

The shipwrecking of literature

All at sea with Olivier Cadiot

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Abstract

It has become something of a cliché to say that avant-garde literature died in France in the early 1980s. Yet, while it is evident that the beginning of the decade marked a turn in literary history, it is also clear that experimental writing practices have emerged since then, and that any assertion of the death of (post)modernism must therefore be relativized. This article considers the work of one writer, Olivier Cadiot, who entered the literary scene with fracas in 1988 with the publication of *L'Art poétique*. Over a period of roughly thirty years, Cadiot has questioned what it means to read and write literature through producing a body of imaginative and theoretically dense cross-genre works. In so doing, he has asserted the creative and intellectual vibrancy of contemporary literary practices in the face of discourse which identifies French literature as being in a state of decline.

Keywords: castaway narrative, French literature, intertextuality, literary history, Olivier Cadiot, postmodernity

The history of recent literature

Olivier Cadiot's *Un Nid pour quoi faire* ['A Nest, What For'] (2007) is a novel about a royal court suffering from an image problem as a result of having set up shop in a mountain chalet. It features a character-cum-narrator named Robinson who is charged with its rebranding. Robinson's function is to dynamite a milieu that is caught between upholding the obtuse codes and conventions of aristocratic etiquette on the one hand, and bowing to hyper-liberalist market forces on the other. It is tempting to interpret the troubled court in Cadiot's novel as a metaphor for the state of French literature in the early twenty-first

century. For the contemporary literary field is also traversed by opposing forces of conservatism and commercialism, and it too suffers from an image problem. As Antoine Compagnon explained in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, the title of which, *La Littérature pour quoi faire?* [*What is Literature For?*], recalled Olivier Cadiot's work:

le lieu de la littérature s'est amenuisé dans notre société depuis une génération: à l'école, où les textes documentaires mordent sur elle, ou même l'ont dévorée; dans la presse, où les pages littéraires s'étiolent et qui traverse elle-même une crise peut-être funeste; durant les loisirs, où l'accélération numérique morcelle le temps disponible pour les livres. (Compagnon 2007a)

[the presence of literature has diminished in our society in the last generation: at school, where documentary texts have encroached upon it, or even superseded it; in the press, where the literary pages are dwindling, and which is itself undergoing a possibly fatal crisis; during leisure time, where the gathering pace of digital technology is fragmenting the time available for books] (Compagnon 2007b)

The decline of literature in terms of readership, visibility, or quality has become a familiar refrain recently in France. With the advent of the twenty-first century, there has been a surge in the number of works decrying the end of theatre, calling poetry completely insignificant, and bemoaning the demise of the novel.¹ A quick survey of such titles as *L'Adieu à la littérature* ['Farewell to Literature'] (Marx 2005), *Les Ecrivains contre la littérature* ['Writers Against Literature'] (Nunez 2006), *Contre Saint Proust ou la fin de la Littérature* ['Against Saint Proust or the End of Literature'] (Maingueneau 2006) illustrates the point eloquently. Some critics have been particularly vitriolic in lambasting what they perceive to be the causes and consequences of France's intellectual culture going to pot. For instance, Richard Millet in *Désenchantement de la littérature* ['Disappointing Literature'] laments that the narratives of the likes of Rabelais, Diderot, Sade, Saint-Simon, Casanova, Balzac, and Proust, and essays in the style of Montaigne, de Quincey, Borges, Bataille, and Magris, will soon be erased through the spread of ignorance and the collapse of the French educational system (2007: 33). Millet is in good company among declinists of the far right, and can call on the intellectual support of Alain Finkielkraut of the Académie française, for whom the internet has spelt the doom of civilization

(2001), and essayist Renaud Camus (2008, 2011), whose fears of migration and cultural collapse are intermingled. However, these attacks on the state of literature are not confined to the right and far right of the political spectrum. Philippe Sollers, who was the leading light of the avant-garde literary journal *Tel Quel* ['as is'] in the 1960s and 1970s, also came out in support of Millet regarding the poor state of literature in France in the early 2000s (Sollers 2009). Moreover, many cultural commentators and theorists concur with the signatories of the manifesto 'Pour une "littérature-monde" en français' published in *Le Monde des livres* in 2007, who claim that the most exciting literature in French is being produced by writers not from Metropolitan France (Barbery et al. 2007). In other words, contemporary literature 'Made in France', as former Minister of the Economy Arnaud Montebourg might have labelled it, is under siege from different quarters.

