

## Book Reviews

*Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945.* Catherine Edwards, editor. Cambridge UP, 1999. xii - 279 pp.

Rome is more than a city, for centuries it was a symbol of Western civilization, not only because it is the center of the Roman Catholic Church, but also because it was the capital of the Roman empire. Catherine Edwards, author of the study *Writing Rome: Textual Approaches to the Eternal City* (1996) has edited a collection of essays *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945* that explores the lasting influence of ancient Roman culture. In her introduction *Shadows and Fragment* she charts not only the territory of the book but also gives a brilliant introduction into the topic. She points out, that whereas in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the importance of Roman antiquity was undisputed, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries things were a lot less clear. The Romantics had lost the optimism of previous generations and were a lot more interested in the dark sides of the former model culture. Ancient Rome no longer possessed the unquestioned cultural authority it used to have in earlier centuries, but remained an important topic in European culture. She points out that Roman antiquity became a much more ambivalent topic, it served as a model for conservatives as well as revolutionaries, it inspired monarchists as well as republicans, even fin-de-siècle decadents were able to find something to their liking. Catherine Edwards introduction is the strongest contribution to the volume, she gives a rather breathtaking overview of European perceptions from the Grand Tour to 1945 and manages to condense a very complicated story into a convincing and precise narrative. Duncan Large's essay *A sense of place: Rome, history and empire revisited* tries something similar, but remains rather general.

Roman Presences in European culture from 1789-1945 are a rather vast topic, perhaps slightly too vast for one book, so it is only natural that many important subjects remain outside of the discussion. Visual culture, architecture and urbanism are hardly covered at all, a pity, since Roman images in visual culture were the reason why the city remained very present in European cultural imagination. This omission might be caused by the

fact that the volume concentrates too much on Rome and neglects the fact, that from Romanticism onwards Rome was no longer an undisputed point of reference for artists, but faced heavy competition from other Italian cities. Turner preferred to paint Venice, also Byron's favorite Italian city and after Jacob Burckhardt popularized the Renaissance, Florence became the favorite town of many 19<sup>th</sup> century European writers and artists. Although Rome remained important, it became more and more an Italian city amongst other cities, a development which seems to have escaped the notice of many contributors.

The heritage of the Roman empire on the other hand is a topic that features perhaps too prominently in *Roman Presences*. But then it is a topic that is very close to the British heart, because in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries they liked to view Britain and its colonies as a sort of successor to the Roman empire. Catherine Edwards discusses *Translating empire? Macaulay's Rome*, Norman Vance *Decadence and the subversion of empire* and Javed Majeed *Comparativism and references in Rome in British imperial attitudes to India*. The dream of borrowing from the glory of ancient Rome was however not limited to British imperialists, as Valerie Huet shows in her well-argued and well-researched contribution *Napoleon I: a new Augustus?*. Napoleon's love to Roman antiquity was not limited to political models, but extended into art, architecture, interior design and fashion.

Ancient Rome did haunt western culture, it weighed like an incubus on the brains of the 19<sup>th</sup> century artists and profoundly influenced their perception of Italy, something that becomes obvious in Chloe Chard's essay *The road to ruin: memory, ghosts, moonlight and weeds*. Apart from her contribution, the essays on the literary representation of Rome are slightly disappointing. The contradictory and ambivalent role Rome plays for European Romanticism is neglected, despite the fact that Madame de Stael's *Corinne* and Byron's *Childe Harold IV* were highly influential in shaping the post-classicist image of Rome. Frank Turner discusses *Christians and pagans in Victorian novels*, but does not regard popular novels like *Quo Vadis* or *The Last days of Pompeii* in socio-historical context. John Lyon's essay *Henry James and the anxiety of Rome* analyses James' contradictory perception of Rome in a very convincing manner. However, he neglects the fact that James was one of the few famous writers who did not favor one of the principle Italian cities over the others, but equally praised Venice and Florence. A comparison between his different perceptions of Italian cities would have benefited Lyon's argument.

