

## Modern Humanities Research Association

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Review

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Source: *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 100, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), pp. 507-508

Published by: [Modern Humanities Research Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3737648>

Accessed: 27-10-2015 01:40 UTC

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*Obermann: dernière version.* By ÉTIENNE PIVERT DE SENANCOUR. Ed. by BÉATRICE DIDIER. (Textes de littérature moderne et contemporaine, 48) Paris: Champion. 2003. 489 pp. ISBN 2-7453-0451-8.

Béatrice Didier, whose earliest contributions to Senancour studies appeared under the name of Le Gall all but half a century ago, continues to present the results of devoted scholarship. On this occasion she offers *Obermann* in its final form. The novelist was, characteristically enough, addicted to rewriting, even altering the spelling of his title to indicate the pronunciation he preferred. Senancour was always in search of the ideal formulation to encapsulate his sensibility and his responses to the natural world. Towards the end of his life he took a copy of the 1840 revised version of his novel and made a number of further alterations for an edition of his complete works that was never brought out. The changes confirmed tendencies already apparent in the 1840 text. They involved 'aussi bien [. . .] l'atténuation de l'antichristianisme que l'épuration du style' (p. 47). In the literary references too modifications were made, reflecting no doubt changes in the author's opinions as well as the tastes of a new generation. As Didier recorded the variants in her thesis, *L'Imaginaire chez Senancour* (2 vols (Paris: Corti, 1966), II, 536–50), this new edition does not come unannounced. All the same, it is very welcome.

Few will dissent from Didier when she asserts that the 1804 *Oberman*, of which her Livre de Poche edition appeared in 1984, and the present 'ultime version' both have a validity of their own and merit individual study in their integrity. Whether all will follow her more general comments on traditional editing is, however, doubtful. 'La naissance de la génétique moderne', she declares, 'a remis en cause le principe de hiérarchie.' Since a text must be regarded as 'en perpétuelle genèse', there is no justification for attributing special authority to any particular version of it. Computers can display on their screens all the different versions 'simultanément'. Consequently, 'le texte devient une sorte de "mobile" que le lecteur construit à son gré' (pp. 44–45). Perhaps. But can readers really take in simultaneously multiple formulations without situating them at least in some provisional context? And in their inescapable picking and choosing are they to have no surer guide than whim?

Didier provides a helpful, wide-ranging introduction, and to Senancour's own two sets of notes she adds some explanations at the foot of the page. She also quotes variants at the end of the volume. All this extra material, valuable though it is, makes demands on readers. Running heads would have been helpful. The rich bibliography is the key to a vast amount of material, but is spoilt by careless drafting. The omission of the pagination of journal articles is especially regrettable. None the less, this edition of *Obermann* will be of considerable interest to old friends of Senancour and help to win him the new ones he deserves.

UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA

CHRISTOPHER SMITH

*Réflexions sur l'autoréflexivité balzacienne.* Ed. by ANDREW OLIVER and STÉPHANE VACHON. Toronto: Centre d'études du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle Joseph Sablé. 2002. 196 pp. \$CAN29.95. ISBN 0-7727-8909-8.

In order to substantiate the editors' claim that 'Balzac situe toujours inlassablement le lecteur face à l'acte même de la représentation' (p. 9), the twelve contributors to this volume show how the intertextual and intergeneric features of Balzac's writing create a critical distance between both form and content and *énonciation* and reader. Considerations of very different kinds of intertext such as *Adolphe* for *Béatrix* and *La Muse du département* (Aline Mura) and Scott, Cooper, the Judith myth, and Sterne for *Le Dernier Chouan* (Michael Tilby) show Balzac creating his own self-conscious fictions

with a critical relationship to his predecessors, to the genres they represent, and to the status of his own texts. Ellénore is both model and counter-model for Balzac's critique of historical realism; *faire* inevitably involves a measure of *contre(-)faire* in the sense of both distortion and disavowal. As a result, a number of other Balzacian texts critique the values they supposedly endorse, from the gold standard in *Melmoth réconcilié* (Émeline Dhommée) to marital fidelity in *Honorine*, a mixture of essay and fiction (Dominique Laporte) and, once again, 'l'illusion réaliste' in *Modeste Mignon* (Andrew Oliver). Apart from being internally self-aware and even self-contradictory, Balzac's texts are further complicated when compared with the formal and ideological contexts in which they appeared or against which they are now appraised: *Le Cousin Pons* foregrounding *gourmandise* when serialized in *Le Constitutionnel* against a background of widespread famine (Gabriel Moyal); the tension between Balzac's fictions and his many justificatory prefaces (Roland Le Huenen); critics' over-easy adoption of Balzac's own architectural metaphors (Rachel Sauvé). In all these cases, Balzac's own self-conscious, multifaceted language betrays what Marie-Christine Aubin calls Balzac's 'illusionnisme social', as illustrated not only by 'l'importance primordiale du paraître' in *César Birotteau* (Graham Falconer), but also by his effort to chart spatial and temporal *signposting* in *La Maison du Chat qui pelote* (Paul Perron) and, particularly interestingly, by possibly further linguistic play with Tours (city and maternal origin) and *tours* (in the sense of both twists and towers), which may well operate as 'le trope-maître, le signifiant phallique qui génère du récit' (p. 186) in the *Contes drolatiques* (Scott Lee). Although somewhat uneven in length, interest, and engagement with the central theme, these papers make an important and highly promising addition to the growing body of work on Balzac's textual hermeneutics or, perhaps more accurately, on the textual hermeneutics that is 'Balzac'.

UNIVERSITY OF BRADFORD

OWEN HEATHCOTE

*Baudelaire devant l'innombrable*. By ANTOINE COMPAGNON. Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne. 2003. 207 pp. €14. ISBN 2-84050-263-1.

Antoine Compagnon is a commentator who is sensitive to the nuances of language. For example, his discussion of the adjective 'énorme' (in 'le rire énorme de la mer' in the poem 'Obsession') shows how Baudelaire uses it in a translation of a Greek phrase from Aeschylus, so that 'énorme' stands for the adjective *anarithmos* (poetical *anērithmos*), which actually means 'innombrable' or 'immense'. The adjective can thus be read as having its full etymological force of going beyond the bounds. In this way, the laughter of the sea assumes a proportion such that it is no longer something that, as critics usually have it, is generous and therefore welcoming—a glimpse of something eternal. Instead, it takes on an aspect that threatens to overwhelm: the sea becomes a horizontal abyss.

Compagnon sets out to challenge and enlarge our appreciation of Baudelaire. He complains of the way the poet has been limited on the basis of a selection or selective reading of his poems. In this way we have Baudelaire the decadent, Baudelaire the symbolist, etc. Another version of this misrepresentation is what Compagnon sees as anachronistic criticism, presenting him either as following a tradition or more usually as the origin of one. In the former case, we are presented with a decadent Baudelaire unable to match or surpass past achievements (and aware of it). In the second case, Baudelaire is valued not for what he wrote but because he showed the way for his successors. Compagnon seeks to free Baudelaire's writings from such static or linear perspectives.

One result of this is a reorientation of our view of Baudelaire's relation to time. Interrupted time ('Paris change') is an important feature of his poetic world, and