

## Reviews

Crenne, Helisenne de. *Les angoyssees douloureuses qui procedent d'amours*. Éd. Christine de Buzon. Textes de la Renaissance 13. Paris : Honoré Champion, 1997. 729 p.

Le premier malheur d'Helisenne fut d'être née, le second, de perdre son père un an plus tard, le troisième, d'avoir été mariée à l'âge de onze ans, et le quatrième, d'être tombée amoureuse de Guenelic. *Les angoyssees* de Madame de Crenne raconte la vie douloureuse et la mort vertueuse des amants, leurs échanges oculaires et épistolaires, leurs chastes rendez-vous secrets, leur séparation et la réunion de leurs âmes aux « Champs Helisiens ». Réduite à lutter sa vie durant contre Amour, Helisenne doit subir les cruautés de son mari, les maladies du corps et de l'esprit, les indiscretions de son ami ; emprisonnée à la fin dans un château, elle n'en est enlevée que pour agoniser dans les bras de son libérateur mourant. Les douleurs de celui-ci furent celles d'une très longue odyssee méditerranéenne, d'une très longue quête de l'introuvable bien-aimée.

L'invitation de Madame de Crenne à détester l'amour et à résister à la sensualité aurait fait de l'histoire fort didactique d'Helisenne et Guenelic un roman fort difficile à lire si l'auteure n'en avait pas doré la leçon par l'artifice et l'art de la composition. En effet, *Les angoyssees* est d'abord le « livre de ses angoyssees » qu'Helisenne écrit dans l'espoir que Guenelic le lira un jour (98-223) ; en fait, c'en est une deuxième version, car la première a été découverte et brûlée par son mari. Helisenne y travaille dans sa tour de château quand elle est interrompue par le retour inattendu de son ami. Pendant que celui-ci prépare l'évasion (ce qui « consuma quelque temps » [450]), Helisenne rédige le rapport que Guenelic lui a fait de ses errances, parlant, dans la deuxième et la troisième partie du roman, « en la personne de son amy » (231-450). Ce qui advint aux âmes des amants (descente au Styx, jugement, ascension aux Champs Helisiens) et au livre d'Helisenne est narré, dans une espèce d'épilogue, par Quezinstra, compagnon de Guenelic : Mercure, descendu pour oindre les corps des amants, découvre le livre enveloppé de soie blanche, en propose la publication au « comité d'édition olympien » (Buzon *dixit* [17]) et enjoint à Quezinstra de le faire imprimer (en l'occurrence, chez Denis Janot à Paris, en 1538).

Dans cette construction originale d'un texte à voix multiples et enchevêtrées racontant son propre devenir, il n'y a qu'un *lapsus narrationis* de quelques pages (450-85) où Helisenne n'a guère pu décrire sa fuite et la poursuite à laquelle se lancent les gens du château. On est tenté de dire qu'ici, peut-être, Helisenne narratrice et Helisenne auteure se confondent totalement, même si c'est par inadvertance. Christine de Buzon ne découvre pas, dans *Les angoyssees*, de pacte autobiographique entre le nom de l'héroïne et le pseudonyme de Madame de Crenne ; elle propose plutôt « des rapports analogues [...] à ceux qui lient Marcel et Marcel Proust » (8). L'auteure est très probablement Marguerite Briet, née vers 1500 à Abbeville, épouse de Philippe Fournel (sieur) de Crenne. En 1552 elle demeure à St-Germain-des-Prés, « sepparee quant aux biens » de son mari ; elle meurt « peu après le 25 août 1552 » (10). Son nom de plume est également associé à des *Epistres familières et invectives* (1539), un *Songe* (1540) et une traduction des *Eneydes du treselégant [...] Virgile* (1541).

Formellement parlant, l'identification d'Helisenne à Marguerite n'est qu'une hypothèse, mais une hypothèse si solide que la seule preuve à apporter serait que Marguerite n'a pas écrit (seule), ou, en tant que femme et provinciale, n'a pas pu écrire (seule) « ce roman complexe, proche des préoccupations littéraires de l'Europe de son

temps et nourri d'une culture humaniste assez précise » (11). La critique, et surtout la critique féministe et féminine (p. ex. Conley 1973, Nash 1990, Robbins-Herring 1987) a déjà largement écarté la plausibilité d'une telle preuve, et rien dans l'Introduction de Christine de Buzon ne permet de douter du fait que Marguerite, même dans sa Picardie profonde, a pu et su puiser dans Ovide, Boccaccio, Caviceo, Antoine de La Sale, Jean Lemaire des Belges et d'autres pour alimenter ses récits, ou que l'allure humaniste qu'a prise son roman (et que l'éditrice documente minutieusement tant dans « L'onomastique du roman » [20-31] que dans les notes explicatives) est de sa facture.

*Les angoysse*s a connu au moins cinq éditions (complètes ou partielles) modernes (entre 1957 et 1973). La présente édition, faisant suite à une thèse sur *Les angoysse*s (Tours 1990) et admirablement exécutée, se base sur le texte de 1538, avec les variantes des éditions de 1541, 1543, 1551, 1553 et 1560. La bibliographie (43-85) comprend la liste descriptive des œuvres conservées dans les bibliothèques parisiennes, provinciales et étrangères, ainsi qu'une soixantaine de titres d'études. La grande richesse non seulement de l'œuvre mais aussi de cette édition est contenue dans l'importante section des « Notes » (509-632). En fin de volume, précédant deux index de noms, C. de Buzon a eu l'heureuse idée d'offrir aux non initié(e)s un « Dictionnaire mythologique extrait des *Eneydes* » de H. de Crenne (667-81) et un petit glossaire (683-90).

La coquille la plus visible s'est glissée dans l'en-tête des pages impaires 707-27 d'un ouvrage dont la présentation est par ailleurs extrêmement soignée.

