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Correspondance Vielé-Griffin-Ghéon (review)

Jenny Higgins

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say, taking up this metamorphosis of the thyrsus, that her achievement is to have turned figures into keyholes, to have shown how a concern with abstract structures can, at least in the space between music and literature, set up endless aesthetic perspectives.

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PETER DAYAN  
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

*Correspondance Vielé-Griffin–Ghéon*. Édition critique établie par CATHERINE BOSCHIAN-CAMPANER. Paris, Champion, 2004. Hb €50.00.

In 1896, the twenty-one-year-old Henri Ghéon wrote an enthusiastic article in *L'Ermitage* in praise of Francis Vielé-Griffin's collection of poems, *Chansons à l'ombre*. This provoked a grateful response from Vielé-Griffin in the form of a letter in which he expressed his delight in finding that in Ghéon, 'l'interlocuteur virtuel des heures lyriques s'incarne, comme ce fut ma foi' (p. 45). These expressions of mutual esteem led to a correspondence and friendship between the two men that continued until Vielé-Griffin's death in 1937. Catherine Boschian-Campaner's edition of this correspondence includes a substantial introduction, which begins by outlining the careers of the two men and goes on to trace the development of their relationship, as portrayed in the letters. Background information about some of the main events and issues referred to in the correspondence throws light on certain references in the letters that might otherwise be obscure. Comments in the Introduction and in footnotes to the letters themselves fill in details of the decline of the relationship between Gide and both Ghéon and Vielé-Griffin, a deterioration that is evident in the letters. The figure of Gide looms large throughout them, as the object of both admiration and irritation for the correspondents, and Boschian-Campaner suggests in the Introduction that the relative neglect into which Ghéon's *œuvre* has fallen can partly be ascribed to Gide's publicly expressed refusal to acknowledge any merit in the work Ghéon produced after his conversion to Catholicism at the age of forty. The letters themselves reveal a relationship in constant development, both from a personal and artistic point of view. After initial assurances of mutual admiration, regular meetings make the bond between the two men a more personal one. The letters then range from discussions of Vielé-Griffin's succession of new cars to more intimate professions of friendship and support, particularly in those written during the First World War, when Ghéon served as an army doctor. The dominant concerns of the letters are, however, literary. As well as discussing their own work in progress, both men comment on the contemporary literary scene in Paris, making this correspondence useful not only for what it can reveal regarding Vielé-Griffin and Ghéon themselves, but also for its details of French literary activity at the time. The frequent discussions concerning *vers libre* bring up various issues concerning its acceptance and adoption, and Ghéon's comments linking *vers libre* to possible communication to a wider audience are illuminating in relation both to his own work and to the wider context of contemporary perceptions of this form. This clear and comprehensive edition includes an extensive bibliography and indexes of people and works referred to in the Introduction and the letters. Although the proofreading leaves a little to be desired, this book is an excellent point of

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

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JENNY HIGGINS  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

*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