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REVIEWS

Georges Daniel. *Le Style de Diderot. Légende et Structure*. Geneva: Droz, 1986.

The relative lack of scholarly interest in Diderot's style was dramatically confirmed in the pages of Frederick Spear's *La Bibliographie de Diderot* (Droz, 1980). This work is, along with Arthur Wilson's biography of the *philosophe* (and some of the volumes in the Hermann *Oeuvres complètes* still being brought out), one of the few indispensable research tools for Diderotistes. Spear's volume is designed as an encyclopedic survey of critical writings on Diderot in virtually all of the world's languages. It includes entries on Diderot's life, his relationship to Horace or Kant, the thematics of the *Encyclopédie* or the *Salons* and, of course, the study of Diderot and problems of narrative form. Yet Spear's book contains at best a handful of references to writings that can be thought of as primarily devoted to Diderot's literary style. All of them are fragmentary in nature and quite old.

The oversight is startling. For the study of style is a vital, though not always recognized, field of critical theory. The articles gathered together in Spitzer's *Linguistics and Literary History* show, for example, how stylistic analysis helps pinpoint the *specificity* of an author's language: that unique discourse which allows one to say that a given text (whether identified as to provenance or not) was written by Rousseau, say, and not Chateaubriand or Bossuet. Riffaterre's inquiries into Gobineau and Hugo work out relationships between *effets de style* and larger issues of literary periodization and genre. In Jacobson's writings on Russian poetry and Baudelaire, one learns of connections between style and problems of linguistics; in contributions like "Hypogram and Inscription" of Paul de Man, of links

between the detailed reading of passages which is one of de Man's trademarks and larger issues which bear on rhetoric and literary semiotics. And of course the enterprise of style analysis takes its bearings—at least as far as France is concerned—from Proust whose "Le Style de Flaubert" first revealed the hidden twists of Flaubert's modernity, and whose *Pastiches et Mélanges*—a key and much underrated text—spelled out the essential tie between modernity and self-parody.

The study under review, though not a major theoretical statement about the problematic of stylistics, is closely related to many of its concerns. For it is the first book-length analysis of Diderot: a figure now taken for granted to be one of the key eighteenth-century ancestors of modernity and one of France's most original comic writers. Those interested in the laws of Diderot's art and in the poetics of eighteenth-century France will find much of interest in it.

An introductory chapter reviews the meager literature on the subject and explodes (once again) the myth of a writer *à la tête de girouette* spinning this way and that with every gust of wind and fresh polemical fancy. Chapter II entitled "Le Thème de l'Extension" shows the specific tack to be taken by Professor Daniel—a Diderotiste of long standing, whose essays on the fantastic aspects of *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* or *bavardage* in *Le Neveu de Rameau* will be familiar to specialists. It is an emphasis on key metaphors or organizing subjects which fuel Diderot's stylistic machine and keep it in proper running order (in this case the displacements and free ironies which have come to be virtually synonymous with a Diderot story, and one of their major pleasures as well).

Four other chapters extend this thematic approach. They supply comments on plurality or "la vision du multiple dans sa double détermination de coexistence ou de succession d'éléments saisis dans leur différence" (Chapter two), "le thème du couplage et de la bipolarité" (Chapter three), "le thème de la réversibilité" (Chapter four) and in Chapter five what Daniel terms "le thème de la coïncidence ou la métalepse du signe."

The survey makes use of an astonishingly wide range of texts to back up these observations, from *L'Histoire des Deux Indes* to the short stories and all of the mixed literary and philosophical tales. Daniel reveals a feeling for the originality of an aesthetic approach which derives, he says, from "un style à la recherche d'une oeuvre." His book ends with concluding remarks very much in the Diderotian

manner. For they are not conceived as a *discours de clôture* or a formal summing up (the kind of "positivistic" line Daniel openly derides on a number of occasions) but the more mystified "conclusion-préface" familiar to readers of *La Religieuse* and the *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*. "Le travail que je viens de terminer est donc à lire comme un épilogue, même si, comme je l'espère, ici et là, se seront révélés les premiers éléments d'une préface." (p. 444)

