

translation is good and the typos are negligible. This book is a welcome contribution to the growing number of fiction (and nonfiction) volumes dealing with life on the U.S.-Mexican border.

Ralph Sarkonak

*Les Trajets de l'écriture, Claude Simon*

Toronto: Les Éditions Paratexte, 1994. Pp. 235

Reviewed by Doris Y. Kadish

In *Les Trajets de l'écriture*, Ralph Sarkonak turns his attention to the five main works published by the Nobel Laureate Claude Simon during the 1980s: *Les Géorgiques* (1981), *La Chevelure de Bérénice* (1983), *L'Invitation* (1987), *Album d'un amateur* (1988), and *L'Acacia* (1989). Sarkonak's book will surely constitute a useful and significant addition to the corpus of Simonian scholarship. The author commands his subject thoroughly and situates his observations in relation to existing critical works in a consistently conscientious and rigorous way. He has an admirable sensitivity to Simon's writing, and his analyses are accordingly probing and original.

*Les Trajets de l'écriture* is most successful to my mind in showing the narrative and thematic unity of the works of the 1980s. In one striking summation, Sarkonak observes that Simon's texts are obsessed by the figure of the father, the theme of war, the leitmotif of the curtain, the color pink, the symbol of the tree, the castration complex, the practice of writing, and the theoretical problem of referentiality (14). Elsewhere he observes that the three fundamental constants in Simon's universe are geometry, biology, and mythology. Sarkonak's analyses provide subtle and persuasive demonstrations of how these obsessions and unifying themes are intricately interwoven throughout Simon's writings. Other positive features of Sarkonak's book include a wealth of information about lesser-known works such as *L'Invitation* and *Album d'un amateur*; a willingness to address the implications of Simon's treatment of women; an original reading of *L'Acacia* as hypertext ("a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways," 211). Although not thoroughly developed, the notion of the Simonian hypertext casts familiar ideas about intertextual echoes in a new and intriguing light.

There are, however, a number of features of Sarkonak's book that I find unsatisfying. The five works that he studies are widely disparate with respect to genre and length (two are novels, two are texts accompanying pictorial or photographic material, and one is an account of a trip that Simon made to Russia), and Sarkonak's approach to them varies substantially. The first chapter devoted to *Les Géorgiques* is a concise analysis of the novel whereas the second chapter, almost two and half times longer, presents a line-by-line commentary of

the written text of *La Chevelure de Bérénice* inspired by Barthe's *S/Z* that I often found tedious. The last chapter devoted to *L'Acacia*, in addition to an analysis of the novel, contains a twenty-five-page list of textual echoes of Simon's earlier works that seems overly detailed. The result is a certain imbalance and a sense of reading five separate essays written at different times and for different purposes.

There is also a jargonistic side to Sarkonak's book that at times proves irritating. No less than eighteen prefixed versions of "text" appear, including such varieties as "auto-texte," "photo-texte," "inter(photo)-texte," "intra-intertexte," etc. The result of this proliferation, and even at times abuse, of theoretical terms can be seen in awkward and off-putting sentences such as the following: "Si l'intertexte général se fait texte par un ensemble de procédés scripturaux que l'on pourrait désigner par le terme 'simonisation,' l'intertexte restreint se (re)fait par un processus que l'on peut appeler 're-simonisation'" (16-17); "À preuve le rapport, la relation et même le va-et-vient rythmé de l'intratexte et de l'intertexte, d'autre part, sans parler pour le moment des rapports (plus pervers!) entre le texte et l'avant-texte que seule une approche génétique pourrait dépister et articuler" (67).

Finally, despite or perhaps because of Sarkonak's praiseworthy enthusiasm for Claude Simon, he seems insufficiently lucid about who Simon's readers really are. Thus he takes it for granted that *Les Géorgiques* is one of the most important books of the twentieth century (16), that the publication of *L'Acacia* is a major event in the history of the twentieth-century novel (169), that there is a need for a concordance of Simonian leitmotifs (66), or that the reader of *L'Acacia* experiences euphoria in recognizing intertextual echoes of Simon's earlier novels (184). A well-written and valuable book, *Les Trajets de l'écriture* would be an even better book if it provided us with a more modest or realistic assessment of Simon's importance for readers of modern French literature today. My reservations notwithstanding, those scholars who are familiar with and sympathetic to Simon's writing will unquestionably learn a great deal from Sarkonak's book.

Alain Robbe-Grillet and René Magritte

*La Belle Captive*

Trans. with an Essay by Ben Stoltzfus

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Pp. xv+230. \$30.00

Reviewed by Lynne Diamond-Nigh

I sit in front of the book, a text on one side of the page, a photograph of a painting on the other. Which do I look at first? It is this, and subsequent related questions, that form the core of the theoretical inquiry implicit in the photo-novel *La Belle Captive* as well as the introduction and interarts essay that enclose it. The