
The Games of Fiction deliberately and methodically introduces the reader to the concept of game space, play and the Oulipian development of the ludic narrative; it also makes clear that these concepts will be used particularly to expose the mechanisms of one key text: La Vie mode d’emploi. As such, this study is, curiously, both tightly and broadly focused, a strategy that David Gascoigne manages well from the outset, making his objectives clear and logical. The reader thus passes through the theory of play, Roussel’s influence on Oulipo, Serialist music, and a comparison of the Nouveau Roman and Oulipian text before arriving at Père as an object of study in his own right, or as Gascoigne suggests, as a pinnacle or extreme case study of all of the above. Père’s work, too, is treated on a case-by-case basis in order to reveal his breadth and versatility, but also to show the logical conclusion that is La Vie mode d’emploi. Consequently, The Games of Fiction manages to be both a book on Père and the ludic and a close reading of specific text(s).

The key to Gascoigne’s success is his ability to steer his target audience, which extends from novice to specialist, between a clear explanation of the basic tenets of a potentially daunting body of work and a sophisticated analysis. The ludic space is shown to lie in that famous area of Oulipian tension, i.e. between the constraint placed deliberately upon the creative process and the innovation — and freedom — that is its constant and necessary counterpoint. The Games of Fiction is a work that should leave even the profane reader rewarded and not defeated, compelled and not dismayed. Indeed, Gascoigne concludes that for all their many challenges and their defiance of the reader, whose erudition and cleverness will never seem to match those of the omnipresent author, Père’s works are there to be read, and that in the play space between rules and escape, there is scope for seduction. If he holds off until his concluding pages to use this magical word, it is because he has so much to reveal about Père’s practice, and to suggest too early in the piece that Oulipian constriction does not in fact exclude writerly jouissance might appear too facile, too dismissive of Père’s talent and, ultimately, too long a stretch from that initial frisson of submission to an overwhelming task.

As Gascoigne reminds us, Oulipo is a school of exaggerating textual practices that are inherent in all forms of writing, and Père’s importance within and without this group is the way in which he carries this work to extreme lengths whilst also using it as a vehicle for personal and truly moving autobiography. Gascoigne continues this work by stimulating us
to think beyond the Oulipian frame of reference; he makes us realise that the ludic and the literary reflect each other, and that Perec is a writer to be hugely admired but to be read, not to be awed and left aside as either too hard, too mathematical, too referential, too funny.

Furthermore, The Games of Fiction refuses to be daunted by the weight of existing analyses, but instead pays due homage to the other great critics, including Perec himself, whose own posthumous cahier des charges of La Vie mode d'emploi has, fortunately, not closed off avenues for future research (Gascoigne is always there to remind us that Perec's authorial presence is forever belied by his own apparent will to readability). It is also a generously written work, which above all else causes the reader to breathe a sigh of relief. For even within the strictures of the Oulipian text, what is sought is not domination of the reader by the writer or self-ligaturing of the writer, but a consensual partnership between reader and writer.

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To mark the centenary of her birth, Les Temps Modernes has devoted an issue to Simone de Beauvoir, as it did for Jean-Paul Sartre in 2005 (Notre Sartre, n°9 632-34). Having founded the review in 1945, both remained involved in its publication for the rest of their lives. The volume contains more than forty articles, by close friends and associates (including Claude Lanzmann, Robert Gallimard, Claire Etcherelli), and by many others, especially feminists and literary writers, in France and overseas. These studies complement knowledge of Simone de Beauvoir as a person, writer, editor, and as the emblematic leader of feminism. They attest that on a personal level her absence is still felt, twenty-two years after her death, and that her writing endures and renews in many readers their self-confidence. As Laure Adler concludes, “elle nous aide à vivre” (p. 145).

In addition, the establishment of the Prix “Simone de Beauvoir pour la Liberté des Femmes” is reported. The initial award of the prize was announced in Paris, January 2008, to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, born in Ethiopia and now living in the Netherlands where she is a politician and writer, and to Taslima Nasreen, born in Bangladesh and now living in India under government protection, author of several novels which have been translated into