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Collins, Bradford R., ed. *Twelve Views of Manet's Bar*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. 318 p.

In the Preface to this collection, its editor defines his goal: a "controlled experiment in current methodology" in art history, bringing together a variety of critical approaches based primarily on the "New Art History," which demonstrate "the way a sampling of 'new' art historians actually work" (xix-xxi). In order to reveal more effectively the attributes and benefits of each method, he has chosen a common object of analysis for all the essays: the well-known Manet work of 1882, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. The result is a fascinating glimpse into the almost infinite richness of one centrally situated work of visual art, and the evolving methodologies developed by art and cultural historians to account for its complexities of meaning.

For specialists in modern French literature and culture, the collection offers an exceptional opportunity to share in the fruits of several interdisciplinary approaches, and to explore parallels with literary study: it is clear that "reading" a work of visual art is an operation as complex as "reading" a literary text. The methods used to interpret the *Bar* by the contributors to this volume include psychoanalytic, feminist, Marxist and historical approaches. Several issues emerge as central in the course of these varied interpretations: perhaps most fundamental is the problem of representation. Manet has intentionally perturbed our perception of the relationship between "real" and "representation" in his work, by introducing a mirror into the scene, and by creating uncertainty about the spatial and psychological relationships involved in the work. In this context, the influence of Lacan is prominent in several essays, particularly in reference to his theories of the "mirror stage." Another important, problematic element is the central character, the barmaid, whose enigmatic expression and lack of connection with the viewer and the other elements

of the painting raise numerous questions involving the interaction of male and female gaze, the structure of perception, and the role of the Other. Collins's essay offers a penetrating Lacanian reading of the relationship between the (presumed) male viewer and the female barmaid: "In failing to smile at us, to respond to our presence, the barmaid refuses to 'recognize' us, to value us, to desire us, to be the mirror in which we may see reflected the sensation of autonomy and wholeness we desire" (132). As this passage suggests, the gender issue plays a central role throughout the collection: it leads to examination of the barmaid's cultural and social status, study of the contemporary figures of "Virgin" and "Whore," and sociological considerations about the role of women in the developing consumer society of late nineteenth-century Paris, as reflected also in Zola's *Au bonheur des dames* and *Le ventre de Paris*.

The book has some minor shortcomings, such as a certain number of typographical errors, and its occasional repetitiveness is due to the concentration on one common object of study which has already been extensively analyzed. However, the collection offers an invaluable basis for cultural and interdisciplinary approaches to artistic production in the latter part of the nineteenth century and, indeed, opens up suggestive perspectives for the study of modern French culture as a whole.

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Holmes, Anne. *Jules Laforgue and Poetic Innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 183 p.

"Laforgue wrote clearly without realizing how much his style was formed by others" (20). Therefore, argues Anne Holmes, his work is "unmistakably intertextual" (13): unconsciously in his early work, *Le sanglot*, but consciously in later works, the poet quotes poetic fragments and ideas from poets, authors and philosophers, both before his time and contemporaneous, using them innovatively, in stages ranging "from imitation through rejection to assimilation, [...] in somewhat perverse fashion" (29).

Holmes attempts to reveal Laforgue's poetic innovation in every one of his collections of poems, by comparing parts of poems, which she quotes from his work, with the best of French poets and authors mentioned in the same breath on every page of the book. Her method of research is identical with Laforgue's "creative method": intertextuality, the difference being that she is more conscious than he. Since the first chapter, "*Le sanglot de la terre* : 'La note aiguë de ma froide, froide destinée'," constitutes an axiomatic basis for the book's development, examining the process of constructing the axiom and its validity is crucial to accepting Holmes' thesis and conclusions.

Via Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Hugo, Vigny, Leconte de Lisle, Nerval, Flaubert, Proust, Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Buddhism, Valéry, Mozart "and others," Holmes concludes that Laforgue's creative process originates in "unconscious creativity," as did Mozart's (19). Thus, Laforgue created a metaphysical logical poetry emerging from the unconscious.

What is the purpose of this tortuous road? Why should Laforgue's creative process be understood on the basis of an eighteenth-century composer, and not on the basis of his own work and the lyric creations of his predecessor poets? A profound knowledge of the writings of Baudelaire—Laforgue's principal "model," according to Holmes—reveals that the raw-material of modern lyric poetry is impressions, senses and feelings, which are part of the poet's "childish imagination," the unconscious. The poet processes these consciously and translates them into poetry, after the whole

composition has totally crystallized in his imagination. Therefore, Laforgue's poetic "innovation"—his initial unconscious creativity—is not innovative. Furthermore, my meticulous reading of *Le sanglot* found no basis for Holmes' revelation of Laforgue's unconscious creativity.

Actually, this chapter discusses the esthetics of Laforgue's "creative imagination." However, not only is the word "imagination" not mentioned there even once, but Laforgue is presented as an unimaginative poet, who unconsciously takes all the elements of his creativity from other artists. How, then, can one talk of the creativity of a poet who is uncreative? Who is his "Reine des Facultés"? The unconscious?

