Reviews

France, Peter, ed. *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French.* Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1995. li + 865 p.

With some 130 contributors, more than 3,000 entries and approximately 900 pages, the *New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* is a worthy successor to the *Oxford Companion to French Literature* published in 1959. In his long introduction the editor suggests that, considering its objectives, this new companion could be no briefer: like its predecessor, it spans over a thousand years of French literature, but also considers the half century or so of new writing that has appeared since the last volume, and broadens its focus to include much more information on literatures in French beyond metropolitan France. This introduction is completed by a succinct reader's guide, a number of useful lists (abbreviations used in the text, general entries, contributors to the volume), nine pages of maps (modern-day Paris, France and her overseas possessions at various points in history), and finally fourteen pages of a reasonably detailed chronology listing rulers of France and significant dates in the country's history with noteworthy authors from 481 to 1993, from Boethius to Jacques Réda.

After these come the central entries, listed in alphabetical order. Their choice has been discriminating but catholic: "literature" here has been interpreted in its broadest sense to include not only works entirely imaginative, but also history, satire, letters, memoirs, journals and journalism. In this companion, moreover, place has been found for forms of writing sometimes excluded from more formal canons: popular songs, folk tales, the music-hall, detective and science fiction, the *photo-roman* and *bande dessinée*. There are the brief biographies of writers and other artists characteristic of a volume of this kind, as well as listings for the best-known works of literature in French. With this edition an attempt has been made to correct gender imbalances of every sort with articles on women writers and gay and lesbian writing, and a considerable number of entries have been allotted to modern critical theorists such as Poulet, Barthes and Lacan, and their theories, phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism.... The usual summaries on the various literary historical periods are included, frequently models of concision prepared by scholars outstanding in their fields: Terence Cave, for instance, has written the entry on the Renaissance, Alan Steele on the Baroque and Peter France himself the article on Classicism. Another strength of this volume is that the entries on various writers within these different periods have usually been assigned to other scholars, so that another viewpoint by a second specialist is usually available. Wisely, the editor has as a matter of principle refrained from imposing a single perspective or stylistic mode on his contributors, so all were free, within obvious spatial constraints, to express themselves as they saw fit. No less commendable is the wide variety of the entries which, while always related to expression in French, range far beyond the merely literary; a cursory review of the "general entries" at the start of the volume demonstrates this: listed under "political and social history," for instance, we find articles—among others—on currency, police, and hunting; under "religious history" entries on anti-semitism and on the Oratorians; under "literary and cultural institutions" descriptions of authorship in the Middle Ages, pseudonyms, and cafés and restaurants; under "French writing outside France" entries on Anglo-Norman literature and African publishing houses; and under "other languages inside France and foreign influences" discussions of Germanic influences and patois and dialect writing.

While Peter France, himself a professor emeritus at the University of Edinburgh, is at pains in his introduction to point out that most of his associates were not culled from Oxford, or even Oxbridge, the great majority of the contributors to this book are British, and as a whole it reflects the practical if deeply sensitive nature of the best British literary scholarship. It was no doubt written with a British readership in mind, but surely Canadian university students have a need just as pressing for what this volume can offer: given the embarrassing ahistorical vacuum in which many of our best undergraduates seem to float, how could they not benefit from the historical grounding of this companion? Considering the speed with which our semester courses flit by, how could undergraduates here not profit from this volume's detail to become better acquainted with those authors whose names, however great, can be mentioned only in passing? And whatever their reaction to certain French-speaking elements in this country may be, how could thoughtful Canadian students using this work fail to be reminded that French literature represents one of the enduring achievements of civilisation in the West? The general editor and his contributors have easily met their objective to make this companion "both a source of information and a pleasant stimulus to reflection" (ix), but its greatest strength is that the breadth and richness of France's glorious literary culture have been so well reflected in a single volume.

D.R. Gamble *Memorial University*

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Gray, Floyd. *Rabelais et le comique du discontinu.* Études et essais sur la Renaissance 2. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1994. 202 p.

