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génétique: Concepts, méthodes, outils**

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Christine Collière-Whiteside

Olga Anokhina and Sabine Pétilion, ed., *Critique génétique: Concepts, méthodes, outils*

In September 2004, I took part in a week-long summer school on genetic criticism organized by the ITEM and the IMEC, in the abbey whose chapel now housed the collections of IMEC and which had been converted into a residence where researchers can stay and work. Rather than a training course, it consisted of lectures and workshops on the numerous aspects of genetic studies, now published in *Critique génétique: Concepts, méthodes, outils* and although some of the articles retain a pedagogical focus, it does not purport to be a textbook, or an introduction to genetic criticism such as Almuth Grésillon's *Éléments de Critique Génétique*, but rather provides a panorama of the current prevalent approaches while describing the tools and concepts developed over the past 30 years. It thus illustrates the specificity of a discipline which, as Louis Hay underlines in his contribution, has not evolved from a theory, but from an empirical experience, open to interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation and very much alive. One might regret that the bibliography has not been better organized, as only two specific topics, codicology and the psycho-cognitive approaches to genetic criticism, are given their own sections. The reader is referred to the online catalogue of the ITEM.

Two complementary points of view open the book, those of Louis Hay, founding father of genetic studies, and Bernard Beugnot who, being originally a specialist of seventeenth century literature, plays the outsider. Louis Hay traces the history of the discipline, from the invention of new tools such as the application of codicology to modern manuscripts to the internationalisation and popularisation of genetic studies, while insisting on the need for specialisation combined with a comparative mindset and pointing out that the advent of personal computers, indispensable tools for genetic critics, might mean the end of manuscripts for them to study. Bernard Beugnot then delineates some of the frontiers of genetic criticism: he questions the historical limits of the discipline, showing the wealth of discourses on the genesis of texts that preceded its invention as well as calling for the study of periods deemed "without drafts", suggesting that the time has come to write a history of genetic studies. He then reflects on the generic limits of the discipline and advocates a reflection on the terminology of genetic criticism, a suggestion taken up by the ITEM with its current general seminar.

The second part is devoted to the material aspects of the study of manuscripts. Claire Bustarret's informative article describes all the criteria of the codicological study of a manuscript and shows what information the genetic critic might gain from this description of the types of paper and writing instruments used by the writer, especially to establish chronology. Marie Odile Germain provides the point of view of the librarian and traces the history of the institutions' attitude regarding the acquisition of manuscripts, demonstrating how decisive the role of the archivist can be, as they often have to become genetic critics themselves to classify and number the documents, unwittingly affecting the future genetic analyses even before they have access to the documents. She finally calls on Cixous and Derrida's writings to reflect on the real and symbolical import of the gift and acceptance of such documents. Jean-Louis Lebrave then presents the different computer programmes developed by genetic critics since the 1970's, aiming both at automating the analysis of drafts as well as exploring ways of publishing genetic files, before describing in detail MEDITE, a programme allowing the comparison of two versions of the same text.

Three case studies follow, each illustrating different types of approaches: microgenetics, with Almuth Grésillon's close study of the drafts for one short poem by Ponge, "l'Ardoise"; macrogenetics, with Bernard Brun's analysis of the interaction between typescripts and proofs in Proust's papers, showing how structural reorganisation takes place at stages first, wrongly, considered final, on proofs; and exogenetics, with Catherine Viollet's study of the use of documentation by Thomas Mann for his short story "Die Betrogene" as well as the role played by his wife and daughter. Each case study is treated as an opportunity to give advice to future genetic critics.

In the fourth part are gathered four theoretical essays. Daniel Ferrer explores the notion of “accident” in the genesis of a work, using the concept of “emergence” and “path dependency” to try and provide a model for the process of literary creation. Anne Herschberg Pierrot calls for a new definition of style as a series of processes and as a dynamic within the text rather than as a stable and homogeneous category, not only in genetic documents but in all texts, then reflects on the characteristics of genetic styles, in particular on heterogeneity and incompleteness. Irène Fenoglio reads drafts from an enunciative perspective and suggests a typology of graphic accidents (corrections, erasures, second thoughts and Freudian slips) as enunciative events, single or repeated, reflecting as A. Herschberg Pierrot does on the necessity of combining singular and general approaches. Denis Alamargot’s more pedagogical article presents the different psycho-cognitive models of writing processes which have been created since the 1950’s, which only cover learners (such as children or teenagers) or limited tasks (such as reports or letters) so far and he shows how the study of the writing processes involved in writing books (writers being considered as “super experts”) could provide information on mental processes involved in writing activities relatively lacking in constraints as well as spread over long periods of time.

By way of conclusion, Pierre-Marc de Biasi’s essay outlines what work has already been done on the genesis of theatrical productions, films, music, art, architecture or science, what the main characteristics of each of those creative processes are and the particular problems they raise, to underline the importance of interdisciplinary exchanges, in particular borrowings of terms and concepts.

This book provides both a good introduction to genetic criticism, as it covers most current areas of research in the discipline and valuable discussion of the fascinating processes at work in literary creation.