A work of this complexity and length—five hundred or so tightly reasoned pages cut down from an original text three times the size—will not be without its controversial side. Readers will look in vain, for example, for full-scale analyses of such key passages in the *oeuvre* as the dream scene of *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* or the one-man band episode of *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Daniel disdains lexicography or the history of vocabulary and word usage. His own style has an irritating tendency to mix words like "metalepsis," "lexemes" and "decoding" with the preciousness of sentences like: "En regard de ces béances démesurées que l'esprit ménage à sa vision translative ou transcendante, il faut considérer les pleins, les solides, les volumes, les agrégats qu'affecte le même mouvement d'expansion" (p. 167). And his use of such terms as "bi-polarity" and "coupling" as major *points de repère* is impressionistic in its own way (or at least open to such a charge); and reductionist to boot.

Yet for all these flaws, *Le Style de Diderot* is a work which students of Diderot will want to know about and read. Daniel's book contains many passages which do illuminate special features or "tics" of the master. The *philosophe's* use of the word *tout* is one of them. So too is his interest in repetition, cliché, and what Daniel calls "la résolution infinitésimale":

L'image atomisée du réel, sur laquelle, soit en l'adoptant, soit en la récusant, s'édifie la pensée du XVIIIe siècle, Diderot s'en empare non seulement comme d'un instrument d'analyse providentiellement approprié à la description des phénomènes qui éveillent sa curiosité mais encore, et surtout, comme d'un miroir de son être. Le fractionnement à l'infini de l'objet et du procès, démarche dont il puise les formules dans les sciences et la philosophie de son temps, semble le conduire à la découverte de l'organisation intime d'un type de sensibilité imaginative qui n'appartient qu'à lui. Ainsi, s'agissant du costume, Diderot en attribue la poésie, plus exactement celle de vêtements usés, à "une multitude infinie de petits accidents intéressants" qui "servent à lier les différentes parties de l'ajustement." (p. 188)

Daniel shows real sensitivity to the mystifications and ironies which are essential to Diderot's texts (and which are also a hidden feature of Daniel's own work as well). For in addition to the ironic last chapter previously mentioned, his work also contains a delightful (and probably intentional) ambiguity on the cover of the book. One reads there that *Le Style de Diderot* is an "Ouvrage publié avec le concours du Centre national de la Recherche scientifique." Yet this "paternity" is challenged by a small yellow note on the first page of the text where one reads that: "La mention figurant sur la couverture et la page de titre de cet ouvrage: 'ouvrage publié avec le concours du Centre national de la Recherche scientifique' figure par erreur. Le lecteur est prié de ne pas en tenir compte."

Above all, *Le Style de Diderot* draws attention by its very existence to a hitherto neglected, though central, aspect of "Diderot Studies." It is Diderot and his style: a subject which is far from being of merely anecdotal interest. For Diderot is, along with Rabelais, La Bruyère and Flaubert, one of France's greatest comic writers; and in works like *Jacques le fataliste*, *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* the creator of unique fictions which show *philosophe* comic writings already moving into Socratic or "romantic" irony. Daniel's book helps one approach these and other issues. It stands as a solid building block for that larger story of Diderot's poetics (and the poetics of the period known as the Enlightenment or *Aufklärung*) which remains to be written.

Stephen Werner, UCLA

Thomas M. Greene. *The Vulnerable Text: Essays on Renaissance Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

The recent book by Thomas M. Greene is a collection of twelve essays on his area of specialization: Humanism and the Renaissance in Italy, France and England. Each study has already appeared elsewhere and they range in date of composition from 1970 ("Ben Jonson and the Centered Self") to 1986 (an essay on Maurice Scève's *dizain* 378 and one entitled "History and Anachronism"). Yet despite the chronological distance separating these studies they are related both by the theme of textual "vulnerability" and, especially, by Greene's hermeneutic practice.

