

Paul Perron. *Semiotics and the Modern Quebec Novel: A Greimassian Analysis of Thériault's Agaguk.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1996. 170 pp.
ISBN-0-802-0926-3

This is a very interesting, ambitious, and academically responsible book. It is rare that one finds an example of literary criticism that offers a fresh reading of a text at the same time as it provides a soundly articulated theoretical position, including a tightly reasoned justification for that position. The title tells it all: *Semiotics and the Modern Quebec Novel: A Greimassian Analysis of Thériault's Agaguk* presents Greimassian semiotics as a tool of literary analysis and demonstrates its operations through a detailed study of an important work of Québécois literature, *Agaguk*, Yves Thériault's 1958 novel about the Inuit. Yet, Perron attempts to do more. The entire project is also an exercise in linguistic and cultural translation: the *Agaguk* here is the English version of the text translated by Miriam Chapin, and the discussion of Paris School Semiotics, which revolves around Algirdas Julien Greimas's work, is framed as an overview for English speaking audiences who may not have had the opportunity to approach either the school or the novel through the original texts.

A project with such wide-ranging goals is challenging and inevitably raises certain issues of structure and readership: is this a book for those English readers who want to learn something about Greimassian school semiotics or for those who want to learn more about Québécois literature or about *Agaguk*? The answer is, of course, yes to all three questions. Yet it is extremely difficult to keep this balance: even Gerard Genette's magisterial *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, which attempts to introduce his version of narratology while providing an analysis of Proust, ultimately tells us more about narrative theory than *Remembrance of Things Past*.

The vast majority of *Semiotics and the Modern Quebec Novel* offers an astute and useful semiotic investigation of *Agaguk*, which opens up some very stimulating and original possibilities for its larger cultural signification, particularly in terms of its relationship to the socio-political world of its production. For readers somewhat familiar with what I would term "hard core" semiotics, the discussion is carried out with admirable clarity: the division of topics and their organization is handled logically, and the argument flows smoothly from one subject to another.

For a more general reader, however, one who is not already familiar with Greimas, Paris school Semiotics, or actantial models, the book may pose some problems, even though the author is certainly cognizant of and prepared for these difficulties. Indeed, he spends the first two chapters and the conclusion (40 of 140 pages) in an attempt to contextualize the results of this inquiry (1) by placing it within literary studies and linguistic theory generally and (2) by exhibiting its "payoff": what it can offer that other investigations can't. My concern here, however, is that these sections must perform a great deal of work, perhaps too much, I think, for the pages devoted to it, especially since the logical rigour and structure of the reading of *Agaguk* precludes this kind of commentary elsewhere.

Still, none of this is to say that Perron does not admirably place the novel within the

generic and historical context of Québécois fiction (chapter one), nor situate the particular analytic methodology and model (Paris school semiotics) within the larger history and theory of the semiotic project (chapter two). He is clearly an expert in all these areas and offers a surprising amount of extremely useful information. Yet, the reader unfamiliar with Greimas and/or Québécois literature may need even more guidance.

Nevertheless, this book accomplishes a great deal, and perhaps it is unfair to prejudge who may get what out of it. It certainly has much to offer for the semiotically initiated who want to delve more deeply into *Agaguk*, and may indeed offer something as well for those, perhaps braver souls, who want a guide for Greimasian semiotics.

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Patrick Imbert. *Le réel à la porte.* Nouvelles. Hull (Québec): Editions Vent d'Ouest. 1997.

Ce réel que nous mettons si facilement à la porte, trop facilement semble nous dire Patrick Imbert, le voilà qui sonne à notre porte, avec insistance, avec rage même, pour pénétrer de façon insidieuse dans notre univers calfeutré. Il nous assaille par petites phrases sèches, qui frappent à coups répétés, se font pressantes, se bousculent à la vitre comme la mouche que la transparence du verre affole. Courtes, tranchantes comme une lame de rasoir, précises comme la balle qui, portée par la loi de la gravitation, ne peut que toucher son but, elles déconcertent, non, elles dérangent.

Ce sont moins des récits que des prises de vue, avec des plongées, contre-plongées, gros plans, plans rapprochés, tableaux à la fois impitoyables et attendrissants, échos d'une violence omniprésente, exacerbée par des relents de tendresse avortée. Un style incisif, des images-contrastes en fondus enchaînés qui vous assaillent comme des vidéos-clips sur un fond de musique troublant. Et puis, des moments de tendresse extrême, de douce ironie, des images belles comme un tableaux de maître, surprenantes comme une toile surréaliste. Enfin, l'écriture se fait intime, elle se regarde se regarder et semble perdre la force qui la portait au-delà de ce regard pour se complaire dans sa propre image, polir ses mots pour finir par les bousculer comme une boule dans un jeu de quilles.

Ces textes parlent une langue qui résonne en nous, même si ce n'est pas la nôtre. On s'y retrouve et leur différence attire. Et c'est pourquoi on continue à lire, pour voir s'ils nous restent fidèles jusqu'au bout, même lorsqu'ils prennent d'autres chemins.

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