Maria Wyke's contribution *Screening ancient Rome in the new Italy* looks at the different uses of *Romanità* in the young Italian state. In the beginning, *Romanità* was promoted to rival the myth of Catholic Rome, it represented a secularized version of the eternal city. Very soon it became a vehicle of popu-

tured prominently in early Italian cinema. Maria Wyke's essay is refreshingly un-classicist in its approach and connects the analysis of the cult of ancient Rome with looking at its contemporary ideological and political context, something that is lacking in most other contributions. The same can be said about Marla Stone's essay *A flexible Rome: Fascism and the cult of Romanità*, which analyzes the different meanings, ideas and symbols from Roman antiquity acquired in Italian fascism. Volker Losemann does the same for German fascism in his interesting and precise contribution *The Nazi concept of Rome*. It is a pity that the rich and diverse traditions of German culture are only worth mentioning in the case of fascism, especially since in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Rome was a focal point of German culture. But then the different European uses of Roman antiquity hardly play a role in the volume, despite a title that promises a European perspective.

The troubled and contradictory relationship European modernism had with Roman antiquity is hardly mentioned, only Charles Martindale dares to explore the tricky subject in his essay *Ruins of Rome: T. S. Eliot and the presence of the past*. It does not say an awful lot about modernist perspectives on Rome, but represents a fine piece of scholarship on T. S. Eliot. This can be said about the majority of the essays, despite a certain narrowness in approaching Roman presences, they offer sound academic approaches to their respective topics.

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Sander L. Gilman and Jurek Becker. *A Life in Five Worlds*. Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 2003. 282 pp.

Jurek Becker (1937-97), the subject of Sander L. Gilman's biography, was a complex and multi-faced person and writer. In the last interview he gave before his death, which Gilman paraphrases, he defines himself "as a new German—one with a multicultural past as a foreigner, Jew, survivor, socialist, dissident, East German, West Berliner, and now German" (228). He was also a public figure, often speaking on social, political, and literary topics; he was a successful TV and film scriptwriter. Above all, he was a major novelist, with one novel *Jakob der Lügner* (Jacob the Liar) (1969) which will certainly long be read and discussed. Other novels—*Irreführung der Behörden* (Misleading the Authorities) (1973), *Der Boxer* (The Boxer) (1976), *Schlaflose Tage* (Sleepless Days) (1978), *Bronsteins Kinder* (Bronstein's Children) (1986), and *Amanda Herzlos* (Amanda Heartless) (1992)—are also highly regarded, engaging in complex, often uneasy, and unsettling, examinations of the Ho-

locust and its effects, Germany Jewry, and the history of the German Democratic Republic, the German socialist/communist state to which Becker gave so much of his allegiance for so long. It is Becker's complex biography and work, full of conflicts and shifts of interest and identity, that brought Gilman to write a biography of a writer whom he also knew personally. He finds Becker's biography "unusual enough to encompass many of the questions about identity and culture in Central Europe from the 1930s to the 1990s" (ix-x). Becker certainly covered a lot of territory (in a metaphorical sense) in his sixty years.

To encompass Becker's multiple personalities and identities, Gilman divides his biography into eight chapters that explore different periods and locales of Becker's life. Gilman signals the continuities and shifts in Becker's identity through these changes in time and place by noting changes in his subject's name—Jurek in Łódź, Jerzy in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto, Georg the young citizen of the GDR and DEFA scriptwriter, Jurek Becker the successful East German novelist and dissident, and Jurek Becker the citizen of West Berlin and much fêted German novelist (with a GDR passport).

Chapter 1 presents Becker's childhood in Łódź before the Second World War, relatively prosperous and thoroughly, if uneasily, Polish. Chapter 2 depicts the vileness of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto and Becker's and his mother's later transport to Ravensbrück, where Chana Becker died of TB. Chapter 3 deals with Becker's life in the Soviet Zone of Germany, after having been found by his father after the war's end. His father, Mordeha Becker, having already been forced to change his name once from Mieczysław to Mordeha, adopted the more German-sounding name of Max Becker for himself, and Georg for his son. Becker junior's difficult relationship with his father and its echoes in Becker's relationships with his own sons is a recurrent theme in Gilman's book. Chapter 4 discusses Becker's life in the GDR between 1949 and 1960, a life which was as complex as one can imagine it. His father was engaged in the interzone black market, and young Becker, along with him classed as a "Victim of Fascism," adopted the language and life of the young communist German state. However, the period ended with Becker in conflict with the authorities at the Humboldt University, just as he was to be in dispute with the powers that be of the GDR for the rest of his life.