In the current climate, it can be tempting to follow Alexandre Gefen in identifying 'sharp opposition in this respect between the Anglophone optimism about the continuing love of literature and the francophone discourse decrying the end of literature' (Fülop 2016: 65). Such 'Anglophone optimism' is exemplified by Rick Rylance (2016: 5) when he notes the 'prominent public presence' of literature in Britain, citing examples of people reading on the London underground. On the other hand, Philip Roth's infamous declaration in *Le Monde* that in a few years there will be as many readers of serious literature as lovers of Latin poetry, reveals that such optimism is not shared by all in the Anglo-American literary sphere ('Philip Roth' 2013). Yet, even in the French context, the current literary crisis can be relativized by the fact that proclaiming literature to be in trouble is hardly a new phenomenon. As Gefen convincingly argues in his pleasantly titled article 'Ma fin est mon commencement: Les Discours sur la fin de la littérature' ['I end where I begin: Discourses on the end of literature'], each time literature is condemned to death, it is to make way for a new movement, avant-garde, or breath of creative energy (2009: 25).

Indeed, there is a notable tendency in French cultural discourse to carve up literary and cultural production into 'manageable epochs, generations, movements, schools and styles' (Duffy 2011: 1), to provide a digestible literary history. However, the danger of such a fondness for periodization is that points of rupture are identified as definitive. A case in point, it has become commonplace to argue that avant-garde literature died in France at roughly the same time as the theory wars came to end in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Viart 2005: 173). The disappearance of Roland Barthes in 1980 and the disbanding of the

Tel Quel group a couple of years later provide convenient curtains to a period of formal experimentation. Yet while it is often stated that the beginning of the decade marked a return to narrative in French literature (Viart 1998: 11; Compagnon 2007c: 787), such an affirmation is too simplistic. For one, as the editors of *L'Esprit Créateur's* special issue on the contemporary novel attest, narrative never really disappeared (Audet and Xanthos 2014: 1). Second, certain authors – Samuel Beckett, for instance – who wrote before and during the 1980s never gave up on formal experimentation. It is also clear that new experimental writing practices have appeared since then. The emergence of writers such as Eric Chevillard, François Bon and Antoine Volodine, is testament to continued interest in formal experimentation.

Birth of an author

Among the writers to come of age towards the end of the decade was Olivier Cadiot, who entered the literary scene with fracas in 1988 following the publication of *L'Art poétique* [Art Poetic], which was immediately recognized as a once in a generation event (Farah 2013: 55). Over a period of thirty years, Olivier Cadiot has questioned what it means to read and write literature through producing a body of imaginative and theoretically dense cross-genre works. Readers unfamiliar with Cadiot's work will be amused to learn that he was associate artist of the Avignon Theatre Festival in 2010 despite never having published a play; is frequently labelled a poet, though he has only one book of poetry to his name; and sometimes a novelist, though he displays a notable lack of interest in narrative. He has written an academic essay, *Histoire de la littérature récente* [History of Recent Literature]; the book for an opera (by Pascal Dusapin) and lyrics for rock songs (by Alain Bashung and Rodolphe Burger); collaborated on an installation for the Paris tramway; and developed a thirteen-year saga (1993–2010) which transplanted Defoe's Robinson into multiple guises, from a fairy performer of poetry to a reluctant magus. Through humour, Cadiot asserts the creative and intellectual vibrancy of literature as it is written today while creatively reinvesting works of the past.

In line with what scholars of the period have identified as characteristics of contemporary French writing, Cadiot engages with 'le dépôt culturel des siècles et des civilisations' [the cultural sediment of centuries and civilizations] (Viart 2005: 18),² and looks back to the avant-gardes with affection (Bessière 2014: 13). As he has explained in interview, when he started writing on the cusp of the 1970s and 1980s he had a large ideas laboratory behind him in which to delve

(2015: 241). Yet, so engrained is the idea that avant-garde literature died in the early 1980s in France that his work deals with the mourning. Thus, it is that in one of the four novellas that make up Olivier Cadiot's *Providence* (2015), a young man intending to become a writer grapples with the fact that modern art is seemingly dead. As I move on to consider how Cadiot explores literary heritage and reinvests the present in his works, the shipwreck (or death) of literature and the constant attempts to rebuild will frame my considerations.