This is Gray's second book on Rabelais. His excellent *Rabelais et l'écriture* (1974) explored different forms of writing in the four books definitely written by Rabelais. Like most modern Rabelais scholars, Gray accepts the basic premise in Alfred Glauser's 1975 *Le faux Rabelais ou l'inauthenticité du Cinquième Livre*: there are very strong reasons for concluding that Rabelais did not write it. Gray excludes the *Cinquième Livre* from this thoughtful analysis of the comic effects of discontinuity in Rabelais's four books. Even a superficial reading of Rabelais makes it obvious that there is no uninterrupted narrative in the four texts. Gray argues persuasively that the discontinuous nature of the narrative and the frequent digressions and changes in style illustrate Rabelais's extraordinary skill in amusing his learned and popular readers alike, while at the same time ridiculing unsympathetic and selfish characters such as Picrochole, Janotus Bragmardo, and Panurge.

Gray demonstrates convincingly that the coexistence in Rabelais's novels of both popular and high cultures, often in the same chapter, enables readers to view the same situation or character from two opposing perspectives. Rabelais created many extremely long lists and many readers have been mystified by their presence in the middle of his fictional narratives. In a brilliant chapter on the catalogue of the library of Saint-Victor in *Pantagruel*, Gray explains that a careful reading of this very long catalogue, which contained 42 titles in the original edition of 1532 and 142 titles in the 1542 edition, enables us to appreciate Rabelais's comic gifts. Many of the Latin titles in this fictional catalogue for an actual Parisian library were written in such poor Latin that we soon realize that Rabelais was criticizing the weak classical learning of sophists who did not even possess a solid command of Latin grammar and wasted their time and that of their students examining insignificant ethical questions. This highly amusing catalogue also leads readers to the conclusion that sophists and reactionary theologians from the Sorbonne who had attacked all four of Rabelais's books had lost touch with reality.

This very solid book of scholarship enriches our appreciation of Rabelais's genius in using laughter and satire as tools against pretentious and ridiculous characters. It should inspire more scholarly research on the myriad links between the comic elements of popular culture and the very serious theological and moral aspects of Rabelais's four novels.

Edmund J. Campion *University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

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Hohl, Ann Mullen. *Exoticism in* Salammbô*: The Languages of Myth, Religion, and War.* Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1995. 177 p.

This thoroughly annotated study is divided into five chapters, each one concentrating on a different facet of Flaubert's exoticism in *Salammbô*.

In the first chapter Hohl analyses exoticism at the level of phonology (phonemics and prosody), using the specialised terminology of linguists, and demonstrating a very extensive knowledge of primary and secondary sources. She compares Flaubert's word-formation technique to the one used by Rabelais in his representation of "foreign words" (13) or "languaige barbare." She raises the question of readability in *Salommbô* caused by the overwhelming number of exotic signifiers and of enumerations which bank on the erudition of the reader. In addition, she discusses archaïc vocabulary and structures as well as exotic signifiers; according to Hohl these were part of Flaubert's technique, "which relied on the familiar to ensure assimilation of unfamiliar vocabulary" (16).

The second chapter is an analysis of descriptions of the monstrous, to show the structure of multiplicity and mutilation, another form of exoticism in *Salammbô*. Exotic flora and fauna, which according to Barthes constitute a "reality effect," acquire in Flaubert's historical novel "a sacred symbolism which constitutes their Punic specificity" (24). Hohl places special emphasis on the exotic representation in *Salammbô*, shown through the symbolism of certain flora, such as fig or sycamore trees. She also studies the biblical allusions, the representation of the temptations (which she compares to the *Tentations de saint Antoine*) and the mythical means of representing fatal love through images of interwoven plant life. She concludes that multiplicity and mutilation are "inescapably linked in Flaubertian exoticism" (40).