In chapter 5, Gilman writes of the fifteen years of Becker's life from just before the building of the Berlin Wall to his achieving fame in the GDR and in West Germany with *Jakob der Lügner* in its book and film form. It was also the time of the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 (disillusion), and the cultural and intellectual thaw promised by Erich Honecker in 1970 (hope). The four years that followed 1974, however, mark Becker's increasing conflicts with the East German authorities. In chapter 6, Gilman writes in detail of meetings of the Berlin branch of the Writers' Union, the

own decision to leave the GDR, on a GDR passport, with an unheard of two year visa. Gilman's final two chapters deal with Becker's nearly twenty years in West Berlin and, after 1990, in a united Germany. These were years of considerable creativity, engagement in East-West political and social debates (for example, concerning disarmament and conflicting visions of the German past), and recognition by the West German literary and cultural establishment.

The strengths of Gilman's book are three-fold. First, he is able to give a detailed account of various aspects of Becker's career, which are interesting both for the light they throw on Becker's work, and as a record of the minutiae of literary and publishing politics in the GDR. Gilman's tales of Writers' Union meetings, a *Stasi* infiltrated book reading in Jena, or of correspondence with ranking GDR cultural bureaucrats are absorbing. Second, his focus on the awkward tugs of Becker's various "identities" and his desire, at a certain level, to be a writer that was more than what could be contained within one label, gives a coherence to a portrait of someone who was very clearly himself in some doubt about who he was or wanted to be. Third, this book will be a good source for those interested in the reception of Becker's prose, in its filming, and in his work in film and television, and how that connects with his fiction.

However, the book does have weaknesses. It rarely goes beyond summaries of the story material of Becker's major works, and, at times, the details of film projects or the shenanigans connected with the Biermann affair become just a little too much. Further, the chronological organization of the text means that central topics, like Becker's shifting sense of his Jewish identity, are scattered over the book as a whole, and might with profit have been analyzed in one place. In addition, the emphasis that Gilman puts on Becker's Jewishness occludes his political commitment to the GDR. One wants to ask why Becker became a committed socialist/communist in the 1950s and 1960s. What brand of Marxism-Leninism did he espouse in the early 1970s? What were the nuts-and-bolts of his socialism? Did he really think the workers were in charge of the factories in Leipzig or the shipyards in Rostock? (And what did he make of the *Solidarity* movement in Poland after 1980?) And, how did he pull the trick of keeping his GDR passport and re-entry visa despite the fact that he was staying in the West, despite his oppositional stance towards the old and none too forgiving men in the East Berlin *Politbüro*? This is a rich and interesting book, marred by some shoddy editing and some cringingly banal English (Gilman really needs a competent editor), but it is an honorable attempt to say some useful things about a complex and considerable author.

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*Conversations with Isabel Allende*. Edited by John Rodden. Austin: U of Texas P, 2004. 304 pp.

"No biography of Isabel Allende has yet been written", explains John Rodden in the acknowledgments section of his book. "My hope"—he continues—"is that *Conversations with Isabel Allende* will partially satisfy the urge of Allende's vast reading public to know more about the life, background, and literary and personal opinion of this remarkable woman." (IX) The volume, originally published in 1999 and now in its second edition, is a collection of nineteen interviews, fourteen of which were retrieved from scholarly books, literary reviews and mass-circulation periodicals. The remaining five—appearing in print for the first time this year—include three interviews that the editor himself had carried out, in 1995. The nineteen pieces are prefaced by an introduction in which Rodden explains the chronological organization of the segments, centers attention on the autobiographical dimension of Allende's art and suitably sketches out the idea of what an original account of Isabel Allende's biological and literary life could be. Ironically, Rodden's "Introduction" is the only portion of the book where we can hear the personal and avowing voice of the biographer—which makes us wonder why he did not continue with his patient work of sifting through the questions and answers to incorporate the most original elements of the interviews into a whole biographical narrative.

