bonnefoy has explicitly justifies the very purpose and function poetry needs to perform in its nowadays plight; he also clarifies in it his long-term expectation as well as

the hope of poetry. In the beginning, Bonnefoy alludes poetry to a certain structuring when mentioning Dante's evocation of Beatrice through poetic devices "to build for her a castle or presence, immortality, returning" (*APP* 101). He then directly relates literary works to man's dwelling, bringing about the perception of seeing poetry as a form of structure that places particular, placial experience. Of course, such experience of man's dwelling should not be misunderstood as a comforting shelter; we might, however, encounter the obscurity that forces us to escape into this structure in the first place.

The truth is that there is always something ambiguous about all great works. And this makes them more deeply akin, among all edifices, among all mansions whose eternity is assured, to a temple, to the dwelling of a god. For the temple ... seeks to establish in the dangerous region the security of a law. Here we escape from the shadowy and the indefinite into the crystal clarity of the timeless. But in the secret heart of the temple, on the altar or deep in a crypt, the unforeseeable is present ... as though a well had been pierced in that luminous enclosure to reveal the unknowable depths of the place. (*APP* 104)

The depths of the place imply the depths of the poetry. Although Bonnefoy encourages the reader to see poetry as "always preserv[ing] within its closed dwelling the sense of an unknown existence, an alternative way of salvation, a different hope," he reminds us still the uncertain, fluctuated depths embedded in its very nature (*APP* 104). How to secure this structure? What is the right "act" of performance to redeem the hope and recognize this "place" anew?

Bonnefoy insists that we must believe in the here and now, identify every presence, and have faith in the earth. In Introduction, I already stated that the act of poetry, as Bonnefoy observes from Baudelaire's poems, is the act of love and of building connections with the



surrounding elements, no matter how transient or subtle they are. I also mention, though in a brief manner, that Bonnefoy's search for the divine is *without* God/gods and is *in* this world, along with his recognition of the earth as our only reality. I would like to return to and further elaborate these ideas to demonstrate how Bonnefoy retrieves his poetic act and finds his poetic space by developing his own unique poetic voice. What must be focalized first is Bonnefoy's cautious attitude toward concepts, language, and speech. As the poet sees it, language presupposes the danger of fixation and conceptualization; it also possesses the "well-known incapacity to express the immediate" (*APP* 113), corresponding to what Bonnefoy says in "Baudelaire's Tomb" from *The Anchor's Long Chain* that "words we can but guess" (*SS* 187). Yet, the employment of language is inescapable, and we, being restricted to the only tool at hand, is bound to its limitation. Bonnefoy, in this regard, encourages us to recognize its failure and to "take it merely as the means of an approach" (*APP* 133); he further directs our attention to simple and real words, words that can "be an action" and restores hope:

And it is true that in authentic poetry nothing remains but those wanderers of the real, those categories of possibility, those elements ... which are the earth, wind, fire, earth, the waters—all the indefinite offerings of the universe, concrete but universal elements. Here and now, but everywhere beyond the here and now, under the canopy and in the forecourt of our place and our moment. Omnipresent and alive; one might say that they are the very speech of being that poetry draws forth. One might also say that they *are* words, being no other than a promise. They appear on the confines of the negative of language, like angels retelling of a still unknown god. (*APP* 114)

The elements are Bonnefoy's words of reality, and the earth is taken as the manifestation of

the divine; being everywhere and forever vital, they speak *to* us and *in* us in the form of words. “[T]he most vividly perceptive objects of this earth ... must be named,” Bonnefoy insists, “[t]herein lies all our hope” (*APP* 113).