In the second half of the chapter, Holmes demonstrates how Laforgue, consciously and unconsciously, uses his lyrical models and creates poetic technical innovations from them:

While writing in a manner that was so fundamentally opposed to the one he was later to adopt, Laforgue used techniques that persisted, and which had their origins in contemporary writings. First, the oratorical tone of the verse, dependent on *Hugo, Vigny, Leconte de Lisle and others*. Laforgue was never to abandon the dramatic forms that are already present here. He may shift addresses from *sun and universe to woman or life*, but he continued to set up dramatic confrontations and to present them as such to the reader. *An initial dualism in the poet's response to the world, no doubt to some extent influenced by Baudelaire*, is reflected already in the vocabulary in this volume. He already employs *to an unusual degree a langage parlé*, deriving from the dramatic or intimate vocabulary of Hugo or Baudelaire [...]. (28-29, emphases mine)

Holmes' comparisons reveal some disturbing assumptions and raise some troubling questions. 1. If Laforgue is similar to Hugo, Vigny, Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire "and others," then they are indistinguishable, with no individuality. 2. Has there been no development in lyric poetry, from Hugo's early Romanticism to Baudelaire's symbolic modern Romanticism? 3. Where does Baudelaire's "langage parlé" figure in his work? 4. Expressions such as "to an unusual degree," "no doubt," "to some extent," scattered routinely throughout the book, void the supreme importance (for the development of modern literature and art) of the proportion between unconscious feelings and logical thought processes. For instance, it is the extent of the influence of God or Satan, childhood or adulthood, on the Baudelairian imagination that defines the character of the poet's work: "divine"-naive or "satanic"-mature; the oscillation between the *sens-esprit-âme* and their "divine" or "satanic" significance evolves, in lyric poetry, from the Baudelairian balance between them to Surrealist imbalance. The role of the art critic is precisely to define this degree of oscillation, so as to situate the poet being studied within the evolution of lyric poetry. 5. Is not the choice of this or that poetic image crucial for characterizing the uniqueness of a particular poetry? Is the image of the "sun" identical to the image of the "universe," "woman" or "life"? And is the significance of one poet's image of the sun identical to that of another poet? Because Holmes does not perceive the modern lyrical image as being self-reflexive of its own creation, of the poet's "creative imagination," she does not decipher it in the context of the poet under study before comparing it to another poet. Thus she distorts its significance, resulting in amateurish comparisons: "Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige [...]" ("Harmonie du soir")—a Baudelairian metaphor for the imagination, not the heart, of the artist, "bleeding" from the creative, metaphysical effort—is interpreted as "Laforgue[s] [...] own heart mirrored in the daily bleeding to death of the sun" (25).

In Holmes' perception, Baudelaire has regressed to the early Romanticism of Lamartine, where the heart's sentimentality rules, whereas in Baudelaire's symbolic modern Romanticism the sensitivity of the "Imagination Créatrice" reigns supreme. During a contextual comparison I made between *Le sanglot* and *Les fleurs du mal*, I discovered that the quality of Laforgue's image has not yet attained modern self-reflexiveness. Laforgue is reminiscent, perhaps, of the excessive sentimentality of Lamartine, whom Holmes, however, neglects to mention. At this early stage Laforgue does not present any poetic innovation as compared to the "Roi des Poètes."

Holmes herself admits to the superficiality of her study:

Laforgue has only to write in his sonnet "La première nuit", [...] "Voici venir le soir doux au vieillard lubrique", and "C'est l'heure où l'enfant prie", for a modern reader to link the poem with Baudelaire's "Crépuscule du soir", even though only three words are repeated in each case [...]. The manuscript of "Recueillement du soir" [...] has the abbreviation "Baud" scribbled by the title, showing his awareness that the title, and perhaps the poem, echoed Baudelaire. (21)

Because of Holmes' superficial and distorting method of research, the axiom, thesis and conclusions and the examples in the first chapter simply collapse. The book is constructed on invalid grounds.

Holmes' book, exhausting to read, constitutes an excellent and regrettable example of the injustice caused by an "extra-contextual" method of research, unjust not only to Laforgue and the artists to whom she compares him, but also to our profession as reliable art critics. Therefore, prophetically, Laforgue's *Sanglot* on "[s]a froide, froide destinée," more than concerning his own fate during his lifetime, reflects the destiny of his poetry, when it falls into the hands of art critics devoid of poetic dignity, knowledge, sensitivity and imagination.

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Babcock, Arthur E. *The New Novel in France: Theory and Practice of the Nouveau Roman*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997. 154 p.

La série Twayne s'enrichit d'un nouveau volume consacré au Nouveau Roman et, comme le titre l'indique, à sa théorie et sa pratique. Babcock commence par un bref historique du mouvement, si l'on peut se permettre ce terme pour une tentative qui défie toute définition à cause des desseins divergents et contradictoires de ses participants ou affiliés. Il y distingue deux phases: la première plutôt phénoménologique / existentielle et la seconde structuraliste (donnant naissance au Nouveau Nouveau Roman), mais là encore les frontières ne sont pas bien étanches. Après un bon rappel des principes théoriques de *Pour un nouveau roman* et de *L'ère du soupçon* (plus loin aussi des *Essais sur le roman* de Butor), son analyse porte davantage sur la phase phénoménologique du Nouveau Roman avec des textes tels que *Les gommes*, *La jalousie*, *Portrait d'un inconnu*, *La modification*, *La route des Flandres*, *Moderato cantabile*. Pour la palette des auteurs retenus (Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Butor, Simon et Duras), Babcock ne se contente cependant pas de leurs premières œuvres mais étudie aussi certaines plus récentes qui s'inscrivent davantage, quoique non exclusivement, dans la phase structuraliste du Nouveau Roman et marquent donc une évolution chez leurs auteurs respectifs. Sont ainsi présentés *Djinn / Le rendez-vous*, *Entre la vie et la mort*, *Niagara*, *Triptyque* et *L'amant*. L'originalité de chaque écrivain et de ses différents projets est bien mise en relief de

même que les contradictions qui subsistent entre leur théorie, quand elle existe, et leur pratique, ou les divergences entre les « nouveaux romanciers » sélectionnés. Sont aussi soulignés les liens qui les unissent : le questionnement du roman dit traditionnel, de la représentation et de l'intelligibilité ou de l'inintelligibilité du réel, de l'identité du sujet, de l'adéquation du langage. En guise de conclusion, Babcock place le Nouveau Roman dans un contexte temporel plus large et s'interroge sur ce qui l'apparente au modernisme ou au postmodernisme.

