

Lana Asfour, *Laurence Sterne in France*. London and New York: Continuum, 2008. Pp. 182. £70. ISBN 9780826495426.

Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane, eds., *Popular Revenants: The German Gothic and Its International Reception, 1800-2000*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2012. Pp. 310. £50. ISBN 9781571135193.

A successful journalist, with constant contributions to such prestigious publications as *The Times*, *The Observer* and *The New Statesman*, Lana Asfour is also an accomplished literary scholar, as her magisterial work on the reception of Sterne in France amply demonstrates. *Laurence Sterne in France* displays all the usual Oxonian rigours (the book is based on the author's doctorate): lucid and persuasive argumentation, critical brevity and a clear and accessible style.

If one takes into account the fact that the latest addition to the field of French reception of Sterne had been published in 1911 (Francis Brown Barton's influential but dated *Étude sur l'influence de Sterne en France au dix-huitième siècle*), one rapidly grasps the importance of Asfour's book. Reception studies, as a highly reputed critical field, are in constant need of innovation and revaluation, so every fresh addition sheds new light on ever-relevant topics, such as the metamorphosis of fiction.

Not entirely devoid of *bons mots*, in the respectable eighteenth-century tradition (one such anecdote is found in the very opening lines of the introduction, referring to a metro plaque in Paris), Asfour's volume delimitates its scope of interest from the very beginning. Thus, the author is quick to point out that her aims are, firstly, to describe 'French literary culture between 1760 and 1800 through its responses to and interaction with Sterne and his fiction' (7), thereby trying to objectify the native readers' 'horizon of expectations' and, secondly, to read 'Sterne in light of early French interpretations' (7). Of course, the syntagm 'horizon of expectations' is to be understood in its strict, Jaussian sense: that of a complex standard which the reader has internalized once he or she has read a sufficient number of similar works.

Divided into three sections of comparably equal lengths (a fact which adds to the feeling of equilibrium pervading the text), the study focuses on criticism, translations and fiction, respectively. Thus, the first part is devoted to the presentation of both the early reviews (1760-1777) and the later reviews (1776-1786) of *Tristram Shandy*. Similarly, the second part is centred upon the three translations of Sterne's eccentric novel, i.e. signed by Joseph-Pierre Frénais, Marquis de Bonnavy and Griffet de La Baume, not before furnishing Asfour's synthetic account of eighteenth-century French theories of translation, some quite idealistic, others more down-to-earth, as found in the works of several *philosophes*, such as D'Alembert or Marmontel.

The third part deals with Sterne's French hypotexts and imitations, mainly of *A Sentimental Journey*: François Vernes, Pierre Blanchard, Julie de Lespinasse, Jean-Claude Gorjy and Louis Damin. The latter part of the chapter draws a fertile critical parallel between *Tristram Shandy* and Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*, a novel written between 1766 and 1780, at the height of 'Sternemania' and published in 1796. Asfour rightfully emphasizes that Diderot's work 'cannot be read as a mere imitation', but, rather, as 'a playful exploration of originality, imitation and plagiarism' (111). A welcome appendix enumerates the main articles on Sterne published in various French journals and reviews between 1760 and 1800.

Edited by two established scholars of German literature, Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane, *Popular Revenants* is a splendid collection of critical essays in the field of reception theory. The first volume explicitly focuses on the German gothic and devoted

specifically to its international reception, *Popular Revenants* is based upon the proceedings of a 2009-conference hosted by Trinity College, Dublin. The book pleasantly surprises its reader by a careful balance between cold fact and sparkling interpretation, and offers a welter of information to the student of gothic in general.

The problematic of *Schauerroman* (shudder novel), a particular expression of German gothic, has only been satisfyingly covered by Michael Hadley's *The Undiscovered Genre: A Search for the German Gothic Novel*, but this book appeared 35 years ago, in 1978. Understandably, the editors of the present collection think that the time has come for a fresh approach. Thus, the scope of *Popular Revenants* is, as Cusack's convincing Introduction wastes no time in emphasizing, threefold: firstly, the volume seeks 'to discover what specifically *German* (italics in the text) literary and intellectual contexts were influential in the formative phase of German gothic' (3), secondly, it examines 'the international reception of German gothic following the appearance in the 1790s of the *Schauerroman* in Germany' (3) and, thirdly, it attempts to 'trace revenants of the gothic in time, rather than geographical space' (4). All these critical lineaments are faithfully observed throughout the essays, and the result is a convincing case for the *Schauerroman*.

Concretely, Barry Murnane's 'Haunting (Literary) History: An Introduction to German Gothic' constitutes a brilliant *vade mecum* to the general theme. Jürgen Barkhoff's "'The echo of the question, as if it had merely resounded in a tomb": The Dark Anthropology of the *Schauerroman* in Schiller's *Der Geisterseher*' offers a subtle analysis of one of the prototypes of the shudder novel. Silke Arnold-de Simine's 'Blaming the Other: English Translations of Benedikte Naubert's *Hermann von Unna* (1788/1794)' concludes that it was the novel's English translations which ensured the survival of this early thriller. Victor Sage's 'Scott, Hoffmann, and the Persistence of the Gothic' scrutinizes Walter Scott's lasting literary influence on E.T.A. Hoffmann.

Andrew Cusack's 'Cultural Transfer in the *Dublin University Magazine*: James Clarence Mangan and the German Gothic' points out that the afore-mentioned Irish journal was the main channel through which German literature was pumped into Victorian culture. Mario Grizelj's 'In the Maelstrom of Interpretation: Reshaping Terror and Horror between 1798 and 1838 – Gleich, Hoffmann, Poe' takes into consideration the evolution of horror fiction within the span of 40 years. Jörg Kreienbrock's 'Popular Ghosts: Heinrich Heine on German *Geistesgeschichte* as Gothic Novel' delves into Heine's conception of horror narratives. Monika Schmitz-Emans's 'The Spirit World of Art and Robert Schumann's Gothic Novel project: The Impact of Gothic Literature on Schumann's Writings' tackles the famous composer's juvenilia and the relationship which may be established between these and the forerunners of horror.

Andrew Webber's 'About Face: E.T.A. Hoffmann, Weimar Film, and the Technological Afterlife of Gothic Physiognomy' is, despite its deceptively Lavaterian title, a superb piece of film criticism. Peter Arnds's 'Of Rats, Wolves, and Men: The Pied Piper as Gothic Revenant and Provenant in Wilhelm Raabe's *Die Hämelschen Kinder*' addresses a powerful myth, whose spell has not vanished altogether. Matthias Bickenbach's 'The Lady in White or the Laws of the Ghost in Theodor Fontane's *Vor der Sturm*' adds terrifying touches to the portrait of a staunch realist writer. Barry Murnane's 'On Golems and Ghosts: Prague as a Site of Gothic Modernism' analyzes the transformations undergone by this great Central European city in the literary imaginary of the early twentieth century. Last but not least, Catherine Smale's "'Ein Gespenst geht um": Christa Wolf, Irina Liebmann and the Post-Wall Gothic' demonstrates how the silhouette of a totalitarian symbol of a divided Germany may be converted into a catalyst for creativity.

All in all, an impressive assembly of critical voices, whose first-rate scholarly contribution is meant to last.

