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Author(s): Alison Martin

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Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty by Cathryn Vasseleu

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149, 157, 165). Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* of 1940 is less prominent (critiqued on p. 18; endorsed on p. 222), and his *L'Imagination* of 1936, a copy of which was still in Beckett's library at his death, is ignored.

Gavard-Perret's ambitious attempt to show that Beckett's 'imaginaire' is 'en dérobade, mais [. . .] fascine par cette dérobadé' (p. 222) is often stimulating, though the book suffers from its own fluctuating focus, and errors of detail occur far too frequently for it to become, even on its own terms, a 'création absolue'. Titles of essays are frequently so inaccurately rendered as to defy retrieval from databases, and such priceless howlers as 'Israel Sherker' (p. 210) and 'Harry Random' (p. 246), (imaginary) names that virtually define what has gone wrong here, situate Gavard-Perret some distance from Calvino's much more exacting pursuit of 'Exactitude'.

UNIVERSITY OF READING

JOHN PILLING

Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty. By CATHRYN VASSELEU. Andover: Routledge. 1998. x+157 pp. £12.99.

Cathryn Vasseleu's text is a philosopher's philosophy book: a serious engagement with the three French thinkers within the phenomenological tradition. Extremely erudite, it is yet written in a lucid manner and patiently sets out arguments without labouring them. Vasseleu structures the team around the work of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, but this is a presentation of their philosophy in the wake of Derrida's interventions and in the context of Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference. Irigaray's readings of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas are not determinant for Vasseleu's understanding of the two men's thought, but she situates Irigaray as an extremely nuanced thinker who makes a serious contribution to phenomenological debate.

Vasseleu's subject is also fascinating in a beautifully esoteric way. She takes up the question of light in the Western philosophical tradition, a central question if we accept Derrida's contention that light is the founding metaphor of a philosophy constituted by metaphoricity and its forgetting. In Greek thought light is related to visibility and truth: the truth of reality is visible as light, which is itself invisible and beyond the sensible and history. Against this tradition of photology, Vasseleu deploys the phenomenological discourses of body and alterity to propose a notion of light as texture. Light is thus no longer valued as an ideal or physical medium with a metaphoric or natural relation to the sun, linking sight and visibility. As texture, it is perhaps somewhat obscurely presented as a woven fabric, a combination of parts and qualities that is not simply given or fabricated. Going with the notion of texture, we are nevertheless persuaded that questions of visibility and invisibility, vision and touch, are themselves framed by the very tradition of photology and its privileging of sight. Through Irigaray's work Vasseleu wishes to dispense with such binaries by presenting the texture of light as a fabric in which touch is always implicated in vision, and vice versa. In this way, Vasseleu both explains and yet significantly complicates the received understanding of Irigaray as a thinker who privileges touch over vision. The association made in feminist thought between ocularcentrism and masculine identity has been extended to Irigaray, who is often presented as an antivisual theorist. Vasseleu argues that while this reading is more tenable in Irigaray's earlier thought, her later phenomenological essays on Merleau-Ponty and Levinas reveal a tremendously nuanced position regarding the differentiations of vision and touch. Hence Irigaray is given to us as a thinker who calls for a different vision, as well as a touch of difference.

Textures of Light is a text that stays with the complexity and difficulty of its subject, without packaging any argument for ready consumption. That is probably why Vasseleu can state a truth of Irigaray's work which contravenes many received readings: for all her closeness to deconstruction, Irigaray's thought as a philosophy of

sexual difference is irreducible to the terms of deconstruction. This enables Vasseleu to touch upon a close reading of Irigaray, while at the same time making clear to us why questions concerning light are important for our understanding.

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

ALISON MARTIN

National Stereotypes in Perspective: Americans in France, Frenchmen in America. Ed. by WILLIAM L. CHEW III. (Studia Imagologica: Amsterdam Studies on Cultural Identity, 9) Amsterdam: Rodopi. 2001. x+433 pp. €82; \$77.

Although originating in a conference which took place in Brussels in 1999, this volume consists of sixteen polished and fully developed essays which are, generally, free from the informalities and discursive shortcuts that so frequently mark conference proceedings. Drawing on the diverse specialisms of its contributors, most of whom are US-based historians, art historians, literary and cultural specialists and linguists, *National Stereotypes in Perspective* offers a well-balanced range of commentaries on the dynamics of Franco-American relations and, in particular, on the national stereotypes constructed in the process of long-standing mutual observation. Although arranged chronologically and weighted towards twentieth-century studies (seven essays are devoted to twentieth-century topics, while an eighth focuses on the 1900 Paris exhibition), the collection achieves coherence partly through its methodological grounding in imagology and partly through the various recurrent thematic threads running throughout. Thus, the editor's long introductory essay establishes the theoretical and interdisciplinary framework for the very varied case studies which follow, while each of the latter engages with the 'auto-images' (images of the self) and/or 'hetero-images' (images of the other) generated in the course of Franco-American interaction since the late eighteenth century. As one might expect, issues relating to race, nationalism, and national identity dominate several essays (Tracy N. Leavelle, Louis Kern, Jeannene Przyblyski, and Jennifer D. Keene) and figure prominently in a number of others. These issues include American perception and treatment of the African, African-American, and American Indian *Other*, French appraisal of America's conduct towards slaves and towards the indigenous peoples of the New World, European fascination with exoticism, France's failure to recognize the relevance of America's racial problems to its own colonizing programme, *American-ness*, and anti-Americanism. Several contributors—most notably Bess Beatty, Keene, William Keylor, Seth Armus, and Patrick G. Gerster—explore the relationship between sexual, cultural, racial, and 'spiritual' stereotypes and particular historical, political, and social contexts (Paris during the period 1830–1900, the First World War, the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the Cold War, 1930s America). Social, political, and judicial questions—in particular, the status of the liberal aristocracy in post-Revolutionary France, the image of the republican hero, European evaluation of American penal innovation—also dominate the contributions of Doina P. Harsanyi, Sarah J. Purcell, and Carlo Colatrella. Finally, the theme of popular culture—the public spectacle, the press, and consumerism—links the contributions of Leavelle, Dominique A. Laurent, Przyblyski, Beatty, and Barbara Zabel, while trans-Atlantic exchange and influence in the plastic and architectural arts and in industry and technology are examined in the essays of Zabel, Isabelle Gournay, and Stephen Harp. The volume is well presented: the essays of Przyblyski, Zabel, and Gournay include well-chosen and telling illustrations; each contribution is preceded by a useful abstract. Although the essays are accompanied by extensive footnotes, a bibliography detailing the principal reference works in the very rich field of Franco-American studies would have been useful. Give the recurrence of topics, the extensive archival work, and the