On aurait aussi aimé voir figurer une interrogation sur ce « soupçon » généralisé à l'égard des formes narratives traditionnelles, du langage et des idéologies. Quelles en furent les raisons ? L'impossibilité d'écrire après Auschwitz, la décolonisation, l'incertitude de soi ? On aurait également aimé voir esquissée l'influence du Nouveau Roman sur les écrivains suivants qui, comme Sollers ou Maurice Roche, ont poussé plus avant l'exploration de la forme romanesque, ou sur ceux qui, comme Tournier ou Modiano, par exemple, le récuse tout en étant néanmoins marqués. Les contraintes de la série n'ont peut-être pas permis de poursuivre l'enquête. Un dernier point : contrairement à ce qu'affirme Babcock (125), Duras avait deux frères, tout comme la fille dans *L'amant*.

Une brève mais excellente bibliographie critique complète cet ouvrage solide, clair et précis, fortement recommandé à quiconque souhaite se familiariser avec ce « mouvement » littéraire.

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Ernaux, Annie. *La honte*. Paris : Gallimard, 1997. 133 p.

----- « *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit* ». Paris : Gallimard, 1997. 110 p.

After an interval of four years, 1997 sees the publication of two works by Annie Ernaux. While *La honte* displays the chronological time scale characteristic of Ernaux's writing—retrospective viewpoint on the author's childhood with occasional contemporaneous remarks on the formal difficulties of the creative process—, « *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit* » recounts a more recent event; dating back to 1986, it takes the form of a diary which traces the gradual degeneration and eventual death of Ernaux's mother from Alzheimer's disease.

« *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit* »—the last sentence ever written by Ernaux's mother—comprises a deeply moving series of diary entries, expressed with poignant immediacy "dans la violence des sensations" (11). The work charts the mother's physical and psychological deterioration, and the daughter's reactions to it, reactions which range from abhorrence at her mother's physical decline, to optimism during her increasingly rare moments of lucidity, to fear at the inevitability of her death: "J'ai peur qu'elle meure. Je la préfère folle" (20). Ernaux's compulsion to confront that fear through writing has two principal motives: first, her mother represents the single most important person in the narrator's life, and any contact with her, however traumatic or indirect, is better than none at all; second, the act of writing facilitates the narrator's acceptance of her own aging process. Ernaux recognizes her physiological condition in that of her mother, not simply in the mother's usurpation of the daughterly role but also in the prefiguration of her own death: "Aveuglant : elle est ma vieillesse, et je sens en moi menacer la dégradation de son corps, ses rides sur les jambes" (36). As the work continues, the mother's childlike behaviour regresses still further—"Tout est renversé, maintenant, elle est ma petite fille" (29)—before finally returning to the point of departure: "Les yeux vagues, la langue et les lèvres suçant, sortant, comme le font les nouveau-nés" (83). Indeed, the portrayal of

the lifecycle of Ernaux's mother transcends personal relevance to encompass a more universal significance, from birth ("Son sexe à elle. *L'origine du monde*" [79]) to death: "Elle est le *temps*, pour moi. Elle me pousse aussi vers la mort" (74). Whatever the acutely personal nature of « *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit* », this enlarged perspective enables Ernaux to perceive her mother, and other women in the geriatric hospital, as embodying the physical and emotional concerns of the female condition: "À côté, la vieille refait indéfiniment son lit, pliant la couverture, la dépliant. Femmes" (30).

Having touched upon her mother's death from Alzheimer's in an earlier work, *Une femme*, Ernaux's desire for an honest depiction of her subject matter—a desire which underlies her entire writing project—accounts for her decision to publish « *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit* ». By disturbing the reassuringly integrated representation of her mother in *Une femme*, she hopes, paradoxically, to render it more exact: "Je crois maintenant que l'unicité, la cohérence auxquelles aboutit une œuvre — quelle que soit par ailleurs la volonté de prendre en compte les données les plus contradictoires — doivent être mises en danger toutes les fois que c'est possible" (12-13). The work's candour is further reinforced both by the portrayal of her mother's shortcomings, "elle me terrorisait" (28), and by the spontaneous quality of the writing; Ernaux claims not to have altered her original transcript before publication, "Je les livre telles qu'elles [ces pages] ont été écrites, dans la stupeur et le bouleversement que j'éprouvais alors" (13), a claim supported by the occasional repetition or contradiction in the narrator's recollection of specific details. One such detail concerns the date of the scene which provides the impetus behind her second work, *La honte*: "Je dois me tromper de date" (57).

*La honte* focuses on "les codes et les règles" (61) governing the daily life of Ernaux's young narrator during the transitional period between childhood and adolescence. The pervasive feeling of shame which characterizes the narrator's existence at this time, and, indeed, subsequently, can be attributed to a particular incident witnessed by her at the age of twelve. This incident involves the attempted murder of the narrator's mother by her father and is related with typical Ernaux laconism in the work's opening sentence: "Mon père a voulu tuer ma mère un dimanche de juin, au début de l'après-midi" (13). As *La honte* progresses, we learn that this incident has functioned as a secret catalyst, a type of perverse talisman, not merely for the narrative of *La honte*, but for the existence of every narrative written by Ernaux: "Cette scène figée depuis des années, je veux la faire bouger pour lui enlever son caractère sacré d'icône à l'intérieur de moi (dont témoigne, par exemple, cette croyance qu'elle me faisait écrire, que c'est elle qui est au fond de mes livres)" (30-31).

