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romans anciens la fable n'est qu'un prétexte à accumuler des descriptions, Simon explique que la fable étant un petit récit d'où l'on tire une moralité, c'est un processus contraire qui a lieu dans la fabrication du récit. C'est le récit qui est tiré de la moralité, l'histoire étant une démonstration imagée pour illustrer la maxime ou la thèse que l'auteur cherche par ce moyen à rendre plus frappante. Une des thèses que Simon veut rendre plus frappante c'est l'absurdité de la guerre. De livre en livre et encore dans *L'Acacia* il s'applique dans ses descriptions à faire un ensemble de démonstrations imagées qui font de lui peut-être l'écrivain contemporain le plus engagé.

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TOUSSAINT, JEAN-PHILIPPE. *L'Appareil-photo*. Paris: Minuit, 1988. ISBN 2-7073-1197-9. Pp. 123. 49 F.

Jean-Philippe Toussaint's third novel, *L'Appareil-photo*, may soon have its turn behind the camera. It is suitably remarkable reading as prose, and will remain so even if it is transformed for the screen. In January 1990 Toussaint released his first film; it is a version of his second novel, *Monsieur* (1986). The immemorial dart-playing of his best-seller, *La Salle de bain* (1985), has also made it to the box office. Some, such as Robbe-Grillet, might find a common thread amongst the new generation of "Minuit" authors (Deville, Echenoz, Toussaint, *et. al.*). They might all share the New Novelists' passion for flat personification and exquisitely-senseless detail. But Toussaint stands out at once for smooth clarity, simplicity, his devoted use of the *passé simple*, and his dry, sardonic sense of humor.

In *L'Appareil-photo*, Toussaint returns to the effective first-person narrative of *La Salle de bain* and uses his standard protagonist: a youngish, torpid, heterosexual male. Like the narrator, Toussaint's narration flows on practically despite himself. Occasionally, peculiar or unexpected situations arise, interrupting the beautiful descriptions of prodigious banalities. Two simultaneous events are announced in the first page of *L'Appareil-photo*: the decision to learn how to drive and the news of a friend's marriage. One of these becomes the subject of the engagingly inane plot; the other is henceforth completely sublimated. A camera does indeed figure in the plot and photos are taken, yet the camera is incidental, accidental. Commonplace events—such as going on an (amorous) escapade or misplacing a sock—are treated in detail from a familiar, yet innovative, angle. For example, Toussaint repeatedly makes use of an ordinary fruit, the olive, for colorful comparison: "tout mon jeu d'approche, assez obscur en apparence, avait en quelque sorte pour effet de fatiguer la réalité à laquelle je me heurtais, comme on peut fatiguer une olive par exemple, avant de la piquer avec succès dans sa fourchette" (14). The novel is filled with such delectable charms.

The narrator describes his outing with the ever-yawning Pascale Poulogaïevski. Although their adventures can be amusing, the narrator's cerebral wandering provides the central stimulating interest; he is, after all, "plutôt un gros penseur, oui" (50). A peaceful moment of solitude can be highly inspirational; this background for deep thought—in a public toilet stall, in a photo-booth, looking out an airplane window, in a phone booth—will often melt away into the realm of the material: "L'endroit où je me trouvais s'était peu à peu dissipé de ma conscience et je fus un instant idéalement nulle part, si ce n'est immobile dans mon esprit, avec

le lieu que je venais de quitter qui disparaissait lentement de ma mémoire et celui qui approchait dont j'étais encore loin" (102).

As with Toussaint's precious *passé simple*, language becomes a perceptible part of the narrative pleasure. Thoughtful meditation is sprightly decorated with common expletive expressions—"tchin tchin," "allez," or "tiens,"—and with other, repeated interjections such as "mon seigneur" and "ma foi" (as in *Monsieur*, which also included a humorous refrain of: "les gens, tout de même"). This "punctuation" is one of Toussaint's trademarks, behind which we feel his bemused presence, as on an underexposed photographic negative, "comme d'imperceptibles traces de mon absence" (116).

Toussaint's novels are engagingly provocative. He might be venturing into the world of cinema to alter his own narrative territory, but his three novels already demonstrate a master's stroke for creating the decidedly original. As is Jarmusch on the silver screen, Toussaint is a poet with rhythm, style, and delightful quirks.

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Thomas Spear

## *Textbooks, CAI Software and Methodology* edited by Jean-Pierre Cauvin

*Avec Plaisir* Level 1. Paris: Hachette, 1985. 4 videocassettes, \$895; 2 audiocassettes; \$40; student text, Pp. 178, \$11.95; *Cahier d'exercices*, Pp. 96, \$4.95; *Guide d'utilisation*, Pp. 60, \$4.95.

*Avec Plaisir* Level 2. 1986. Same materials and prices.

Described as a "multimedia conversation course for beginning and intermediate French," this program follows the adventures of three French people: Martine, a *stagiaire* for a Lyon newspaper, Laurent, a reporter, and Bernard, a photographer. Most of Level 1 takes place in Lyon with a side trip to Annecy and Switzerland. In the twelfth and last episode, the three receive the news that they will open an office in Nice. Level 2 continues the story in Provence.

All episodes have the same structure. Lasting seventeen to twenty minutes, they start with a two-minute review of the previous episode via selected scenes and a voice-over. We then see the main action in two parts of about five minutes each. The next section, "Comprendre et s'exprimer," is a functional/notional approach to teaching certain items from the lesson. This section either excerpts lines from the episode or has two additional actors playing roles. The last section, "Ça peut vous être utile," shows survival techniques with some aspect of life in France (trains, post office, border crossing, etc.). Level 2 tapes begin with a short travelogue (Eze, the port of Marseille, the Camargue), the twelve longer, two-part episodes, and "Regards sur la langue," which continue the functional/notional teaching. They conclude with "Trois minutes avec . . .," an interview concerning an individual's profession.

Both levels also have two audio cassettes (not available for review) and three printed manuals. The student text gives all dialogues from the videotapes, amplified functional/notional instruction, pronunciation sections (ironically based on phonics), comprehension quizzes, and a brief outline of French grammar as an appendix. The workbooks have a variety of short exercises based on understanding the video and audio tapes and also putting into practice the functional teaching.

The teacher's guides offer specific suggestions for each episode. The video tapes