



PROJECT MUSE®

---

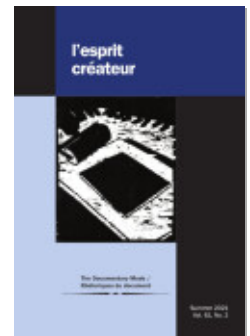
*Absent the Archive: Cultural Traces of a Massacre in Paris,*  
17 October 1961 by Lia Brozgal (review)

Patrick Lyons

L'Esprit Créateur, Volume 61, Number 2, Summer 2021, pp. 168-169 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2021.0017>



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/800233>

## Book Reviews

Robert St. Clair. *Poetry, Politics, and the Body in Rimbaud: Lyrical Material*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 276, including 2 illustrations. £63.

Robert St. Clair's study of Rimbaud's early verse is erudite, wide-ranging in argumentation, and sensitive to the intricacies of poetry's expressivity. Homage is soundly paid to Ross Chambers, who was steadfast to the end with exhortations to "be brave and be strong" (viii). Four main chapters—categorized as "Departures," "Diagnostic," "Prognosis," and "Anamnesis"—revolve around "unabashedly 'close' readings of French verse" (14) that focus on bodily materiality as an inspiration for revolutionary poetic expression. Paramount importance is afforded to a single poem in each portion of the analysis: "Sensation" for "Natural Bodies"; "Les effarés" for "Impoverished Bodies"; "Au Cabaret-vert, cinq heures du soir" for "Happy Bodies"; "Le forgeron" for "Revolting Bodies." Hundreds of expansive footnotes bear out the depth of an undertaking pertaining to "History producing form as a kind of poetic upheaval within the *body* of language that is a poem" (17). Akin to discussions of Rimbaud's ecosensitivity in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (2015) and *French Ecocriticism* (2017), Chapter 1 elucidates an ecopoetics linked to "the body's weave within the world" (51), as the youthful poet touches on the complex interconnectedness of human and more-than-human being. In Chapter 2, the disfiguring forces of poverty around the time of the Paris Commune are shown to have spurred Rimbaud's concern for social justice to the point of him rebuking "the 'ogre industriel' that 'eats the poor alive' with no regard for age or social station, and that transforms necessary labor [...] into a grinding source of alienation, if not an objective form of violence subtending social relations" (112–13). Chapter 3 illustrates not only how Rimbaud envisages triviality and a go-slow attitude as counterpoints to an unequal distribution of power, but also how "the stylistic signature of his verse in the 1870–71 *corpus* often resides in its innovative riffs on and radicalizations of poetic resources and practices—such as the semantic investment of enjambment, [and] the use of non-canonical rhyme schemes in sonnets" (131). A distinctive sense of politically oriented *poésie-voyante* emerges in Chapter 4, which deals with "Rimbaud, like Hugo if more dramatically, navigat[ing] between breaking and respecting the rules of the poetic game in order to democratize the space of the lyric" (194). Concluding remarks about "Other Bodies" dwell on "L'idole—Le sonnet du trou du cul" as a Rimbaud-Verlaine coproduction, in conjunction with the iterations of Fantin-Latour's *Coin de table* from 1872–73. As in the case of the human-filled version of the painting, the lovers' handling of each other's style in the sonnet is evocative of "poetry as a [...] practice carried out both *with* and *against* other poets, and whose contexts and circumstances play, along with these relationships, a crucial role in their intelligibility" (222). The sixteen-page bibliography and seven-page index succeed in pointing up key scholarship by the likes of Steve Murphy and Seth Whidden within a dense field that still has plenty of scope to be enriched through pioneering approaches such as St. Clair's.

DANIEL A. FINCH-RACE

*Center for the Humanities and Social Change, Università Ca' Foscari, Venice*

Lia Brozgal. *Absent the Archive: Cultural Traces of a Massacre in Paris, 17 October 1961*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020. Pp. xiv + 351.