The shame experienced by the narrator subsequent to this event is perceived as inextricably linked to her social class: "Tout de notre existence est devenu signe de honte. La pissotière dans la cour, la chambre commune — où, selon une habitude répandue dans notre milieu et due au manque d'espace, je dormais avec mes parents —, les gifles et les gros mots de ma mère, les clients ivres et les familles qui achetaient à crédit" (131). This Bourdieusian interest in social and linguistic codes, in the cultural products designating the parameters of working-class life, in the notion of "bon goût" articulated in Ernaux's first publication, *Les armoires vides*, permeates *La honte*: "La répartition sociale des choses a plus de sens que leur existence" (36-37). Indeed, while Ernaux's earlier narratives portray specific childhood events and memories, *La honte* regresses still further into that past, detailing, rather, the environment—the concrete objects—which first gave rise to such events, whether the geographical location of the narrator's house in Yvetot (which, despite

painstaking precision in representing, she insists on designating as "Y."), or the precise layout of her school.

*La honte* comprises many of the themes found throughout Ernaux's corpus: the important influence of the narrator's working-class childhood, her desire that her work be ethnologically significant—an aim reinforced by the prominence given to social codes mentioned above—the use of annotated lists to capture the essence of an object or person, or of italicization to reflect accurately working-class speech, the rejection of the validity of psychoanalysis in understanding the narrator's past, and the self-conscious asides on the exacting nature of the writing process. The list goes on. To the reader familiar with Ernaux's corpus, the literary landscape covered in *La honte* may appear well-worn in places and certain observations rather forced, as when the narrator begins to discuss her schooling, "Je reconstruirai maintenant l'univers de l'école privée catholique" (71), or provides superfluous explanations in footnotes, describing, for example, how one executes "un signe de croix" (76): "Qu'on effectue en portant la main droite à la tête, puis à la poitrine, à l'épaule gauche et à l'épaule droite, de préférence avec la croix du chapelet qu'on baise à la fin."

*La honte* is none the less a well-written, courageous work, informative not only in the "public" sense of examining components of French working-class life in the mid-twentieth century, but in the more private sense of facilitating the reader's understanding of Ernaux's writing project generally. The narrative structure of Ernaux's works demonstrates her belief in the fundamental continuity between past and present selves: the retrospective narrative viewpoint and the resultant dissection of the key personal experiences in the narrator's childhood facilitate understanding of her present situation. *La honte* differs from the earlier works, however, in its explicit recognition that such disparate elements of identity cannot be easily reconciled, that the decades separating younger and older narrator cannot be consigned to hermeneutic oblivion. If *La honte* continues to voice objectives found throughout Ernaux's corpus—"Il me semble que je cherche toujours à écrire dans cette langue matérielle d'alors et non avec des mots et une syntaxe qui ne me sont pas venus, qui ne me seraient pas venus alors" (69-70)—it simultaneously acknowledges the limitations inherent in the realization of this project: "Mais la femme que je suis en 95 est incapable de se replacer dans la fille de 52 qui ne connaissait que sa petite ville, sa famille et son école privée, n'avait à sa disposition qu'un lexique réduit" (37). This confession brings with it the readerly hope that, having revealed the precise source of her "ur-honte," Ernaux may venture onto fresh literary territory.

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Pinson, Jean-Claude. *Habiter en poète*. Seysell: Champ Vallon, 1995. 279 p.

« La raison théologique cède la place à la raison "ardente" de la poétique ». (*Habiter en poète*, 162)

*Habiter en poète*, a finely elaborated treatment of contemporary French poetry, is philosopher and poet Jean-Claude Pinson's fourth book (*Hegel le droit et le libéralisme* [1989], *J'habite ici* [1989], *Laius au bord de l'eau* [1993]). In it Pinson deploys both a poet's ear and a philosopher's logical and structural rigour. The result is a philosophically acute treatment of modernity and a poetically sensitive reading of the principal contemporary poets of France, one which argues for and demonstrates a fruitful and powerful imbrication of the two modes of thought and writing. This



major work is henceforth an essential reference for any student or specialist in the field.

Pinson's approach is highly theoretical and the many lucid readings of individual authors and texts are always conceived of as *Éléments pour une philosophie de la poésie contemporaine*.

Tout au long de ce siècle, nombreux furent les poètes (et en France sans doute plus qu'ailleurs) à vivre dans le voisinage de philosophies (celle des Romantiques allemands puis celle de Heidegger) qui leur donnaient bien des raisons de croire en l'étoile de la philosophie, se substituant aux clochers théologiques, leur étaient autant d'amers qui les confortaient dans leur vocation ontologique. Cette vocation est aujourd'hui en question. (11)

The specificity of the French poetry that Pinson champions so vigorously in these pages is its ontological orientation and Pinson's own outlook may be broadly categorized as neo-Heideggerian, with priority given to analysis of the "ontological vocation" of various poetic figures. Questions of meaning, the sacred, the nature of the material and of the textual, the possibility of the ideal and the theological, are some of the constant preoccupations which flow from the fundamental question of being.

One of several places where these diverse preoccupations become knotted in an exemplary way is in Pinson's very useful treatment of Yves Bonnefoy. He captures Bonnefoy's unique poeticization of onto-theology, its *via negativa*, its "presencing," all in the context of the overarching Hölderlinian problematic of dwelling on the earth:

En faisant [...] de la poésie une herméneutique de notre présence mystérieuse au monde et une « théologie de la terre », Yves Bonnefoy paraît se situer aux antipodes de la conception d'un Ponge pour qui le monde est irrémédiablement non-sens et multiplicité. Aux antipodes aussi de Nietzsche déclarant la nécessité d'émietter l'univers et de « perdre le respect du Tout », sous peine de restaurer le Dieu de la métaphysique. [...Pourtant...] la poésie ne peut être théologie qu'en tant qu'elle habite la finitude et, regardant vers l'avenir, assume la responsabilité d'une parole soucieuse de ménager dans le monde la place pour un « dieu à venir » synonyme d'une terre préservée de la dévastation moderne. C'est comme « poéthique » qu'elle est théologie. (164)

The introduction of the "h" to poetics (an interesting illustration of *différance*) allows for the bringing together of so much that Pinson values in the French poetic current of modernity. With Bonnefoy, and other contemporaries, he sees the possibility of poetry after poetry, theology after theology, a new grasp of the sacred and a new mode of dwelling.

