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Nerval: l'écriture du voyage (review)

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*d'un livre*. This 'cross-reading' seems to be precisely the kind of dynamic approach that these essays advocate, and would be a welcome addition to future studies of not only the novel, but also one of the nineteenth century's most pivotal figures.

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*Nerval: l'écriture du voyage*. By HISASHI MIZUNO. Paris, Champion, 2003. Hb €33.00.

This substantial study examines Nerval's travel works, the *Voyage en Orient* (1851) and *Lorely — Souvenirs d'Allemagne* (1852), in the form in which they originally appeared, as fragments published in journals from 1838 to 1852. It focuses, not on textual differences (which are minimal), but on the effects on Nerval's writing of changes in the political climate of the time and the varying readership of the journals for which he wrote. Although not denying that Nerval's travel writing is an aesthetic and creative act, and paying some attention to theatricality of presentation and the aura of dream and myth, Mizuno's study deliberately diverges from a path that it regards as sufficiently well trodden, in order to emphasize Nerval's engagement with real life and the issues of the time: the most convincing and original sections of this study are those that deal with Nerval's depiction of the conflicts of aims in contemporary English and French foreign policy for Syria and the Lebanon, or with his presentation of the 'Oriental female', which Mizuno reads as an exceptionally cool-headed analysis of relationships between the male Western European traveller and his Eastern subject (although more could have been made of the Javanese slave being taught to speak French by means of the phrase 'Je suis un petit sauvage'). Even the apparently anodine depictions of Dutch and German 'fêtes artistiques' of 1850 to 1852 are seen as alluding quietly to current political events in France. Nerval's travel writing emerges in this perspective as an 'écriture subversive et oppositionnelle', which is more or less overt according to whether it appeared in a journal of the Left or of the Right. Although casting a welcome new light on Nerval's travel writing, this work could have benefited from more revision. The French is often awkward and sometimes incomprehensible. Nerval's words are sometimes misunderstood. The chronological approach leads inevitably to repetitions. There are heavy-handed and unnecessary paraphrases, not only of Nerval's own sometimes tortuous religious and mythical elucidations but also of passages where Nerval is at his lightest and most elusive. More crucial is the unaccountable omission of any discussion of Nerval's *Nuits d'octobre*, those wayward and original depictions of travel at home, in and around Paris, which are every bit as engaged, subversive and politically oppositional as anything to be found in the *Voyage en Orient*. Moreover, the pendulum has swung too far away from the literary and creative. Much more could have been done to link the idea of Nerval's changing forms not only with historical change but with formal developments in the genre of travel writing. There is little more than a tantalising nod towards what Mizuno calls a 'nouvelle expression poétique', where (as in Flaubert's travel accounts) an espousal of the 'modern' ideals of scientific simplicity and clarity create a new 'poésie de la présence'. That this has all the

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