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UCLA FRENCH DEPARTMENT DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

Stélla Béhar. *Georges Perec: Ecrire pour ne pas dire*. (Ph.D. Dissertation: Eric L. Gans, Chair, UCLA, 1991).

From 1965, the date of publication of his first novel, *Les choses*, until his premature death in 1982, Georges Perec wrote an extremely diverse body of work, ranging from novels, poetry and theater to newspaper articles, game treatises and crossword puzzles. Haunted by two ambitions, the desire to write all, "tout écrire," and the refusal to speak, "ne rien dire," Perec, whose parents disappeared during World War II, built an apparently heterogeneous work that translates the indelible experience of loss.

In my dissertation, "Ecrire pour ne pas dire," I analyze, in Perec's prose production, his aesthetic response to the undefined and unspeakable malaise provoked by the Holocaust and Hiroshima. Indeed, centuries of technological, epistemological and ethical progress only seemed to lead to the collapse of humanism and the possible destruction of humankind. Yet, for Perec, this experience does not mean the end of humanity. For him the response of post-modern man must precisely be to deal more than ever with his own reality and reconstruct a new identity on the tabula rasa left behind by the remembrance of this violent scene. Originally pressed by the need to speak, Perec in fact found it impossible to say straightforwardly what had to be said. His work, which has been recognized as one of the most significant productions of post-1950 French literature, demonstrates that this impossibility of speaking is not due to some inappropriateness of language, but on the contrary lies in the need to avoid a violence which began in discourse. It was necessary to go

back to language to regain, through the eloquence of signs, an identity originally obliterated by signs. By putting language, novelistic conventions, borrowed texts, and symbols through combinatorial and artificial constraints—which he explored through his participation in the avant-garde group OULIPO—Perec made use of a strategy of obliquity which reinstates meaning in the margins of logos.

Marc-André Wiesmann. *The Precipice and the Apple: The Functions of the Reader in Two Essays of Montaigne*. (Ph.D. Dissertation: Jean-Claude Carron, Chair, UCLA, 1991).

The “précipice” halting the reader’s progress in an ill-integrated text and the textual apple rolling towards the reader’s grasp at the end of an essay are two useful metaphors which point towards the fragmentation/unity dichotomy in reading and writing without finally reducing Montaigne’s positions to one or the other pole. These images arise respectively in “De l’institution des enfans” and “Sur des vers de Virgile,” and the dissertation performs a global reading of the two essays to unveil the implicit Montanian “imaginaire” of reading. The analysis involves a close engagement with four Letters of Seneca (33, 79, 84, 108) and an examination of the Longinian dimensions of the essayist’s perspectives on the “sublime” or “ravishing” nature of poetic texts. As an activity which should reduce precipices, reading in the sixteenth century seeks territories eminently suitable for total apprehension (a sentential “brevitas,” a blinding “evidentia”), and a description of reading’s perceived phenomenologies involves stylistic considerations bearing upon Renaissance theories of literary imitation. Montaigne’s use of the topoi of imitation illuminates his conception of the ideal reader.


But his texts are also active demonstrations of reading’s productivities, and his handling of citations provides the definition of the “suffisant lecteur.” Catullus, Virgil and Lucretius are read and transformed by the work of a text as “Sur des vers de Virgile,” and the apple the essay sends its reader as a pledge for hermeneutic union vitally displays these transformations. As modalities of the reader/text commerce two main traits peculiar to the essayist’s literary consciousness surface: a network of images of a highly ocular nature links reading closely to the arch-metaphor of the self portrait; and the body of “strong” texts acts in a gendered and carnate fashion ensuring their renewed parturitions through future readers’ eyes.

PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies

Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait
ici l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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