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Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics: or, How to Understand Texts

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Review article on: SCHLEIERMACHER, Friedrich D. E. (2021): *Hermenéutique. Pour une logique du discours individuel.* Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée. Présentation, traduction et notes par Christian Berner. Paris-Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion. 286 pp. ISBN: 978-2-7574-3237-2.

Hermenéutique. Pour une logique du discours individuel comprises French renderings of Friedrich Schleiermacher's writings devoted to hermeneutics and textual criticism. Dating from 1805 to 1830, some of these writings are relatively well-elaborated texts, whereas others are more disparate lecture notes and transcriptions. Translated by the distinguished scholar of Schleiermacher, Christian Berner (author of the important work *La philosophie de Schleiermacher*, 1995), this volume gives Francophone readers valuable insights into Schleiermacher's account of the art of interpretation.

Schleiermacher is esteemed as one of the founding fathers of modern hermeneutics, especially insofar as what would be modern, in this case, involves the effort to subsume the age-old specialized domains of Biblical and juridical hermeneutics into a general hermeneutics, one supplied with a robust philosophy and accompanied by a rigorous reflection on the nature of language as such. To be sure, Schleiermacher's hermeneutical concerns are rarely far removed from his preoccupation with New Testament theology in particular, but the general applicability of his hermeneutical approach remains salient nonetheless. And while one can observe that hermeneutics was of relatively secondary importance compared to his work on theology and religion on the one hand, and both dialectical and aesthetic philosophy on the other, it remains the case that what Schleiermacher enjoins us to think is how hermeneutics is of valuable assistance in gaining a fuller comprehension of the topic at hand—a philosophical topic, a theological topic, a literary-critical topic, etc. Hermeneutics, in that sense, is applicable across many domains—it supplies itself as an auxiliary for thought, as an aid to the attainment of a more evolved mode of considered self-reflection.

Readers of *Hermenéutique. Pour une logique du discours individuel* will find much food for thought, and because this is so, it will not be remiss, I take it, to devote portions of the present review to discussing what Schleiermacher says in these texts. (I'll be quoting from Berner's French translations of Schleiermacher's German.) Consider Schleiermacher's question: "Comment apprend-on originellement à comprendre? C'est là l'opération la plus difficile et le fondement de toutes les autres, et nous l'accomplissons dans l'enfance" (p. 89). How to understand understanding? We ought to begin by looking at children, and contemplate their remarkably quick—almost spontaneous—progress as learners. That learning is part and

parcel of an inculcation into language, and hence children are already performing a hermeneutic operation insofar as they grasp at the meaning of discrete words, sift their vocabulary for nuances of signification, and assess matters of context, register and tone. As Schleiermacher writes, "Tout enfant n'accède à la signification des mots que par l'herméneutique" (p. 67). Schleiermacher therefore asserts a self-evident truth: from infancy onwards, all human beings are creatures of language. The business of hermeneutics is accordingly the business of language. Thus, "Le langage est la seule chose qu'il faille présupposer dans l'herméneutique" (p. 65). But the further business of hermeneutics is to gain insight into persons —be it children, or adults—who express themselves in language, and so Schleiermacher observes that "On doit déjà connaître l'homme pour comprendre le discours, et pourtant on ne doit faire sa connaissance qu'à partir du discours" (p. 72).

Already we discern the hermeneutic desire to gain insight into human beings—to access their individual subjectivities and their thoughts by means of their use of language. Nonetheless, the writings collected in Berner's volume also concern the access interpreters might gain not into spoken discourse, but into texts. At issue, in this respect, is textual criticism and textual interpretation. Here, Schleiermacher describes two operations which ought to be combined in the effort to understand texts. The first operation is characterized as grammatical hermeneutics. This concerns understanding the objective, or concrete laws and structures of a given language, as well as comprehending the expressive availabilities afforded by that language to speakers and writers at a given period in time. In this case, "L'homme disparaît avec son activité et n'apparaît que comme organe du langage" (p. 101). The second hermeneutic operation—described as "psycho-

logical" and "technical"—is subjective. Here, "la langue disparaît avec sa puissance déterminante et n'apparaît que comme organe de l'homme au service de son individualité" (p. 101). A novel by Balzac, for instance, is hardly a grammar book—rather, the expressive components of French are assembled by him and wedded to a singular linguistic enterprise, namely the writing of *Illusions perdues*, say, or *Le Père Goriot*. If one wishes to know that Balzac, and those novels, then psychological interpretation would involve the effort to gain insight into the textual products of that author's individual creativity. Ideally, what would accordingly be "subjective," is a meeting of minds—the author's, and the interpreter's. Schleiermacher, in that regard, is not shy of the idea that interpreters, some of the time, work by intuition or even have the capacity to divine matters relating to authors and the texts at hand. Only some of the time, however. For at other times, the interpretive task, subjective though it may be, is appreciably technical, concerned with the *making* of that particular text—its imaginative craft, its expressive fabrication.

Schleiermacher's hermeneutics thus acknowledges the particularity, individuality, or singularity of a given work. But that work is hardly so idiosyncratic or idiomatic that it divorces itself from all generalities. To continue with my example, Balzac's French is generally recognizable as French and partakes thereby of the "universals" which are singular to that language and which allow for such recognition in the first place: Balzac's grammar and syntax resemble that of other users of French, general linguistic laws governing French are respected by him, and one can find his words defined in a French dictionary.

Schleiermacher probably wouldn't deny that interpretation can be arduously technical, and there are further technicalities to be confronted in respect of the painstaking editorial

work of textual criticism. But there is much to be appreciated in Schleiermacher's characterization of interpretation as an *art*. If this be so, then interpretation mustn't be a monotonous, mechanical, or sterile exercise—a schoolroom chore rather than an enjoyable practice of hermeneutic dexterity. "Comprendre est un art" (p. 122), he writes. The ultimate goal of hermeneutics isn't to produce a work of art, but interpretation is an art insofar as interpretive practice resembles artistic practice. Here, one has to insist that the process of making art isn't solely a matter of the robotic application of whatever norms, conventions or outright rules are in force and which prescribe to artists how they ought undertake their own artistry. If artists assert their right to a latitude, *vis-à-vis* such prescriptions, so do interpreters. Assuredly, Schleiermacher proposes certain guidelines—though one hesitates to call them *rules* for the hermeneutic method. But since each work one undertakes to interpret is different and singular, then one's interpretive approach must flex to that particular "case," and it's that flexion which characterizes the hermeneutic art. Hermeneutics could not otherwise earn that term "art" if it were the opposite of any art, namely the mechanical implementation of a rote method.

