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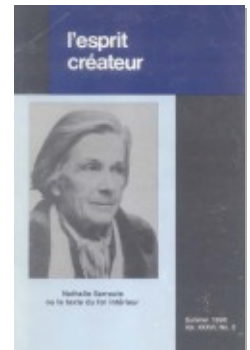
*Une Ecriture de l'Effraction* (review)

Reginald McGinnis

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## L'ESPRIT CRÉATEUR

Although *Nathalie Sarraute and the Feminist Critic* does contain several conspicuous flaws, they should not be overrated. Barbour's work is quite impressive, and although the philosophical basis of her hermeneutics is debatable, her approach and conclusions are worth examining. For any scholar interested in iconoclastic approaches to Sarraute's work and/or feminist literary criticism, Barbour's book offers both a treat and a challenge. Although it does not definitively settle many issues, it does do an excellent job of opening the door to a new world of sarrautien interpretation and discussion.

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*Françoise Asso. UNE ECRITURE DE L'EFFRACTION. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995. Pp. 272. 149FF.*

Through the perpetual agitation, the continual interruption (and repetition) of beginnings which comprise the works of Nathalie Sarraute, the object of Françoise Asso's book is to show the writer's production of an artistic form—which expresses the rejection of form. The book is presented as a quest (*une recherche*). And in the very Proustian opening sentence, both in form and content, the author evokes the importance of an aesthetic choice regarding a form “qui est au cœur de la recherche et de l'œuvre tout entière.” This choice of form revealed in the evolution of Sarraute's works is inseparable from the “opening of the moment” (“cette fêlure”) at the origin of her writing, which Asso calls “une écriture de l'effraction.” Consideration of Sarraute's different formal choices leads back invariably to the idea of a breach (*effraction*)—in the sense of breaking, violation, interruption—which Asso uses to explain technical stylistic questions, but which also elucidates the author's celebrated iconoclasm as regards traditional form: “la phrase elle-même est [. . .] ce qui se fraie une voie en bousculant un ordre classique et en ébréchant sans relâche ‘le beau langage.’ ”

Whereas one might expect a formal study of Sarraute to bypass questions of content, Asso shows rather the absence of rupture between form and content, which exist in a relation of mutual imitation: “la violence de la phrase” imitates the violence of the dialogue, which, beginning with *Les Fruits d'Or* (1963), becomes the veritable subject of Sarraute's works (*Les Fruits d'Or* being a dialogue on dialogue in which the characters discuss a fictive novel called “Les Fruits d'Or”). Dialogue in Sarraute is essentially conflictual: the relation between her characters takes shape around a compulsive pursuit of dialogue, ending in the systematic refusal of dialogue. The opening of the dialogue, as such, is nothing other than the occasion for its closure, and it is this negative reciprocity between the characters that constitutes the law of the dialogue: “la loi du dialogue est d'amener le sujet à se voir refuser celui-ci par un double pervers, l'interlocuteur à qui il ‘donne’ la parole.” The subject who meets with the refusal of dialogue is said to be the victim of a perverse double, who, by virtue of being a double, can always substitute for the victim, while the victim in turn plays the role of perverse double. This alternation of roles pervasive of Sarraute's dialogues describes a general relation of victims working in collusion with her persecutors, systematically narrated in her works from the standpoint of the victim: “chaque page, chaque phrase s'écrit et se lit du point de vue de la victime.” To the extent that the victim is the one whose pursuit of dialogue meets with refusal, the point of view of the victim coincides with the interruption of dialogue, that is silence—a silence often spoken in the mode of *sous-conversation*, revealing the truth of the dialogue in the suppression of the truth.

## BOOK REVIEWS

The characters' pursuit of dialogue reflects the writer's pursuit of an aesthetic form, which, to some degree, has the form of a quest for truth (*une recherche de la vérité*). Asso artfully shows the contradictions Sarraute poses for criticism ("la recherche de l'écrivain défie l'interprétation"), which she nonetheless manages to reconcile with her own critical objectives. This global reading of Sarraute displays a degree of intimacy with the author's writings which is entirely exceptional. With remarkable ease and clarity, Asso draws from virtually every part of a literary production often perceived as fragmented and disjointed, showing unmistakably the formidable coherence of the work.

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Nancy M. Frelick. *DÉLIE AS OTHER: TOWARD A POETICS OF DESIRE IN SCÈVE'S DÉLIE*. Lexington, KY: French Forum, Publishers, 1994. Pp. 176.

Jerry C. Nash, ed. *A SCÈVE CELEBRATION: DÉLIE 1544-1994*. Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri (Stanford French and Italian Studies 77), 1994. Pp. 189.

Scève's *Délie* continues to attract readers of different critical persuasions. There are "traditional" readers who seek to discern in the text traces of the author's emotional life and "experience." There are readers who, clinging to the somewhat discredited notion that the "author is dead," prefer to speak of a "subject" whose voice resonates across the 449 *dizains* and 50 emblems that make up the text. Still other readers are interested in the historical or philosophical dimensions of the work. Although Scève's main "sources" have been identified, or so we like to think, several critics continue to discover hitherto undetected intertextual echoes in the poem. Structuralists and postmodernists have had a go at the *Délie*. So have readers who, persuaded that psychoanalysis is the royal road to truth, approach the text armed with an arsenal of terms derived from Freud, naturally, but more often than not from Lacan.

Nancy M. Frelick's approach is mainly psychoanalytic. Indeed, she lays her cards on the table in the first sentence of her preface: "In this book, I have tried to elaborate a set of reading strategies for the *Délie* inspired by Lacanian and (post-)structuralist theories" (9). She works diligently to fit the Scevean text into the Lacanian system, or—for Lacan's complex thought resists systematization at every point—the reductive categories (the mirror stage, the Other, the *petit a*, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the like) that popularizers of Lacan have often presented as the essence of the Master's "system." Thus, the *innamoramento* is experienced by the Lover as a moment of rupture: "This initial shock in which the Poet-Lover feels himself split up is like the trauma of the primordial moment when the three orders (the Imaginary, or the realm of images, the Symbolic, or the realm of language, and the Real) are perceived as falling apart" (108). Driven by Desire, which is insatiable, "the poetic persona always seems to fall back into anguish and despair as he confronts the impossibility of attaining the object(s) of his desires" (63). Everywhere in the text Frelick sees failure, defeat, despair, hopelessness.

Having set up the Lacanian framework in the first half of her book, she moves, in the second half, to a study of the mythic subtexts (usually Ovidean) that inform the *Délie*. Here she weaves intertextual with psychoanalytic criticism, offering several striking and provocative readings of individual *dizains*. In accord with her premise that the poetic persona is a Lacanian subject, split and destined never to find satisfaction, she pays special attention to the story of Actaeon, a split and fragmented subject if ever there was one.

The volume edited by Jerry C. Nash demonstrates the wealth, diversity, and vitality of recent Scevean criticism. Several chapters deal with intertextual matters and focus on the