The way that language’s plenitude appears exactly on its confinement is the demonstration of what Bonnefoy calls *a negative theology*. This idea of showing the presence of God by what He *is not* appears throughout Bonnefoy’s oeuvre, which is similar to his exemplifying of presence through the absence, life through death, and movements through the immobility. By directing our concentration onto the earth itself, the poet seeks in it “the divine or sacred in the material and existential real. It is the ‘word’ made flesh ... [or] [t]he ‘flesh’ made word” (Naughton 25). Whether it to be steady or fluctuated, the words that point to the most real grants us the possibility to get near to our divinity and plenitude; though they “prove our nothingness, opening an abyss beneath our feet,” they still “offer us a home” (*APP* 65). Words also, by their requirement for us “to act” and “to conceive of a true place,” help construct and to revitalize the initial poetic temple anew (*APP* 115). Bonnefoy would confess straightforwardly that the true place “does not exist, that it is only mirage;” however, he would simultaneously claim that “a longing for the true place is the vow made by poetry” (*APP* 115-116). The act of poetry is to get near to this true place, anticipating it to be the possible home. Bonnefoy would never be certain whether or not he had reached this promise; nonetheless, in his incessant attempts of approaching, he does demonstrate, with his poetic creations, the possible poetic space in which he places all his anticipations and unfading hope.

As demonstrated throughout, Bonnefoy has found the particular dealing with his desire; he also learned, gradually as well as faithfully, to live alongside with not only himself but the world. The poetry is his final home, in which he names out the ambivalences as well as the promises; he also understands well that the very poetic act, one that encourages us to realize the very reality of our earth, might emerge in words: “[t]he immense outside

reconciled / With what is done and undone / Or wants and unwants, in words” (“Low Branches,” *PH* 32). Although the dream of the poet remains forever fluctuated, Bonnefoy never strays from his poetics; he encourages the reader to fully engage in the plenitude and immerse in our own dreaming depth and faith instead:

But remember  
Childhood’s meadows: remember walking  
On the way to lie down and look at the sky  
Charged with so many signs but immense  
Within you this benevolence,  
Flashes of heat lighting of summer nights.  
Present hour, do not renounce,  
Take back your words from the lightning’s errant hands,  
Listen to them making of nothing speech,  
Risk, risk  
Even the confidence that nothing can prove,

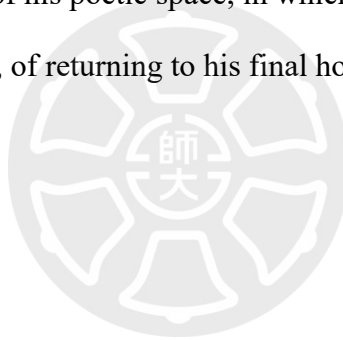
Will us not to die despairing. (“The Present Hour,” *PH* 71)

This final remark is indeed Bonnefoy’s defense of poetry. The poet is well aware of the ambivalence of poetry, of the limitation of words, and the unsteadiness of our dreams and beings. Still, he chooses to live alongside all these ambivalences (“Risk, risk / Even the confidence that nothing can prove), and he sees that act as the fundamental gesture of restoring man’s dignity (“Will us not to die despairing”). Bonnefoy confesses:

I myself am prepared, envisaging the future of poetry, seeing speech as invention or

recovery, and pursuing the path which is the only possible one, to affirm passionately this *here* and this *now* which, indeed, are already an elsewhere and a past, which no longer exists, which have stolen from us but which, eternally in their temporal finitude, universally in their spatial limitation, are the only conceivable good, the only place that deserves the name of place. (*APP* 112-113)

Poetry is Bonnefoy's sacred place. Over and over, he would return to the things that lure and haunt, learn the failures and limits in such encounters, then repolish his poetics anew. It is in such an ultimate dialectics that the poet restores the centrality to his poetry: with his ceaseless returns to the center, along with the constant revitalization of his poetic confidence and faith, Bonnefoy fulfills the roundness of his poetic space, in which he poetically dwells. This is indeed a gesture of homecoming, of returning to his final home that is found in poetry.



## CONCLUSION: POETIC SPACE

Inspired by Gaston Bachelard's influential work *The Poetics of Space*, this thesis aimed to explore the manifestations of place and space in four of Yves Bonnefoy's poetry collections, to see how these poems in a gradual phase constitute collectively and ultimately to what I referred to and justified as the poet's *poetic space*. The reason for interpreting Bonnefoy through Bachelard's theory was due to the similarities shared by two: both strived to see in the imagined object the active working of the imagining being, which further proved the depth and profundity of the subject. To reach the aim, the related themes such as imagination, poetic image, dynamism, dialectics, and roundness in Bachelard's discourse were discussed; though *The Poetics of Space* was mostly quoted due to its maturity, other early works of Bachelard written in the stage of elemental analysis were also examined to provide much thorough, theoretical frame. The foremost methodology this thesis employed was close reading of both the primary and secondary texts. Since one of the purposes of this thesis was to build a continual delineation of Bonnefoy's evolving poetics, the poetic works were chronologically examined with exceptional focus on their forms and contents; in such examination, Bachelard's ideas were provided in the beginning of each section to give a possible trajectory to the reading of poems.