By no means are we lessening the caliber of each individual piece, since, within such particular contexts, timeframes and readers, all have provided an ageless contribution to literary history. However, the fundamental drawback of the book—regretfully emerging after the very first interview and progressively getting in the way of an energetic and fruitful reading—is the incessant repetition of the same or analogous inquiries. The result is, on one hand, a tedious array of identical answers, anecdotes, and non-stupefying revelations, and on the other, the trivialization of serious issues, such as Allende's posture towards excruciating personal events or specific literary choices. The question about the author's personal writing timeline, for example, posed in interview number 4 by Ilan Stavans after Allende explains that she starts all her books on January 8th ("Is there some mystical meaning to January 8—someone's birthday?" 99) is set forth again in interview number 8 by Ian Goggans ("You have a very individual writing process. Could you talk about the specific rituals you follow when you begin a novel?" 150), to whom Allende replies that on January 8, 1981 she received a phone call that her grandfather was dying and started writing to him the letter that became, exactly one year later, the five-hundred-pages manuscript of *The House of the Spirits*. In interview number 9, after mentioning again the reasons behind the decision of that date, she tells us that she answers Michael Tom's question "How do you

start writing a book?" (171) by focusing on the ritualistic ceremony that takes place on January 8. Finally, the same details are one more time presented to our attention in one of the closing interviews, a not-previously-published piece by Rodden himself, who chooses the topic as his starting question:

You are known for starting to write all your books on January 8, including your recent nonfiction book, *Paula*. You've said that you do this because *The House of the Spirits* was begun on that date. January 8 also just happens to be the birthday of Elvis Presley. Is this your "lucky date"? Is the practice of beginning on that date superstition? (209)

Indeed, as we read through the book, Isabel Allende's prefatory words echo in our mind and put all the repetition in perspective. "Finding a selection of [interviews] in one volume"—admits the author in her usual candid and straightforward tone—"was scary. [ . . . ] What did I say in 1983? Was it the same answer in 1997? Impossible. [ . . . ] Most writers are as vulnerable as their work. If you pin them against the wall and force them to explain the unexplainable, you might break them." (XI-XII) Notwithstanding her understandable apprehension, Allende's personality ends up shining through the book as she patiently and with ever renowned wit continues addressing the literary, biographical, personal and even intimate issues that the interviewers persistently address: the intermeshing of historical and fictional in her novels, the genesis of her characters and plots, García Márquez's influence on her work, her relation with journalism, the personal and professional cost of her exile, her life in the United States, her relationship with her mother, the terrible tragedy of her daughter Paula.

The "Annotated Bibliography" that signs off the volume—and structurally parallels the "Chronology" segment at the beginning of the book—illustrates Allende's popularity by enumerating one hundred and forty mass-circulation newspapers and magazine articles from the United States, England, Spain, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, France and Denmark. At the same time—by including only twenty-three scholarly articles, the most recent one published in 1996—the segment does not do Allende the justice that Rodden seems to seek when he states that she "is a serious writer whose work is enshrined in the literary canon [and] the best-selling female writer of serious prose in the world." (291)

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Alan D. Schrift, ed. *Why Nietzsche Still?* Reflections on Drama, Culture, and Politics. Berkeley: UC Press, 2000. xv + 309 pp.

The introduction to this collection of essays, *Why Nietzsche Still?*, surveys various recent attempts to demonstrate Nietzsche's relevance or irrelevance today. In my estimation, this collection accomplishes its goal of answering definitively the "charge of Nietzsche's critical irrelevance" from those who claim that "his perspectives are no longer pertinent in a post-postmodern world" (3). In addition, Alan D. Schrift aspires that the collection should "elucidate the multifaceted nature of Nietzsche's reflections" and "show the range of innovative and exciting Nietzsche scholarship that is being carried out across the humanities and social sciences in the English-speaking world" (4). This interdisciplinary collection successfully meets all of these goals.