It will eventually prove necessary for Schleiermacher to describe moments where that art isn't required, however, and moreover characterize what artless discourses look like. I will return to this matter below. But, at this juncture, we might offer a provisional summary of Schleiermacher's account by availing ourselves of Berner's introductory "Aperçu analytique." Two points are to be retained. Firstly, Schleiermacher views hermeneutics as an undertaking that can be called, with certain precautions, a technical discipline, one which serves the interest of correct comprehension. Yet, and to insist on the point, while hermeneutics can be characterized as a

method (it can therefore be followed, and indeed taught), it can also be deemed an art. "Method" and "art" aren't opposed to each other, but find their commonality once it's grasped that hermeneutics advocates for flexibility *vis-à-vis* "rules"—that flexibility should be as proper to "method" as to "art."

Secondly, Schleiermacher doesn't think that the role of hermeneutics should be limited to moments when interpretive difficulties become apparent: in the context of interpreting texts, for instance, this might simply be occasions when readers encounter something perplexing or something that looks wrong, like a patent error. One might imagine that readers, faced with such difficulties, then avail themselves of hermeneutics to solve the problems, and then carry on. Not so: hermeneutics, as Berner stresses on Schleiermacher's behalf, is necessary if one wants to understand anything, even in circumstances where one isn't confronted by an apparent difficulty. If one finds the meaning of a given passage in a text to be completely limpid, one has still performed an operation of interpretation to deem it so. Hermeneutics—in a higher sense—cannot be reduced to a "how-to" manual for solving discrete problems of textual difficulty. For what hermeneutics really is, or should be, is what affords us the illumination we seek when we are motivated to understand. Hermeneutics accompanies our will-to-understand. That *volonté* may well be oriented towards a knowledge that is scientific or epistemological, but the flexible process of interpretation which conducts and conduces to that knowledge-goal remains appreciably "artistic" in nature. Thus, as Berner puts it: "L'interprétation (qui connaît une forme laxiste lorsqu'elle n'est engendrée que par une difficulté et une forme rigoureuse lorsqu'elle relève d'une volonté constante de comprendre) est artistique" (p. 42).

Given the richness of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical reflection, the difficulty confronted by anyone who presents these texts to an audience—in Berner's case a presentation to Francophone readers—concerns the variety of readers who will find Schleiermacher of interest. Specialists of theology will find interest in his discussion of New Testament interpretation, and philosophers will find much food for thought in these texts as well. But one constituency also concerned with Schleiermacher is constituted by specialists of literature. Let me address that constituency in particular.

Schleiermacher envisages interpretation as an interplay between analytical work on details and an apprehension of the meaning of the whole. This is a version of the hermeneutic circle, of course: "Toute compréhension du détail est conditionnée par une compréhension du tout" (p. 75), writes Schleiermacher. But the difficulty concerns how many "wholes" interpreters have to take into account. To return to my Balzac example, is the "whole" in question the total meaning of *Illusions perdues*? Or is the "whole" something one grasps only if one compares that novel to other works by Balzac, perhaps indeed to his *œuvres complètes*? Or ought interpreters enter into their hermeneutic compass the generic "set" of such works, namely the genre of the Novel as such? Eventually, and inevitably, the circular logic of interpretation risks devolving its manageable circles to a potentially uncontrollable, and indeed spiraling inclusion of yet wider "wholes"—the last "whole" being nothing less than the generic set describable as the entirety of Literature as such. Berner is right to observe, therefore, that "En fait, le cercle de la compréhension est multiple et s'élève en spirale vers la généralité" (p. 47). Thus while the interpreter might be concerned solely with the singularity of just one work by Balzac, the apprehension of "generality" might well encompass the relation of that

work to what Berner calls the "domaine de la littérature dont elle fait partie" (p. 48).

Revealingly, therefore, Schleiermacher relies on the apprehension of *genre* to stabilize what otherwise threatens to become a logic of hermeneutic circularity (or spirality) that asks too much of interpreters. Thus if Schleiermacher can declare that "toute compréhension du détail est conditionnée par une compréhension du tout," he subsequently adds that "Originellement le tout est compris comme genre" (p. 76). He also says that "La totalité doit provisoirement être comprise comme individu d'un genre, et l'intuition du genre, c'est-à-dire la compréhension formelle de la totalité, doit précéder la compréhension matérielle du détail" (p. 124). To be noted, moreover, is the rider: "Des productions arbitraires ne deviennent jamais des genres" (p. 124). As interpreters begin their analysis of the details of *Illusions perdues*, for example, it seems that they must first identify that novel as the token of a more general type—as a novel belonging to the genre Novel. Perhaps such interpreters will not deem that operation to be a philosophical operation, but nonetheless, once "totalities" enter into the equation, as counterparts to discrete "details," then perhaps—via the notion of "genre"—we can guardedly assert that such interpreters are willy-nilly treading upon the domain philosophy considers its own – the domain of the total, of the categorical, and arguably the generic. Each text is different from all other texts, but genericity supplies a relatively perceptible notion of Sameness. For the sake of what can be called the dialectical logic of hermeneutical interpretation (and once one speaks of "dialectics" and "logic" one is surely doing philosophy), a logic which requires both Difference and Sameness, what cannot be tolerated are texts that refuse to confirm their generic belonging: these would be "arbitrary productions."

