

Kathy Comfort. *Refiguring Les Années Noires: Literary Representations of the Nazi Occupation*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books (an imprint of Rowman & Littlefield), 2019. viii + 207 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4985-6160-0.

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Kathy Comfort's *Refiguring Les Années Noires: Literary Representations of the Nazi Occupation* delivers fully on its promise of analyzing with tremendous insight eight literary interpretations of the Occupation of France during World War II: Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *D'un château l'autre* (1957); Jean Cayrol's *Les Corps étrangers* (1959); Annie Guéhenno's *L'Épreuve* (1968); Matéo Maximoff's *La Septième fille* (1982); Charlotte Delbo's *Spectres, mes compagnons* (1977); Évelyne Le Garrec's *La Rive allemande de ma mémoire* (1980); and, Marguerite Duras' "La Douleur" (1985) and "Albert des Capitales." (1985) Key to Comfort's analysis is her organization based on the four phases of memory of Vichy France put forth by Henry Rousso in *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*:

1. Unfinished Mourning (1944-1954);
2. Repressions (1954-1971);
3. The Broken Mirror (1971-1974); and,
4. Obsession (1974-present). (4)

Comfort is also careful to draw attention to the work of Richard J. Golsan, who in his *The Vichy Past in France Today* (2017), "cautiously submits that another period of memory has emerged as evidenced by the commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the end of the Liberation during the summer of 2014. The events, in particular those marking the liberation of Paris, 'seem to point—troublingly—to the return of the Gaullist or 'Resistancialist' Myth" (11). Equally important is Comfort's reference to the work of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who "sees memory as the product of our interactions with others, which helps to explain how *résistancialisme* became a part of the national narrative" (2).

While each work analyzed by Comfort is extremely well done, two are particularly striking for the very simple reason that they bring much needed attention to neglected aspects of the history of the World War II Occupation of France, the first being that of the internment of the Roma and the other being that of the children of Collaborators. In Chapter Four: “Matéo Maximoff’s *La Septième fille*: A Roma Testimony of Internment,” Comfort writes:

French Roman novelist and filmmaker Matéo Maximoff was an early advocate for United Nations recognition of the Roma Holocaust, which the Roma call *porrajomos*, or “devouring.” ... Like *D’un château l’autre*, *Les Corps étrangers*, and *L’Épreuve*, *La Septième fille* belongs to the Repression period of the memory of Vichy France and, like them, it contests the resistancialist myth with its setting in the internment camp in Lannemezan. (81)

She further elucidates that “Until recently, the Roma internment has received little attention from historians; in fact, the average reader would likely not even be aware that the Roma—many of them French citizens—were interned by the French State.” (87). Specifically,

In order to isolate them from the general population, Vichy authorities placed the Roman in sparsely populated areas in barracks of abandoned buildings that offered little shelter from the elements, a fact made all the more disturbing since the majority of internees were children. The Roma had to leave behind most of their belongings—including their caravans and tents—when they were arrested. In most cases—including at Lannemezan where Maximoff and his family were sent—they had to find the means to supplement the meagre rations of food they were given. Denis Peschanski establishes that ration cards issued to individual families were confiscated by the camp administrators as a means to prevent escapes, an administrative complication that affected the quality of life of the internees. Since entire families were confined to the camps, the Roma had no relatives to send them food from the outside and visits from the Red Cross were few and far between. (87)

Comfort emphasizes: “Malnutrition was thus a serious problem and in some camps, the leading cause of death. To give one striking example, Matéo Maximoff weighed 75 kilos when he arrived at Lannemezan; when he was released three years later, he weighed 42 kilos.” (87)

As for the children of Collaborators, Chapter Six: “Postmemory and Familial Inquest in Évelyne Le Garrec’s *La Rive allemande de ma mémoire*” focuses on how Le

Garrec's strove to deal with her family's dark history (that of a grandmother born in Germany and that of her Collaborator father who was assassinated by the Resistance in front of her childhood home) as she grew up in post-war France. Le Garrec's work, published in 1980 and falling into the Obsession category, is viewed by Comfort as a trauma testimony:

Le Garrec analyzes the way in which the trauma of her father's violent death at the hands of the Resistance determined at once her path in life and her self-image. She pinpoints her father's murder as the pivotal moment in her life but her genetic connection to Germany also determines the nature of interpersonal relationships, that is, the impossibility of forming a true bond with others because of the need to lie about her family. This concealment of her childhood trauma and what she sees as the shame of her German heritage create a toxic self-loathing that impacts the way she interacts with others. (139-140)

Comfort succinctly sums up: "*La Rive allemande* illustrates Leigh Gilmore's assertion that, because identity is in part built on memory, it is inevitably influenced by trauma" (140). Comfort does a spectacular job of showing how in writing *La Rive allemande*, Le Garrec navigated the process of moving back and forth among the present moment of writing the memoir, the immediate past (referred to as the inquest by Comfort, meaning Le Garrec's scrutiny of her father's association with Parti Populaire Français (PPF, the French fascist and anti-semitic political party led by Jacques Doriot before and during World War II and regarded as the most collaborationist party of France), and the distant past, all while "combining informed imagination, vague memories and factual evidence." (143) In short, Le Garrec was traumatized at the age of nine by her father's assassination and the trauma continued well into adulthood.

As a reviewer and scholar, I have spent many years researching the World War II Occupation of France. It is truly a pleasure when I am able to view the Occupation through a new lens. Comfort's *Refiguring Les Années Noires: Literary Representations of the Nazi Occupation* has allowed me to do that.