

Translator's Foreword to "Appreciation"
(from *The Theatre of Metamorphoses*
by Jean Ricardou)

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"Si l'on fait de la littérature, parler autrement que les journaux" (Stéphane Mallarmé).

This foreword is followed by an interview, *How to Reduce Fallacious Representative Innocence, Word by Word* (July–October 1990) and a translation of the first few pages of *Le Théâtre des métamorphoses* (1982). A complete bibliography, made available here for the first time, is also included with a selected list of articles on Jean Ricardou's works.

Le Théâtre des métamorphoses presents itself as a "mixte." The section here translated represents the first part—"Appreciation"—of the first chapter of the book, which deals with "the Press" but does not "represent" the book on the whole. It is a preamble to one architected ensemble. Thus, textual extraction can not help but raise some critical questions. At least this one which Ricardou mentioned when one section of the book was republished: "The fact that one feels pressed to offer it immediately in fragment to a review prevents a text from being further read" (CL 18).

To characterize the book in a nutshell, one could say, in the author's own words, that the mixt searches for the "non-identifying integration of diversity" (TL 27). This diversity is intergeneric and intertextual. First, the text is a dialogue between several genres. Besides the general opposition between fiction and theory, various types of heterogeneous discourses are also articulated: a radio play, dialogues, an autobiography, descriptions, sonnets, and as for our translation, a genre close to the pamphlet. Second, it is a woven fabric of quotations: a variety of allographic texts are invoked, rewritten

and blended (Proust, Jarry, Jean de Tinan and Mallarmé, to mention a few). From this point of view, the mixt can remind us of the “multi-stylism” and of the “multi-tonality” of Menippean satire, “an all-inclusive genre, put together as a pavement of citations” from which Kristeva traces back the “polyphonic modern novel” with its plurality of “textual” “elements in dialogical relationships” (WDN 83–85). In Ricardou’s own terms, the mixt is a “poly-intra-intertext” that fights against the “mono[-logical]text” (TL 28).

We can then surmise why Ricardou has told us that he does not really believe that a translation of his work is possible. And since we may as well wonder why very few of his works, namely of fiction, have been translated into English, I took up this question of “untranslatability” in the interview. Ricardou’s answer is a perfect example of how his current research (“textique”) has the potential adaptability to reformulate theoretical problems.

Let us recall briefly Ricardou’s work before and after *Le Théâtre des métamorphoses*. Philippe Sollers, as early as 1961, welcomed Ricardou’s first novel, *L’Observatoire de Cannes*. After *Tel Quel* and *Problèmes du Nouveau Roman* (1967), there was the Nouveau Roman and, specially, for Ricardou, the Nouveau Nouveau Roman period marked by the famous Cerisy Colloquiums, on Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon in the seventies, as well as the publication in 1974 of what is considered one of the best studies on the narrative characteristics of this movement, *Le Nouveau Roman*. Nonetheless, there would be today a perfect misunderstanding in insisting solely on Ricardou’s important role as a Nouveau Romancier. Although essential—as the recent republication (fall 1990) of his *Le Nouveau Roman* in a popular pocket edition proves—although he undoubtedly started in writing as early as the late sixties important articles on many questions raised here in the United States within the post-structuralist/post-modern context (the concepts of “mise en abyme,” “textual production,” “hypogrammatic generators/operators,” “scripteurs,” “reflexivity,” “metatextuality,” “self- and antirepresentation,” etc.), although his fictions like *La Prise/Prose de Constantinople* (1965) worked on the relationship between the “péritexte” and the “paratexte” to the “text” long before Gérard Genette started theorizing it in his wonderful *Seuils* (1988), it would certainly be a mistake to now emphasize all these past achievements but to overlook Ricardou’s present attempts to go beyond any so-called formalist closure. No theory, no fictional works are more open

than his, open to a constant research, a permanent questioning of what is already thought, preconceived or simply ready to be frozen and identified.

In the past two years, no less than four new texts have come out: two collections of short stories, *La Cathédrale de Sens* (1988) and, with the revised version of *Révolutions minuscules*, one new example of a "mixed" text, *Révélation minuscules, en guise de préface à la gloire de Jean Paulhan* (1988); one theoretical essay, *Une Maladie chronique* (1989) which clarifies the "problems of written representation of simultaneity," and, the first four sections of a theoretical work in progress, the *Eléments de textique* (1988–1990).

Ricardou's writing is today amazingly diverse and productive. To complete this present picture, I will mention two other important theoretical contributions: *Pour une théorie de la réécriture* (1989) which would interest anyone who is dealing with collective writing workshops, and the series of eight *Textuelles* (1984–1990) that relate particularly to reader response theory. Then, the bibliography can also give an idea of the variety and range of articles he has published besides his main theoretical books.

No one would think that his prose, because refined and baroque, subtle and elegant, "byzantine" as Ricardou likes to say, would make his texts so difficult to grasp that they would discourage further reading. However, one reaction to *Le Théâtre des métamorphoses* that seems less interested in reporting on what is actually evolving in literature than in cultivating everlasting clichés in Friday's *Le Monde Littéraire* is certainly symptomatic: the critic speaks of "gongorism" and raises the problem of "lisibilité." We still may simply wonder why the achievement of one major Spanish poet gave way to a negative adjective and why the problem of "readability"—"lecturability" as Ricardou recently put it—as opposed to what is often naively considered "easy or pleasant to read" is not more deeply analyzed in a cultural context contaminated by what we can call, since *Le Théâtre des métamorphoses*, the "mass-mediatization of reality" and also (why not?) of literature.

How to Reduce Fallacious Representative Innocence, Word by Word will update Jean Ricardou's reception within the American academy, introduce his new fictions and theoretical concepts, help us to better comprehend his literary itinerary, and, one hopes, remove any misunderstanding often due to a reductive, or simply, too careless approach.

Let us finally dedicate this ensemble, as Ricardou would certainly put it, "to the new translators."

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