No doubt, scholars of a different stripe might be inclined to query whether literary genres are sufficiently stable for this hermeneutic or dialectical work to achieve itself—especially so in respect of the novel, which is somewhat generically unstable (according to Jacques Rancière, indeed, "Le roman est le genre de ce qui est sans genre" (p. 29). Investments in the stability of genre can often prove risky investments, at least if the risk is assessed in terms of philosophy's desiderata, namely stable categories and discrete sets or identifiable classes of something or another. But speaking of genre, in any event, one notes that Schleiermacher is moved to say that "un seul écrivain doit être considéré comme plusieurs s'il a écrit dans plusieurs genres [littéraires]" (p. 97). Much to be preferred is the logic of one writer for one genre. The number one enables us to decisively identify one thing from another—one writer from another, one genre from another. It gives us an idea of the individual—that which is undivided, and hence particular and singular. Reliable identification is built into Schleiermacher's hermeneutic system, and that reliability is afforded only if comparing and contrasting can elicit stable individualities—this author not that author, this genre not that genre. But if interpreters confront instances of the *several*, then difficulties multiply. It would be preferable if Balzac had only written novels, so that a singular Balzac corresponds to a singular genre. Yet he also wrote for the theater (some plays being adaptations of his novels, like the 1839 work *Vautrin*), a work of tragic verse, and numerous short stories or *contes*. So we perhaps need to split Balzac into a number of variants of the same authorial persona—one "Balzac" for one genre, another "Balzac" for another genre and so on. (And, in respect of the putative stability of the genre called "Novel," the indistinct borderline between Balzac's long novels and his

shorter novels—novels and novellas, so to speak—poses additional problems.)

Like all dialectical thinkers, Schleiermacher is concerned with the categorical stability of Sameness and Difference, and hence with the stability of particularities, individualities, and specificities. The hermeneutic gesture to identify anything at all depends on the reliability of the act of comparison (and accordingly the possibility of contrast without which there is no comparison). Hence Schleiermacher's remark concerning arbitrary productions, and also the move to cope with the ambiguities of a single writer who writes in several genres. Hence also Schleiermacher's desire to wed one author to just one singular property, which is his or her individual *style*. We must, therefore, also countenance the (philosophical) category of the "proper." A style must be proper to each singular author, and that signature style must be perceivable at all times. Thus Schleiermacher asserts: "Chaque écrivain a son propre style" (p. 105). Furthermore, "Le style d'un individu doit rester le même dans tous les genres, modifié par le caractère de ces derniers" (p. 149). One would want to be able to identify Balzac by registering his style as the same style across all genres he adopted—the novel, the *conte*, the theater etc. "Modification" is accordingly all that can be tolerated. But Schleiermacher puts it more strongly: the style of an individual—let's say, of an individual writer—*must* remain the same. Philosophy's neat categorizations dictate that "must," one suspects, rather than the contingent imperatives of literary criticism's assessment of stylistics. Whether it be the matter of genre or that of style, in any case, Schleiermacher persistently asserts the possibility of a reliable dialectical mediation between particularity and/as individuality, and generality. But if we are still attempting to apprehend the "whole" of *Illusions perdues*, even as we work on the details of that text, how do

we identify that "whole"? Would it be a unifying meaning of that novel? Or a central theme, a core Idea which emerges from our reading, enabling us to thereby declare that this is what Balzac's novel is verily *about*?

Here, Schleiermacher is rather interesting. Assuredly, we might look to the title, and hence confidently declare that if the title is *Illusions perdues*, then the novel is presumably about lost illusions. Yet Schleiermacher has his doubts about titles, those doubts being motivated by the fact that, for ancient texts, titles were often missing, or only belatedly imposed on a given text. So if titles aren't always reliable indicators of a given work's unifying theme, if they don't always give us purchase on the compositional or thematic unity of the work, then what will? Sometimes a literary work, Schleiermacher observes, announces its central theme at the beginning (consider the first page of Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps perdu* or at the end, where "Le Temps perdu," the last tome of Proust's novel, effectively resumes the entire project of the novel). The sense of an ending, to allude to Frank Kermode, surely can give interpreters a reliable sense of the book's central idea. But not always, which is why Schleiermacher suggests that we might have to look for episodes in a given work that are more salient than others—he characterizes them as "passages accentués" (p. 108)—and assume that such an accentuation is an indication of the author signaling a core theme or idea. The problem, however, is that some texts don't accentuate this or that passage: Schleiermacher references the epic, remarking that in epics every passage or episode is treated with equal emphasis (i.e. no emphasis at all). He also mentions irony, which can indeed be a challenge for readers: if they don't grasp the irony, then they don't get the point. Think, moreover, of ironic tone: Flaubert's deadpan irony is almost toneless, and so doesn't give us that "accentu-

ation" readers might desire in order to specify the core theme of *Madame Bovary*.

The difficulties accumulate, and indeed Schleiermacher remarks that "De nombreux écrits prétendent avoir pour sujet quelque chose qui est tout à fait subordonné par rapport au thème véritable" (p. 107). To change literary contexts away from the French, one might suggest Joyce's *Ulysses* as an example: it purports to have Homer's *Odyssey* as its subject matter, but that ancient text is in a very complex relation of subordination to the "thème véritable" which emerges out of Joyce's account of the Dublin-based activities of Leopold Bloom, his interactions with Stephen Dedalus, and indeed (since she gets the last word, and thereby offers her sense of an ending in more than one way) the sensations and experiences of Molly Bloom. Still, interpretation must be capable of apprehending some kind of meaningful whole otherwise the logic of the hermeneutic circle—that work on parts and wholes—simply breaks down. What, then, can we say concerning the particular wholeness of a given literary composition? Again, the gesture to specify that particularity, and that wholeness, will have to involve comparison and contrast. In a limited context, one might establish that work's singularity by comparing it to other works. Perhaps it's possible to forgo acts of comparison and simply intimate or intuit that singularity. But in a more expansive context (and here is where Berner's "spiral" reemerges) one would be working with another whole, namely the whole historical, cultural and linguistic horizons in and against which that work is situated—assessing, therefore, all that was creatively possible at that particular period in time. It is hence a matter of

> la totalité de ce qui était à la disposition de cet auteur. On doit donc s'en tenir aux limites de la nation et de l'époque […]. L'individualité nationale et séculaire est la base de l'individualité personnelle. Par