The third chapter studies metonymy, in particular the metonymy of horns and skins. Hohl analyses perforations, mutilations and destruction of skin, both animal and human, and brings forward a network of signs that "ties together Schahabarim's castration, Salammbô's losing her virginity, the snake its skin and ultimately its life" (62). Hohl compares these images and their symbolism to Balzac's *Peau de chagrin*.

The fourth chapter concentrates on the myth of Adonis which, according to the author, saturates this novel to the point of constituting *Salammbô*'s "organizing principle" (67). The two aspects of the Adonis myth that Hohl sees as recurring are castration and sacred harlotry. She also claims that the role of the sacred in this novel should be re–evaluated, since it is "far from being a representation of religious orthodoxy as has been hitherto thought" (101).

The last chapter studies the representation of sacrifice: it examines the partial mutilations and total sacrifices and their relations to fertility rites. The author carefully examines lexical significances and symbolisms. She concludes that Flaubert's "obfuscation on narrative veiling" (133) through an intricate system of ambiguity, was probably caused by his fear of the judicial system which had persecuted him for *Madame Bovary*.

This study is difficult to absorb because of its technical lexical expression, but it is intensely researched and presents ample proof of the author's extensive erudition.

Ira Ashcroft *Wilfrid Laurier University*

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Ravis, Suzanne, ed. *Le rêve de Grenade : Aragon et* Le fou d'Elsa. Aix-en-Provence : Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1996. 360 p.

Aragon's *Le fou d'Elsa*, published in 1963, ranks as one of the great achievements of twentieth-century literature, combining massive erudition and formal virtuosity. *Le rêve de Grenade*, which gathers together the proceedings of a colloquium held in Grenada in 1994, studies the multiple facets of this work. Links are traced between the events of 1492—the fall of Muslim Grenada and anti-Jewish pogroms—and Aragon's contemporary political reality: Nazism, Stalin's USSR, the Algerian War. Aragon is shown to be preoccupied with popular bigotry and a future made uncertain by the betrayal of ideals. *Le fou d'Elsa* emerges as a courageously cosmopolitan text: its use of Arab myth as well as of Arab poetic forms; its hybrid, "polyphonic" structure. Written at a time when the Arab world connoted terrorist insurrection, *Le fou d'Elsa* challenges European ethnocentrism and valorises Arab culture. At the same time, some papers in this excellent book study Aragon's dialogue with Christian culture, and especially with Jean de la Croix, whose mysticism of love appeals to "le fou."

Gavin Bowd *University of Manchester*

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Moatti, Christiane. *L'espoir Malraux*. Profil 4. Paris: Hatier, 1996. 127 p.

Christiane Moatti, professor at the University of Paris-Sorbonne Nouvelle and a Malraux specialist, has just completed a masterful work on *L'espoir*. The Profil series, of which hers is the fourth volume, is designed to help students prepare for the Baccalaureat examination.

In keeping with the format of the series, Moatti divides her work into a variety of sections. The first, focusing on biographical material, begins with a discussion of Malraux's early years, his youthful writings, his Indochina adventure, his fame as a writer, his anti-fascist venture, the somber years, and concludes with his ministerial functions and his essays.

The most important segments of Moatti's book start with section 2, "Histoire de la guerre d'Espagne," with sequences detailing the pre-war political, economic and cultural situations in Spain; explanations of the various factions involved in the conflagration; and a chronology of the war. A fascinating chapter-by-chapter summary of *L'espoir* centers on discussions underscoring such themes as "L'illusion lyrique," "Exercice de l'apocalypse," "Le Manzanares," and the novel's title. In "Le traitement du temps" probed in section 4, emphasis is placed on "Le calendrier des événements," "La perception du temps vécu," "Le grand temps de l'histoire," within the context of the past two centuries and "Le temps suspendu, l'éternité." Section 5 broaches "L'espace et la description du réel" while also underscoring the cities involved, the variety of contrasting landscapes, their climatic conditions, and concludes with such philosophical notions as "L'homme face au cosmos." "Structure de *L'espoir*" is treated in section 6, with explications concerning the work's unity and its architecture. Arresting and profound analyses of sections 7 and 8 reflect the

natures of both male and female protagonists peopling the novel. "Morale et politique" come under scrutiny in section 9, underscoring the points of view of idealists, realists, intellectuals, and, to be sure, Malraux's own position. Political, military, elective, existential fraternities are studied in part 10. The last four sections are dedicated to "*L'espoir*, roman polyphonique," to the "Influence des techniques cinématographiques," "Transfiguration épique du réel," and "*L'espoir*, roman engagé."

