

Serroy, Jean (ed.). Paul Scarron. *Le Virgile travesti*. Texte, introduction générale, chronologie, notes, analyse des livres, bibliographie, index établis par Jean Serroy. Paris: Bordas (Classiques Garnier), 1988. Paper. Pp. 686. Illustrations.

One hundred and thirteen years after the Garnier Frères publishing house put out Victor Fournel's edition of *Le Virgile travesti* (simultaneous with the Imprimerie Nationale edition), scholars and lovers of Scarron and burlesque have again available, thanks to Serroy's efforts, a highly readable, modern one, pleasantly illustrated with reproductions from the Paris 1668 edition. The inspired general introduction is but one portion of an exemplary critical apparatus. Serroy shows himself in the "Remarques sur le texte" portion to be as able a philologist as he is a literary critic. He explains his double system of notes (one set opposite the verses, the other at the end of the poem) on p. 35 of the introduction. A comparison between the two sets shows his choice to be well-founded, although perhaps the variants could have been included in the endnotes, Pléiade-style. The nutshell analysis of the books making up *Le Virgile travesti*, bibliography, and index are all well-done and highly useful.

Readability is the key to understanding Serroy's purpose. His remark that Scarron's epic masterpiece "n'existe plus guère que sous forme de référence" (2) informs his entire effort. Even as he comments on the necessarily specular character of the work, he makes no bones that, to him, *Le Virgile travesti* is no mere pastiche of the *Aeneid*, albeit a clever one, but stands on its own and finds in itself its own justification.

In order to ease the reader into Scarron's text, Serroy engages in an exposé of the notion of burlesque that is both elegant and didactic. Obviously inspired both by Genette's *Palimpsestes* and Francis Bar's *Le genre burlesque en France au XVIIe siècle, étude de style*, it draws upon history, style, and aesthetics. Serroy sees burlesque as a double notion: *stricto sensu*, what is exemplified in the years 1648-1653 (in other words, the

years of the Fronde...) by the *Virgile travesti*, and, *lato sensu*, the atemporal phenomenon of ridiculing in extravagant and buffoonish way, through irony. The former is what preoccupies Serroy here: with a sympathy not devoid of caution, he traces the text's Italian ancestry, which he shows to be unquestionable, if by no means exclusive. On the other hand, he presents the relationship of burlesque to the Fronde as historically necessary: the replacement of Richelieu and Louis XIII in 1642-1643 by their "parodies," Mazarin and Ann of Austria, is a crisis of authority which constitutes a model of devalorization, a model assumed by *Le Virgile travesti* within very specific dates. At the same time, he points out the aesthetic parameters of burlesque style and syntax, whose characteristics are "la dissonance, la décalage, la rupture." (14) These characteristics he places halfway between the epic and the novel. He sees, then, *Le Virgile travesti* as a necessary ancestor of *Le Roman comique*, in the same way that the serious epic precedes both chronologically and aesthetically the heroic novel. When the tedium of burlesque travesty becomes burdensome, Scarron abandons his "épopée comique" (Book VIII) to embark upon the next venture, the one taking place, over many times twenty-four hours, in Le Mans.

Drawing on Genette to clarify the relationship of Scarron with Vergil, Serroy expresses this relationship in terms, essentially, of hypertextuality and metatextuality, an assessment which merits further study, especially in light of his explicit perception of Scarron's overt practice of *lecture* and *ré-écriture*, a scheme that is central to Barthes' textual aesthetics (see the preface of *S/Z*). Serroy does not limit to the literary domain the parodic mimesis which *Le Virgile travesti* exemplifies, however. He comments, perhaps a bit tongue-in-cheek, on Scarron's physical distortion as a factor in his "distorted" writing. Even though the notion is not new, the commentary is legitimate, and shows Serroy's great fondness for an author he knows extremely well. But his analysis also has a serious side: *Le Virgile travesti*'s most important effect is to render the Vergilian epic accessible again to the

common reader, through the triple process of translation, burlesque travesty, and metatextual comment.

What Scarron did for his contemporaries, Serroy does for us. This edition is a powerful tool for research and graduate teaching. It is a must-read for anyone interested in poetry of the period, baroque, or burlesque.

Francis Assaf