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Monsieur by Jean-Philippe Toussaint

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lyrique et les points de suspension à la Joyce-Céline. C'est aussi souvent drôle: S. va apporter à Dante "quelques révisions fondamentales", baptiser ça *Le Divin Bordel* et faire de Béatrice une nymphette. Et on sourit quand S. cite ce que les critiques lui reprochent: "ensemble contradictoire, disparate, succès commercial de mauvais aloi, il ne peut que se répéter". Oui, ça se répète, toujours la même musique: littéralement Bach ou Mozart, métaphoriquement le déclin de l'occident, l'ennui du monde moderne, la perversité de la pillule et de la fécondation in vitro, les coups de patte au Paris-Paris. Mais ne cherchez pas à identifier les personnages, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (23-29 janvier 1987, p. 55) n'arrive pas à trouver les clés. Quant aux nombreuses citations d'auteurs classiques avec préférence pour le 18ème et coquin, on s'en lasse aussi car le discours qui les escorte ne va jamais loin. Et puis, figurez-vous que S. redécouvre Pavlov. On a même l'impression que cette série de clips pour épater la province s'enchaîne dans un agencement du type stimulus/réaction: S. voit ou entend/S. dit ou fait. Malgré tout, ici et là, une belle effervescence et quelques calembours perlés.

S. espère vendre 200.000 exemplaires de son dernier bouquin. Un grand libraire de province nous affirme que celui de Sollers a tiré à 15.000 et vendu à environ 12.000. C'est peut-être parce qu'aujourd'hui Sollers fait exprès de ne pas reconnaître qu'un certain public aime encore "les conneries freudiennes" (comme dit un ami de S.) et a du mal à encaisser un roman peu lisible à force de l'être trop.

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Yvonne Ozzello

TOUSSAINT, JEAN-PHILIPPE, *Monsieur*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1986. Pp. 111. 99 F.

The Belgian-born Toussaint, author of *La Salle de Bain*, has just fathered a new novel, *Monsieur*. Not invoking the painter, Mondrian as he had in his former work, Toussaint new focuses, amid interlacing networks of illusions, on geology, physics, astronomy, mathematics, and the quantum theory attempting to expand, distend, and stretch the meaningful associations that occur in his non-character's world.

Perhaps the most significant information concerning Monsieur is given at the outset of the novel: "Le jour où, voici trois ans, Monsieur entra dans ses nouvelles fonctions, on lui attribua un bureau personnel, jusqu'à présent c'était parfait, au seizième étage, tour Léonard-de-Vinci." High above the ground is Monsieur's way; 'towering' over the rest of society, as if unrelated to people or to events; interested, as was the Renaissance man, in the arts and the sciences. That Monsieur has been appointed one of the most important directors of Fiat-France is surprising since he seems to be out of it all. Nothing motivates him; never does he seem to know what he is doing, nor where he is going. Is this evanescent and fleeting figure directed by some otherworldly force? Is this why he acts without rhyme or reason?

Monsieur is detached, feelingless, and identityless. Whether he lives with his fiancée's parents, breaks off his engagement, moves into another apartment, evokes not the slightest emotion in Monsieur. Only after having bruised his wrist does some inner and unreasoned pulsion encourage him to take a few days off from work and go to Cannes to see a friend.

Monsieur, a kind of sonambulist, yields to the dominating influence of a neighbor, Kaltz, who wants him to co-author a book on geology. That Monsieur knows nothing about geology is not even the point here, particularly since Monsieur's functions are those of a glorified secretary.

There are, to be sure, some tongue in cheek passages in *Monsieur*. Or is the entire book a spoof? When Monsieur's brother, a professor of philosophy, goes to the opera and asks him to baby sit for his six year old twins, Monsieur accepts and decides to teach them to play chess. Or when Monsieur reaches a state of ataraxia and "parcourait toute le nuit de la pensée, loin dans la mémoire de l'univers . . ." Is Toussaint attempting to emulate Beckettian depths?

Toussaint's style is commendable: simple, clear, and concise; a fine example of classicism at its best. Nevertheless, the reader remains removed and uninvolved in Monsieur's peregrinations.

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