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La Malédiction littéraire: du poète crotté au génie
malheureux (review)

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job of placing it within the context of both Diderot's own *œuvre* as well as broader, contemporary debates within the 'life sciences'. The editor's introduction is also immensely useful in that it paints a detailed picture of the philosophical landscape within which Diderot was operating, and offers a comprehensive overview of those thinkers that most deeply influenced his 'biological' thought, most notably Haller, Bordeu, Buffon and Maupertuis. The methodological and attentive nature of Quintili's approach may be best demonstrated, however, by the inclusion of a diagram that neatly highlights the seminal intellectual underpinnings of *Éléments de physiologie*, presenting them as a series of interconnected 'problem points'. Also of interest are the Appendices, which present fragmentary manuscript notes that allow the Diderot scholar to carefully trace the evolution of the thinker's ideas from *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* right through to the latter stages of his life. Quintili's edition is a well laid out and information-rich examination of Diderot's definitive statement on vitalism, materialism and the best means of understanding the nature of man. It will be invaluable to *diderotistes* and to students of eighteenth-century natural philosophy alike.

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La Malédiction littéraire: du poète crotté au génie malheureux. By PASCAL BRISSETTE.
Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2005. 413 pp. Pb €31.00; Cdn \$34.95.

In this study, Pascal Brissette proposes both a prehistory and a case-based analysis of what he identifies as a cardinal myth of the autonomous literary field in France: that linking artistic virtue with personal suffering. 'Malheureux, donc légitime' (p. 39) is, for Brissette, the shared governing logic of the discourses to which this association gives rise. His articulation of the myth in terms of legitimacy announces the sociologically influenced perspective prevalent throughout a book that is not, however, as the Introduction makes clear, a primarily sociological study. After having argued for a general view of myth as an enabling hermeneutic device (providing an explicative schema that is both a compensatory mechanism and an impetus to action), Brissette proposes a history of the 'acceptability' of the myth he has identified through the study, as an evolving discursive system, of the abundant discourses of literary misfortune. The chronological and cultural boundaries of this complex object are necessarily problematic. In his first part, which sets out a prehistory of the myth proper where legitimizing discourses on melancholy, on poverty and on persecution are argued to converge on the subsequent topos of 'malheur'/'malédiction', Brissette draws on both classical and medieval sources before discussing representative cases (most but not all in French) from across the early modern period. Each of the three chapters devoted to these tributary discourses functions quite well as an autonomous outline of its particular affliction. Each cohere in their readings of representations of these evils as (unequally successful) attempts to establish symbolic capital, in which varieties of melancholy, poverty or persecution succeed one another as so many permutations of an already apparently implacable logic.

The critical moment in Brissette's construction of the myth is that of Rousseau's *Confessions*, and Rousseau becomes, both in his own right and in his

reception, the central figure in the consolidation within a single general principle of the topoi already explored. Drawing upon the pre-existing discursive possibilities, that author becomes ‘un *exemplum* de premier ordre’ of the unified myth. He also inaugurates the period (1770–1840) that Brissette had identified as the historical focal point of his study, but which is largely confined to the second part thereof. Following Rousseau, there are discussions of Julie de Lespinasse, of émigré literature (Chateaubriand, Sénac de Meilhan) and of Romantic avatars of the myth (including Vigny’s *Chatterton* and the *poète-assassin* Lacenaire), which all emphasize its recuperative properties across the literary field. The work concludes on a largely self-contained iconographic study of Hugo in exile in Jersey. A further illustration of the ability of the myth to assimilate contradictory positions to itself, this chapter ultimately highlights as unresolved both the question of the chronological parameters of Brissette’s study and the ongoing terminological drift therein between *malheur* and *malédiction*. However, neither these issues, nor an occasionally over-ebullient demystificatory tone, which emerges as the writing progresses (in contrast to more nuanced understandings established at the outset), seriously undermine this invigoratingly written and wide-ranging discussion of one of literary modernity’s key ideologies.

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Le Moi, l'histoire: 1789–1848. Textes réunis par DAMIEN ZANONE avec la collaboration de CHANTAL MASSOL. Grenoble, ELLUG, 2005. 1998 pp. Pb €22.00.

Much of the writing produced during the Romantic period in France was concerned with the articulation of individual destiny and collective life. To a large degree this had to do with the enduring impact of the secular liberalism of the Enlightenment joined with the consequences of the Revolution. The individual self, free but unfulfilled, quested after an external validating power that would be capable investing selfhood with a stable meaning — hence the attempts to root the self in nature, history and in collective entities such as the nation or ‘le peuple’. The period witnessed an explosion of historical writing, generally sympathetic to the political left. It also saw the emergence of the ‘roman personnel’, first-person narratives often strongly tinged with autobiography. This volume contains ten contributions of varying lengths. Apart from a wide-ranging article by Gérard Rannaud, most of the remaining pieces focus on individual authors, Nerval, Michelet, Tocqueville, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Madame de Staël, Chateaubriand, Sand, Stendhal. It is a pleasure to see Rannaud quote from Georges Poulet, whose pioneering work on Romanticism and on the relationship between different forms of temporality no longer seems to receive the attention it deserves. The only article really to step outside the canon is the editor’s own contribution on historical memoirs. This turns out to be a very interesting essay. Booksellers’ lists of the Restoration and the July Monarchy overflowed with historical memoirs — sometimes genuine, sometimes fictitious — but scholars rarely pay these influential works the attention they deserve. Zanone looks at memoirs relating to Napoleon and identifies two main types of writing. In the first, the author’s presence in the