The structure of the book comprises three sections. The first, titled simply "Drama," deals with visual and dramatic culture of various forms, boasting such essays as "Oedipal Dramas" by Debra B. Bergoffen, who adeptly reads Nietzsche both against and with Freud and Lacan, in order to reveal the logic behind current debates on humanism and antihumanism. In the chapter "Odysseus Bound?," Daniel W. Conway intriguingly analogizes Nietzsche's authorial stance and his "pursuit of a limit experience" (33) to Odysseus's desire to survive the sirens' song. In illuminating Nietzsche's relationship to Greek heroes, both Conway and Bergoffen point out how and why the philosopher failed in his great experiments of mind and soul. Next to these and other pieces, the first part of this book includes a careful analysis by Duncan Large of Nietzsche's "Shakespearean figures" and of the "dramatizing philosopher's" attraction to, and identification with, his own versions of Shakespeare the "philosophizing dramatist" (47). Gary Shapiro focuses in his chapter "This is not a Christ" on the "Nietzschean sources and parallels" (81) that he finds in Foucault's work on visual imagery in Magritte, Warhol, and others, relating these observations to the "visual turn" in contemporary cultural theory.

The book's second part, "Cultural Dramatics," deals with thought-provoking arguments such as: the circular reasoning inherent in Nietzsche's (and Freud's) notions of bad conscience and social regulation (Judith Butler); a counter to the standard view that Nietzsche's "human types" are biologically based, arguing instead that they are culturally oriented *rapports à soi* (David Owen and Aaron Ridley); and a biological approach leading to the rejection of Nietzsche's will to power (Alphonso Lingis). The latter chapter begins with a wonderfully poetic introduction, and the essay as a whole retains a refreshing literary feel, but the author loses sight of Nietzsche throughout much of it.



Alan D. Schrift's final essay in the second part astutely outlines the treatment of the Nietzschean "agon" in both primary and secondary works, serving as an apt transition to the book's final section, "Culture and the Political." In skillful ways to which I cannot do justice here, Wendy Brown and Dana R. Villa examine approaches to the ideal of democratic agonism in terms of scholarship since Nietzsche, as well as discussing the appropriation and misappropriation of agonism in politics today. Rebecca Stringer then situates Nietzsche in what might seem at first to be an unlikely discourse, by positing "an alternative interpretation of Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*" for feminist political theory (248), arguing that in viewing *ressentiment* as a potentially positive process, "feminists can also afford to *expand* their indebtedness to Nietzsche" (249). In the course of her essay, she also constructs an excellent analytical overview of the generational and social divide between feminists old and young, academic and mainstream. This book is not only about the "whys" of Nietzsche, as the title might suggest, but also very much about the "hows." An incredible number of essential aspects in Nietzsche scholarship are touched on in this volume, as the authors elaborate on how he conceptualized his era, and on how his thought applies to today's world. Yet the moments in which an answer to the question "Why Nietzsche still?" is vigorously pursued strike me as the most inspired and inspiring in these essays. Among several others, two examples of such moments are Jeffrey T. Nealon's deliberations on Rush Limbaugh and other present-day "white, angry males" as the unrealized and unrealizable norms borne of a Nietzschean *ressentiment*, and Paul Patton's use of the butler-protagonist in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* to analogize the tightrope walker in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*.

A possible minor drawback of this volume is the thematic overlap inherent in some of the essays, all but one of which were written specifically for this collection. Through no fault of the individual authors, pertinent quotations—such as the well-known "bad conscience is an illness, there is no doubt about that, but an illness as pregnancy is an illness" from the *Genealogy of Morals*—are repeated conspicuously across chapters. On the other hand, the recurrent topics of political agonism and *ressentiment* provide a common thread such that the essays need not be read in strict isolation from one another. Above all, each chapter stresses the pervasiveness of Nietzsche in the twentieth century, where "Nietzsche" stands for "both his thought and the arguments, positions, or motifs derived from it," as John Burt Foster, Jr. notes (99).

