Un Homme, Deux Cultures: Charles de Villers entre France et Allemagne (1765–1815) (book review)

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desire but one where seeing is a vital question, as a result of the absence of a founding identification, thus revealing the central role of language” and its “renewed importance in the context of technology,” as is read in Film and the radio plays that allow for the object to be present without falling into the visible/invisible binary (451). Brown moves beyond a critical analysis of Beckett’s works to reference the manuscripts, letters, non-literary writings, and the author’s biography that at times is an exploration of Beckett: the figure unified under this name. This poses difficulty, for the text argues a “lack of grounding of any subjective identification” (311), leaving comments that refer to Beckett’s intentionality out of place when they are not put under the same pressure. It is precisely the gesture of illumination, suggesting a final signification or understanding, a banishment of all obscurity, that remains on the side of “the tyrannical oppression of language and society” (276). The reader is dissuaded from attempting a restoration of “some coherent ‘meaning’” and instead encouraged to produce readings that arise from “a zone of indeterminacy where the light and darkness coexist” (579). Brown references problematic moments in Beckett’s texts, such as the figure of the mother who appears in the window in Murphy (213), and without giving resolutions, opens his text by inviting scholars to re-view these moments and to produce further readings and texts out of indeterminacy and obscurity.

Emory University (GA)

Federica Signorini


This collection of seventeen essays unites French and German scholars offering fresh insights into the Lorraine native Charles de Villers (1765–1815), a central figure in the exchange of ideas between France and Germany at the turn of the nineteenth century. Until now, scholarship on this emigrant, essayist, translator, and professor at Göttingen has been scattered, due largely to his disparate range of influence. Among other things, he is credited with introducing Kantian philosophy in France, pioneering the field of comparative literature, exercising a significant influence on Madame de Staël, penning an important history of the Reformation, and popularizing homeopathic medicine and mesmerism. After Brucker’s informative introduction, four essays treat Villers as cultural mediator. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink analyses the relations between his works and translation processes, Marie-Claire Hoock-Demarle studies the correspondence between Staël and Villers, Franziska Meier reconstructs the complicated circumstances under which his *Coup d’œil sur les universités* (1808) was written, and Friedemann Pestel places his trajectory in the context of French emigration in the Holy Roman Empire. Three essays examine Villers in the Republic
of Letters, Freya Baur looking at his private correspondence, Fabian Schmitz treating his activity during the French occupation of Lübeck in 1806, and Hans-Ulrich Seifert studying his correspondence with the German librarian and scholar Johann Wyttenbach. Three essays treat Villers’s encounters, Monique Bernard analyzing his meeting with Staël in Metz in 1803, Kurt Kloocke studying his friendship with Benjamin Constant, and Nicolas Brucker offering insights on his notions of homeopathic medicine, animal magnetism, and the philosophy of nature through the prism of his correspondence with the German physician Samuel Hahnemann. Four essays examine Villers as a writer and journalist. Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval demonstrates how his literary and social débuts are accompanied by specific social practices in his native town of Boulay. Catriona Seth shows how his Érotique comparée (1806) anticipates French Romanticism by applying the idea of nationality to the comparative study of literature. Philippe Hoch offers a new understanding of his personality by examining his correspondence with his main publisher in Metz, Christophe-Gabriel Collignon. Éric Francalanza analyses the surviving letters between Villers and fellow writer and kindred spirit Jean-Baptiste Suard. The last three essays treat Villers and the Reformation. Martin Keßler and Catherine Julliard examine his most famous work, the Essai sur l’esprit et l’influence de la Réformation de Luther (1804), the former treating its reception and distribution in Europe and North America, and the latter demonstrating its indebtedness to Kant. Susanne Ardisson shows how the idealized conception of German love, as explained by Villers, is centered on the soul and virtue, contrasting with the French conception of love, centered on pleasure and the body. This volume provides an invaluable contribution to research on this little-known but important figure. It is highly recommended to all interested in intellectual exchanges between France and Germany during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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This book traces the trauma of France’s colonization of Algeria, which caused Théophile Gautier, Eugène Fromentin, Gustave Flaubert, and Pierre Loti to respond in evocative prose. It seeks “to uncover the layers of disquiet in the above authors’ fiction and travelogues” (10) as they experience discomfort remembering their time abroad. Their uneasiness recurs due to moral revulsion at the despoliation after recent warfare. An eerie, haunted aspect pervades their writing. In 1845, Gautier began a récit de voyage with Algeria as its focus. His trip was to be illustrated in pictorial and written format. The more Gautier immersed himself in his new setting, the more ill