I proposed that this poetic space was a unity of roundness that includes and performs multiplicity: it abounded in various sensations, lived or experienced places, imagined spaces, earthly matters, humanitarian care, and many other themes valued by the poet. In another word, this poetic space became the visualization as well as the integration of the poet's particular care and concern for this earth. For this reason, the things cared by the poet had incarnated into different poetic images that dominated his works, namely snow, stones, water, fire, a house, a boat, a child, etc. Through the poet's retrospective glances on these images, not only their implications were changed over time but also the poetics of Bonnefoy was

renewed. By constant referring to things he cared and revitalizing their meanings through the working of his imagination in both positive and negative textual spaces, Bonnefoy demonstrated how this poetic space was structured, solidified, and motivated by the being's own imaginative faculty; with the intimate bond built between the subject and the object, poetic space thus displayed a cyclical and dynamic performance of always returning to its center to be made motivated again. Except for Introduction and Conclusion, three main chapters were presented in this thesis to show the deductive process of how such a structure of poetic space was made possible. Three chapters respectively represented three stages, temptation, venture, and confidence; each closely examined the poetic images listed above.

Focusing on the luring quality of snow image, Chapter One delineated the imaginative opening of poetic space with Bachelard's illustration of imagination's dynamism. This chapter began with the establishment of the poet's actual experience of geographically concrete places and spaces delineated in *Beginning and End of the Snow* (1991); such delineation was crucial since the similar sense structuring of placial and spatial experiences was also applicable to later volumes. I then moved to Bachelard's theory of imagination, focusing particularly its dynamic quality in opening up the poetics of the real places and spaces previously described; with such working of dynamic imagination on snow image, I delineated how the poet gradually contoured his poetic space with the inclusion of multiple spaces he cared. For instance, in the snowy landscape were seen geographical, mental, aesthetic, historical, or representational spaces; human beings' voluntary, subjective involvement with the external world were also described through the being's humanitarian care for other species. Though space indeed possessed the luring characteristic as demonstrated by the polymorphous performances of the snow image, it too was rich in its capability of constantly forming and deforming its structure to reach Bonnefoy's poetic need. Such dynamic formation was further explored with the examination of the working of imagination in negative context presented by *The Curved Planks* (2001) in Chapter Two.

With the structuring of poetic space outlined in the first chapter, Chapter Two continued Bachelard's discourse on imagination, only this time focused on its workings in negative textual contexts such as the placeless place and the deserted house. I first illustrated how Bonnefoy presented his negative, passive imaginings with the employments of the break with the form and content; I also demonstrated in this stage the possible workings of spatial growth with the poet's deliberate juxtaposition of confronting elements. To better explain the dynamism created out of rivalry in the seemingly inert, indifferent, and even hostile space, Bachelard's theory on dialectics proposed in *The Poetics of Space* was introduced. This notion of dynamism rising from the oppositional confrontation was important with its demonstration of the poet's fearlessness in venturing into spaces of negations and denials. Since this dynamic force founded its root in the poet's active imaginings, it therefore represented the poet's subjective will and faith. Bonnefoy proved with his subjective will that this poetic space was indeed energized from within; with this intrinsic power it further secured its structure.