Each chapter of Moatti's in-depth analyses adds greater understanding of Malraux's work. As a learning device, her understading of *L'espoir* is of the highest quality.

Bettina L. Knapp *Hunter College*
Graduate Center of the City University of New York

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Brewer, Mária Minich. *Claude Simon: Narrativities without Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. xxxv + 183 p.

Is it possible to produce narrativities without narrative? This is the central question posed, and answered, by Professor Brewer who seeks to advance beyond the work of critics such as Celia Britton and Lucien Dällenbach who are inclined to see in Claude Simon's work a formalist æsthetics outside the concerns of history and culture. Brewer argues that Simon's novels, by describing and analyzing cultural legacies at the level of their figures of narrativity, reformulate the standard forms of fiction and thereby expose the "logic" of narrative, a complex legacy populated with stereotypes all too easily accepted as natural. This, however, is only part of her larger aim, not simply to emphasize continuity between Simon's personal, modernist Faulknerian texts and those considered impersonal and postmodernist, but, more crucially, to return to the "ground" of the figural and discursive constitution of cultural formations, in the process resisting literary and cultural theory's totalizing, antihistorical impulse.

Claude Simon: Narrativities without Narrative is divided into five main parts. The first, an extensive introduction, eloquently argues the need for an historically and culturally grounded postmodern æsthetics. Chapter 1, "Like a Narrative: Myth, History, and Genre in the Aftermath," addresses the historical density of Simon's art of *bricolage* and shows clearly that Simon's cultural narrative cannot be blocked at a formal description of intertextually related fragments. Brewer proves that in novels like *Le vent* Simon maintains the fragment as an essentially cultural and historical detail. In chapter 2, "Refiguring Narrative and Cultural Legacies," which highlights the cultural legacies embedded in narrative as well as the narrative dimensions of culture and history, the author moves on to the broader issues of the status of cultural legacies in postmodernism, revealing how the de Reixach cycle of novels makes tangible the figures organizing their narrative determinations. The narrativities of cultural legacies and memory, she asserts, cannot be made to conform to a universal, homogeneous narrative text (58). Chapter 3, "Parody in Postmodernity: Replication and Cultural Critique," explores how parody creates connections between the æsthetic and the cultural, fiction and non-fiction, its effects extending to the multiple social texts whose discontinuities it replicates, refigures and distorts. A discussion of Bakhtin's theory of parodic genres enables Brewer to trace the parodic play of replication—or repetition in difference—in Simon's work, and to suggest that parody is the privileged mode for his critique of the society of the simulacrum and the imaginary relations (i.e. narratives) which it reproduces. Chapter 4, "General and

Particular Mobilizations: Gender, War, and Narrative," which examines the figures of "mobilization" in history and personal history through detailed analysis of the novel *L'acacia*, establishes links between the narrative order and modern technological warfare. Brewer puts forward a convincing case for nonsacrificial and "unmobilized" forms of writing.

Claude Simon: Narrativities without Narrative displays a most impressive grasp of the Simon corpus and of its wider implications for cultural and postmodern theory. This is despite Brewer's critical style which is sometimes laboured and repetitious: key ideas are liable to be overstated while recurring terms such as "tangent" are never satisfactorily explained. Indeed, certain provocative and all-encompassing statements fall flat for not being properly developed, for instance, the suggestion that the mother's description in *L'acacia* of the horses being sewn up at the bullfight can be read as a figure for her own suturing in phallic culture (133). One suspects at times merely a theoretical stock-taking, as in the glib invocations of postmodern writing and theory on page 142, and in the unhelpful references to Derrida's notions of the chiasmus (70) and "invagination" (111). Any doubts which are raised by the author, for example, that Simon may himself be perpetuating a monumental history (71), are too swiftly dispelled. These points of criticism, however, although important, cannot detract from the polemical force of Brewer's consistently bold, challenging and timely study.

