

## Lloyd on Ellerbrock (2014)

Ellerbrock, Karl Philipp. *Ästhetische Differenz: Zur Originalität von Baudelaires Poe-Übersetzungen*. Paderborn, Germany: Wilhelm Fink, 2014. Pp. 244. ISBN: 978-3-7705-5654-0

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Among this publication's attractive illustrations is Nadar's esthetically and politically daring "Au grand homme, le daguerrotype instantané reconnaissant," and Jacques Wely's curious illustration for "L'Affaire de la Rue Morgue," showing an ape holding what looks like a peeled banana but is probably a razor. While interpreting Nadar's aping of national pomp raises no problems, translating the ape's gesture requires the ingenuity of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin. Certainly ingenuity is central to Karl Philipp Ellerbrock's erudite study.

Drawing on an impressive variety of sources from Aristotle and Augustin through Petrarch and Quintilian to Virgil and Voltaire, it builds an elegant argument concerning not just Charles Baudelaire's translations of Poe but translation more broadly. Translation here is to be understood, moreover, not just as a literary activity but one that can be exemplified more widely. Thus, while he opens somewhat conventionally with an exploration of the images of evil that link the two writers, Ellerbrock swiftly and with much greater originality moves on to examine the role played, as a result of new technologies, in the inclusion of visual portraits of writers in their publications. Quoting Baudelaire's affirmation that it is both a great and a useful pleasure to compare an author's features and his or her work, Ellerbrock nonetheless reveals in his investigation of the French poet's written portraits of his American counterpart how the concept of portraiture is to be read as an extended metaphor for literary translation.

This affirmation leads into an ample analysis of changes in translation methods and concepts between the Classical and Romantic periods, changes which are presented as having not only literary and esthetic causes but also, and perhaps above all, ideological implications. Thus, a comparison of two French versions of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* exposes a move away from the Classical desire to preserve the purity of the French language towards a Romantic determination to represent the preciseness, originality, and energy of the English original.

With this historical context established, Ellerbrock draws on a variety of theoretical statements, notably those of Quintilian and Joachim du Bellay, to underpin his affirmation that Baudelaire, when describing Poe's texts as being singularly audacious, is speaking above all of his own translations. And it is through those translations, Ellerbrock argues in a chapter devoted to the ways in which society values different achievements, that Baudelaire seeks to translate Poe to the rank of greatness and in so doing to force his compatriots to recognize his own genius. For all their intrinsic interest and erudition, this chapter and the next, which explores the dedications to Maria Clemm, leave the reader feeling that the originality of Baudelaire's translations, highlighted in the book's subtitle, has ceased to be the center of interest, displaced by an understandable fascination with the introductions and prefaces that present those translations to their readers. What seems more at issue here is the extent to which Baudelaire is using these texts to craft a portrait of the author as translator, despite his affirmation in a letter of 15 Feb. 1865: "Je ne suis pas traducteur."

Indeed, the determination to show how Baudelaire is driven less by his vision of Poe as Doppelgänger or mirror image than by a vision of translation as a creative act in its own right is the focus of a chapter titled "Übersetzung und Imagination" exploring "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." With its survey of the concepts of imagination, fancy, and ingenuity as central to the detective's craft, this tale offers a useful analogy to the task of both writing and translating. Here, too, Ellerbrock's reading roves widely, from Charles Meryon and Walter Scott through Georges Cuvier and Paul Valéry to Jacques Lacan, scrutinizing other French translations of Poe's tale *en route*. Parallel passages from Poe and Baudelaire reveal how creatively at times the translation diverges from the original (compare for instance "a very little fellow" with "un petit avorton" or "chuckling" with "épanoui"). Ellerbrock offers consistently suggestive commentaries on such differences to reach the triumphant conclusion: "Baudelaires Übersetzungen sind eine Verführung zur Philologie."

At times one longs for closer analyses of the translations themselves, rather than what can appear to be a prolonged deferral of such readings while the background matter is established. A discussion of English-French dictionaries available at the time or of any difference in methods Baudelaire used for translating different genres—essay, novel, short story—would also have been welcome. Nevertheless, this is a study of considerable appeal and undeniable inventiveness. Broader in scope than its title and subtitle suggest, it deserves to reach a wide readership.

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