While elucidating the work of particular contemporary authors, Pinson is always intent on interrogating modernity itself, opening up a discussion of two forms of modernity revealed and proposed in the poetry of our time: the semiotic or modernist, and the romantic. A few sentences from an introductory section entitled "Une double modernité" will suffice to indicate the implications of this schema:

Cette double modalité de la modernité définit aujourd'hui deux poétiques et deux esthétiques. La première, qu'on peut qualifier de « spéculative », est, par bien des côtés, une poétique préoccupée d'un « salut » par le sens [...]. Incrédule quant à ce même sens (Sens), la seconde [...] ne voit en la poésie, à la façon de Ponge, qu'un jeu qui puisse être source de « consolation ». (26-27)

From a clear account of the historical development of these positions, and their existence in a kind of "réciprocité des preuves," Pinson is able to develop richly nuanced explanations of particular authors and texts. The result is an admirable equilibrium between the broadest issues of (post)modernity and the singular (and often apparently discrete) logics of the many individual writers considered here.

Pinson's determination to remain detached from, and thereby subvert, fruitless polemics allows him to bring the question of lyricism to the fore without falling into the possibly limiting traps of, on the one hand, apologist for the singing subject, or, on the other, disabused anti-humanist debunker. It is to the degree that the lyrical subject might be the subject of poetic dwelling that it can once again be a legitimate locus for poetic theory and practice:

Car la question du lyrisme, en même temps qu'elle est celle de la voix et du rythme, n'est autre que la question d'un certain séjour, d'une certaine façon d'« habiter » le monde. C'est pourquoi le philosophe ne peut que porter un regard attentif sur ce lyrisme qui renaît comme un des visages possibles de la poésie française d'aujourd'hui. (59)

Therefore, *pace* Denis Roche, lyricism is not only *not* inadmissible, but inextricably bound up with any human living-on-the-earth: "La poésie lyrique [...] peut parfaitement être pensée comme poésie de « l'être-au-monde » plutôt que du sujet" (215).

In his own admirable way, Pinson participates in the renewal of contemporary poetry, the reinvention of its ontological vocation, the revaluation of its immemorial chant, seeking for what Jean-Marie Gleize calls « la poésie après la poésie ». His conciliatory reason, his powerful grasp of our historical moment and the firmness of his æsthetic judgements have produced a book that constitutes both a statement concerning the current state of the poetic art in its relation to philosophy, and an expression of confidence in its ongoing and undiminished pertinence to our modern civilisation.

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Brandt, Joan. *Geopoetics: The Politics of Mimesis in Poststructuralist French Poetry and Theory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. xii-288 p.

*Geopoetics* is an intensely—and often brilliantly—argued book which will be of value to anyone interested in French poststructuralism. The scope of Brandt's analysis is broad and there is much to admire in the particular moments of her argument. She takes the reader through an illuminating review of more than thirty years of French intellectual life. In important respects, however, the book falls short of achieving its primary goal: the elaboration of a new thinking of mimesis in the light of its political implications, one that could bring together diverse poststructuralist positions, thereby correcting certain errors of the "last of the avant-gardes," *Tel Quel*, giving a new sense to such "revolutionary" projects and recuperating poetry in general in the process. The desired *rapprochement* of figures like Derrida, Kristeva, Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, Jabès and others could only be achieved if Brandt's own "geopoetics" truly operated as a poetics, a thinking through of bringing-together in making, yet in both theory and practice the formidable task of thinking-together which Brandt sets for herself, suffers precisely from weaknesses of a properly poetic nature.

Proceeding from an initial questioning of the relation between Derridean deconstruction and Marxism, Brandt considers *Tel Quel's* politicization of the text and demonstrates how a more coherent relation to deconstruction might have spared that group some of its more grotesque errors. Her treatment of Althusser, an immensely difficult figure, is penetrating and concise. The chapters on *Tel Quel* are extremely significant contributions to the ongoing assessment of that adventure; Brandt's formulæ here, as elsewhere, are sharp and revealing, as when she refers to *Tel Quel's* search for "a politicized practice uncorrupted by politics" (63). The evolution of Kristeva's thought and in particular the originality of its psychoanalytic theory and the cultural implications of Kristevan *psychanalyse* are expertly treated. In the final sections of the book Brandt works out a very thoughtful connection between Kristeva's thought of cosmopolitanism and Derrida's recent writings on European cultural identity. This is valuable work for anyone interested in such questions. Her treatment of the controversies surrounding possible connections of Deconstruction to Nazism through Heidegger and De Man is also highly useful and leads to a very original and effective reading of the place of "the jews" (in Lyotard's formulation) in contemporary French texts. The subsection "Of Ashes and Holocaustal Fire: 'Techné,' the 'Traité,' and 'the jews'" (196-210) is a marvellously subtle piece of analysis.

Significantly, though, for a book that puts poetry before theory in its title, it is in Brandt's use of poetry, and in a weakly-conceived *geopoetics*, that the book's compelling argument comes to less than it might have done had the promise marked by its title been fulfilled. Three poets are analysed at length by Brandt: Marcelin Pleynet, Denis Roche and Edmond Jabès. The analysis of a long poem of Pleynet's, *Stanze*, is impeccably integrated into the general arguments about *Tel Quel's* radicalizing textualism. Roche's *Le Mécrît* gets a two-sided reading which confirms in interesting ways a good deal of what Brandt is so careful to articulate about the need to get beyond a revolutionary textuality that remains in thrall to mere negations of traditional metaphysical oppositions. It is in Brandt's handling of the third poet that the reader may be struck by a certain forced quality of the argument. It is much less problematic to think and read Pleynet and Roche in relation to the theory of *Tel Quel* than it is to bring together the vast corpus of Jabès with the disparate thought of Kristeva, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy and Derrida. Here her reading of Jabès is so selective as to provoke doubts of adequacy, as she very intelligently brings her reading around to the idea of hospitality while leaving aside poetic notions that, more broadly considered, might have deepened the content of this crucial principle.

