

Quandt on Locatelli (2015)

Locatelli, Federica. *Une figure de l'expansion: la périphrase chez Charles Baudelaire*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015. Pp. 194. ISBN: 978-3-0343-1589-0

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The title of Federica Locatelli's new volume illuminates her aim to expand periphrasis out of its narrow associations with decorative flourish. Drawing principally from the works of poetry theorists Michel Deguy and Sergio Cigada, her smartly written and well-researched analysis reads Baudelairean periphrasis as "la voie tracée par le poète vers une ontologie du langage" (17), a reflection of poetry's eternal yet inherently futile endeavor to express meaning.

In a succinct introduction, Locatelli orients readers by clearly setting up her argument and furnishing a brief outline. After examining in her first chapter how modern literary theorists established Symbolist poets as animating stilted rhetoric into a powerful means of suggestion, the author continues to contextualize her argument in the second chapter as she traces a general history of the expansion of periphrasis and considers the Symbolist poetic imagination's amplification of decorative language into "la dialectique entre dicibilité et indicibilité" (39). Locatelli reads "L'Albatros" and "La Mort des pauvres" in particular as featuring creative circumlocutions that do not simply serve as plugged-in synonyms, but instead metamorphose the "real" (the albatross, death) into figures of the poet's imaginary as he suffers the alienation and disillusion brought on by the experiences of modern life. The third chapter considers an array of poems from *Les Fleurs du mal* in which biblical subjects, lovers, and the Madonna all represent the evocation of "le mystère divin de l'attribution du nom" (90) rather than named objects of love or devotion. The final chapters, in which Locatelli demonstrates through even more poems Baudelaire's conjoining of the figure of the "allégorèse" (the concretized image) with periphrasis, illustrate how the poet addresses the conundrum of representing time and space given this limitless, enigmatic expanse. Continuing with numerous examples from *Les Fleurs du mal*, the author accentuates a "constellation lexicale" (120) as well as the dynamic detours of suggestive naming that play out in Baudelaire's poetry as it negotiates the ambiguous demarcation between the real and the Infinite. Locatelli supplements her study with three appendices, which chart French Symbolist poets' use of language with statistical tables (instances of verbs, nouns, etc.), Baudelaire's use of proper names throughout his corpus, and Cigada's conceptualizing of literary periphrasis as "syntagmes synonymiques" that drive poetic creativity.

Une figure de l'expansion pleases with its clear prose, its adept handling of poems and secondary readings, and its thorough bibliography. Most revealing is Locatelli's exposure of the intense degree to which Baudelaire struggled to express poetic language. However, the author's continual references to Deguy and other critics—Deguy has both the first and the last word—subdue Locatelli's own voice. Other portions of her analysis could be stronger; for example, she might have nuanced her firm pronouncement that *Les Fleurs du mal* of 1857 ushered in a revolutionary literary moment by taking into account that Baudelaire's most famous urban lyric poems of 1859 amount to masterful periphrases of Hugolian language. Locatelli reads Baudelaire through Symbolist poets, and through what structuralists and postmodernists have said about the Symbolists, yet does not acknowledge the strong persistence of Baudelaire's Romantic and even classical tendencies. His creative use of periphrasis had significant precedent. Hugo's preface to *Cromwell* (1828) and Sainte-Beuve's *Joseph Delorme* (1829), to take salient examples, had described the neo-classical and didactic poet Jacques Delille's decorative periphrasis as a degenerate "polype" (Hugo) and a sickly "ulcère" (Sainte-Beuve) that needed to be cured by a more picturesque vocabulary reflective of a scintillating poetic imagination. Finally, the frequency of very short paragraphs throughout the study lends an unfinished quality to the author's ideas, and the text of the poems under discussion is often not provided in full.

Une figure de l'expansion offers a good point of departure for future studies of Baudelaire's creative use of rhetoric. Locatelli's analyses of certain poems are evocative and deserve a good look; her reading of "Les Sept vieillards" as a reformulation of biblical language is particularly revealing as it delves under the customary analysis of urban themes to showcase Baudelaire's brilliant reworking of myths and tropes. Locatelli's study succeeds in showing what occupied Baudelaire most: not Paris, not mythological or biblical references, and not women in and of themselves, but the process of the creative imagination as it struggles to express these subjects in a highly innovative way.

Volume: 44.3-4

Year:

- 2016

