3-2016

The Realist Author and Sympathetic Imagination (book review)

Juliana Starr

University of New Orleans, jstarr1@uno.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.uno.edu/fl_facpubs

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, and the French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

movement. The range of childhood memories, culinary traditions, and the myth of the migrant painter El Greco in the writings of Francophone Greek writers are enriching new routes for interested scholars. While the volume is not divided into chapters, undergraduate as well as graduate students might find this helpful as contributions can be read in any order without any prior knowledge of the region or writers. This fact enables the reader to make more meaningful connections between different works and themes, thus going beyond the first article by Lalagianni and Moura, which contextualizes the study of exile and migration in the French-speaking world. The following pieces vary in analytical focus and depth. Some contributions deal with a limited number of primary and secondary sources but manage to build a convincing argument about authors Andrée Chedid, Abla Farhoud, Boualem Sansal, and others. These articles are counterbalanced with more extensive comparative studies that are rather original in their analysis of authors of different regions or in their move toward a new approach to commonly studied topics, for example, Odile Cazenave’s shifting focus on those who stay behind while others leave their native land. Yet other contributions construct an impressive analysis of one author as a whole, for example, Antoine Sassine’s study of Georges Schéhadé’s representations of paradise. Readers will certainly appreciate that every article purposefully presents the texts and authors in question, thus introducing a variety of lesser-known titles such as Dimitris Analis’s short story “Des ailes trop grandes.” In addition, each contribution offers insightful concluding remarks that draw meaningful connections to the theme of the volume, which highlights Moura’s request for a more transcultural approach to Francophone studies. The collection appropriately closes with a minor contradiction in Moura’s justified critique of the publishing world that is governed by a desire to circulate books with the highest potential for economic profit. Moura’s choice of Ben Jelloun’s L’enfant de sable is valid as far as modalities of multiculturalism are concerned, yet, it seems that the very topic of this particular book also falls within the category of consumable topics Moura argues against.

McDaniel College (MD)

Silvia U. Baage


Studies of realism often exhibit a tendency to make it vanish, seeing it as merely pre-modernism, or express astonishment when it emerges as a sophisticated form of writing—two tendencies that Paraschás seeks to avoid. The main contention of his insightful monograph, part of the Studies in Comparative Literature series, is that a particular configuration of elements (the sympathetic imagination, the authorial double and his potential for expressing the aesthetic, economic, and legal standing of the author) is specific to nineteenth-century realism. The realist author is seen as a
contradictory figure, a celebrity subservient to publishers and the public in a newly industrialized literary marketplace, and the owner of his work divested of his property by imperfect copyright laws, playwrights adapting his novels for the stage, and sequellriters. This combination of a conspicuous yet precarious status with a self-effacing attitude meant the realist author carefully orchestrated his presence and absence both inside and outside his work. An authorial scenario corresponding to this strategy of “screened presence” was embodied in a certain type of fictional character, the “authorial double”—a plural, Protean, chameleonic character who could enter the minds of his fellow characters through a process of imaginative identification, thus resembling the author in his faculty of the “sympathetic imagination” (13). Comprising an introduction and two parts of three and four chapters respectively, the first two chapters are devoted to elaborating several early versions of authorial plurality: theories of Shakespeare as Proteus, Diderot’s Paradoxe sur le comédien (1830), and Friedrich Schlegel’s notion of irony put into practice by E.T.A. Hoffmann. Both chapters conclude that in eighteenth-century theories of the sympathetic imagination, sympathy and emotional identification with the characters are associated with the reader, and are viewed as a defect, while the sympathetic imagination is unsentimental, detached and expressed by characters resembling the author. Chapter 3 shows how authorial doubles respond to new challenges posed to the author in the nineteenth century by the increasing commodification of literature and by inadequate protection offered by copyright legislation. The authorial double is seen as a means by which the realist author claims the work as his own. Chapter 4 follows the development of the figure of the authorial double in Balzac’s La peau de chagrin (1831), Gobseck (1830), and the Vautrin trilogy, while chapter 5 views the description of the sympathetic imagination in terms of prostitution and the flâneur in Baudelaire’s prose poems as essential to the understanding of this realist authorial scenario. Chapter 6 argues that the use of the sympathetic imagination in George Eliot’s last novel, Daniel Deronda (1876), corresponds to a fundamental fear about the alienability of her work. The last chapter treats the decline of this configuration at the end of the nineteenth century and concludes with André Gide’s Les faux-monnayeurs (1925), considered a retrospective evaluation of the realist authorial scenario that signals its demise. This fascinating study views realist fiction in a new light, as a vitally important art form springing from unique conditions of production.

University of New Orleans

Juliana Starr


L’élégance et la concision distinguent cette invitation à découvrir une œuvre profundément marquée par la lecture jumelée des Anciens et des Modernes, œuvre