It is significant that Brandt has taken the notion of *geopoetics* from Michel Deguy who has been discussing the poetics of the earth since his volumes of the 1960s and continues to develop and refine the idea. Significant too that Brandt explains her choice of title and refers to Deguy only in her preface:

I hope to respond not only to those who insist upon the apolitical, ahistorical character of poststructuralist theory and practice [...] but also to those who tend to consign modern poetry to the distant margins of contemporary culture. The term "geopoetics" was indeed chosen as the title of this work for this very reason. Borrowed from a relatively recent treatise on poetry by Michel Deguy, *La poésie n'est pas seule*, it is a term that stresses the interrelatedness of the poetic, the theoretical, and the sociopolitical and thus reinforces the central argument of this book—that far from cutting themselves off from the political and cultural concerns of the modern world, poststructuralist theory and poetic practice have for some time now been actively engaged in real-world issues. (viii)

Leaving aside the difficulty of defining "real-world issues," such a statement must be subjected to close scrutiny, for it leaves out crucial aspects of what a geopoetics might be and thus prepares the ultimately unsatisfying conclusion of the book. How can one speak of the geopoetical at all without explicitly examining the poetics of the earth that clearly underpin the very notion?

When Brandt insists on the triad of the poetic, the theoretical and the sociopolitical she consciously or unconsciously establishes a hierarchy in which the question of the earth, and perhaps the question of being generally, are made secondary to issues of representation and of mimesis in their political dimension. But what is properly poetic, despite the keen analyses of individual texts and authors, never comes into focus as a primary consideration in *Geopoetics*. For Michel Deguy, who on this point is not alone, there will be no new community (*comme-unité*) without a new thought of comparison (*comparaison/comparution*). Indeed, an interrogation of such Deguyan ideas as the *comme-un des mortels* or *ineffacement* could have done much to elucidate a deconstructionist poetics that truly does reconceive the mimetic in a manner that is no less ethically penetrating for being in the first instance oriented toward "l'être amené à stance," and toward the "dwelling on the earth" of the Heideggerian reading of Hölderlin. Brandt's curious silence on the founding poet of geopoetics is not, then, merely a silence about the author of *La poésie n'est pas seule*, it is a silence which leaves in partial obscurity the poetic function itself, relegating poetry once again to the very margins from which Brandt had sought to rescue it.

These reservations of a theoretical or structural kind are confirmed by the final pages of the book with their move to analyze (and contribute to) a new poststructuralist synthesis around the notion of "hospitality." After a very patient development, the last pages of the book appear excessively optimistic and insufficiently critical. Bringing together hospitality, Derrida's "New Internationale" (*Specters of Marx*), and the "democratic ideal" with ideas of new communities derived from such disparate sources as Lyotard, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, is a very difficult proposition and one which perhaps ought to be framed more polemically, less as the conclusion to an argument about mimesis, more as a possible destination for future thinking-together in the respectful light of poetics (i.e., comparison). Is Brandt not guilty herself (though there is no *crime* here!) of proceeding from an exhilarating glimpse of reconciliation, through her own *mimetologic* (Lacoue-Labarthe) to a rather hasty conclusion; from a brilliantly-prepared model of hospitality to a too-convenient disposition of intellectual forces on the ground?

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Runte, Annette. *Biographische Operationen: Diskurse der Transsexualität*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1996. 798 p.

The phenomenon under investigation in this *Habilitationschrift* is, as the title indicates, biographical operations, i.e. discourses in which authors or their biographers unveil, describe, dramatize, psychologize, analyze and medicalize a sex change. A critical reading of these texts reveals that the motivation for sex change, or better, the coordination of gendered self-awareness and biological anatomy, is rooted in an essentialist belief in a definite difference between genders. Obviously, these discourses came into being and exist in realities that are far from the brightly lit thoroughfares of academic life. However, even the research-medical and psychological-exploratory histories unconsciously conform to a traditional

body/soul dualism and reveal a persistent essentialist *Vorverständnis*. Such evidence shows that theories of a contemporary evolution toward the levelling of sexual differences in the collective "style of thought" need to be adjusted.

Transsexual autobiography is transparent of our culture of desire. Miracles of modern science can reverse "nature's erroneous inversion" and make gender change an option. Operational successes in turn confirm and legitimize the miracle of modern science. What strikes this reviewer as the sharpest contribution of this scholarly work is the strange mix of archaic and *moderne*, with, however, the *moderne* always in dominance and control, conjugating the old to fit its own positivist purposes. For example, the archaic and synchronic mind/body, male/female, identity/society dualisms are mixed up in concrete medical research, psycho-analytical assessment and diagnosis, culminating in actual operations which fulfill desires and align physical and psychological states (14). This very aspect must seem sobering to educators as we recognize how the *moderne* tends to cloud and cover its own processes.

The literature of transsexuality, telling of woman trapped in a male body and vice versa, is a thoroughly modern phenomenon. While early texts, dating from the beginning of the eighteenth century, make no connection between childhood and "anomalous" experiences of the male or female inner self, during its heyday (*fin de siècle* to the present) the play form of sexual autobiography largely reflects family and culture impacts. The modern political dimensions of the operations are implied rather than overtly stated. The assimilating force of liberal political ideology is not only apparent in the affirmation of individual choice but in the means facilitating the discourse in the public arena. German has an excellent term for the abuse of literacy: *kolportiertes Wissen*—knowledge obtained and spread broadly through cheap magazines peddled and circulated from door to door. The exact relationship of these "modes of telling" and advanced critical theory at the universities is not explored, although the reference to childhood psychology in popularized autobiographies leaves no doubt that the latter clearly has an unreciprocated impact on the former.

