so that the gesture, like the word, remains only a gesture and not an act. When Hoscar Hana agrees to marry Banos Maya, it is in the form of a "faux mariage" with a "faux curé" (35) and with a chasity belt to guarantee that another "câlin pour rire" "ne me couillonnera pas une deuxième fois" (66). As a corollary to this paradigm of "plaisanterie," or language without consequences, the narrative form keeps the characters at a distance and in a slightly ironic perspective. Furthermore, the narrative perspective shifts gradually from interest in the young girl's sexuality to interest in the character of the old man. As the novel unfolds, the author reveals Hoscar Hana as a *savant*, who redeems Africa from the stigma of Aimé Césaire's famous line that Africans never invented either the compass or gun powder (115).

Tansi's novel suggests that Africa's most important conflicts have, in fact, been solved. The violence is not the calamitous and baroque cruelty of the author's first work, *La Vie et demie*, but a series of outbursts of impatience and frustration that are solved by the appeal to reason and perspective. He has moved his concern for collective responsibility away from the life and death questions that he raised in *Les Sept Solitudes* or any suggestion of collective up-rising, such as occurred in *Les Yeux du volcan*. He finesses the question of Banos Maya's sexual rights and leaves us with a picture of "l'Afrique éternelle," wrapped in food, drink, language and tightly woven social ritual.

Aquinas College Susan Gasster-Carrièrre

TOUSSAINT, JEAN-PHILIPPE. *La Télévision*. Paris: Minuit, 1997. ISBN 2-7073-1582-6. Pp. 270. 98 F.

La Télévision is Jean-Philippe Toussaint's fifth novel. Its size will surprise readers familiar with his writing, for it is twice as long as his other books. Yet Toussaint's vision here remains closely focused on little things. *La Télévision* takes its place in a droll and highly original body of work that is beginning to look like an epic of the trivial.

Like Toussaint's other protagonists, the narrator of this story is anonymous. Passive, reticent, recumbent, he is bewildered by the minute protocols of daily life. Reluctantly approaching his fortieth birthday, he reflects upon life's modest joys: he used to place sex above swimming in his pantheon of pleasures (just below thinking, he assures us, because he is first and foremost an intellectual), but now he prefers swimming to sex. His chief joy is to do nothing: "Par ne rien faire, j'entends ne faire que l'essentiel: penser, lire, écouter de la musique, faire l'amour, me promener, aller à la piscine, cueillir des champignons" (11). That schedule of activities will inspire sympathy in all but the most hardened reader. Alas, less attractive obligations assail the narrator. He is a professor of art history at a French university, and he has taken a sabbatical year in Berlin in order to write a book on Titian. Finding that he has been spending too much time watching television, he swears off it, cold turkey, right after the final stage of the Tour de France.

Initially, it's an easy choice, for he realizes that television conditions his life in pernicious ways: it fosters indifference, its representation of experience is reductive, it doesn't leave time for reflection, etc. Yet, having renounced television, he finds himself drawn to it in strange ways. He sits in front of the darkened screen, reading the television guide in the newspaper. Looking out the window at the

other apartments in the neighborhood, he discovers with bitter nostalgia that the entire city of Berlin is glued to *Baywatch*. He sees images of TV everywhere: in a computer screen, in the monitor of a microfilm viewer, in a darkened shop window. As a man of the written word, he is convinced that literature is vastly superior to television: "Car, au lieu que les livres, par exemple, offrent toujours mille fois plus que ce qu'ils sont, la télévision offre exactement ce qu'elle est, son immédiateté essentielle, sa superficialité en cours" (159).

In the narrator's embattled imagination, however, television continues to compete with books—and, most brutally, with his own book project. With a shudder of dismay, he realizes that Titian Vecellio's initials are "T.V." Straining to write the first sentence of his book, he stares into the emptiness of his computer screen—a postmodern correlative of Mallarmé's "vide papier que la blancheur défend"—but no inspiration comes. He's blocked. Understandably enough, he is loathe to admit that fact. He wonders if merely thinking about work isn't work enough, if not writing isn't equally as important as writing. Sunbathing in the nude in a city park, he savors "ces moments de paisible mise en condition à l'écrituré" (99). He turns toward small tasks for solace, arranging the papers in his desk, classifying and reclassifying his research materials, even cleaning the windows of his apartment, engaging in those rituals of preliminary procrastination that allow him to defer the more imposing task which awaits. His account of that behavior is hilarious; it is nonetheless harrowing for anyone who has struggled with writing. That struggle is the crucial theme of Toussaint's novel. What the narrator sees in the darkened mirror of the television screen is writing and its vexations. The same image is emblazoned in specular fashion throughout *La Télévision*—and more than a few benighted academics will recognize themselves in it.

University of Colorado Warren Motte

Linguistics
edited by Albert Valdman

GROUPE AIXOIS de RECHERCHES en SYNTAXE. *Recherches sur le français parlé* 13. Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1995. ISBN 2-85399-355-8. Pp. 200. 130 F.

This recent volume of the G.A.R.S. series is of the same mold as its predecessors (see *French Review* 67:5 [1994] and 68:5 [1995]). Though expanded in size to eight articles, six of the eight are by authors who have appeared regularly in the series, and some of these articles revisit topics addressed in earlier issues.

As readers of the series know, its scope goes well beyond the description of spoken French, but all articles have in common a solid grounding in the data of corpuses, of both spoken and written French. In addition, each contribution shares the theoretical and methodological framework elaborated by Claire Blanche-Benveniste and colleagues (Blanche-Benveniste, Claire, M. Bilger, Ch. Rouget and K. Van den Eynde, *Le Français parlé: etudes grammaticales*, Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1990), with its dual levels of analysis, *micro-syntaxe* and *macro-syntaxe*, and the accompanying *analyse en grilles* for representing visually the nonlinear configurations of spoken and written texts. Whereas this approach clearly distinguishes itself from most of contemporary syntactic analysis by its rejection of abstract