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SPECIAL ISSUE ON VIRGINIE DESPENTES

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Preface to Special Issue on Virginie Despentes

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Virginie Despentes's œuvre addresses the social marginalization experienced by a variety of disenfranchised individuals who are alienated from full participation in society and characterized as deviating from societal norms: the poor, women, and sexual minorities. Challenging social mores and writing from the margins, our featured author's focus on the excluded sheds light on those living on the fringes of society as well as on those at its center. Introduced by Michèle A. Schaal's detailed discussion of Despentes's literary trajectory, the eight articles in this special volume examine her versatile narrative voice, her critique of gender boundaries and her feminist identity as an artist. The importance of her extensive corpus, validated by the articles in this volume and in the words of bell hooks, is evident in its "revolutionary [and] transformative impact on society" (hooks xvii).

With Despentes's analysis "depuis toujours, sortir de la cage a été accompagné de sanctions brutales" (KKT 21) as a focal point, the opening selection of articles provides insight on the theme of violence in her fiction. Léonore Brassard's study of *Baise-Moi* illuminates parallels between the colonial paradigm posited by Frantz Fanon and Despentes's conception of gender and feminism. Mercédès Baillargeon's and Michèle P. Schaal's articles on *Les Chiennes savantes* attest to the importance and impact of gender-based violence on socialization and the position of women in society. Through the lens of intersectionality, Colette Trout's essay on the eleven short stories in *Mordre au travers* reveals the multiplicity of factors that impact violence and women in an oppressive patriarchal system.

Pioneering a new genre of feminist literature, Despentes's novels challenge traditional representations of women in society by explicitly criticizing patriarchal discourses that hinder women's autonomy. Considering her explanation of the title *King Kong théorie*: "je suis plutôt King Kong que Kate Moss, comme fille . . . Ce sont pourtant mes qualités viriles qui font de moi autre chose qu'un cas social parmi d'autres" (11), the next two essays consider the authorial voice. Nadia Louar focuses on her crafting of an original position as an author, while Leah Wilson elucidates an expansion of

gender identity in *Apocalypse Baby* (the English translation of her sixth novel).

The volume closes with two essays that address the trilogy *Vernon Subutex* and our author's more recent exploration with form: Maxime Goergen's article considers her narrative style in relation to the Balzacian model, and Colin Nettelbeck's highly original analysis provides insight into the symbolic and transformative influence of music on her authorial voice.

All the articles in the volume attest to her pervasive and transgressive voice while tracing her trajectory as a feminist, as an artist, and as a writer. Offering a radical feminist critique as well as a feminist theoretical argument, Despentes's writing continues to attack social concepts of gender and elucidate new ways to perceive identity and self. She likewise demonstrates her versatility as a writer, developing new aesthetic and thematic routes in her current fiction. In *Feminist Theory*, bell hooks asserts that "the formation of an oppositional world view is necessary for feminist struggle" (166). As her voice moves beyond the margins and to the center, her words not only have the ability to impact society but, more importantly, to transform our present reality and the society in which we live.

List of Abbreviations : Despentes's Works

<i>AB</i>	<i>Apocalypse Bébé</i>
<i>BBB</i>	<i>Bye Bye Blondie</i>
<i>BM</i>	<i>Baise-moi</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>Les Chiennes savantes</i>
<i>JC</i>	<i>Les Jolies choses</i>
<i>KKT</i>	<i>King Kong théorie</i>
<i>MAT</i>	<i>Mordre au travers</i>
<i>VS</i>	<i>Vernon Subutex</i>