
Carolyn A. Durham. *Literary Globalism: Anglo-American Fiction Set in France*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Presses, 2005. 265p.

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This collection of essays by Carolyn A. Durham takes a major step in demystifying the ever-growing fascination with France in English-language literature that goes back at least as far as 1841 when Edgar Allan Poe (who never traveled to France but loved the works of Balzac and Hugo) published “The Murders on the Rue Morgue.”

Durham notes that the thriving Anglo-American passion for everything French was magnified in the 1920s and 1930s when Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and other writers of the “Lost Generation” migrated to the Bohemian *quartiers* of Paris to drink, commiserate, and create. In 1919, Shakespeare and Company, an English-language bookstore, was established in Paris’ 5^{ème} arrondissement, and has since expanded to include a library, salon and neighborhood clubhouse. In her Introduction, Durham reports that the bookstore held its first literary festival in 2003 to observe and honor French influence on English-language literature. In recent years, several competing Anglophone bookstores have cropped up in Paris as well.

Durham’s colorful historical overview of English-language writers’ interest in French culture is an interesting backdrop to her primary focus on the surge during the past twenty years of Anglophone novels that take place in France and involve the interaction of English, American, and French characters. In her first chapter, the author quotes a French bride-to-be, Anne-Sophie, in Diane Johnson’s *Le Marriage* (2000), who surveys a gathering of Americans in Paris. “Was this a reception for...someone what had written a book, another book, about France? *Zut*, they produced them endlessly, Anglophones and their books” (Durham 25).

These nine essays are broadly researched and footnoted, and conclude with an extensive bibliography attesting to Durham’s knowledge of other recent studies about the ongoing prickly relationship between the United States and France—and there are many such works. Among the titles from which she quotes are *Paris in American Literature* by Jean Méral (1989), *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity*, by J. Gerald Kennedy (1993), *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* by Richard F. Kuisel (1993), and *French Resistance: The French-American Culture Wars*, by Jean-Philippe Mathy (2000).

A quick caveat to Internet book-buying junkies like myself: as many of the novels Durham analyzes are quite recent and have not yet found their way into every campus and public library, these essays with all of their intriguing descriptions and comments may well send you on a spending spree.

The Anglophone novels by Johnson, Rose Tremain, Joanne Harris, Claire Mesud, Edmund White, and others not only have sold well in France in their original English versions, but also have been translated into French with unusual rapidity, Durham reports. "At the same time, however, English is fast becoming the international language of a culturally unified Europe" (23).

One of Durham's major emphases is how these various authors use certain postmodernist writing strategies to suggest creeping globalization of cultures as they affect France, England, and the United States. Postmodernism, is, in fact, the literary counterpart of globalization, she states (27); "in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries even mainstream English-language fiction can no longer be contained within conventional boundaries whether narrative, national, or even perhaps, linguistic. In an increasingly globalized world of constant border crossing and cultural borrowing, notions of national origin and native language no longer retain the same meaning" (23).

Durham's first chapter examines Johnson's *Le Divorce* (1997), upon which the popular 2003 Hollywood film was based, and *Le Mariage* (2000), both of which examine a series of cross-cultural (mostly Franco-American) romances with various troubled dynamics. In fatal Racinian tradition, every relationship in these novels is unsuitable in one way or another, and thereby, doomed. "Selecting elements indiscriminately from American and European culture, *Le Divorce* and *Le Mariage* recombine and rearrange them in a fashion...that is distinctively postmodern" (40).

Durham opts to examine Johnson's third novel *L'Affaire* (2003) in her ninth and last chapter, and to point out through the story's good-hearted, but bumbling, American heroine Amy, that anti-U.S. sentiment among the French is simply inevitable and even formulaic in these kinds of novels. Amy's innocent acts of ill-advised good will (which include whisking an avalanche victim from the Alps to a London hospital, where he dies) are a microcosm of many recent well-intentioned, but disastrous, U.S. military tactics (201).