Lia Brozgal's *Absent the Archive* provides a vast, richly detailed account of cultural production dedicated to an event that was repressed for decades in France: the massacre of scores of peacefully protesting Algerians by the Parisian police on October 17, 1961. In the sixty years following the massacre, an impressive, wide-ranging archive of cultural works—novels, documen-

taries, films, performances, graphic novels, and internet experiments—has proliferated in several discernable waves, which Brozgal draws into a cohesive narrative about the ebb and flow of national memory.

*Absent the Archive*, however, is not a work of historiography *per se*. It is a book “about the value and function of literature and cultural production, about how they make the silences of history speak, and to what ends” (6). The book’s central intervention is to bring together a transhistorical and trans-medium collection of primary creative sources on the October massacre, “to articulate its internal divisions and to speculate on its synergies,” and to “make the *anarchive* visible” (24). Drawing upon—and moving beyond—work by Derrida in *Archive Fever* and Brian Massumi’s dispatches from his “Sense Lab,” Brozgal’s concept of the anarchive is situated oppositionally to the archive as an (often state-) institutionalized, orderly site, and opens onto a more chaotic assemblage, lacking authority or common origin. Many elements of the October 17 anarchive, in particular, emerged in the shadow of aggressive censorship, their recovery necessitating a “rogue form of historiography” (313). The guardian of the anarchive is the literary scholar, who gathers, interprets, and works to unravel and “make signify” (26) its composite elements.

In Chapter One, Brozgal periodizes cultural responses to the events of October 17 across three “waves”: immediate (and largely state-censored) impressions from 1961 to 1963, the “beginning to the end of forgetting” (40); from 1983 to 1999, a period marked by the trial of Maurice Papon; and a “Post-Papon” anarchive emerging from 1999 and continuing through to the present. Chapter Two focuses on the police archives: the story of their eventual declassification, Brozgal’s own experience in the archive, and the archives’ prominent role as indices of reality in “October 17 Fictions” (91). Chapters Three and Four consider October 17’s representation in terms of the urban space in which it unfolded. Of particular interest is Brozgal’s attention to the role of the Seine itself as a “witness” within the October 17 anarchive. Chapters Five and Six critically examine issues of race (and “race talk”) and the cultural memory of Vichy and the Holocaust as they intermingle with retellings of the October 17 massacre. In a brief epilogue, Brozgal points to the absence of the October 17 massacre in discourse following the November 13, 2015, terrorist attacks in Paris, the latter quickly named the “bloodiest day in France since World War II” (311). She then closes with a series of reflections on the future of the anarchive as an oppositional concept, as access to information about the massacre continues to proliferate, suggesting its potential, eventual inclusion within the French *roman national*. Impressive in scope and meticulous in detail, *Absent the Archive* will no doubt set the bar for future critical studies of the cultural afterlives of October 17.

PATRICK LYONS

*University of California, Berkeley*

Jonathan F. Krell. *Ecocritics and Ecoskeptics: A Humanist Reading of Recent French Ecofiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020. Pp.261.

This book belongs to a recent current of expanding criticism exploring environmental issues in French literature. While ‘green’ fiction scholarship has been prominent since the dawn of the 21st century in the Anglo-Saxon literary landscape, publications about French novels that have environmental concerns at their heart are still quite scarce: Finch-Race and Weber (2017); Romestaing, Schoentjes, and Simon (2015); Finch-Race and Posthumus (2017); Persels (2012); Desblache (2006). As its title suggests, *Ecocritics and Ecoskeptics* discusses not only authors of fiction sympathetic to environmental concerns but those critical of them, in order to present the possibilities of an “ecological humanism” (180), in a French theoretical context that has been reluctant to “overturn the Cartesian humanism that elevates humanity to a place of dominance over the rest of the universe” (204). The introduction frames this approach, opposing, while in some respects attempting to reconcile, the views of two leading French contemporary theorists,