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Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures:
The Persistence of Diversity (review)

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French Studies: A Quarterly Review, Volume 60, Number 3, July 2006, pp.
407-408 (Review)

Published by Oxford University Press



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reference for the study of Vielé-Griffin, Ghéon and the literary climate in which they worked.

doi:10.1093/fs/knl061

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Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures: The Persistence of Diversity. By CHARLES FORSDICK. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005. xxiii + 255 pp. Hb \$90.00.

There is something insidiously subversive about the way this book digs beneath the surface of the banal and the ‘everyday’ to reveal interconnections between orders of experience and knowledge that are not usually allowed to contaminate each other. The suspicion of witnessing a subversive activity unfold undoubtedly comes partly from the sense of transgressive delight to be derived from seeing so much of the material selected for attention punching so tellingly above its weight. From surprisingly simple starting points, an examination of the nature of travel in the post-colonial era (to use Françoise Lionnet’s definition of ‘post-colonial’ as a synonym of ‘post-contact’) and how it has been represented in various forms of literature, Professor Forsdick leads his readers into a close interrogation of some of the central concepts of postcolonial theory: an ongoing reflection on the term exoticism, an interrogation of what constitutes cultural diversity and what are the implicit kinds of intersubjectivity on which such a notion can be founded, how agency within representational strategies is indissociably linked to processes of identity formation and so on. Indeed it is because Forsdick is prepared to excavate, unrelentingly, the material traces of ‘journeys’ as events (and events that relied on ‘journeys’) that the simultaneous archaeology of related concepts (travel, exoticism, cultural diversity, authenticity, identity formation) can be recognized as interconnected in new and enriching ways. The book has a clear chronological sweep, with chapters focusing on texts/events located between the two ‘fins de siècle’ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, before engaging with this material, a good deal of space is devoted (in the Preface, Introduction and first chapter) to ‘clearing the ground’, outlining a central paradox that subsequent chapters will interrogate more fully: exoticism is figured as internalizing a twin movement of ‘death and rebirth, loss and recovery’ (p. 21) so that although diversity is perceived as declining under the combined onslaughts of hypermodernization and globalization, it nevertheless persists. Subsequent chapters devote attention to an appropriately diverse range of forms of ‘displacement’ and the writings they have motivated, from Albert Kahn’s *Archives de la Planète*, via the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*, ethnographic missions, ‘travel’ narratives from and into the metropolitan centre, through to the recent work of the *Pour une littérature voyageuse* movement. With meticulous attention and punctilious scholarship, Forsdick draws on the writings of a panoply of postcolonial theorists and cultural anthropologists to help negotiate these contradictory perceptions of the exotic. The filiation from Segalen through to Glissant is possibly the key to accessing Forsdick’s rather understated and probably provisional conclusion that processes such as ‘syncretism, relation, hybridity, creolization, [and] transculturation’, which ‘imply a travelling within and between cultures’ (p. 220) in a non-hierarchical, self-reflexive way and

relying on notions of multiple rather than fixed conceptions of identity, allow an understanding of the persistence of diversity in the face of its purported entropic erosion and decline. One of the lasting contributions of this book to current debates may well be the productive tension it generates between its ‘ostensible’ subject matter: the tracking of how ‘elsewhere’ is figured in practical terms in French and francophone cultures, and the ongoing reflection on, and theorization of, the complex notion of the exotic. Forsdick modestly identifies as one of his objectives a desire to ‘contribute to a further opening up of the field of studies of travel literature in French’ (p. xvi). This book goes much further than that: it demonstrates how a cultural archive can be decolonized, thus opening up a refreshing engagement with new theoretical spaces.

doi:10.1093/fs/knl093

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Ce beau français un peu individuel: Proust et la langue. By SYLVIE PIERRON. Saint-Denis, Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2005. 263 pp. Pb €22.00.

Sylvie Pierron’s innovative study maps out the intersection of national and individual language, of linguistic tradition and experimentation in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Reflecting a crisis in French national identity following the defeat at Sedan, Proust’s novel, Pierron argues, embodies a tension between reactionary and progressive trends in language. Within this frame, Pierron’s study offers new readings of individual characters’ idiolects, and explores the interdependence of the narrator’s evolving perspectives on language and his path to creation. The structure of the study echoes this dual evolution, and the paradoxes that Pierron skilfully evokes throughout her study are present from Part One, where the apparent purist of ‘Contre l’obscurité’ is also lured by the verbal innovations of writers as diverse as Racine and Maeterlinck. The next section of the study immerses the reader in the richly composite curiosities of language usage in *A la recherche*. Here, Pierron extends the narrator’s already plural identity: he becomes the philologist whose metalinguistic commentary ranges from normative remarks on the anomalous features of individual characters’ speech to broader considerations on ‘la langue française’. Neologisms, jargon, private languages, slang, borrowings, pastiche and mispronunciation represent just a selection of the quirks written into the linguistic textures of the novel. These are exhaustively catalogued and their features and effects analysed by reference to such measures as their inclusive/exclusive function or their voluntary/involuntary status. The unity behind this heterogeneity of speech habits is ‘excess’: each pushes back the boundaries of standard language and/or the speaker’s normal linguistic context. This polyphony of voices is not merely ornamental, as Pierron rightly demonstrates, but rather a dynamic construction that creates (and shows the reader how to create) meaning within the novel. More generally, too, it dramatizes the shifting shape of the French language. The narrator-philologist’s linguistic authority may be confirmed here, but Pierron deftly resists resolving the novel’s inherent tensions by highlighting, in the following section, how language also evades and defies the narrator. Particularly suggestive is the discussion of polysemantic terms such as ‘langue’. Its erotic, gustatory and verbal