
Overture to this Collection

“The style is the man himself,” people repeat without seeing any harm in it, and without worrying about the fact that man is no longer so sure a reference point. Besides, the image of the cloth that adorned Buffon while he wrote is there to keep us inattentive.

A re-edition of *Voyage à Montbard* (published posthumously in the year IX by the Solvet press), penned by Hérault de Séchelles—the title alters that of the edition published in 1785, *Visite à Buffon*—gives us pause for thought. Not simply because one finds in it another style, which prefigures the best of our buffoonish reporting, but because it resituates the saying itself in a context of impertinence in which the host is in no wise outdone by his guest.

For the man discussed in the adage—which was already classic by that time [1785], having been extracted from Buffon’s discourse to the Academy—proves, in Séchelles’ portrait, to be a fantasy of the great man, Buffon turning it into a scenario that involves his whole household. There is nothing natural here; Voltaire generalizes maliciously on this point, as we recall.

Shall we adopt the formulation—the style is the man—if we simply add to it: the man one addresses?

This would be simply to comply with the principle I have proposed: that in language our message comes to us from the Other, and—to state

the rest of the principle—in an inverted form. (Let me remind you that this principle applied to its own enunciation since, although I proposed it, it received its finest formulation from another, an eminent interlocutor.)

But if man were reduced to being nothing but the echoing locus of our discourse, wouldn't the question then come back to us, "What is the point of addressing our discourse to him?"

That is the question posed to me by the new reader, this reader being the reason that has been put forward to convince me to publish a collection of my writings.

I am offering this reader an easy entryway into my style by opening this collection with "The Purloined Letter," even though that means taking it out of chronological order.

10 It will be up to this reader to give the letter in question, beyond those to whom it was one day addressed, the very thing he will find as its concluding word: its destination. Namely, Poe's message deciphered and returning from him, the reader, so that in reading this message he realizes that he is no more feigned than the truth is when it inhabits fiction.

This "purloining of the letter" [*vol de la lettre*] will be said to be the parody of my discourse, whether one confines one's attention to the etymology of "parody," which indicates an accompaniment and implies the precedence of the trajectory that is parodied, or, in returning to the usual meaning of the term, one sees the shadow of the intellectual master dispelled in it in order to obtain the effect that I prefer to it.

The title of the poem "The Rape of the Lock"* [*le vol de la boucle*] is evoked here in which Pope, thanks to parody, ravishes—from the epic, in his case—the secret feature of its derisory stakes.

Our task brings back this charming lock, in the topological sense of the term [*boucle* also means loop]: a knot whose trajectory closes on the basis of its inverted redoubling—namely, such as I have recently formulated it as sustaining the subject's structure.

It is here that my students would be right to recognize the "already" for which they sometimes content themselves with less well-founded homologies.

For I decipher here in Poe's fiction, which is so powerful in the mathematical sense of the term, the division in which the subject is verified in the fact that an object traverses him without them interpenetrating in any respect, this division being at the crux of what emerges at the end of this collection that goes by the name of object *a* (to be read: little *a*).

It is the object that (cor)responds to the question about style that I am

raising right at the outset. In the place man marked for Buffon, I call for the falling away [*chute*] of this object, which is revealing due to the fact that the fall isolates this object, both as the cause of desire in which the subject disappears and as sustaining the subject between truth and knowledge. With this itinerary, of which these writings are the milestones, and this style, which the audience to whom they were addressed required, I want to lead the reader to a consequence in which he must pay the price with elbow grease.

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