Schrift writes in his introduction that the contributors are "less interested in getting Nietzsche 'right' than in showing his continuing pertinence" (4). The many multidisciplinary perspectives offered here might substantiate this claim, but the quality and depth of the close readings and textual interpretations should not be sold short. Further, most essays in

*Why Nietzsche Still?* possess a sound theoretical basis, engage in dialogue with previous scholarship, while maintaining their readability. This collection will remain on my shelf as a valued reference book, as Nietzschean concepts are reviewed in comprehensive, but not tedious, detail. David B. Allison's essay on "Musical Psychodramatics: Ecstasis in Nietzsche" includes a lucid summary and explanation of the Dionysian and Apollonian distinction as outlined in *The Birth of Tragedy*, for instance. Overall, I highly recommend this rich collection for scholars with either cursory or more specialized knowledge of Nietzsche.

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Michel Viegnes, ed. *Hugo et la chimère. Recherches & Travaux* 62. Revue de UFR de Lettres Classiques et Modernes. Grenoble: ELLUG (Éditions littéraires et linguistiques de l'université de Grenoble), 2003. 188 pp.

One of the many volumes associated with *l'année Hugo*—the bicentenary celebration of Victor Hugo's birth in 1802—this collection of essays from the 2002 colloquium at the Université Stendhal on "Construire une chimère" explores "la figure de la chimère, figure mythologique de l'hybride et matrice féconde de l'imaginaire, de l'Antiquité à nos jours" (5), both in both the writer's own work and in the works of other nineteenth- and twentieth-century French authors. The volume also includes an article on biological chimeras, as well as a illustrated overview of the exhibit held at the Médiathèque publique & universitaire de Valence in conjunction with the colloquium. In this way, Hugo's rich meditations in *Promontorium Somnii* (1863) on "le chimérisme," that is, on our capacity for fabrication, give rise to a mosaic of reflections on his "actualité toujours plus évidente" (5). This topic is potentially a fertile area for interdisciplinary investigation.

In her liminal presentation of the core notion of *chimérisme*, Françoise Chenet-Faugeras deftly orients the reader with regard to Hugo's focus on "la construction du réel" (12) through dreams and imagination alike. Next comes an overview of the related drawings and works displayed in the médiathèque (Johann Berti and Vincent Chaballier), followed by eleven essays that return primarily to literary subjects in a loosely organized manner: a reading of the prisoner's dream in *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* (Anne Ubersfeld); a study of Nerval's "femmes-monstres" in *Les Chimères* (Chiwaki Shinoda); four articles (out of chronological order) on *Les Tra-*

nique Massonnaud), and *Les Misérables* (Véronique Dufief-Sanchez); three (again embracing a mixed chronology) on Hugo's theatre in exile (Christian Chelebourg), his problematics of thought (Jean Maurel), and his voyages (Philippe Antoine); and two on Hugo's contemporaneity (Reynald André Chalard) and on his intertextual relations with Queneau (Jean-Marie Pochet). The volume concludes with an essay on natural, theoretical, and genetically engineered chimeras (Philippe Descamps).

