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Senancour: Penser nature. By YVON LE SCANFF. (Études romantiques et dix-neuviémistes, 116) Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2022. 377 pp.

Yvon Le Scanff sets out to explore the extent to which Senancour's works should be taken seriously as philosophy, building upon Béatrice Didier's characterization of him as the most "philosophe" of the Pre-Romantic French writers, and correcting Émile Bréhier's somewhat dismissive description of a writer forever coming close to philosophy without ever really engaging in it. The book seeks to move beyond two critical commonplaces about Senancour: that his thinking was incoherent, and that his was a "conscience malheureuse". With regard to the former Le Scanff acknowledges that Senancour's written expression of his ideas might well be considered a developmental "pensée en archipels" (p. 13), scattered throughout the work; it certainly isn't a systematically-articulated philosophy. Nevertheless, he argues, there is more critical value – if harder critical work – in seeking coherence than in asserting incoherence. With this in mind he conceives of Senancour's work as a mobile. The elements are constantly moving, disconcerting, yet connected. Individual thoughts occur as isolated experiences, but the concept of the natural provides a thread to connect this isolated experience to the broader idea of nature itself, conceived as a set of relationships. Thinking is always moving; to think is to rethink; the goal is not to finalize a philosophical system but rather to keep on thinking. To the second critical commonplace, Le Scanff retorts that while there are good grounds to characterize Senancour's consciousness as unhappy, critics have tended to stop there, or just assert some relationship of cause and effect between this and the accusation of incoherence, without delving far enough into the distinctively modern character of this particular melancholy, into its exploration of a mode of existence that is more sentimental than naïve or natural. What emerges from Le Scanff's study is a picture of a writer rooted in Enlightenment traditions but exploring forms of spirituality through his reflection on nature, and more specifically human nature, in search of a reconciliation between the senses and sensibility. This is achieved primarily through reflection on individual, contingent existences, rather than sweeping ideas of progress and perfectibility on the one hand, or corruption, decline, salvation through divine love on the other. Le Scanff shows along the way that Senancour's reflections on "l'homme naturel" deserve to be taken seriously: he shares a key Romantic preoccupation with the problem of the relationships between human beings and nature, and ultimately offers a distinctive conception of what Le Scanff calls "la nature *en l'homme*", rather than "*de l'homme*" (p. 344). Le Scanff's analysis is sustained, detailed and dense; it situates Senancour in relation to a wide range of thinkers, from Aristotle to Zimmermann via Deleuze and Schelling. Although this lengthy study will likely appeal primarily to the specialist – after the introduction, few concessions are made to readers with less intimate knowledge of the issues – there are many invitations here to think and rethink our understanding of Senancour's significance as a Romantic *philosophe*.

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482 words