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October 2005

Review of Jean-Nicolas Illouz, *Le Symbolisme*

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Olds, Marshall C., "Review of Jean-Nicolas Illouz, *Le Symbolisme*" (2005). *French Language and Literature Papers*. 36.
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of those serendipitous events that scholars have come to expect, an erroneous book delivery at the New York Public Library resulted in [her] receiving Alexandre Dumas's *Mes Mémoires*, wherein [she] discovered his essay 'Cuckoldry, Adultery and the Civil Code.'" *Oh les beaux jours...*

Illouz, Jean-Nicolas. *Le Symbolisme*. Paris: Le Livre de Poche, Références, 2004. ISBN 2-253-10799-9

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As emphases in literary studies have shifted away from structuralist, semiotic, and other modes of reading informed by theory toward historically-oriented esthetic and cultural analysis, we have needed a new examination of Symbolism that would account for its complexities both as a literary and artistic movement and as a "compound moment" in literary and cultural history. Jean-Nicolas Illouz has provided the foundation for such a reexamination. His study is, to my knowledge, the most complete and nuanced overview of the movement that we have, bringing together in a historically informed and carefully researched reading of Symbolism as both the *point de rencontre* for a multitude of literary, artistic and cultural currents of the French and Belgian fin-de-siècle and also as a decisive moment in the founding of literary Modernism.

Literary histories have usually made the distinction between the Symbolist movement of 1885-1900, and the poetry of the four great precursors of that movement – Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud – who have been so associated with it that they have acquired (or we have endowed them with) the *titres de noblesse* of a literary movement. It is perhaps a unique case in literary history (there may be other examples of which I'm unaware) where not only are the forerunners of a movement seen as more significant than the movement they announce but where they have come to stand for the movement, forerunners of themselves, as it were. The reason for this reversal was that – and this was remarked upon as the movement drew to a close after 1895 – the activity of the young poets baptized as Symbolists by Jean Moréas in 1886 simply had produced no works that could rival "Correspondances," "L'Après-midi d'un faune," or "Le Bateau ivre." Neglect has been the result. Aside from scholars of the Belgian side of the movement, such as Patrick Laude, who refuse to let us to lose sight of Maeterlinck and Verhearen, or students of the obverse of canonical histories, such as Michel Pierssens (*NCFS* 32.3-4: 345-55), in recent decades scant attention has been paid to the generation of writers (principally, though not exclusively, poets) following Verlaine and Mallarmé, with the prominent exceptions of Valéry and, though not recently, Claudel. Jean-Nicolas Illouz convinces us of the inaccuracy of the received view.

In a series of chapters that are as attentive to the nuances of literary meaning as to those of the contemporary scene, Jean-Nicolas Illouz offers a virtually complete genealogy of the Symbolist movement of 1885-1900: its debts to its precursors, its commingled destiny with that of the Decadent movement – which Illouz argues as being but another branch of a common literary and cultural modernism expressed institutionally by Verlaine's left bank café gatherings and Mallarmé's right bank Tuesday evenings – , and through affiliation with the Decadents, Symbolism's second parentage

of literary Naturalism and Realism.

Not content to present a literary history only, Illouz argues that the importance of the Symbolist movement lies in large measure in the cross-fertilization among the arts. He stresses the close associations between writers and painters (Gauguin, Redon, Moreau, Beardsley), between writers, or their writings, and musicians (Debussy, Strauss). Venturing beyond a strictly formalist understanding of Symbolism in order to show a pervasive *mentalité*, Illouz points also to the dream motifs of architecture (Art Nouveau) and, through the understanding of Wagner afforded by Baudelaire and Mallarmé, to the presence of a Symbolist theater and opera. Illouz is especially informative in his discussion of esthetic elements that unite cultural production during the fin-de-siècle: not only motifs of dream and decay, symbol as allegory, but the singularly tenacious reappearance of what he labels the two principal myths: Salomé and Narcissus.

Interesting pages are devoted to the writers who helped shape the different facets of this post-Mallarméan esthetic: Ghil, Saint-Pol-Roux, Laforgue. Infinitely helpful are the descriptive analyses of the myriad journals that flourished during the period, each having a distinct role and a pronounced *parti-pris* both literary and political. These journals, Illouz argues, were the real literary laboratory of the modernist *avant-garde*, where Gide, Proust, and Valéry had their earliest publications. (This important observation has been independently substantiated by Mairesse, *NCFS* 32.1-2:104-120). If Illouz doesn't push far enough in these pages, it is in the analysis of the politics of the Symbolist and Decadent journals where anarchism and other important elements surrounding the Dreyfus Affair were at play (see Shryock, *NCFS* 33.3-4: 385-98). Illouz provides informed discussion of the international literary afterlife of this Franco-Belgian movement as its radical experiments with syntax, punctuation, semantics, and assonance played as important a role as the attention the Movement drew to the four major precursors in sparking Symbolist movements throughout Western and Eastern Europe, Russia, Spanish-speaking America, and the English-speaking world. The volume closes with an extended appendix containing the major documents relative to Symbolism.

All those interested in poetry, the fin-de-siècle, and cultural modernism will find this book to be an indispensable reference, unique in its scope and thorough in its scholarship.

Reed, Arden. *Manet, Flaubert, and the Emergence of Modernism. Blurring Genre Boundaries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. 372. ISBN 0521815053

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Édouard Manet's radical manner of painting and Gustave Flaubert's avowal to write a novel about nothing have often served to situate these two men as fountainheads of modernist style in their respective fields. Their work has often been interpreted as dealing a death-blow to the theory of *ut pictura poesis* in the wake of Gotthold Lessing's restrictive pronouncements in his 1776 essay *Laocoon*, where he insisted upon the separation of the arts. Arden Reed takes on the task of demonstrating the impossibility of this stance that insists on the arts shunning all aspects except those inherent in