Alexandre Leupin

Édouard Glissant, philosophe: Héraclite et Hegel dans le Tout-Monde. Paris: Éditions Hermann, 2016. 381 pp. (Paper € 27.00)

This is an extraordinary book, both in its ambition and its structure. Alexandre Leupin sets out to show that Glissant was first and foremost a philosopher. He argues that his writing was, far more than has previously been recognized, deeply influenced by European philosophy, while at the same time it presents his ideas in a completely different way from that of standard philosophical discourse: for Glissant philosophy is *poetic*, and, conversely, poetic writing is the “*mode ultime de la connaissance*” (p. 143). His philosophy is “*un espace où les choses elles-mêmes (les étants) parlent: laves, fleuves, rochers, oiseaux, arbres*” (p. 247). The central concepts of *Relation* and *Tout-Monde* are reexamined in the light of Hegel and Heraclitus and also many other thinkers, who are often not openly acknowledged by Glissant but, Leupin shows, allusively permeate his thought. But this does not detract from Glissant’s originality: indeed, Leupin makes the bold claim that “*Glissant, en relisant l’ensemble de la tradition philosophique, propose en dernière analyse un dépassement de la philosophie*” (p. 56) because his refusal of abstract systematic thought in favor of a poetic immersion in concrete realities allows *Relation* and the *Tout-Monde* to be all-inclusive totalities, an ever-expanding network of interrelated details orientated to an indefinite future. Thus he rejects Hegel’s “*finalisme historique*” (p. 149) and his separation of philosophy and art (p. 122). While the influence of Hegel on Glissant has been discussed by other critics, that of Heraclitus has not, as far as I know. Leupin shows how Heraclitus is a subterranean presence throughout much of Glissant’s writing, informing his view of the relations between human beings and the natural world, and the concept of change. His knowledge of Greek philosophy and of phenomenology is impressively extensive.

The book consists of 18 chapters, the order of which is not determined by any apparent logic, and whose titles are quotations from Glissant’s work that appear in the relevant chapter. Some of these titles give an idea of the contents of the chapter, but others are very opaque (to use a Glissantian term): Chapter 1, for instance, is “*Les feuillages immenses d’un chêne de Louisiane, comme d’un arbre à palabres mis à plat.*” Therefore, looking at the table of contents does not give readers any idea of what the book is about—one simply has to plunge in. Leupin is clearly not interested in writing according to academic norms. This may be partly because he was a colleague and friend of Glissant (and the book is dedicated to Sylvie Glissant, who was closely involved in its writing), so his perspective is overtly personal; it is also out of solidarity with Glissant’s

own rejection of academic protocols. But it is above all because the antisystematic nature of Glissant's thought means that it can be truly illuminated only through a similar approach. Glissant proceeds not in a linear fashion but through "*ressassement*," constantly returning to his earlier work so that ideas emerge and develop through a process of repetition-variation: "*Le ressassement n'est pas statique retour à l'identique, il produit des variantes infinitésimales, desquelles surgissent des sens neufs*" (p. 38). Thus, "*Glissant retourne à l'origine pour produire le futur*" (p. 261). As a result, Leupin's own book is extremely repetitive—sanctioned by Glissant's insistence on the value of (inexact) repetition (Chapter 2: "*La répétition n'est pas un inutile dédoublement*"). But this also leads Leupin, I think, to overemphasize the *unity* of Glissant's thought. He can do so only by considering *Le Discours antillais* as an anomaly, which he explains by saying that it was originally written just to obtain a doctorate (p. 19); given the passion that infuses large parts of the *Discours*, this seems to me unconvincing (just as I am not convinced that Glissant's disinclination to identify with the characters in his novels means that "psychological" analysis of them by critics is necessarily irrelevant).

Indeed, Leupin discusses *Le Discours* at length in Chapter 13 with reference to Glissant's analysis of the commodification of sexuality. As this suggests, some of the later chapters move away from philosophy *per se* to, for example, psychoanalysis and structuralism. Overall Leupin considers the relevance to Glissant of a whole range of systems of thought, some of which will be familiar to Glissant's readers (Deleuze and Guattari, Faulkner) or to contemporary intellectuals more generally (Bachelard, Nietzsche, Lacan, Saussure, et cetera), while others—such as medieval heresies—will not. He presents them all with great clarity. But his book still makes considerable demands on its readers. It also made great demands on Leupin himself, as he tells us: "*Pour écrire ce livre, j'ai dû me défaire et me refaire*" (p. 23). Writing the book was a labor of love; and so, ideally, is reading it.

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