

Centre

P.Sollers

March 20, 2019

It is billed as a novel, but there is no plot, nothing made up really, but just a sequence of philosophical pronouncements and commentaries. Ostensibly it is about a writer and his lover Nora, a psycho-analyst, and some of the comments are made in reference to her; but the author is an author and he is married (since more than fifty years) to Julia Kristeva, a psycho-analyst and public intellectual, but in the 'novel' she is called 'Nora' and is supposed to be a forty-year old divorcee. The book is short, easily read in an afternoon, divided into very short chapters on different themes such as Religion, Crimes, Big-Bang, Contradictions, Grâce, made up by more or less self-contained paragraphs of pronouncements, reflections, commentaries, mostly, but not exclusively, philosophical, as there are also a sprinkling of literary, historical, biographical and political ruminations. They are mildly interesting, but not strikingly so, and will not stay for long in memory. But the writing is undeniably pleasant, and the lay-out and font, as in all Gallimard editions, a delight to read.

So what could be commented upon? He refers to patients which has read a lot and vie with the analyst as to be most superior of the two, they are the hardest to treat and cure, if cure even is an option; while the nonintellectual ones, those who are modest and really want to be cured, are the ones most amenable to treatment. *Heureux les pauvres d'esprit, la porte de l'inconscient leur est grande ouvert* and one is of course reminded of the Biblical saying in Matthew 5:3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* and similar sayings blessing the meek (who will inherit the Earth)[5:5] and those pure in heart [5:8]. Furthermore he adds *Ceux qui ne comprennent rien comprennent mieux que ceux qui comprennent mal*. Later on he refers to Dante, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Bach, Mozart, *et bien autres, sont absolument sortis leurs corps, leurs oeuvres sont là, mais leur souvenir s'est perdu*, which reminds me of my saying that the people of the past are turned into fictional characters, as they do not breathe nor *parler, marcher, manger, boire, jouir, dormir*, what remains are their disembodied existences, Platonic essentials dwelling in a kind of heaven, namely that of the collective imagination.

But the celestial dwellers which mainly occupy the celestial imagination of the author are Lacan and Freud. Of those two Freud is of course the more picturesque and the author recalls with a mixture of glee and astonishment Freud's romantic not to say exuberant discovery of Italy and how he traveled with his sister in law - Minna - presenting her as his wife (true she was prettier than Martha). But he cannot refrain from quoting Freud on the intellectual capacities of women. *L'infériorité intellectuelle de tant des femmes, qui et un réalité indiscutable. doit être attribuée à l'inhibition de la pensée, inhibition requise pour la répression sexuelle*. It is dismissed, rightly no doubt, as monstrous, but what would he have written in another time when different social conventions would have reigned?

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