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Victor Hugo et le romanesque (review)

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historical importance of her correspondence with Liszt, a record of the love of an aristocrat and an artist, and wanted to keep it for posterity: 'Notre vie intéressera tant de gens!', she wrote in November 1939. Letters written at this time reveal the complexity of her relationship with Liszt, who was at once lover, friend and mentor. In one missive, she says that in order to gain honour in Paris he must be successful, and above all rich. This shows that she has now renounced her former idealism, when her head was quite full of Music and Love.

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Victor Hugo et le romanesque. Textes réunis et présentés par AGNÈS SPIQUEL. (Études romanesques, 9). Paris, Caen, Lettres modernes Minard, 2005. 216 pp. Pb €30.00.

In her brief but useful opening remarks, Spiquel clarifies how the *romanesque* for Victor Hugo became not simply a thematic concern, but also a structural strategy. Hugo not only maximizes the novel's potentially ironic interaction of the story itself with the telling of that story, he also observes how that exchange between object and subject operates in other modes of writing as well. He considers how the novel, as a melting pot of various genres from the historical and the philosophical to the poetic and the fantastic, not only can be read according to those particular tones, but moreover how those types themselves can be read through their crossover in the novel form. Two introductory explorations from Anne Ubersfeld and Judith Wolf helpfully flag the major theoretical issues that are at stake in such a case study. They underpin a hybrid concept of the *romanesque* as a perpetual doubling of the general and the individual that motivates and yet thwarts the drive towards genre and interpretation. We can move beyond thematics such as mystery, adventure and romance to appreciate how, as a mode of writing, the *romanesque* is inherently bound up in questions of identity and being. The novelist's trade of description, intrigue and revelation can be structurally examined to explore how the narrative voice indicates a shifting and duplicitous form that can be traced outside novel writing. No fewer than thirteen contributions then elaborate upon how various aspects of Hugo's writing help illustrate this compelling argument. Far from being the kind of rhapsodic celebration that Hugo's 2002 bicentenary seemed to encourage, the contributors sharpen their critical edge by cutting through the Olympian reputation of their subject to serve up a substantial analysis. Although Hugo's mammoth *œuvre* is evidently too expansive to be compressed into one study, it is regrettable that, although two essays each look at a relatively little-known work like *Le Rbin*, *Les Contemplations* is strangely absent. None the less, there is a great deal of diversity on display here, from narrative works like *Quatrevingt-treize* to autobiography in *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie*, as well as poetry such as *Les Orientales*. Worth particular mention is Pierre Laforgue's discussion, which looks at Hugo's frantic output in 1860 to construct a cross-section of his writing. Laforgue points to the thematic and formal connections between the poetry of *La Fin de Satan*, the fiction of *Les Misérables* (the manuscript of which Hugo was returning to) and the essays towards his original preface to that novel, entitled *Philosophie. Commencement*

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