Reconfiguring literary heritage

In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the eponymous character retrieves objects from crates in the ship following his marooning. The society that he creates on the island is thus made out of pre-existing elements. It is less a story about building anew than one about reconfiguring the building blocks of Protestant culture. This is indeed why Gilles Deleuze complained that 'Tout est tiré du bateau, rien n'est inventé, tout est appliqué péniblement sur l'île' (2002: 15) ['Everything is taken from the ship. Nothing is invented. It is all painstakingly applied on the island'] (2004: 12). However, each subsequent rewriting of the Robinson story can also be viewed as taking elements from pre-existing stock and applying them to a new set of narrative constraints. Indeed, the tradition of the 'robinsonnade' (or castaway narrative) is, as Gérard Genette has noted, a practice of rewriting that stems from a practice of reading (1982: 265), a reading of the history of these narratives. French literature is replete with castaway narratives, from Jules Verne's *L'Île mystérieuse* [*The Mysterious Island*] (1875) to Michel Tournier's *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* [*Friday, or, The Other Island*] (1967) via Jean Giraudoux's *Suzanne et le Pacifique* [*Suzanne and the Pacific*] (1921). The novels that comprise Olivier Cadiot's six-part 'robinsonnade' cycle (1993–2010) are populated by avatars of Robinson Crusoe that do not bear any physical resemblance to Defoe's character, but are completely obsessed by islands and island-dwelling, as the following quote from *Un Nid pour quoi faire* demonstrates:

Un homme seul est assis dans cette cuisine, appelons-le Robinson, il n'a pas de barbe, de chapeau en peau de chèvre, de parasol et de perroquet, mais quelque chose dans son cerveau persiste, il traduit tout ce qui lui arrive en termes d'île, chaque événement est un naufrage, chaque décision minuscule est à la vie à la mort, comment faire pour s'installer ici, que faire pour améliorer ça? (2007: 74)

[A man is sat alone in this kitchen, let's call him Robinson. He doesn't have a beard, a goatskin hat, a parasol or a parrot, but there's something about the way his mind works, he considers everything that happens to him in terms of islands, every event is a calamity, each minute decision is a matter of life or death, how can you set up here, how could this be improved?]

The fact that Robinson is incarnated in so many different guises in Cadiot's work is testament to a history of literary appropriation of the figure. Moreover, from the point where he is 'introduced as narrator in [Cadiot's first novel] *Futur, ancien, fugitif* ['Future, former, fugitive'] (1993), Robinson coordinates the recovery of linguistic fragments from before his shipwreck' (Lynch 2014: 86). Cadiot thus 'radicalises many of the aspects of the contemporary solitary adventure' (Acquisto 2012: 244). Cadiot describes his interest in the figure of Robinson in rather prosaic terms; for instance, in an interview with the magazine *Vacarme*, he humorously reveals that: 'Robinson, c'est l'employé modèle pour un roman. Voilà un type qui se retrouve dans une île avec trois caisses échouées et à partir de ça, nous refabrique un monde complet' ['Robinson is the model employee for a novel. Here's a guy who finds himself with three crates and out of this recreates a whole new world'] (Cadiot et al. 2008). Yet even before using Robinson as a device, Cadiot was already reconfiguring linguistic and literary heritage in his very first major work, *L'Art poétique*, using a writing technique inspired by William Burroughs.

In a recent radio interview, Olivier Cadiot explained that when he started out, writing for him meant 'donner un coup de ciseau au moment où il faut' ['Snipping right on cue'] to uncover a poem in the universal texts of grammar books (Cadiot 2012). In *L'Art Poétique* (1988), *Roméo & Juliette I* (1989), and, to a certain extent, *Futur, ancien, fugitif*, Cadiot makes use of cut-up techniques to reassemble a variety of materials including novels, newspapers, and grammar books into lively dialogues, such as in the following: 'Le voici qui vient / Ha! vous voilà! / Vous ne venez pas? Si' ['Here he comes/ Ha! There you are! / Aren't you coming? Yes'] (1988: 15). Writing via cut-up techniques can be interpreted as an appropriation of the practice of citation, which Antoine Compagnon has described as excising, mutilating, and sampling (1979: 17). Like citation, writing through cutting-up involves a double process of selecting material and assembling it in a new order. To quote Jean Espitallier:

Cette pratique implique une double opération; opération de sélection (choix du type de texte que sur lequel je vais travailler puis choix des objets

à prélever) et opération de montage (recycler, redistribuer, réagencer dans un autre espace). (2014: 194)

[This practice implies a double process; a selection process (choosing the text to work on and choosing the objects to remove) and an assembling process (recycling, redistributing, reorganizing in a new configuration)]

Espitallier's description has a lot in common with Genette's analysis of the castaway narrative referenced above. I would therefore suggest that in Cadiot's case, the use of the cut-up gesture to remodel linguistic and literary fragments (a passage of Chateaubriand is transformed into a fill the gaps exercise) prefigures his utilization of Robinson as a device to achieve the same aims. Just as the castaway makes use in a new environment of instruments that have been ripped from their original context, the author removes sentences or parts of sentences and places them in a new literary set-up.

