

Forrest on Dessy and Stiénon, eds. (2015)

Dessy, Clément, and Valérie Stiénon, editors. *(Bé)vués du futur: les imaginaires visuels de la dystopie (1840-1940)*. PU du Septentrion, 2015, pp. 306, ISBN 978-2-7574-0887-2

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Clément Dessy and Valérie Stiénon propose to fill gaps in current research on dystopia. In their introduction they first consider visual components in the portrayal of disastrous political, social, technological, scientific, or environmental crisis as integral to an assessment of the theme's generic attributes. Second, they expand the genre's frontiers beyond popular literature. Third, they encourage French scholars to familiarize themselves with the interdisciplinary model found in American and English utopian studies. Finally, in contradistinction to existing studies dominated by English and American authors, they examine Francophone writers almost exclusively.

Roughly half of the volume is devoted to the last half of the nineteenth century with essays exploring the tensions between text and image, and between contemporary society and a fictional future. Olivier Ghuzel examines the interaction of the Saint-Simonian Émile Souvestre with the formative influences of the young illustrator Bertall (the comic press, almanacs, boulevard revues) of *Le Monde tel qu'il sera*. Chapman Wing revisits Souvestre along with works by Hippolyte Mettais, Albert Robida, and Henriot. He shows how the illustrations suspend narrative progression, a phenomenon that mirrors a problematized relation to history and archeology as modern disciplines. Modern archeology, represented by the fragment, fails to recover the past in Xavier Fontaine's study of short works by Joseph Méry, Alexandre Dumas, and Alfred Franklin. He charts the *mise en abyme* of fragmentation from archeology as a practice to the illustrations and encompassing the very fragmented structure of the works themselves. Françoise Sylvos takes a transgeneric look at anti-communist satires from the 1840s: panoramic literature, caricature, dialogued prose, and vaudeville. Sylvos shows how the illustrations often exceed the "propagande anti-réformatrice" of the narratives (106). In Sandrine Doré's essay on Robida's *Le Vingtième Siècle*, futuristic illustration reinforces the author's concerns regarding unbridled faith in the advances of technology and the threat it posed to cultural heritage and to the future of the arts. Philippe Kaenel takes the last book in Robida's twentieth-century trilogy *La Vie électrique* for a discussion of graphic incarnations of electricity: represented as a seductive woman, electricity bore the graphic burden of expressing anxiety about real and anticipated social revolutions ranging from upended conventions in sexual roles to political, economic, and ecological destabilization. Henriot's *Paris en l'an 3000* reappears in Julie Fäcker's essay. Here, the author argues that the illustrations comically stage fears regarding ever-accelerating technological (particularly military) and scientific progress on the eve of World War I.

In the second half, the authors introduce a more eclectic approach. Dessy proposes that the Englishman Frank Brangwyn's illustrations to the 1919 edition of Émile Verhaeren's *Les Villes tentaculaires* accentuated the dystopian strains of the poems. Natacha Van-Deyres tackles the ascendancy of ants in popular literature, children's literature, and film from 1880 to 1950. Initially objects of admiration for their social structure, subsequent narratives on their superiority transform them into monsters. Thibault Gardereau takes an unexpected angle on dystopia in the study of French narratives of travel to the United States from 1890 to 1945. Once the U.S. Census Bureau declared that it would no longer study westward migration, visitors sought signs of the New World's fall. Dick Tomasovic turns to Berthold Bartosch's liberal adaptation of Franz Masereel's Expressionist wordless novel in woodcut images to animated film. Bartosch extensively reworked Masereel's images to fit his more dystopian vision. Ubald Paquin's *La Cité dans les fers* imagines a future Québec that Jean-François Chassay reads against the author's intentions. Chassay examines the novel's violence and fascist propaganda as dystopic given that the novel's form of "utopia" materialized soon after with Adolf Hitler. Laurent Bazin studies science fiction for young readers between the two world wars. The exploitation of this market was marked by the transition from instructional to entertaining narratives, a greater attention on illustration, and attention to more adult concerns, among which figured dystopian themes. The dystopia that Jérôme Dutel finds in the imaginary voyage of the avant-garde *Grande Beuverie* by René Daumal is one in which both graphic representation and language fail as mediums of communication and creation. Dominique Warfa and Björn-Olav Dozo's essay treats *Le Retour au silence*'s disturbing narrative of "benevolent" social control as a commentary on the sinister clinical method of "liberté obligatoire" at the Salve Mater de Lovenjoel clinic where Stéphane Hautem (pseudonym of psychiatrist Étienne De Greef) practiced (263). Katarzyna Cytlak's study of Evguéni Zamiatine's *Nous autres* stresses this dystopian novel's influence on French writers, especially the way it links social critique with Modernist, particularly glass, architecture. Cytlak shows as well that Zamiatine denounced the Russian avant-garde's complicity with state propaganda. Finally, Francesco Muzzioli provides a fitting analytical framework for the wide array of approaches and conclusions offered in the preceding essays.

Such concentration on the French-speaking world sets *(Bé)vues du futur* at the forefront of a reorientation in dystopia studies, of which Jeffrey C. Kinkley's *Visions of Dystopia in China's New Historical Novels* (2014) is a notable example. Like Chinese dystopic scenarios, Francophone contributions to the theme possess "leurs propres filiations et traditions" (27). It is rare to find an edition whose range of approaches fulfills as admirably its editors' objectives. It is equally rare to find such consistently high quality writing and research.

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