

Paul J. Young, *Seducing the Eighteenth-Century French Reader*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2008. 172pp. US\$99.95. ISBN 978-0-7546-6417-8.

This book follows several strands: the study of seduction as the master trope of eighteenth-century literature, the focus on reading as creating a suspect response of mimetic identification, the culture of the book in the eighteenth century, and the fears associated with novels. There have been many studies of libertine material in recent years, but Paul Young's interesting move in his book is to connect these libertine novels to the traditional novel and the anxieties about the genre.

Chapter 1 situates more precisely the objectives of the book and is the most intriguing of the five, as it is devoted to cultural and historical documents. The author focuses on the way "reading was coded as seductive in eighteenth-century France" (8). More to the point, and drawing on the work by Jean-Marie Goulemot and Robert Darnton, he puts into context the monitoring of the reader attempted by a number of pastoral texts that condemn "bad books" (mostly novels singled out for their capacity to pervert). He quotes some Catholic authors and Christian orators who campaigned against reading these impious books (Ambroise Lalouette, Dupuy La Chapelle, Antoine Dorsanne) and later in the century, in 1768, a certain Simon Paris, a lawyer at the *Parlement* with a declared Rousseauian influence. The chapter opposes the spectacle of repression of impious books with solitary reading viewed as a perilous moment for the individual. Young studies this in the context of the rise of literacy in the eighteenth century, reading as a private activity, and emulation as a sensitive factor for the reader.

Chapter 2 starts with the analysis of two pornographic best-sellers of the 1740s, *Thérèse philosophe*, attributed to Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens, and *Dom Bougre* by Gervaise de Latouche. Young succeeds in providing an original reading of these novels. His analysis of *volupté* in these works stresses, however, what appears paradoxically as un-arousing in the two novels. Young introduces this notion that combines pleasure with responsibility and intellect, in other words a superior form of pleasure. In *Thérèse*, the author insists on the "pitfalls" and dangers of the uses of pleasure. And in *Dom Bougre* particularly, he uncovers a series of dramatic pathologies of the main character (castration, impotence). Young examines how sex becomes challenged in the novel by risk and death. *Dom Bougre* paradoxically sets up a series of episodes of "depreciation of sex" (50), antagonistic to the erotic tale. The author analyses the way the novel incorporates disgust and dissatisfaction.

This leads him to chapter 3 and the study of the rediscovered popular novella by Jean-François de Bastide, *La Petite maison*. I thought there was nothing left to be said about this little text, but Young proves me wrong. He insists on the contradictions of private and public in the text.

He concentrates unusually on the seducer of the plot, Trémicour, and explores his “sincerity” in a complex debate about reading and misreading of interiority and exteriority put forth by Bastide. Young analyses Trémicour’s ambiguous place in the lineage of libertine characters, his mastery of the plot of seduction that he directs against Mélite, as he engages in a form of passivity towards his quest. It is Trémicour’s own interiority that is explored: the seducer offers his collection of “things” as “guarantor for sincerity” (66). Bringing into context the original ending of the novella, Young focuses on Trémicour’s libertinage, comparing him to the Versac of Crébillon’s *Égarements*. Young argues, placing *La Petite maison* into a more general cultural context, that the text articulates a critique of libertinage, with Bastide’s lament of transparency.

This same reading against the grain can be seen in his analysis of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in chapter 4, a seminal chapter in the book, given Rousseau’s own ambiguous response to the anxiety about the novel and its seductive power. But Young interprets Julie against the trend of her conventional virtuousness by writing rather of her domination (comparing her with the infamous Mme de Merteuil of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*). He concentrates in fact on Julie’s seduction rather than her passivity. His sexualizing of Rousseau’s heroine is quite convincing. Young also focuses more formally on the many footnotes added to the novel. Most important to him are those that he judges were intended to change the reader, offering a “critique of the novel” (98), most notably of Saint-Preux. Rousseau seems interested in disrupting the reader’s identification with the text and pointing to the flaws of his character.

The final chapter on Sade presents some surprises. Young concentrates on secrets and forbidden spaces in Sade, showing how Sade’s text operates according to a different economy, especially as it ceaselessly claims to disclose “all.” He shows how a combination of secrecy and architectural retreat place a demand on the reader’s imagination (Sade’s superior faculty). The chapter on Sade is a perfect conclusion to the book. Returning full circle to the argument about reading and seduction, about the reader’s suspected passive imitation, Young observes an inversion of that posture in Sade’s text: the reader is called this time to activity—not through the expected excess literality of the text but through the text’s silences. The libertine education of the reader commences through this occult act. Young returns to the architectural metaphor to make his point. The reading of secret places offers the best interpretation of the dialectic between transparency and secrecy. Young observes rightly how Rousseau’s famous transparency is perverted in Sade and in fact criminalized. The “cabinet reculé” of Saint-Fond in *Histoire de Juliette* is such a space that silences the atrocities of the libertine. The cabinet to which Domancé and Augustin retire, in *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*, is also recalled with the same intention of secrecy and horror. In these

constructions, Young finds the illustration of Sade's ultimate invitation to the reader's imagination.

This well-written and nuanced book connects aptly the erotic novels of the eighteenth century with the rest of the more well-known novelistic corpus. The author provides the tools to read these novels in the context of a homogeneous repressive culture and of institutions that organized to stifle them. More specifically, Young manages to show how writing for these authors emerges as a place of affirmation and pleasure, and imagination. He gives us a lot to chew on and opens up the corpus of erotic texts to cultural questions beyond just textual interpretation. We can be grateful for that.

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Elsbeth Jajdelska. *Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. x+224pp. CAN \$60. ISBN 978-0-8020-9364-6.

On the second page of *Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator*, Elspeth Jajdelska states her "central hypothesis" clearly and directly: "In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, for the first time in England, a large enough group of children became sufficiently skilled in silent reading to constitute (in adulthood) an audience for a new style of writing. This style arose from the development of a new model of reading, as hearing rather than as speaking ... The change in underlying reading models, and consequently in prose styles, created a need for what is now called 'the narrator' and was central to the development of all kinds of prose genres, including the novel" (4). She goes on to explain the difference in these models of reading: "Reading aloud creates an identification between the writer and the reader. The reader is a speaker, the writer's mouthpiece, with the writer's words in his or her mouth. Silent reading creates a different relationship between writer and reader. Instead of identifying with the writer as the speaker of his or her words, the reader becomes an (internal) hearer of the writer's words" (6).

In her first chapter, Jajdelska discusses the material, intellectual, and ideological changes that enabled the growth of silent reading. She notes that fluent silent reading comes only as a result of much practice in reading and argues convincingly that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries conditions were in place for at least "the children of the well-off and worldly" (23) to acquire such practice, thanks to changing patterns of consumption and new ideas about childhood education and the moral status of recreational reading, among other factors.