The fact that Johnson's title *L'Affaire* is a word that has many meanings in French besides the assumed English interpretation of adultery, reiterates the surety of ever-present ambiguities in writings that cross borders and cultures that haunt every Anglophone novel set in France, Durham opines in her last chapter.

Chapter 2 discusses Tremain's *The Way I Found Her* wherein Lewis, a 13-year-old English boy spending a summer in Paris with his translator-mother, becomes fascinated with the novel *Le Grand Meaulnes*, and attempts to translate it into English on his own. Tremain assumes all her readers are familiar with Alain-Fournier's 1913 masterpiece, thereby suggesting a sort of cultural globalism (45). "One of Tremain's essential insights about the future of culture in a globalized Europe is that

literature can become international in reach without losing the national specificity of its origins” (56).

Tremain’s readers see various dilemmas Lewis has with language as he translates. His variety of words choices suggest the experimentalism of Robbe-Grillet, and he poses some interesting questions about translators and how much liberty they do or do not have. Tremain also revives the adage that translation is always a form of betrayal as well as an act of creativity...a kind of plagiarism in reverse, portraying one’s own language as someone else’s. “More importantly, in an increasingly globalized world of border crossings and constant cultural borrowing, can notions of national origin and native language still retain either meaning or significance?” Durham asks (59).

She speculates that reason behind the growing number of Anglophone novels about France since the early 1990s is elusive, but might by due in part to the “Peter Mayer effect”: that is, the success of the English author’s best-selling books—*A Year in Provence* (1990; the source of a 1993 TV mini-series as well as a looser adaptation in the 2006 film *A Good Year* starring Russell Crowe), and *Toujours Provence* (1991) about his own experiences buying an estate in southern France, and the resultant culture clashes, as well as his fictional *Hotel Pastis: A Novel of Provence* (1993). Chapters 4 and 5 treat this yearning of Anglophones for the disappearing charm of bucolic small towns in France as described in Harris’ *Chocolat* (1999; also the source of a successful Hollywood film), and *Blackberry Wine* (2000).

One of Durham’s most intriguing chapters is her analysis of Massud’s *The Last Life*, a novel originally written in English, but whose characters are, for the most part, speaking in French. *The Last Life*—or, in its ironically inexact French translation, *La Vie Après*—is a *Bildungsroman* narrated in first person by bilingual Sagesse LaBasse who recounts her life as a teen living with her American mother and French-Algerian father in southern France. A psychological study of troubled characters unable to adjust to the loss of French colonialism, *The Last Life* concludes with Sagesse’s realization of Camus’ philosophy that despite her family members who remain mired in other people’s expectations and rules, she has freedom to chart her own course—which she eventually does as an expatriate herself in New York City.

Fans of the myriads of murder mysteries set in Paris over the centuries will enjoy Chapters 6 and 7, in which Durham examines recent Anglophone *romans policiers* such as *Mascarade* by Walter Satterthwait (1998), *Murder in Montparnasse* by Howard Engles (1999) and *Murder in the Latin Quarter* by Tony Hays (1993) as well as Sarah Smith’s historical detective novels, such as *The Knowledge of Water* (1996), which takes place in 1910 Paris, and recalls the Gertrude Stein era of museum-like setting and period salons.

Chapter 8 treats another significant subcategory of Anglophone novels set in France—those that feature homosexual protagonists. Durham quotes Edmund White's claim that ever since Henry James, American writers have wanted to describe the experience of a relationship between "a very open American and a very enigmatic Frenchman" (177). Her analysis of White's *The Married Man* (2000) calls this work a "comedy of manners" in the tradition of James as well as a love story, a portrait of Paris, a social satire, a cross-cultural comparison, an AIDS chronicle, a semi-autobiographical portrait of White, a psychological mystery, and a travelogue (165-166).

At the end of her chapters, Durham includes a substantial list for further reading of other Anglophone novels about English or American characters that are set in France and have appeared between 1994 and 2004. ✱