Even in Cadiot's later works, which were not crafted, like as *L'Art poétique*, with the same 'jubilatory mock innocence of a child playing with a shredder' (Glynn 2015: 47), the author continues to make use, albeit more sparingly, of cutting and pasting. For instance, Anne Woelfel has identified a passage on Higgs's boson in *Un Mage en été* ['A Magus in Summer'] (2010) which is lifted from a short film project (2014: 169). Also in *Un Mage en été*, the reluctant magus describes the process of making a poem out of cutting up the correspondence of Vigny (Cadiot 2010: 108). Though this attempt results in failure, 'Bon, ça ne marche pas' ['OK, so that doesn't work'] (Cadiot 2010: 110), it nevertheless demonstrates continued interest in the process (though dissatisfaction with the result). More generally, references to chopping, snipping and blending abound in all of Cadiot's works, as in *Un Nid pour quoi faire*, where a special advisor named Goethe congratulates the king on his use of the metaphor of blending as a springboard for a new political theory (2007: 17). What is more, the way in which Cadiot places side by side incongruous images and objects, such as a royal court completely obsessed with skiing and extreme sports, can be considered to stem from the practice of placing two incongruous fragments of text next to each other.

However, it would be reductive to suggest that cutting and pasting is Cadiot's only engagement with referencing and intertextuality. On the contrary, he utilizes a vast array of techniques of referencing or allusion. Broadly speaking, though, as Michel Gauthier has highlighted in his trailblazing analysis of Cadiot's work, there are two systems at play: a general intext (which we might

describe as the relationship between a text and those by other authors) and a restricted intertext (between Cadiot's own works) (Gauthier 2004: 25). Regarding the former, references to films are particularly common, such as in *Fairy queen*, where the narrator describes a scene in Godard's *Pierrot le fou* ['Pierrot the Madman'] during which Anna Karina and Jean-Paul Belmondo play out an episode of the Vietnam war to American navy officers (Cadiot 2002: 20). Another example of a filmic reference can be found in *Un Mage en été* where the narrator suggests mimicking the voice of the narrator in Orson Welles's *Magnificent Ambersons* (Cadiot 2010: 19). However, equally frequent are references to Cadiot's own works. These lead to what Daniel Letendre labels 'une reflexion en "circuit fermé" où l'écrivain, plutôt que de se confronter à l'histoire générale des formes, se mesure à son propre travail' ['a "closed-circuit" reflexion where the writer, rather than engaging with a general stylistic history, measures up to his own work'] (2013: 14). Yet, I would argue that the two systems work in line with the same principles. References to other works, whether by the author himself or others, provide a mind-map for locating the text in relation to them. This intertext attempts to do several things. For one, it is an attempt to show what is important. For two, it provides suggestions for future reading. And third, by the very obtuse nature of certain references, it frustrates the reader, highlighting that such knowledge may not be as important as all that.

References to Cadiot's previous work nevertheless come with accompanying criticism. Frequently, a narrative voice turns on the author persona and hurls abuse. The most telling example of this is in the first section of *Providence*, where a creature abandoned by its creator calls for revenge. In promotional interviews, Cadiot has pointed out that *Providence* is the first of his 'post-Robinsonnade' works. However, this very first section stages this transition – in the same way that *Futur, ancien, fugitif* stages the move from writing via cut-ups to writing via blending. Certainly, for a reader who has not read Cadiot's entire *œuvre*, these will not be clear. However, it is also worth noting that these are often the most facile of references. It is tempting to read in the references to biographical material a critique of the narrative turn in the 1980s. The risk of uncovering such allusions is to find a boojum rather than a snark (Glynn 2015: 49), but it also draws attention to the constructed nature of the piece, in the same way that Perec's *Un cabinet d'amateur* [*A Gallery Portrait*] (1979) ends with the affirmation that most of the paintings in Rafke's collection were fake 'comme sont faux la plupart des détails de ce récit fictif' ['as are most of the details in this fictional tale'] (1979: 120).