Greene is not dogmatic in defining literary vulnerability, but he does single out four areas which repeatedly give rise to interpretive ambiguity: historicity, intertextuality or dialogue, referentiality, and figuration. These aspects are discussed in the early pages of the chapter on Scève, where he also examines a fifth poetic characteristic—the “tolerance of dissonance.” (103) It is clear, however, that Greene’s dominant critical concern is the problematic of textual historicity, and this slant, which is implicit in all of Greene’s work, receives deliberate confirmation in one of his chapters on Shakespeare (there are three in all), entitled “Anti-Hermeneutics: The Case of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129.” This study begins by calling into question editors’ attempts to modernize the punctuation of Renaissance texts in order to facilitate one’s understanding. Greene argues that in Sonnet 129 such a process in fact hinders one’s perceptions, for by covering up the “presuppositions [a Jacobean reader] brought to the printed page . . . it fails to preserve an important element of Shakespeare’s semiotic world.” (163). The second half of this essay engages in a broader theoretical discussion as Greene sets out his own method of understanding in opposition to what he views as the partial and egocentric interpretations of a number of reader-minded critics (Gadamer receives particular attention). The first moment of Greene’s interpretive process would be a refusal to appropriate the text’s otherness, opting instead to acknowledge “the pathos of estrangement,” to recognize in the text that which “deceives our expectations, offends our proprieties, refuses dialogue, will not abide our questions.” (171) After this anti-hermeneutic stage would follow the attempt to discover the text’s own encoded intentionality, or *orientation* (a term borrowed from Ricoeur), to “accept a responsibility for a partial interpretive correspondence to an intrinsic meaning or complex of meanings,” (173) arising, one might suppose, from each work’s own “vulnerabilities.”

Remaining faithful to a text’s design and its historical contingencies is thus the primary goal of Greene’s analyses. In defense of his manner of interpretation he eloquently invokes only the armor of his own critical beliefs:

These essays themselves are conspicuously vulnerable, since they rest on presuppositions many will not grant. They assume that one can speak meaningfully of a literary text, that such a text has a moral dimension, that its historicity is essential to it, that some readings are more appropriate to it than others, and perhaps more crucially that,

in Ricoeur's terms, a hermeneutic of faith is not incompatible with a hermeneutic of suspicion. (xii)

In wishing to avoid readings of "self-indulgent anachronism" (or what he called somewhat more strongly in a recent conference paper, the "monotonous pathology" and "ineffable ennui of hermeneutic narcissism") Greene stands opposed to the "effort of demystification" of many contemporary critical schools such as Freudianism, deconstruction, Marxism, and feminism. Still he does not fail to cite his own indebtedness to a major deconstructive critic in Renaissance studies—Terence Cave, author of *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance*, and probably well known to readers of this journal. Indeed it is especially interesting for the student of the French sixteenth century, for whom Cave's book has become a kind of primer, to witness Greene's assessment of plenitude in Rabelais and Montaigne (as well as Erasmus' *Adagia*) and to contrast it with the Derridean readings of these authors carried out by Cave. Greene traces, for instance, the motif of thirst through Rabelais' books, and finds that the author does not build his narrative on a "mythical cornucopian plenitude" destined to be emptied out, but instead keenly perceives his characters' "primal *soif*" and foregrounds repeatedly their figurative indigence as being "the fundamental framework in which man acts." (87). In his study of the military siege in Montaigne's essays I.5 and I.6, taken as a metaphor for the internal/external struggles of discourse, Greene contests Cave's claims of an absent self at the heart of Montaigne's writing by showing how the author develops and enacts such private, centralizing techniques as "*stile*" and "*façon*."

Thomas Greene's writing, in *The Vulnerable Text* as elsewhere, is marked by its own subtleties of style and thought, particularly evident when the critic engages in discussion of the more elusive aspects of literature such as "tone." One may wish ultimately to assert one's readerly rights to the Renaissance text more independently than Greene would seem to advise. Even so, most readers are likely to profit by and come to admire his rigorous preservation of textual integrity.

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PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies



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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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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

The Logic of the Undecidable:
An Interview with René Girard 1
Thomas F. Bertonneau

Faire: "dire" ~~est~~ dire: "faire"
dans *Dom Juan* et *George Dandin* 25
Atiyeh Showrai

Ghost-Ridden Authors/Ghost-Written Texts:
Female Phantoms in Two Works by André Breton
and Georges Bataille 37
Vicki Kirsch

REVIEWS 55

Georges Daniel, *Le Style de Diderot. Légende et
Structure* [Stephen Werner]

Thomas M. Greene, *The Vulnerable Text. Essays on
Renaissance Literature* [Susan Delaney]

UCLA FRENCH DEPARTMENT DISSERTATIONS 61