The organizational meanderings of the collection—not particularly surprising in conference proceedings—are emblematic, however, of a more serious weakness: the unevenness of the proceedings themselves. Thus, whereas Chelebourg's provocative study of "La Femme" in *Le Théâtre en liberté*, takes into account a considerable range of criticism, the reader might well be disappointed by the generally low level of engagement in the volume not only with current Hugo scholarship, but also with the wider critical field. Though perhaps occasioned by the pressure of publication deadlines, one can only regret that this set of highly stimulating conference papers has not been uniformly converted into a collection of scholarly articles. For example, Ubersfeld's brilliant interpretation of the condemned man's dream contains not a single footnote, although she mentions several other critics in passing; Laforgue cites only himself, in addition to the primary sources, in his otherwise stimulating account of Hugo's attempts in *Les Travailleurs* to "percer l'énigme de l'être" (49), and Wulf likewise fails to engage with other Hugo scholars; Maurel refers only to a 1970 essay by Pierre Albouy in his treatment of Hugo's transgression of limits within the context of Kant's aesthetics of the sublime; and Dufief-Sanchez notes one colleague's 1985 article on *Les Travailleurs de la mer* in her analysis of Hugo's "pédagogie poétique de l'imagination" (85) in *Les Misérables*, but no works from the cornucopia of recent studies on the novel (or on anything else, for that matter). It is a shame that so many opportunities for intellectual dialogue outside the frame of the colloquium were missed in the process of publishing the proceedings. Naomi Schor's *George Sand and Idealism* (1993), for instance, might have served as a perfect touchstone for the subject of Hugo's fascination with all that surpasses "reality," while no analysis of Hugo's novels should neglect Miriam Roman's ground-breaking *Victor Hugo et le roman philosophique* (1999).

And yet . . . There is much to recommend this volume to readers less intent on knotting scholarly threads. For one thing, the insights into Hugo's fiction from *Le Dernier Jour* to *L'Homme qui rit* open important new vistas on the relations between reality and imagination in both Hugo and in the romantic novel in general. For another, beyond the concepts of *chimère* and *chimérisme*, there are interesting resonances, for example, between the studies of female figures in Nerval and Hugo by Shinoda and Chelebourg, respectively, or between the views of Chenet-Faugeras, Dufief-Sanchez,

and Maurel on the primacy of *le songe* in Hugo. Finally, Chalard's piece on Hugo's legacy to contemporary poetry (which I considered the most consequential of the collection), places Hugo's "obsession de l'infini" (153) in the context of poetic debates from Baudelaire to the present—most notably with regard to the contemporary poets André du Bouchet and Guillevic—showing him to be "«vivant» par le dialogue et la réflexion qu'il suscite chez de nombreux poètes encore aujourd'hui" (154). The reader unencumbered by critical considerations can thus enjoy the many insights that the collection offers on Hugo's prose, poetry, travel literature, and essays, as well as on the nature of creative endeavors in general.

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Jane Bradley Winston. *Postcolonial Duras: Cultural Memory in Postwar France*. N.Y.: Palgrave, 2001. 254 pp.

Jane Winston's study of Duras's works in the light of postcolonialism is a ground-breaking achievement that breathes new life into Duras criticism and broadens our knowledge of the postwar context in which she wrote. Winston draws on cultural anthropology, economics, history, literary and social theory in her analysis that is framed by her invitation to read Duras in dialogue with *Duras*. The italicized version of the author's name, in Winston's argument, indicates the cultural icon that was a construction of conservative critics in the 1950s. Their "laundering" of Duras's political agenda in favor of a more comfortable "feminine" tag of sentimental autobiography and narratives of desire for the novels has influenced readings to this day, according to Winston. In addition to the counterpoint of Duras with Duras, Winston sets up another pair of discursive constructs, Indochina-*Indochina*, borrowing from Panivong Norindr's notion of "phantasmatic Indochina" for the italicized term, a nostalgic view of France's relation to its former colony. Winston maintains that Duras's first major novel, *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, represented a political and cultural threat to the notion of Empire by its representation of a split colonial subject whose psychic structure revealed conflicts and contradictions in colonization. The date of its publication, 1950, coincided with the imminent loss of Indochina and serious rifts in Algeria. The subsequent containment of Duras's political agenda is the subject of Winston's study that seeks to re-map a postcolonial Duras.