> exemple, pour les auteurs dramatiques anciens, il ne faut pas dire qu'ils disposaient de notre composition caractérisante ou que les poètes anciens disposaient de notre sentimentalité. (P. 109)

There is much to say here. It's the sort of thing Madame de Staël, in *De la littérature* and in *De l'Allemagne*, could have written: she reflects on literature by way of a historical account that works back to the writers of antiquity, but which also looks across to England and Germany in order to consider the linguistic, cultural, and indeed political contexts which individualize the literature of one nation compared to another. She also registers the question of "individuality" at different levels of specificity (and, not incidentally, does so by means of translation), and the matter of "sentimentality" is addressed by her as well, in light of an assertion that Christianity divorced modern literature from the literature of antiquity, and that Christianity provided the context for our modern approach to the expression of feelings—for her, sentimentality is a matter of a romantic melancholy informed by a specifically Christian intimation of the fallenness of Man.

De Staël would have agreed with Schleiermacher that "l'écrivain ne peut donc être compris qu'à partir de son époque" (p. 109), and that "On découvre cette totalité a. par la comparaison de ce qui est contemporain et semblable ; b. en recourant à l'analogie de ce qui est étranger et de ce qui appartient à une autre époque quant aux lois générales de la combinaison" (p. 109). But whether an interpreter, in view of that "totalité," has to effectively embed the analysis in a larger historical reflection is perhaps the key question. It's asking a lot. The more manageable way concerns, once more, fixing oneself on the reliable identification of genre: it gives us a sense of what was possible at that time, that spread of creative possibility being a matter of what constitutes a genre in the first place, namely the putative laws it abides by, or transgress-

es. We can therefore contemplate, for instance, the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, and assess Balzac's *Illusions perdues* or Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale* against the background of that genre—look across to Goethe's *Bildungsromane*, for instance, and back again to Balzac and Flaubert. Still, if the basic gestures remain those of comparison and contrast, it's notable that Schleiermacher admits that some writers seem to exist in a genre of one (and hence can hardly be considered generic at all): "Difficile chez ceux qui ne se rencontrent qu'une seule fois, comme Pindare et, à certains égards, Platon" (p. 111). One admires that rhetorical precaution, "à certains égards," in connection with none other than Plato …

Give or take Pindar and Plato, and those genre-less productions Schleiermacher calls "arbitrary," the relative stability of generic affiliation provides a basis for the circular apprehension of details in light of a certain "whole," and vice versa. Schleiermacher puts it this way: "Pour reconnaître tout genre de particularité, on doit conjuguer deux méthodes, l'immédiate et la comparative" (p. 155). He adds: "La méthode immédiate consiste à chercher à connaître physiognomoniquement le principe subjectif par la confrontation entre l'ouvrage et l'idée pure de son genre" (p. 155). Moreover, "des ouvrages intuitionnés physiognomoniquement dans le détail doivent être comparés entre eux dans la perspective de l'idée commune du genre" (p. 155). So to perceive genre, one either compares works deemed to belong to the same genre, or performs an immediate act Schleiermacher intriguingly characterizes as an act of *physiognomonique* intuition. But notice how one must must keep in mind the "idée pure de son genre." Can there be such a thing? One suspects that Friedrich Schlegel would have been interested in this idea (or Idea) of a pure genre. Perhaps Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, and Schlegel's notions of Critique and Theory, converge here: at issue is the

intimation of such a purity as the ideal horizon of a given work, even if that horizon remains only ideal given the practical circumstances of writing literary works. Imagine the complete fulfillment of genericity in one single *ouvrage*, the end of all sundry examples of this or that genre, and the realization of an *exemplar* or paradigm that can be profiled as a (or *the*) Literary Absolute: the pure poem, the pure novel, the pure genre.

Obviously, comparing and contrasting are likely to be the more usual ways interpreters will go about matters, and so we can attend to Schleiermacher's remark that "Ce n'est que dans la mesure où on compare plusieurs ouvrages du même genre que la connaissance de l'individu peut être complétée" (p. 156). But one wonders whether the stabilities Schleiermacher wants for genre are not constantly threatened by the caveats and qualifications he himself so intriguingly enters. And though Schleiermacher doesn't make the question of the novel salient in his discussion, one senses that the generic and compositional unruliness of the novel is what concerns him. For on the topic of composition—which Schleiermacher would wish to be organic, cohesive and hence amenable to the hermeneutic detection of the work's unity, theme, idea and generic affiliation—he has this to say of a work that isn't properly composed. In this case,

> l'écrivain fait montre d'une grande imperfection et son ouvrage n'est qu'un amas, un composé d'imitations hétérogènes, ou bien le lecteur a pris pour un point principal ce qui n'en était pas un. Un tel danger est principalement engendré pas de grandes masses subjectives morcelées, des épisodes, des digressions, etc. (P. 155)

To my mind (and to Rancière's mind as well), the novel is particularly susceptible to such digressions and to the incorporation of heterogeneous matter. Notwithstanding what use is made of Aristotle's *Poetics* to delineate the right rules for

novelistic composition (it ought to have a beginning, a middle, and an end), the novel has a bad habit of becoming a baggy monster, to allude to Henry James: it incorporates material which—if one is inclined to insist on generic specificities—would be putatively "heterogeneous" to it, it loses the thread of its own plot quite frequently, and can go off on proliferating digressions. One thinks of *Tristram Shandy* and of the novels of Jean Paul—possibly the writer Schleiermacher had in mind here. No wonder readers might mistake the "point principal" if they are always being invited to enter the novel at multiple points and find themselves always-already *in medias res*.

I have dwelt on these aspects of Schleiermacher's discussion because, to me, a key interest of these texts lies in the implications one can tease out in connection with literary studies. I will return later to Berner's presentation of the philosophical interest of these texts shortly, but the point to make for now is that Schleiermacher is hardly a thinker solely concerned with the mysterious rapport interpreters might effect with authors by means of a certain empathy, intuition, or even divination. And, when one inspects what he says about the figure of the author and the figure of the reader (or interpreter), there are rich subtleties to be apprehended. Schleiermacher can indeed write that "L'une des choses essentielles lorsqu'on interprète est d'être capable de faire abstraction de sa propre conviction pour épouser celle de l'écrivain" (p. 57). But this "espousal" does not necessarily imply a Romantic resuscitation of the author, a sort of critical naivety that Barthes's "La mort de l'auteur" essay dispelled for us in 1967.

