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Nerval: une poétique du deuil Ã Â l'âge romantique
(review)

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makings of a good book is clear from the Conclusion, with its succinct and convincing formulations; but these will come too late for most readers.

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Nerval: une poétique du deuil à l'âge romantique. By DAGMAR WIESER. (Histoire des idées et critique littéraire, 412). Geneva, Droz, 2004. 408 pp. Pb 60 SwF.

Dagmar Wieser here strives to meld analysis of genre and psychoanalytical criticism. She focuses on accounting for Nerval's clearly announced, but never quite realized, abandonment of poetry for prose. Wieser also interleaves her text with questions of authorial intention, and follows recent attempts to direct critical attention away from Nerval's best-known works (the *Odelettes* and *Promenades et souvenirs* receive more attention than *Les Chimères* and *Aurélia*). Hers is, then, an ambitious study. Wieser's combination of critical approaches and objectives is not a radical departure, however. Jean-Nicolas Illouz's *Nerval: le rêveur en prose — Imaginaire et écriture* (1997) also involves the study of genre and psychoanalysis, and it even sets out its *modus operandi* in similar terms. The various strands of Wieser's work are equally related to significant works from the mid-1990s by Claude Leroy and Michel Brix. Recognizing such facts, Wieser is meticulous in citing her sources. The scholarship involved in this book's wide coverage of past material is indeed laudable. The text is, however, haunted by citations of other works, and Wieser's own arguments are sometimes difficult to extract from the mass of quotations that she includes. None the less, Wieser's overall argument regarding Nerval emerges more clearly. Nerval's *œuvre* is seen as an attempt to trace a process of mourning that can never be resolved, because its object has never properly been known. For Wieser, the irresolvable quality of this process leads to a fluctuation between the denial of loss and its acceptance, and a correlative movement between genres. She views Nerval's poetry as the primary site of denial, and his prose as the privileged space for the acceptance of loss. Yet Wieser is far from simplistically binary in her reasoning here; she explores extensively the ways in which denial fails in the verse and resurfaces in poetic sections of the prose. Moreover, her premise that the Nervalian object of mourning has never really been known means that she also resists — just — a wild psychoanalysis of textual mourning in terms of the death of Nerval's real-life mother. Nevertheless, Wieser's incessant return to Nervalian images of the mother, especially in the first section of her book, suggests a considerable temptation to abandon the distinction between the textual self and the person who created it. Wieser eventually cedes to that temptation regarding a different textual detail. She reads the fragmentary nature of *Aurélia* as the result of impasses in the writer's unconscious, and her approach nears that presented by Julia Kristeva's reductive reading of 'El Desdichado' in *Soleil noir*. However, unlike Kristeva, Wieser fails to undertake any rigorous explanation of her choice of psychoanalytical terminology. Her introduction cites Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* as a guide, but she does not discuss the differences between 'normal mourning' and melancholia outlined by Freud. This omission is particularly troubling in a book that takes one of those categories as its central concern, but whose more original and engrossing

sections include somewhat peripheral close readings of child imagery in *Aurélia* and dissidence in *Les Faux-Saulniers*. Indeed, the impact of such digressive sections troubles the thematic primacy of mourning in the book. Wieser's insistence on Nerval's unresolved attitude towards loss, meanwhile, might leave the reader wondering why she features mourning rather than melancholia in her title.

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Zola et la littérature naturaliste en parodies. By CATHERINE DOUSTEYSSIER-KHOZE. Paris, Eurédit, 2004. 307 pp. Pb €70.00.

Catherine Dousteysier-Khoze begins her book with the claim that parody is a tool 'permettant d'enrichir notre connaissance du naturalisme ou de l'éclairer d'une lumière nouvelle' (p. 10), and the second and third parts of this extensively researched and well-written study exemplify this approach. In the second part, 'Parodies de réception, parodies parasites?', Dousteysier-Khoze presents a detailed and revealing analysis of contemporary parodies of both specific Naturalist texts (such as *L'Assommoir* and *Nana*) and Naturalism more generally. Her readings not only introduce a number of little-known yet significant texts, many of which are not easily available (some are usefully reproduced in the extensive appendix), but also examine precisely what this hitherto neglected literary genre — and she convincingly argues that it is a genre in its own right — reveals about how Naturalism was perceived and received in the 1870s and 1880s. In her third section, 'La Cinquième Colonne naturaliste', Dousteysier-Khoze extends her exploration by examining how Naturalist texts, especially those produced in the later decades of the century when Zolian Naturalism was in decline, can be read as self-parodies of the movement with which they are most closely associated. A close and persuasive examination of works by writers including Céard, Hennique, Desprez, Huysmans and Mirbeau reveals that naturalist texts frequently contain within themselves a parodic *mise en abyme*, which can be read either as evidence of the end of Naturalism or as an attempt to either resuscitate or redefine the dying movement. Naturalism's (auto)parodies are an integral, even fundamental part of the movement, rather than an often neglected reaction to it.

By describing parody merely as a tool employed in her investigations of Naturalism, Dousteysier-Khoze underestimates her own theoretical contribution to the study of parody itself. In the first part, 'Naturalisme et Parodie', Dousteysier-Khoze presents an extensive appraisal of theories of parody, which students and scholars of parody will find invaluable. Drawing on a range of theorists of parody from both the French and Anglo-American traditions, Dousteysier-Khoze goes on to elaborate her own notion of *parodicité*, which she then employs in the subsequent chapters of the book. According to Dousteysier-Khoze, the *parodicité* of a text depends on the author's intention to produce a parody and on the reader's reception of the text as a parody. This emphasis on intentionality, which is central to Dousteysier-Khoze's argument, may appear outmoded; however, Dousteysier-Khoze