

Sugden on Grenaud-Tostain and Lumbroso, eds. (2016)

Grenaud-Tostain, Céline, et Olivier Lumbroso, éditeurs. *Naturalisme. —Vous avez dit naturalismes?* PU Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2016, pp. 220, ISBN 9782878546897

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“C’est du Zola!” “Une histoire à la Zola”... One need only scan the *faits divers* column to find evidence of a doxic certitude deserving of a place in a twenty-first-century *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. “Le maître de Médan” still serves as a metonym for the sordid and the salacious, a dubious honor which prolongs the vision of “la littérature putride” first adumbrated in Louis Ulbach’s 1868 diatribe in *Le Figaro*. In their excellent edited volume, which takes its origins in a 2015 colloquium interrogating the question of “Héritages naturalistes,” Céline Grenaud-Tostain and Olivier Lumbroso draw out a twofold objection to this monolithic vision of literary Naturalism. This collective attempt to “démonter les stéréotypes et les clichés qui pèsent sur un mouvement artistique enfermé trop souvent dans le misérabilisme, le document, la pornographie, l’absence d’art et de beauté” (10–11) takes as its corollary a deconstruction of the hidebound understanding that would reduce the movement to the man—that is, “la domination écrasante, presque asphyxiante [de l’]œuvre zolienne” (8) in critical discourse. Instead, plurality is the name of the game, from the playful interrogation of the title to the laudable span of contributors, from the most promising graduate students to the doyens of the field.

In their comprehensive introduction, Grenaud-Tostain and Lumbroso set out the stakes of the enterprise, reflecting on the value and limitations of literary categorization. Building on the landmark studies of Yves Chevrel and David Baguley, they make a convincing case for a critical approach almost iconoclastic in its revisionist impetus: “faire voler en éclats la notion de ‘mouvement littéraire’” (8). Accordingly, while attentive to the “dimension patrimoniale” (7) of Zola’s work, the editors seek to shift the focus beyond the temporal and topographical borders of the nineteenth-century French context towards the “vision plurielle” (9) heralded in the title. To open the volume’s multi-voiced discussion of “l’utilité de penser le naturalisme en *naturalismes*” (18), they turn to the ambitious dictionary projects of recent years. The prologue, “Naturalisme ou naturalismes? Les dictionnaires à l’épreuve de l’héritage patrimonial,” is organized around three prize examples of this “ambition encyclopédique” (18): René-Pierre Colin’s *Le Dictionnaire du naturalisme* (2012), Colette Becker and Pierre-Jean Dufief’s *Dictionnaire des naturalismes* (2017), and Kosei Ogura’s Japanese-language *Guide Zola*, currently under preparation.

If the impetus of such dictionaries “a pour principe premier le dépassement de la simple nomenclature” (56), the book’s first section, “Les héritages: filiations et désaffiliations,” also invites reconsideration of the conventional understanding of the “legs naturaliste” (56). Focusing in the first instance on the question of influence in the French context, this portion brings together three cogent explorations of a Naturalism “aspirant à se développer et à évoluer jusque dans les contre-modèles qu’il inspire” (56). Renaud Oulié uses the example of Léon Hennique to highlight the challenges of contemporaneity for the writing of a history of literary influence. Béatrice Laville turns her attention to those *naturalistes* “[qui] ont contribué à rallier autour de Zola, aux heures grises, une partie de la nouvelle génération” (68), while Marie-Ange Fougère examines the texts and paratexts of Paul Bourget, René Boylesve, and Édouard Estaunié to make the case for “une empreinte non assumée” (86) of Naturalism in the *roman psychologique*. The second section, “Métamorphoses et résonances naturalistes en contextes,” posits a Naturalist “paradigme transculturel” (88) as it seeks to “envisage[r] les naturalismes comme une littérature sans frontières” (12). The temporal concerns of the previous chapters are not abandoned, but complemented by a subtle shift of emphasis towards the spatial. Aurélie Barjonet draws on the central place of the Zola-Ibsen-Tolstoy triad in Curt Grottewitz’s 1892 investigation into the future of German literature. Suggesting that fin-de-siècle German writers “attendent leur grand *Dichter* qui saura réaliser l’alliance du naturalisme et de l’idéalisme” (104), her compelling argument demonstrates that Naturalism in its German declension was perceived not as the logical conclusion of Realism, but rather as the origin of literary modernity. Zaki Coussa, too, looks beyond French borders to examine “l’émergence du naturalisme dans le monde arabe” (107), whilst Kosei Ogura and Béatrice Desgranges deal with the Japanese and Chinese contexts respectively. The concluding section, “Interactions et tensions: l’héritage critique du naturalisme au XXI^e siècle,” provides a space for reflection on the movement’s “héritage pré-figurateur” (142) and its limitations. Chantal Pierre takes umbrage with those “lecture[s] conservatrice[s]” that would reduce Naturalism to “une écriture dés empathique” (152), and Véronique Cnockaert accompanies us through Octave Mouret’s department store in the company of Yves Guyot and John Stuart Mill. Marion Glaumaud-Carbonnier’s masterful analysis of the absence of divorce from Naturalist fiction, “étrangement silencieux” (167) for a literature claiming to *tout dire*, provides a fitting counter-point to Sophie Guermès’s contribution, which moves from the historicizing to the actualizing in drawing out resonances of *Le Roman expérimental* (1880) in the Nouveau Roman and beyond. It falls, finally, to Corinne Saminadayar-Perrin to reflect on Zola’s “[p]oétique de la variance” (207) in the *Rougon-Macquart* series, a “dialectique du récurrent et de l’innovant, laquelle métamorphose sans cesse les dispositifs et

les instruments au service de la création” (207).

This, then, is a richly textured collection that makes a convincing case for the need to “parler de naturalismes au pluriel” (38). If it lacks the polemic urgency of recent studies in a similar vein, most notably Susan Harrow’s 2010 *Zola, The Body Modern*, this is attributable only to the inevitable dilution of critical perspective that bedevils multi-author works. Grenaud-Tostain and Lombroso have achieved the admirable feat of lending clarity and coherence to the polyphonic treatment of an impressive breadth of material. Happily, the volume has served to launch a new Laboratoire d’excellence (Labex), “Le ‘naturalisme-monde’ en question: réceptions et créations d’un mouvement littéraire international (XIXe–XXIe siècles),” whose international reach augurs well for future collaborative research of a similarly high quality. To echo that infamous telegram from Zola’s ever-faithful disciple, Paul Alexis: “naturalisme pas mort,” indeed.

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