James S. Williams *University of Kent at Canterbury*

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Redonnet, Marie. *Nevermore*. Trans. Jordan Stump. European Writers Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. 123 p.

Nevermore is the fifth of Marie Redonnet's novels to be translated into English for the European Writers Series (see *Dalhousie French Studies* 33 [1995]: 156–57, and 36 [1996]: 150–51). This most recent work presents us with a dark and disturbing parable of the shadowy underpinnings of contemporary Western society. Most fascinating about *Nevermore* is that, by combining the popular thriller with a prose style reminiscent of the fairytale, an experiment in form that blends the hardcore world of the detective with the fantasy world of the child, Redonnet has achieved a remarkable hybrid text. The odd series of coincidences, the mysterious, the overlooked, the arbitrary, the hidden, the superfluous detail, the intractable workings of fate are common to both genres and are recurring elements of Redonnet's cosmogony. The author's terse and laconic style is admirably suited to the formal challenge. To my knowledge, this is the first of Redonnet's novels to be written in the third person, allowing for shifts in focus among the four main characters. In order to reconstruct their lives, Commander Roney Burke, Willy Bost, Cassie MacKey and Lizzie Malik must come to terms with what are key Redonnetian themes, memory and inheritance. The absence of any traditional psychological development contributes to the sense of mystery that surrounds the characters and confounds any attempt by the reader to identify with them. As in a postmodern fairytale, they operate according to their own distinct logic. *Nevermore* is situated in a fictional country that undeniably resembles the American West Coast. However, in his translation Jordan Stump has astutely chosen to retain some of the more quintessentially French elements, the "pissotière" and the "buvette," thus maintaining the sense of the foreign within the familiar so characteristic of Redonnet's prose.

The plot centers around the investigation led by San Rosa's new deputy detective, Willy Bost, into the intrigues and political machinations of the city's

wealthy and powerful. Bost makes concerted efforts to forget the past and his former aspirations. Paradoxically, a key strategy to forgetting involves writing in a notebook that he carries in his breastpocket for that purpose. The police detective arrives in San Rosa at the same time as Cassie MacKey, another figure attempting to leave the past behind. Through a dense and constantly shifting web of alliances, Bost uncovers how San Rosa's shady ruling elite maintains its dominance at the expense of the weak, murdering with impunity, and otherwise neutralizing those who could potentially stand in the way. Symbolic of the widespread corruption in the city is the "pissotière," ignominious site of repeated assassinations, which lies at the heart of the Fuch Circus. Parallel to Bost's investigation are Lizzie Malik's renewed efforts to break the code of silence surrounding the circus. A former acrobat, Lizzie is the victim of an accident she justifiably believes to be an attempt on her life and which abruptly ended her career. In a cataclysmic moment that has all the elements of a Hollywood disaster film—erupting volcanoes, bomb explosions, fires—Lizzie discovers the truth about her accident. Yet, for as many mysteries as are "solved," there are others to take their place. They remain as persistent questions, holes or absences in the text, constantly destabilizing efforts to construct a solid or reassuring world. Despite the title of the novel, which seems to suggest that the mistakes of the past will not be repeated, the narrative concludes on a distinctly ambivalent note. The disappearance of Cassie and Willy leaves the spot where they were last seen, Angel Cove, marked with a curse. It is a "place which everyone wants to forget, and where no one ever goes" (123). This is an ominous sign as the past is inscribed in the landscape and returns inevitably to be repeated by those who refuse to remember.

Jeannette Gaudet *St. Thomas University*