For Schleiermacher also writes this: "L'idée de l'auteur ne garantit que sa dignité, et non son individualité qui, elle, est garantie par la façon dont il l'expose" (p. 106). Barthes, since I have just mentioned him, probably wouldn't disagree with

that. Barthes did not wish away the "dignity" of the author (and in any case, the law acknowledges authors' rights to dignity by bestowing the right of copyright), but the appreciation of an author's individuality can only be a matter of that authorial exposure or exposition which is made manifest by the writings we readers are given to read. Barthes would approve, I think, of Schleiermacher's remark that grammatical interpretation involves an analysis that works "comme si on ne savait rien de celui qui discourt ou qu'on ne devait faire sa connaissance qu'à partir de là" (p. 122/3). Barthes might not have portrayed that kind of interpretation as "grammatical," however—that's not how a structuralist would put it—but that activity of "comme si" is surely what is entailed if the analysis is to bracket out the "author." One pretends as if the author never existed, even if one knows well enough that Shakespeare did exist, in flesh and blood, and authored *Hamlet*. If one wishes to know authors, then the principal way to do so is to pass via their writings. Assuredly, one might facilitate that knowledge by reading not just *Hamlet* but a biography of Shakespeare, but, as Schleiermacher observes, "la connaissance de l'écrivain, qui doit venir en aide à l'interprétation grammaticale, doit venir d'ailleurs" (p. 123). Here, however, might be the divergence with Barthes: it depends on whether the second hermeneutic operation is still oriented towards insight or access into the author's creative subjectivity. If it is, then we have to ask where one gets that information. From "ailleurs," to be sure, but presumably from the elsewhere domain occupied by biographies and autobiographies—precisely those texts Barthes, in his critique of the Sorbonne dogmas of the scholarly exercise to provide dissertations on *l'homme et l'œuvre*, sought to ward off and quarantine to an *ailleurs* that wouldn't intrude on the analysis of a writer's text.

But it's only a very strong structuralist position that asserts the desirability of ignoring the author altogether, and, contrariwise, only strong intentionalist positions claim that the task of interpretation is to grasp the original intentions of the author. Most positions acknowledge the heuristic utility of the notion of an implied author (differentiating, therefore, the implied author from the flesh and blood author). Schleiermacher is appreciably more balanced, less extreme in his positions, and such intellectual balance, we might agree, is an admirable hallmark of hermeneutics. Thus it's important to be clear about the following remark: "On doit comprendre aussi bien et comprendre mieux que l'écrivain" (p. 83). This isn't necessarily an arrogant exercise in hermeneutic superiority, nor is it a Freudianism *avant la lettre* that understands the author better than himself insofar as the interpreter/analyst claims to understand the writer's *unconscious*. Instead, Schleiermacher simply means that interpreters take more factors into account, when contemplating works of literary creativity, than writers did themselves. This is obvious: when Balzac or Flaubert sat down to write their works, they didn't precede their writing process by a full-scale contemplation of the entire history of Western literature. It wasn't necessary for them to contemplate the title of de Staël's *De la littérature* and then pose it as a question, namely "What is Literature?" before they wrote *Illusions perdues* or *Madame Bovary*.

But the interpreter, in Schleiermacher's eyes, is enjoined to such tasks, and assuming such tasks are performed competently, it's possible to declare that one knows writers better than they know themselves. The hermeneutic task accordingly remains this: "Reconstruire le discours donné de façon à la fois historique et divinatoire, objective et subjective" (p. 173). Yet, as Schleiermacher explains, there are many aspects to this interpretive practice. If one thinks about matters in terms

of literary texts, one firstly has to consider how the text is embedded in whatever constituted the horizons of linguistic possibility at a given epoch—these are objectively historical considerations. One also has to grasp how language, which is a material reality or "fact," was transposed into the writer's mind and deployed in the service of that writer's subjective and individual creativity—this entails subjectively historical considerations. Then there are matters concerning "objectively prophetic" (p. 173) issues. One could understand this as sensing how the text itself will become a point from which language will develop into the future (Joyce's *Ulysses* points towards the future of the English language, showing what expressive resources the English language already harbored within itself). Finally, there are "subjectively prophetic" (p. 173) questions to take into account, which we might envisage in terms of how writers contend with pressing expressive matters at one occasion of writing but develop such matters across the span of their careers: consider the early Joyce of *Portrait of the Artist,* then the Joyce of *Ulysses* and then the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*.

In terms of such prophesies—presentiments of future developments both in terms of writerly creativity and in terms of the potential of language as well—interpreters have more horizons to consider than any given writer. Because this is so, it's not an arrogance or a hermeneutic presumption of special insight to declare that the interpreter has to initially understand things as well as, and then better than the author did. Hopefully, it's therefore clear what Schleiermacher means (and doesn't mean) when he says "Avant d'appliquer l'art, il faut qu'on se soit mis au même niveau que l'auteur, tant du côté objectif que du côté subjectif" (p. 174). This isn't just an expression of Romantic hermeneutics too easily caricatured as a matter of intuitive or empathetic identification with the

thoughts and feelings of the author of a text, as if that "level" implies interpreters standing shoulder to shoulder with authors at the very time and place of their creativity. And indeed, because this is a caricature, then there is no impediment to the deeming of Schleiermacher more compatible with approaches to language and meaning that we see in structuralism and post-structuralism than appears at first glance.

