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Questions of Influence in Modern French Literature. New York:
Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. xxvii + 223 pp.**

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Abstract

Review of Thomas Baldwin, James Fowler and Ana de Medeiros, eds. *Questions of Influence in Modern French Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. xxvii + 223 pp.

Keywords

French literature, modern literature, influence

Thomas Baldwin, James Fowler and Ana de Medeiros, eds. *Questions of Influence in Modern French Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. xxvii + 223 pp.

This volume of essays considers various manifestations of “influence” in modern French literature and is a welcome addition to the Palgrave Studies in Modern European Literature series. A brief preface from the series editors addresses how they envision the parameters of “modern,” “European,” and “literature.” The preface by the volume’s editors coherently presents the wide scope covered by the essays, along with an introduction to some of the main theoretical approaches with which contributors engage: Harold Bloom and *The Anxiety of Influence*; Jacques Derrida and deconstructionism; Roland Barthes and intertextuality; as well as Michael Baxandall and his ideas regarding arts as “positional games” (xvi).

While this volume focuses on French works, one of its strengths is the wide range of interdisciplinary and comparative approaches undertaken by the contributors. Topics include visual art, music, painting, theatre, dance, poetry, philosophy, theory, and literature, from the late medieval period to the 21st century. Influence is considered not only in terms of A’s influence on B, but also in terms of B’s influence on A, even when B comes later temporally, for B’s interpretation or re-presentation of A’s work can offer new ways of understanding it. Indeed, reading and writing never take place in a vacuum, as Daniel Brewer points out in his introduction. Brewer notes the absence of the term “influence” from the critical vocabulary of literary scholarship and teaching and urges us to consider how the concept of influence can enhance literary studies today. Brewer contextualizes influence in terms of theoretical and conceptual approaches, engages with disciplinary debates surrounding the questions associated with influence, and closes by envisioning “an ethical turn in literary studies” (16).

The essays that follow are arranged chronologically and thematically. Some might argue in favor of adding clearly defined sections to the volume, but the very nature of the interlaced themes in the chapters would make this a difficult task. In chapter 1, Russell Goulbourne examines Voltaire’s translation of Dante’s *Commedia* and demonstrates how the former used translation as a vehicle for critiquing 18th-century religious corruption. Reading text and translation together reveals a reciprocal influence and generates further meaning. In chapter 2, Philip Knee discusses how counter-Revolutionaries—Chateaubriand, Bonald, Lamennais, and Maistre—appropriated Pascal to support their anti-Enlightenment ideas and in the process made a Romantic of Pascal. Perrine Coudurier analyzes in chapter 3 a fascination with Sade in the 1950s and argues that Sade serves as a historical reference point that “ceaselessly polarizes opinion” (46) while granting us a means of exploring evil. Next, in chapter 4, Madeleine Guy examines three

of Jules Laforgue's novellas, all parodies of artistic and literary myths, and demonstrates how his incorporation of intertextual references results in true rewritings and the creation of original works shaped especially by the philosophies of Eduard von Hartmann and Arthur Schopenhauer.

Chapter 5, by Natasha Grigorian, examines how different art forms and media influenced Paul Valéry's work. The parallels between the poetry, music dramas, and the Ballets Russes that inspired Valéry's melodrama *Sémiramis* demonstrate the interrelation between the verbal, visual, and aural. The *livre d'artiste* 'artist's book' of Henri Matisse, consisting of his illustration and transcription of poetry by Charles d'Orléans, provides the object of Kathryn Brown's study in chapter 6. She situates this "re-originating" within a modern artistic paradigm and demonstrates the reciprocal influence between the men's works, stating that the texts of the 15th century become the script for a new performance in the 20th. Images would have been a welcome addition to both this chapter and the following one, in which Claire Lozier details Samuel Beckett's fascination with funerary statues and the ontological shift he effects in representing the act of writing. Beckett both recognized himself in Wolfskehlmeister's funerary sculptures and was inspired by them, as evident in the physical demeanors and the behaviors of a number of Beckett's narrators.

Next follow three chapters focused on theoretical issues. John McKeane opens chapter 8 by asking "What is the influence of deconstruction?" (111) and then analyzes writings by Blanchot and Derrida, with an insistence on their mutual influence. Derrida remains a focal point in the following chapter, in which Paul Earlie explores the use of influential metaphors in Derrida, Valéry, and Freud with the aim of interrogating "what deconstruction can tell us about the nature of one thinker's influence on another" (127). In chapter ten, Fabien Arribert-Narce studies Barthes's photobiographical legacy as manifested in the 1970s and 1980s and suggests that Barthes's texts and photographs resist our attempts to exert our own "influence" on his work.

The final four chapters carry us into the twenty-first century. Angela Kimyongür investigates Patrick Pécherot's rewriting of Léo Malet's *romans noirs*, in part by tackling and modifying themes including gender, politics, and racism, and recreating Malet's main character (Nestor) as a version more palatable for a contemporary audience. In chapter 12, Lucy O'Meara demonstrates how Jacques Roubaud's text *Tokyo infra-ordinaire* engages with both classical Japanese poetry as well as contemporary reality to create a rich text that rejects traditional "aestheticcentric *japonisme*" (169). Next, Carine Fréville examines spectrality in the novels of Marie Darrieussecq, emphasizing the importance of psychoanalysis in the writer's life and writing and noting her use of fiction as "a space to reflect on and displace her own fears and traumas" (181). Finally, in chapter 14, Ana de Medeiros analyzes the influence of the father figure

as a present absence in Marie Nimier's *Photo-Photo*, highlighting in particular the self-reflexive nature of the novel.

At times, space constraints seem too evident in this volume; this distracts from the analyses offered. Given the vast span of topics and chronology covered in this volume, readers will no doubt encounter unfamiliar writers and works. Not all of the authors grant readers enough contextual information to allow them to fully appreciate their analyses. Nevertheless, this volume provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of the term "influence," which, as the editors note, "cannot be exhaustively defined" (xx), and it will interest literary scholars and historians alike.

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