Literature against storytelling

In Cadiot's works, Robinson also acts as a device to reinvest the past in the present at the same time as providing social commentary. In the opening pages of *Retour définitif et durable de l'être aimé* ['The Definitive and Lasting Return of the Loved One'] (2002), a party scene which the first-person narrator attends is described in some detail to comic effect. To the repetitive beats of Daft Punk's commercial house music – 'Ouin'mor'tai'm' (2002: 58) – guests at the arty-farty event try to outdo each other with their exploits. One writes pseudo-pornography, a Japanese photographer gets all excited about flies, and a sausage dog excretes on the kitchen floor. However, the most amusing sequence is when an amnesiac film buff suffering with the flu pursues Robinson, relentlessly reminiscing about films he can't quite remember. After whingeing about his illness, he launches into trite summaries of films he claims to be masterpieces:

Yamamoto quitte Tokyo-centre après la mort de son chef et retrouve son demi-frère à L.A., là il rencontre les copains de Denny, un jeune Noir dont il devient l'ami intime après tout de même lui avoir pratiquement crevé un œil, excusez-moi, je suis émotif à force d'être confronté à des choses magnifiques. (2002: 64)

[Yamamoto flees central Tokyo after his boss dies and goes to find his half-brother in LA, where he meets the mates of Denny, a black kid he befriends after having almost poked his eye out, I'm sorry, I get so emotional through being exposed to such beautiful things]

The film buff not only subjects his interlocutor (and thus the reader) to such subjective choices but complains when one of the other guests delivers what he reckons to be a terrible pitch for one of her ideas: 'Mauvais pitch, tonne le cinéphile allemande amnésique grippé que je croyais disparu, zéro, dehors, virez-moi cette conne' ['Bad pitch, bellows the sick amnesic German film buff I thought had disappeared, rubbish, get out, get this bitch out of here'] (2002: 57). On the other hand, he describes how a good pitch 'fout en l'air la journée de celui qui l'entend, une idée tellement simple qu'elle peut se dire en une seule phrase' ['completely overturns the day of the person who hears it, it's such a simple idea it can be expressed in a single sentence'] (2002: 42). It is precisely this passage which Gisèle Sapiro chose to highlight in her discussion with Cadiot at the Maison de la Poésie. This conversation was held as part of

the Fiction Contre Storytelling seminar series, which was developed out of the writings of Christian Salmon in *Storytelling* (2007). However, these pitches are what literature has become in a very prescient way. They are condensed clips of epic novels or fragments of memory (hence poetry). Cadot has already explored such an approach to condensing writing in *Le Colonel des Zouaves* ['The Colonel of the Zouaves'] (1997), where a hyper-meticulous butler (Robinson, again) amuses himself by condensing huge volumes into short summaries. Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* [*In Search of Lost Time*] (1927), for instance, is cruelly condensed to the following mocking lines:

Un homme raconte son enfance et à un moment donné, à cause d'un banal gâteau trempé dans du thé, retrouve tous ses souvenirs en intégral, pas ceux concentrés en une seule phrase que l'on fait défiler juste avant de mourir, mais les choses en temps réel. On se retrouve donc devant quelqu'un qui raconte très lentement qu'il raconte ses souvenirs très vite. Et inversement. (1997: 79)

[A man talks about his childhood and at a given moment, because of a banal cake dipped in tea, is flooded by his entire collection of memories, not those concentrated in a single sentence that run before your eyes when you're dying, but things in real time. You're faced with someone telling you very slowly that they're telling you things very fast. And vice versa]

The effect is not dissimilar to the short summaries in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, where, prior to burning the books, the great works are condensed to manageable chunks. The discrepancy between the three-sentence summary and the multivolume work by Proust, as well as the snide reduction to a single moment's discovery, is one way of doing this. In similar fashion, in *Un Nid pour quoi faire*, the whole paraphernalia of the *ancien régime* court is reduced to a chalet in the mountains: 'Ma Galerie des Glaces, en réduction, ça détonne un peu à l'intérieur d'un chalet' ['My reduced Hall of Mirrors is a bit out of place inside a chalet'] (2007: 29). The change of scale means that old conspiracies are fought out on a reduced scale:

les complots d'avant persistent, mais en version familiale, des cabales, des alliances, des putschs avortés pour des détails, une mini-guerre de Cent ans pour obtenir du ketchup en plus. (2007: 28)