Runte works interdisciplinarily: aligning the psychological theories of Lacan, Pfeiffer, Kristeva with the literary criticism of Derrida and the discontinuity model of sexual and literary history provided by Foucault. The research core of her work is a collection of about fifty primary "auto-biographies" as well as publicistic work written by and dealing with transsexuality. Related to that core is a body of 135 primary discourses by psychologists (22 works by Freud, many by Hirschfeld) who collected and analyzed the phenomenon of transsexuality without ever worrying about literary theory, as well as sixty academic works on transsexualism as a social and medical phenomenon. A further section of primary sources for Runte's investigation consists of pre-modern texts of a humanistic or philosophical order, as well as pre-historic testimony about Hermaphrodites and Eunuchs. These are supported by "related" primary sources such as chronicles and testimonies by transvestites (not to be confused with the clearly defined sexuality and inversion of transsexuals) and by homosexuals, whose inversion does not involve dissatisfaction with their anatomic gender.

Runte's work is extremely thorough, in the sense of "deep" rather than widely surveying. It deserves the term "work," for it reflects formidable intellectual labour and covers—analytically and critically—an impressive corpus of primary and secondary texts. Its language is that of modern textual criticism, each word a tool filled with associations. Considering this work also, after all, as a discourse transparent of our *moderne*, I cannot help but share Edward Said's sadness about the academy: being viewed with distrust from the outside, attacked by "practical" rejectors of discourse, and seen as a place where "critics are criticizing criticism." I

have therefore attempted here, as far as it is possible, to avoid Runte's critical style and to use an accessible, interdisciplinary vocabulary.

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Perron, Paul. *Semiotics and the Modern Quebec Novel: A Greimassian Analysis of Thériault's Agaguk*. Toronto Studies in Semiotics. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. 170 p.

Ouvrage à la fois de réflexion méthodologique et d'interprétation littéraire, ce livre séduira par son exceptionnelle rigueur et par sa volonté de renouveler l'entreprise narratologique. D'obédience d'abord très greimassienne, la méthode se raffine peu à peu, de manière à tenir compte de la complexité du roman de Thériault. Car le projet était ambitieux. La syntaxe narratologique, avec ses oppositions binaires et ses réciprocitys presque obsessionnelles, s'était contentée, depuis sa création, de textes relativement brefs, sortant rarement du cadre du récit traditionnel. L'analyse de Perron — car c'est véritablement une analyse ici — propulse la méthode choisie au-delà de ses limites connues. Perron ne remet nullement en question la primordiale de la grammaire narrative de Greimas : il ne fait que l'aérer à l'aide de notions plus fluctuantes comme le devoir, la responsabilité, le désir sexuel, la communauté.

En effet, la syntaxe narrative développée par Greimas au début des années quatre-vingts paraissait plutôt pudique et désincarnée. Elle permettait d'observer la structure profonde et réitérative des récits, mais à quel prix ! Pour donner chair à la méthode, Perron se tourne, comme J. - C. Coquet avant lui, vers une théorie de l'actant. C'est la construction anthropomorphique qui est porteuse de transformations, seules aptes à rendre compte du récit long. À la séquence conventionnelle, Perron prend donc le risque d'ajouter une modalité moins « pure », qui lui permet d'ouvrir le carré sémiotique simplement descriptif et le soumettre à l'interprétation. On sera donc, à mon sens, moins ébloui chez Perron par la succession des formules sybillines censées réduire le roman à ses structures profondes qu'à la fracture même du schéma sémiotique, porteuse de débat et d'analyse.

Le récit inuit de Thériault se prêtait admirablement bien aux modalités de la narratologie. L'univers dans lequel évoluent *Agaguk* et *Iriook*, en tant que couple primordial, est traversé par un imaginaire du pouvoir différencié, à la fois masculin et féminin, et celui du savoir traditionnel autochtone. Mais ce qui fait avancer magnifiquement l'analyse, c'est la notion même de devoir, de responsabilité envers soi-même et envers la communauté, qui est au cœur des transformations actantielles.

Pour Perron, *Agaguk* constitue un point tournant dans l'évolution du roman québécois. Jamais auparavant, on avait pu assister à un tel déploiement de force brute et de sexualité explicite. Il n'est pas sûr que le schéma narratologique utilisé ici, malgré sa rigueur et sa flexibilité, permette de confirmer entièrement cette opinion. Ce qui est intéressant, cependant, c'est que la description systématique des actants démontre sans l'ombre d'un doute l'utopie « blanche » de Thériault, son rejet progressif de la communauté (axée sur le pouvoir et la lutte) et sa défense du couple primordial, complémentaire et nécessaire. Si les premiers chapitres de *Semiotics and the Modern Quebec Novel*, de nature descriptive, laissent le lecteur plutôt indifférent, il n'en est donc pas de même des pages de conclusion où Perron démontre son profond engagement envers le texte à l'étude. Les carrés greimassiens avaient confirmé sans grande surprise le caractère oppositionnel du roman de Thériault ; leur ouverture au terme de l'analyse à des notions aussi imprévisibles que le désir sexuel et le devoir religieux permet d'en dévoiler la richesse. Ce n'est donc pas la grammaire narrative

qui m'a paru porteuse de sens ici, car je ne crois pas qu'on puisse s'abstraire de l'histoire et de la valeur ; ce sont plutôt ce que Perron appelle — avec une belle réserve — les « qualifications », qui font voir la pluralité du sujet érotisé tel que Thériault a voulu le mettre en scène. Or le carré sémiotique est de peu d'intérêt s'il ne permet d'accueillir le probable, l'irrationnel, le rêvé, la valeur.

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