Yet if Schleiermacher retains the term "art" in order to describe interpretation, then we must nonetheless mark the difference between hermeneutics and structuralist "decoding." Let's therefore retrieve, at this juncture, what it means to declare that interpretation is an art. In doing so, I now want to begin reviewing Berner's edition and translation of Schleiermacher by taking the liberty of comparing it with Andrew Bowie's English edition, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*. The comparisons are instructive, I think. The section that matters, for our present purposes, is section 9 of the 1819 text on hermeneutics. Berner's heading for that section is "Interpréter est un art" (p. 166). Bowie has "Explication [*das Auslegen*] is an art" (p. 11). Perhaps the difference between "interpretation" and "explication" doesn't matter, but then again, perhaps that difference does matter, since Bowie feels it necessary to interpolate the original German and, in a translator's note, explains that he prefers "explication" as a translation of *Auslegen* and *Auslegung* "as its links to 'unfolding' bring it closer to the German sense of 'laying out' the meaning of a text" (p. 3). In any case, the key remark by Schleiermacher, revisiting the difference between grammatical, and psychological or technical interpretation, is this:

> Si l'aspect grammatical devait être achevé pour lui-même isolément, il faudrait une connaissance parfaite de la langue et, si c'est l'autre [aspect qui devait être achevé isolément pour lui-même], alors il faudrait, une connaissance exhaustive de l'homme. Puisqu'aucune des deux ne peut jamais être donnée, on est contraint de passer d'un as-

> pect à l'autre, et on ne peut formuler aucune règle sur la façon dont devrait s'effectuer ce passage. (Pp. 166–7)

One cannot formulate a rule to establish how one passes from one aspect to the other. This is important, because the lack of rules takes us to the heart of Schleiermacher's invocation of "art" in respect of his hermeneutics. We might now contemplate an interpolation that Bowie adduces to section 9, but which Berner's edition doesn't. It reads: "The complete task of hermeneutics is to be regarded as a work of art, but not as if carrying it out resulted in a work of art, but in such a way that the activity only bears the *character* of art in itself, because the application is not also given with the rules, i.e. cannot be mechanized" (p. 11). What makes interpretation an art is not the end result (an artwork) but that "art" confronts the fact that there is no rule for the application of rules. *Kunst* throws off the tethers of mechanically heedless rule-obedience, and edges into a flexible balancing-act between free play and a recognition that art isn't so heedless of rules that it resembles spontaneous improvisation. So it is for art, so it is for the art of interpretation.

Here, then, is the ambiguity of the word "art." Two of Bowie's translator's notes clarify the matter: "Schleiermacher's use of words based on *Kunst* involves both the sense of 'method' or 'technique,' which entails the application of rules, and of 'art' as that which cannot be bound by rules" (p. xx). And,

> For Schleiermacher, "art" is any activity that relies on rules, for which there can be no rules for the applying of those rules. Schleiermacher uses "art" (*Kunst*) both in the sense of the Greek *techne*, meaning ability, capacity, and in a sense related to the new aesthetic notion, primarily associated with Kant, that something cannot be understood as *art* merely via the rules of the particular form of articulation. The differing senses of the word are decisive for the whole of his hermeneutics. (P. 3)

Perhaps Schleiermacher can be accused of having it all ways at once: there are methodological rules, but then again the character of art seems to go beyond such rules. But it's obviously the robotic aspect of rule-obedience he rejects; what isn't envisaged is the outright abandonment of methodological protocols, nor the severing of any association between hermeneutic method and Greek *techne*. For if this were so, it's hard to see how one could gain any rigorous, or indeed philosophical purchase on interpretative praxis, and—although Kant is less concerned with *techne*—it would have been similarly impossible for Kant to devote a philosophical treatise—*The Critique of Judgment*—to the nature of art.

No doubt, Schleiermacher is characteristic of his age, whether one describes that age as Kantian and post-Kantian, or Romantic. It's not that art entered into the era of complete liberty, as if one summarily declared "There are no rules for art," nor is it that the rule-books, like Aristotle's *Poetics*, were suddenly rendered defunct—one thinks of the presence of Aristotle in Lessing, and in Dilthey's essays on poetics and literary creativity (published in English translation under the title *Poetry and Experience*). Yet if one recalls Dilthey's texts, one still appreciates that the nature of artistic creativity, in his view, now has to be treated in new ways—not so much by an inspection of whether an artist did, or didn't adhere to the rules established by the Greeks (or, as in France, in light of the codifications of *Belles Lettres* and the treatises of Boileau, Batteux, Marmontel, and others), but as a sometimes mysterious activity, unamenable to the pedestrian insights of hidebound critics. Hence the Romantic concern with the mysteries of genius. Hence Kant's claim that the genius gives the rule to art but no one, except maybe Nature, gives the rule to a genius. Hence de Staël, moreover, and her preoccupation with Shakespeare's genius, and (more guardedly) of Goethe's.

If Schleiermacher's use of the term "art" is not without its strategic ambiguities, what is significant is that there is a moment where he refers to occasions when interpretive art isn't required. Firstly, he says that "là où le discours est sans art, il n'est pas non plus besoin d'art pour comprendre" (p. 164). Secondly, he clarifies that artless discourse as follows: "Mais ce qui ne fait que répéter quelque chose qui a déjà été donné n'est au fond rien: propos sur la pluie et le beau temps. Cette valeur nulle n'est cependant pas le néant absolu, mais seulement le minimum. Car c'est à partir d'elle que se développe ce qui est signifiant" (pp. 167–8). It's interesting that, following that remark, Bowie's edition inserts the following whereas Berner's edition does not: "The minimum is common discourse in business matters and in habitual conversation in everyday life" (p. 13). Talking about the weather and the banalities of bureaucratic parlance: *le degr*é *zéro du discours*, you might say, as far as hermeneutics is concerned. But no hermeneutic thinker will accept such a zero degree, as if hermeneutics reaches its limit and finds itself wholly redundant. So "minimum" is a carefully chosen term which takes us out of these dangerously non-hermeneutic null or zero-degree scenarios and back into the context where hermeneutics still has applicability. (Schleiermacher will not have been able to have anticipate, when he spoke of the almost non-hermeneutical impertinence of talking about the weather, Jacques Derrida's text, entitled *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche,* on Nietzsche's reference to having forgotten his umbrella …).