[the plots of the past still exist but in reduced form, the conspiracies, the alliances, attempted coups for trivial things, a mini Hundred Years' War to get more ketchup]

Playing with scale goes hand in hand with playing with speed, for just as narratives are reduced, they are sped up. There is a veritable obsession with speed and physical prowess in Cadiot's works, which is best exemplified by the fact that critic Michel Gauthier entitled his study of Cadiot's work *Olivier Cadiot: le facteur vitesse* ['Olivier Cadiot: The Speed Factor'] (2007). Gauthier argues that acceleration through fragmentary writing is at the basis of Cadiot's project to poetize narrative (2007: 31). This is associated with the inclusion of very short sentences, such as the non-verbal sentence at the end of the above quote – 'et inversement' – that turn the whole passage on its head. Not only is the supposedly significant discovery presented as ludicrous, but it is flippantly invalidated by being shown to be multidirectional. This is taken to its extreme in *Un Mage en été*, where Robinson, who is a magus this time, travels through time and space at breakneck speed. From a walk in the woods, bathing in a stream, he ends up in Gallo-Roman France before a Viking ship erupts onto the scene (2010: 42). Narrative is played with in *Fairy queen* too: the poetess's performance, the main event, is never actually described. There is an ellipsis before the simple summary: 'j'ai fait un premier poème d'une vingtaine de minutes, ils avaient l'air contents' ['I performed a first poem that lasted about twenty minutes, they seemed pleased'] (2002: 61).

It is important not to forget that such playing with scale enables social commentary and criticism of social rituals. Cadiot has one foot in and one foot out of the camp in this regard, as those who do not master the social codes of each setting are singled out and mocked just as the settings themselves are sent up as ridiculous. A case in point: in *Un Nid pour quoi faire*, the court protocol is baffling due to its mix of tradition and blatant modernism. 'Moi je suis de mon temps, on range les armures, je suis un Roi lucide' ['I'm a man of the times, put away the armour, I'm a lucid king'] (2007: 54) says the king, while at the same time he attacks the prince for not mastering court etiquette. Moreover, in most of the social situations, a tyrant takes over: the king in *Un Nid pour quoi faire*, Gertrude Stein in *Fairy queen*. Robinson figures as an inverted Man Friday, forced into silent monologue for the most part. Language is presented as a tool of mastery and dominance, just as in the salon culture described by Proust. In the stage adaptation of Cadiot's work on the occasion of the 2010 Festival d'Avignon, theatre critics noted the social critique, yet wondered whether it was

not obscured by language. It is also the case that for all the criticism labelled at society, Cadiot is very much complacent. There is admiration for trends and developments, surface reality, and also digs at it. In this way, Cadiot cannot be taken out of his social context, and his work must be viewed not so much as social commentary (here the relationship with Proust becomes more evident).

Literature, what for

Alexandre Gefen has explained that, on the one hand, academics are keen to signal the end of literature in order to better study Proust, Flaubert, or even Beckett, while, on the other, writers look to profit from the mess they make (2009: 27). Concerning the latter, this can take the form of a ‘volonté suicidaire d’anéantissement’ [‘suicidal wish for annihilation’] (Marx 2005: 17). In other words, it is like in the apocalyptic films when people decide to go out with a bang, partying the night away. However, in another article, Gefen is remarkably clear about the function of irony in sapping the authority of the author in order to allow the regeneration of literature (2008: 8). It is this tension between the need to destroy and the need to regenerate, between the shipwreck and the manual for survival, that is at the heart of Cadiot’s project and which is the key life breath of contemporary French literature. In his *Revue de Littérature générale* [‘General Literature Review’], he argues that a new theory of literature is needed, and another, and another. Similarly, as Olivier Cadiot’s last published work to date, *Histoire de la littérature récente* (2016), refers to Philip Roth’s comments about the disappearance of literary readers. However, it refuses to take such a glum attitude, and works to find an escape route from the seemingly inescapable reality of the decline of readership. Cadiot’s literary project is encapsulated by the paradox of putting old wine in new bottles such that they explode, and doing the same again and again. In this way, he revitalizes the model for literary practice, while acknowledging that his solution is not perennial, and the need to do so again and again and again.

Notes

1. Regarding theatre, see for instance Guenoun (1997), Dupuis (1998), and Cormann (2006); regarding poetry, Maingueneau (2006).
2. Translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

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