The book adopts a tri-partite structure that includes, in Part One, a pre-history of *Duras*, or an overview of the critical reception of her work  
<https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl/vol29/iss2/11>  
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in the 1950s that determined future readings; Part Two, an examination of what was excluded from that “official” history; and, finally, in Part Three, how those exclusions play out in the succeeding generation of post-Indochinese artists, such as contemporary novelist Linda Lê and filmmaker Tran Anh Hung. In Part One, Winston effectively charts the repression of Duras’s borderzone status (she was both a product of the colonies and a post-colonial critic of colonial education, both narrator of personal desire and political activist, both lower-class colon and Parisian icon) in early critical reviews. For example, J.-H. Roy’s review in the influential *Les Temps modernes* prevailed over more political readings proffered by critics in *Combat*, *L’Observateur*, and *Les Lettres françaises*, and cast the novel as “literary” rather than “didactic.” So, too, did a 1961 issue of *Yale French Studies*. These (mostly male) literary critics were joined by René Clément whose 1958 filmic version of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* also contributed to the containment of the controversial Duras by displacing the setting of the film from Indochina to Thailand, at a time when Indochina had been replaced by Vietnam. Later on, Jacques Lacan, with his emphasis on the intuitive Duras, Alain Vircondelet and Pierre Assouline in the 1991 issue of *Lire*, where Duras was portrayed as dissimulator, and Jean-Jacques Annaud whose film *L’Amant* reduced the novel to spectacle, were just a few who foregrounded Duras by silencing Duras, treating the creative work as if it emanated from the place of a privileged, middle-class Parisian female.

Winston proceeds to examine the exclusions from these “laundered” readings of Duras in Part Two, and this is where her book is truly original in its insights. She details the discourse of French colonial education as formative of a colonial imaginary where social-cultural-gender distinctions help us to understand the importance of the mother-daughter relationships in Duras’s fiction, as well as the roles of the beggar-woman and the Chinese lover, among others, as representations of the abject colonial subject. Winston offers powerful readings of Duras in concert or contrast with contemporaries Richard Wright and Sartre, and with formative predecessors such as George Sand (*India Song*’s early title was *Indiana’s Song*) and with the “other” Duras, Claire de Duras, author of *Ourika*. She examines Duras’s notion of revolution, linked with Dionys Mascolo’s idea of a communist ethics, through the lens of Kristeva’s *Révolution du langage Poétique*. Winston rightly characterizes Duras’s prose as an extreme rejection of the symbolic in favor of a more anarchic, if utopian, view of the power of language to establish new beginnings. *Le Ravissement de Lot V. Stein* and *La Douleur* are analyzed as exemplary of Duras’s recovery of her political project. Winston points out a repositioning of trauma in these works. Duras’s deferred confrontation of her situation in Indochina as creole daughter of an abject mother is inaugurated by *Le Ravissement*, in Winston’s view, but played out in her scripting of the postwar events in *La Douleur*, where the

destruction of the rational subject by torture and concentration camp horrors is represented in the destruction of her rational, narrative "I."

Part Three of the study treats the question of diaspora and cultural displacement as elaborated in the works of Linda Lê, who immigrated to Paris from Vietnam in 1975, and in Tran Anh Hung's 1993 film, *The Scent of Green Papaya*. The former's novels resonate with Durassian themes; the latter's film aimed to reverse the ideology of nostalgia in Annaud's 1991 film, *The Lover*, and Régis Wargnier's 1992 film, *Indochine*. Lê's work is examined in dialogue with key elements of Duras's Indochina, especially in Lê's replay of Duras's recurring character, the beggarwoman, in the figure of the *maison bleue* of the Chinese lover, and in Lê's remake of Vinh Long, geographical emblem of French colonialism, into the character of Vinh L. in *Les Evangiles du Crime*. Winston is quick to point out, however, that Lê's work goes beyond mere citation of Duras. Tran's 1995 film *Cyclo* is examined as a problematization of the colonial subject in relation to Vietnam's past and future identity. Both Lê and Tran are interrogated by Winston to see whether, as diasporic Vietnamese artists of the eighties and nineties, they challenge the colonial ideological construct and to what degree their project is modulated by consumer capitalism.

Winston's book is, indeed, as Françoise Lionnet indicates on the book jacket, "paradigm-shifting," not only in the way that it reads Duras's works, but also in its contextualization of the fiction in the light of French South-east Asian colonialism, collaboration, and postwar issues. Ambitious in its scope, but scholarly in its analysis, *Postcolonial Duras: Cultural Memory in Postwar France* lives up to the expectations that it sets in the Introduction and deserves a wide readership.

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