In any case, talk of the weather is the minimum pole on the spectrum of what constitutes hermeneutic interest. The Flaubert of *Un Cœur simple* knew this too, incidentally, which is why Barthes devoted portions of his essay, "L'effet de réel," to a barometer one finds in that Flaubertian text. But

what about the maximum pole? The maximum is "ce qui est le plus productif et le moins répétitif ; *classique*. Du côté psychologique, [le maximum] est ce qui est le plus particulier et le moins commun : *original*. N'est absolue que l'identité des deux, le *génial*" (p. 168). Despite the differences, what matters for the hermeneutic thinker is an admiration for linguistic productivity: in terms of literary production, a classic work will stimulate further literary production, albeit in terms, perhaps, of derivative acts of imitation and translation. An original work will do likewise, as will, to a supreme degree, the genial artwork, simultaneously baptized as a (perhaps instant) classic and as unprecedentedly original.

My discussion of Schleiermacher's texts has, up to now, underscored the interest they will have for specialists of literature, and in that regard modestly complemented Berner's discussion in his introduction. But there is much more to be considered, in respect of that introduction, and so one might begin, again, with the matter of the paradox that while Schleiermacher is credited as a founding father of modern hermeneutics, hermeneutics was not necessarily in the forefront of his concerns. But if the bestowal of that founding-father status was an outcome of first Dilthey's and then Gadamer's profiling of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical work, then Berner rightly enters the requisite caveats in respect especially of Gadamer's objections to what the author of *Truth and Method* takes to be Schleiermacher's desire to reduce the gap between the author and the contemporary reader by means of psychological intuition. But if one reads the texts collected in this volume, as Berner observes, then one can gauge the extent to which Gadamer's engagement with Schleiermacher is somewhat misleading. Berner also invokes the important work on Schleiermacher undertaken by Peter Szondi and Manfred Frank (and one hastens to acknowledge the important work

of Berner himself, particularly in the contexts of the French reception of Schleiermacher).

Berner briefly refers to what could crudely be called the "post-modern" contention that sometimes differing perspectives on a given topic cannot be reconciled by hermeneutic arbitration. For Jean-François Lyotard, this would be the matter of "le différend." The rebuttal of Lyotard can be mounted by a number of hermeneutic thinkers of the more diplomatic persuasion, be it Schleiermacher, Gadamer, or Ricœur. Consider the hermeneutic motif of dialogue, where the interlocutors aren't utter strangers to each other, nor deaf to each other's viewpoint. For it can be assumed that the interlocutors have at least agreed on the topic for that conversation. Only on the basis of that agreement can one intelligibly converse upon the matter at hand (although it might be that the conversational outcome is that each partner agrees to disagree). For Berner, Schleiermacher accordingly "prend pour point de départ les présupposés mêmes du dialogue ainsi que la volonté de l'entente" (p. 18). Indeed so: it's hard to imagine any hermeneutic approach that isn't inspired by the will to achieve common accord, understanding, or "entente." *Pace* Lyotard, hermeneutics insists that "un différend ou un conflit entre des discours n'a de sens qu'à présupposer une intention d'accord et une volonté d'entente" (p. 18). Nonetheless, I think one has to acknowledge Lyotard's distinction between a *litige* (where there is a possibility of arbitration between contending viewpoints) and a *différend* (where there isn't). Moreover, since there is a French word—"différend"—which designates that irreconcilable position, then such a situation is at least thinkable.

At issue, in any case, is that "intention d'accord," and here we might ask whether it's too easy to simply *presuppose* that intention. Could we imagine a situation where that inten-

tion is not presupposed, in advance of any subsequent debate, conflictual or otherwise, on a given topic? The famous Derrida/Gadamer debate (if that's what it was) is a case in point: Derrida didn't abide by that presupposition, and, by a performance of what one might call intellectual irrelevance, he refused to enter onto the common ground that had been priorly (or always-already) established for that debate between himself and Gadamer. It's not the brief of the present review to litigate the contention between hermeneutics and deconstruction, between diplomatic hermeneutics and radical hermeneutics, or between hermeneutics and post-modernism. But one notes Berner's tellingly predictable invocation of Jürgen Habermas, in whom we find, as with Schleiermacher, "le *télos* du dialogue comme entente établie rationnellement qui se manifeste dès l'herméneutique dans la volonté de comprendre l'autre" (p. 19). Andrew Bowie, incidentally, gestures in the same vein to Donald Davidson's *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, citing him as declaring that "The method is not designed to eliminate disagreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible, and this depends on a foundation—*some* foundation—in agreement" (p. xxvii).

Nonetheless, hermeneutics apparently remains on the side of anti-foundationalist thinking insofar as hermeneutics embraces the relativism of differing viewpoints, and thus—at the level of philosophy—appears to disbelieve in the possibility of definitive Truths or Absolute Knowledge. (Though once one enters caveats for Gadamer—author of *Truth and Method*, after all—and Ricœur, then the contention involves the problem of what philosophy means by Truth in the last instance.) But, as with Habermas as well, Schleiermacher is still sufficiently Kantian that he believes one can conduct the operations of interpretation in a rational way, and moreover posits that rational knowledge, or knowledge achieved by ra-

tional interpretive procedures, characterizes the kind of knowledge that can indeed be held in common. Yet if what is at stake is “la volonté de comprendre l’autre,” as Berner puts it, then ethical considerations must be taken into account. The ethical quandaries, however, are these: if the ultimate goal of the hermeneutic engagement with the Other is to transpose or indeed translate the knowledge gained of the Other into a commonly shared knowledge, then the category of the Same presides. From the perspective one can attribute (though not without precaution) to Emmanuel Levinas, however, the category of Difference, or rather Alterity, must preside, for fear that the otherness of the Other is compromised by that effort to gain a measure of common knowledge. But hermeneutics is less categorical in its engagement with the Other, compared to Levinas, even as hermeneutics respects what would be individual, singular, or particular to the Other. Hermeneutics seeks to place that respect at the heart of what still remains a bid to overcome what would otherwise be the unknowable difference of the Other. Berner’s quotation from Schleiermacher here is important:

> Ce qui importe, c’est donc un art d’utiliser la langue comme action, et la possibilité d’une approximation d’une identité du savoir de tous dépend entièrement de l’art de reconstruire le discours d’autrui comme acte. – Ce sont donc l’art d’interprétation et l’art de la traduction qui permettent de maîtriser cette relativité de la pensée, qui la rendent concordante avec la pensée générale et qui réalisent l’idée du savoir, dans chaque cas particulier, nonobstant cette différence. (Pp. 25–6)

This merits more commentary than I can provide here, but let’s note the interaction between the vocabulary of sameness (“identité du savoir,” “tous,” “pensée générale”) and the vocabulary of difference (implied by “relativité de la pensée” and “chaque cas particulier”). Compare another remark of Schleiermacher’s, moreover: “Si nous envisageons alors la pensée dans l’acte de communication, alors la tendance de la

pensée, comme ce qui est communicable, est de rendre le savoir commun à tous" (p. 26). The "tendency" of thought, as and when it implies acts of communication, entails a bid to render knowledge common to all. But if the matter concerns the hermeneutic reconstruction of someone else's communicative act—the discourse of the Other, or the writing of the Other—then this reconstruction must not operate a "maîtrise" that becomes overweening, or indeed hermeneutically violent—this would be unethical, especially in Levinas's view, because the reduction of what otherwise should be the irreducible otherness of the Other is a failure of ethical responsibility. Hermeneutics, it might be objected (particularly of Gadamer), has no real sense of hermeneutical violence—or of violence as such—whatever it says about certain conflicts of interpretation. Hence it has a faulty notion of ethics by the same token. Then again, hermeneutics offers a middle way, as long as it's implemented by interpretive tact (as Gadamer stresses), and is sensitive to the particularity of a given "case" (as both Schleiermacher and Gadamer emphasize). That particularity notwithstanding, there is still an effort to achieve common ground, or a generally apprehensible knowledge. If that were impossible, then hermeneutic dialogue would simply ruin itself into the futile opposite of dialogue, namely a stand-off between two Others where the gulf of mutual difference is so wide and deep as to be effectively unbridgeable.

Here, finally, is where we can stress Schleiermacher's valuable invocation of the *art de la traduction* (in Berner's translation). For isn't it precisely the aim and activity of *translatio* to bridge differences, to span the two sides of what translation prefers to regard as riverbanks rather than as the two sides of an infinitely distant gulf? We know that Schleiermacher was keenly invested in the art of translation—the essay "On the different Methods of Translating" is much-discussed, of

course (and Francophones owe to Antoine Berman and Berner himself the French translation of that essay), and it's worth pointing out that Schleiermacher undertook translations of Plato—he took over the task from Friedrich Schlegel, with whom Schleiermacher was originally collaborating on the project.

Rightly, however, Berner does not make the topic of translation particularly salient in his presentation of Schleiermacher's texts—rightly, because the topic doesn't emerge as an explicit issue in these hermeneutic texts. Berner's introduction does not profile his own translation strategies, moreover, which is a perfectly legitimate decision, of course, but nonetheless, one is struck by the relative scarcity of translator's notes in this volume. I do think there could have been more assistance provided to French readers in respect of the more challenging terms Schleiermacher uses, however. I have already cited Bowie's helpful gloss on the German term for "art," namely *Kunst*. Moreover, as regards a term Berner translates as "discours," Bowie alerts the Anglophone to the difficulties of rendering *Rede:* "I shall often use the rather artificial terms 'discourse,' or 'utterance,' for *Rede*, rather than referring to 'speech,' because Schleiermacher often uses the term *Rede* for both spoken and written language, and there is no obvious English equivalent which keeps this ambiguity" (p. 3). It would have been desirable for the French translation to offer more assistance with the term *Gegenstand*. Take two examples: one line of Schleiermacher's reads: "Car l'agencement selon lequel l'objet [*Gegenstand*] se décompose est une chose" (p. 134). Then we read the following: "Ce qui, dans un discours, est importé d'un domaine étranger peut être expliqué à partir de tous les discours dont il est le sujet [*Gegenstand*] principal" (p. 135). Berner's interpolation of the German word is presumably intended to alert readers to some-

thing important, but given the fact that in the first instance *Gegenstand* is translated as "objet" and in the second translated as "sujet," one can well imagine readers being considerably unsettled by that ambiguity—subject and object are surely very different terms, although Berner's translatory decision in each case is the correct one, as far as I am competent to judge. Still, a translator's note would have been useful, I think, especially since *Gegenstand* emerges—with similar ambiguity—at many moments in the translation.

Berner's edition is a little less user-friendly compared to Bowie's, and it's unfortunate, moreover, that *Hermenéutique. Pour une logique du discours individuel* doesn't provide an index, as Bowie's edition does (it's a regrettable feature of French academic publishing in general that they don't often bother to provide a thematic index or an index of names). And one would have liked more direct explanation of the decision to title the volume *Hermenéutique. Pour une logique du discours individuel.* One could have followed Bowie—he is content with *Hermeneutics and Criticism* (Bowie justifies the term "criticism" rather than "critique," moreover, on the grounds that these texts largely concern textual criticism). And the French term "discours" seems to orient us to oral utterance (caveats duly entered for the problematic translation of Schleiermacher's use of the term *Rede*), whereas—as my review tried to show earlier—Schleiermacher's writings are rather more geared to textual discussions where what "individuates" a text is weighed against what nonetheless establishes its belonging to the more general class of texts assembled under the rubric of a given genre (thus I hope it isn't captious to wonder if another title could be *Herméneutique. Pour une logique du discours général*).

It remains to be said that *Hermenéutique. Pour une logique du discours individuel* offers a satisfying example of the art (or

Kunst) of translation. No scholar immersed as deeply in hermeneutical thought as Berner is would accept the compliment that his translation of Schleiermacher is definitive, but he will, I hope, accept the compliment that his translation is as approximate (to use a Schleiermacherian term) to that definitive translation as one might wish. French readers are hence fortunate to have the riches of Schleiermacher's thought available to them in a volume that blends the dexterity of Berner's translations with the expert rigor of Berner's reflection on the central features of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical approach.

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