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*Poetic Becomings: Studies in Contemporary French Literature*  
by Jérôme Game (review)

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the illogic of a genre that she works hard to explain logically, sometimes even literally. But, as Mallarmé said to Degas, poems are not made with ideas, but with words and, one might add, with the spaces between the words. Professor Hess is to be admired for tackling such difficult poetry, but aesthetic concepts like “feeling,” “tone,” “ambiguity,” or “irony” seem to be irrelevant to her undertaking. Without them, I am left with the question I believe all of these poets are asking, for different reasons and in different, painful or playful ways, “*Quel est le lieu de la poésie dans le monde contemporain?*”

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Jérôme Game, *Poetic Becomings: Studies in Contemporary French Literature*. Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2011. 253 pp.

What happens to the poetic subject after deconstruction? How does poetry deconstruct the self? What does the deconstructed self do to poetry? And how can the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze help us examine these questions? Such are the concerns addressed by Jérôme Game in *Poetic Becomings: Studies in Contemporary French Literature*, a rich and stimulating study of four writers, Christian Prigent, Dominique Fourcade, Olivier Cadiot, and Hubert Lucot. These are forerunners of a generation of poets in France, who—like Baudelaire before them—are not so much engaged in a redefinition of poetry, as they are in its “un-definition,” in its liberation from the shackles of Aristotelian didacticism. For instance, “poetry may now be written in metered verse as well as in prose, that is to say in sentences, paragraphs, chapters” writes Game (16). Poetry can even move outside the book, one might add, as does Game’s own poetry, but this is another study. Game concentrates here on pioneering writers who are particularly relevant to the question of the poetic subject and its paradigmatic shift in current French poetry. He describes how crucial the debate on subjectivity is in contemporary French writing, and in particular how wide-ranging its criticism of the very idea of subjectivity. His aim is to show how Deleuze’s philosophy and theory of literature can enlighten one’s reading of these key writers, even if they themselves

are not necessarily influenced by Deleuze. Game delves deeply into his subject, but always with great clarity, explaining the key concepts every inch of the way: "I call poetic becoming this poetic subject whose precariousness is a transcendental feature rather than a theme or a posture, and whose form is that of a (de-) subjectifying process carried out by linguistic signs" (52).

*Poetic Becomings* is very much a book of close readings and analyses rather than a literary history (which it does not claim to be). However, the book is always entertaining, and sufficiently contextualized for readers to acquire a good general grasp of the early period of poststructuralist writing in France. Game begins with Prigent's work, showing how his poetry presents human existence as primarily bodily. The deconstruction of being is therefore accomplished through anatomy, which is either shown undone with skin or flesh removed, or is made only precariously human through a process of becoming animal. Game argues that Prigent's work is not simply scatological or simplistically Rabelaisian, but that "[i]t is an ontology of the in-between, a linguistic anatomy of the Body-without-organs. In it, the self is pure becoming" (106). The following chapter is a study of Fourcade's rhizomatic poetics, a poetics of the line and the surface, of horizontality, where the integrity of the self is compromised by a play with lines and sentences and the rhythmic dynamics of language. Game also convincingly analyzes the deconstruction of self at play in Cadiot's *Futur, Ancien, Fugitif*, a landmark piece of contemporary French literature playing on the story of Robinson Crusoe and the theme of the cast-away. This Robinson is a rather uncertain being; he is first described dealing with the difficulties of life on a deserted island, but then as a psychiatric patient on a hospital ward. There, the truth of his past on the island is put in doubt. Game argues that the protagonist's sense of self is destroyed by the suggestion that his narrative could have been unreal. Indeed, if this were the case, it would have been composed by an unreal self and would be the work of a schizophrenic. But, suggests Game, what matters here is not so much whether this Robinson's experience really happened, as the creation by Cadiot of that sense of a dismantlement of the self, by which we have a character narrating his story on and in his own deconstructed self. This sense of dismantlement is also made visible in the stuttering narrative. Game explains the Deleuzian idea of linguistic deterritorialization in detail, and develops the argument of the "stuttering self" (151),

the self which is always in a state of becoming, and where “the subject emerges as incessant self-production rather than representation of an ideal and stable formation” (153). Lastly, Game studies Lucot’s prose, focusing on his novel *Probablement*. Lucot is known for his “bio-politico-graphy” (191), a type of writing in which world politics and economics infiltrate the discourse of self, and his “action writing,” in which the text figures on a giant poster, thus inviting reflection on non-linear forms of representation. In *Probablement*, he creates an original form of narration, where autobiography becomes “the story of perception itself” (201). Perception is taken as raw matter, fragmentary and desubjectivized. There is no description of the outside world; the story comes directly from the deconstructed self, to create a “heterobiographic narrative” (205), the autobiography of the self as it evolves continuously.

In “Towards a Politics of Becoming,” Game’s concluding essay, the question of how to write outside subjectivity, as a deconstructed subject, is summarized. Poetic becoming is not a theme but an experience acted out textually. It is a way of experiencing the subject as an unstable concept, something which is always evolving towards something else, which is always happening. In that respect, this poetry is radical, for it undoes what Game calls “the politics of the ideal subject” (234). Game’s book is wholly original and well-argued, and a rich source of ideas for any scholar in the field. It should also be of interest to a public curious about sources of recent developments in French writing.

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Keith Reader, *The Place de la Bastille: The Story of a Quartier*.  
 Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011. vi + 184 pp.

In the early hours of May 7, 2012, France’s newly-elected socialist president arrived at the Place de la Bastille to address supporters, reaffirming the political and symbolic importance of this Parisian space. Imploring his audience to remember this moment, “trente-et-un ans après, jour pour jour,” Mitterrand’s Bastille election gathering, François Hollande proclaimed “Portez loin le message, souvenez-vous