Chapter Three proceeded with the discussion of the being's will as well as the idea of dialectics by examining the correlations between inner and outer, subject and object, or the imagining being and the imagined image. This chapter relied heavily on Bachelard's discourse on poetics of spaces. According to Bachelard, the imagined image, or the way the exterior object reflected, was actually the dreaming depth of the subject: the verticality of the image thus became the profundity of being. Such relation was implicitly shown in previous two chapters, only it was closely and carefully examined with Bonnefoy's late works *The Anchor's Long Chain* (2008) and *The Present Hour* (2011) here in Chapter Three. Though the correlation between inner and outer was understood as the convergence that points to the subjective depth, such correlation should not be taken as a total annihilation of the opposites but the harmonious balance reached by two ends. With this knowledge in mind as well as with Bachelard's further illustration, I proceeded with Bonnefoy's poetic characteristics to

discuss the ultimate dialectics embedded in his works. Though Bonnefoy's yearning for true place proved his poetry to be forever dialectical, the poet resided rather comfortably and confidently with such intrinsic ambivalence by reconciling with as well as recognizing his futile, unachievable desire. Though this awareness was already mentioned in *Yesterday's Empty Kingdom* (1958), with his late year poetics we now know for sure that Bonnefoy indeed realized that "[i]mperfection is the summit" (*EP* 217). The real poetic stance of fearlessness and confidence was that when one recognized his/her own limitation yet still held faith. Bonnefoy's poetic space thus met its full roundness with the poet's firm clinging to his center.

To conclude, this poetic space was founded due to Bachelard's theoretical discourse proposed in *The Poetics of Space*: similar to Bachelard's imagining of the childhood house to be the center in which the primitive values of human beings were made congregated and dreaming depth revealed, Bonnefoy's poetic space too served as a structure that manifested and further housed the poet's poetic being. With its inclusion of the things for which the poet cared, such as poetry, the natural world, humankind, and this earth, this poetic space had developed in it the home-like quality to which the poet dwelled. The homeliness, however, did not necessarily relate to the positive, eulogized space; unlike Bachelard's inclusion of only the "images that attract," Bonnefoy's poetic space indeed welcomed the ones that the poet lamented, feared, or perplexed (*PS* 20). Poetic space included spaces of negation and promises, spaces that *are* and *are not*.

Although the whole thesis centered on the author's subjective experience and his own poetic delineations, in such a structure of poetic space I indeed see the universal value of speaking for all imagining being's depth. For instance, the things and matters included in this structure was determined by the poet's preference and care for them; through the working of imaginative faculty in both readers and the poet, these imagined things had become poetic images that arouse both parties' sensations by their repercussions, which "invite us to give



greater depths to our own existence” (Bachelard, *PS* 7). The poetic images were not only poetic projections of the creator, but could actively affect the receptive readers and make us believe that “we speak it, it is our own;” to be precise, “[t]he reverberations bring about a change of being” (Bachelard, *PS* 7). Despite the poet’s unique experiences owing to cultural or geographical factors, we know for certain that Bonnefoy had no intention to limit his experiences to an individual reflection; rather, he regarded himself as a member of larger community, speaking always in the collective manner by third-person plurals *we*, *our*, and *us*. In such an attempt the poet’s determination to speak for the shared-experience of humankind is clear. He illustrated the mundane struggles all human beings suffer, such as the unrelenting desire, unrealizable want, loss, solitude, and alienation; with his evolving poetic stance he too had taught us the importance of searching and establishing one’s core and dwelling place, and to act upon it the very subjective determination and will. From “I” to “we,” Bonnefoy had spoken for our undone speech, wept over our despair, and dreamed our dreams.

The most important factor for rendering Bonnefoy’s poetics universal was his care for this earth. Bonnefoy valued the earth, seeing this earth as the only reality that restored our divinity. For instance, in his poems and prose were often seen simple, natural elements such as fire, water, trees, stones, branches, along with creatures of all kind. By building his poetics on such earthly things, listening attentively to the most minute sound, and showing generously his respect for the surrounding world, Bonnefoy illustrated the intimate interrelationship between humankind and nature. Bonnefoy’s poetic space, in his own words, was “[v]ast sails, the sails of all that is, agreed to lift / Our fragile human life aboard the ship” (*CP* 133). Whatever topics Bonnefoy dealt with, it was clear that he always included, or attempted to include, the multiple appearances seen in this world. The poet’s fearless stance has become the gesture hidden in all humankind; his poetic space also inspires us to look into our imagining being to develop a homelike structure from within. Bonnefoy’s homecoming is resolute and promising: the poet has made us believe in home.

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