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Rethinking the French Classroom: New Approaches to Teaching Contemporary French and Francophone Women ed. by E. Nicole Meyer and Joyce Johnston (review)

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all its forms” (36). Following Octavia E. Butler’s incomparable legacy, contemporary women SF authors alter the established narrative by offering untold stories and erasing their invisibility.

Literary Afrofuturism’s significance and impact lie in its scathing critique of the complex and unsettling nature of SF’s institutional racism while providing a diverse blueprint for the amelioration of these problems from a resolute black perspective. In sum, notwithstanding pragmatic amendments to Afrofuturism’s definition and scope, it poignantly analyzes a tragic past but directs readers to a future with the potential to inject esoteric storylines that diminish the anti-blackness in SF.

E. Nicole Meyer and Joyce Johnston, eds. ***Rethinking the French Classroom: New Approaches to Teaching Contemporary French and Francophone Women***. Routledge, 2019. 165p.

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The title, *Rethinking the French Classroom: New Approaches to Teaching Contemporary French and Francophone Women*, attracts readers, who, like so many of “today’s French instructors must be prepared to teach outside of the French classroom. We are challenged to reinvent how we teach along with what we teach” (1). The volume, expertly edited by E. Nicole Meyer and Joyce Johnston, responds to this need in four parts, each with four or five articles.

Their Introduction details the overall structure and the importance of each article, addressing immediately the reader’s first questions of *Why?* and *How?*. Instead of dwelling on the negative circumstances that render French “an embattled language in the States, despite its cultural, literary, and linguistic prominence across the world” (1), the editors provide much-needed solutions, and “concrete strategies for teaching difference and diversity at all levels of the French classroom, as well as tools to promote their programs on campus” (1).

Part 1, “Exploring Identities/Exploring the Self: French Literature and Women’s Studies in the Twenty-First Century,” brings together four articles. Eilene Hoft-March justifies studying languages and literature: “being able to make sense of human beings is an

invaluable (read also: commodifiable) ability” (13). Articles by E. Nicole Meyer, Alison Rice, and Dawn M. Cornelio note the value of studying autobiographies, focusing on questions of identity and authenticity, both of which are pertinent to our society.

In part 2, “New beginnings, New Horizons: Women Writers in Beginning and Intermediate French Classes,” the articles by Sage Goellner and Elizabeth Berglund Hall are increasingly relevant with a focus on online course structure and e-journaling, respectively. Joyce Johnston articulates ways to link advanced learners to beginners, inspiring us to bridge “the gap in contemporary language teaching” (62). Natalie Edwards and Christopher Hogarth present a course in which “the literary text [is] at the center” which “push[es] students to learn about the language and culture at the same time, rather than by introducing a false dichotomy between them” (70). This second section gives specific examples that support French instructors who wish to move beyond dichotomies of mode of teaching—online or in-person, of linguistic levels—beginner or advanced, and of content—linguistic or cultural.

Five authors contribute to, “Colonial and Postcolonial French Women Writers: Teaching Diversity on Shifty Ground.” In the course he proposes, Laurence M. Porter introduces a diversity of writers from across the postcolonial Francophone world “to dissociate the issues of gender and postcolonial identity construction from a specific location, and to introduce students to the wide varieties of postcolonial feminist writing” (80). Rebecca E. Léal advocates an analysis of the shifting definition of “French” which shapes her course on “Multicultural Identities and Gender in Contemporary French Literature” (95). Florina Matu speaks of “disrupt[ing] stereotypes associated with Algerian women” (105) with strategies for teaching Algerian literature and film. Eric Touya de Marenne specifically responds to what he sees as the need for higher education “to offer alternative ways of thinking, [to] challenge ways of knowing, [to] interrogate sources of information, and [to] create a context for counternarrative” (111). These articles propose specific examples—ranging from detailed syllabus descriptions to theoretical approaches and reading material—to help French instructors address potential lacunae in their courses.

Responding to a desire for interdisciplinarity, the fourth part “Interdisciplinary Approaches to French Studies”, brings the

French classroom together with the fields of Criminal Justice (Araceli Hernández-Laroche), History (Courtney Sullivan and Kerry Wynn), Music (Arline Cravens), and Queer Studies (CJ Gomolka), as well as incorporating French in boarder courses in institutions where there is no French major or minor (Shira Weidenbaum). All these fields, and others, as Hernández-Laroche indicates, gain “with the integration of languages, cultures, and world literatures” (121). Weidenbaum, as well as Sullivan and Wynn, push students beyond their comfort zones by discussing unlikable female characters and WWII films and their representation of women, respectively. Cravens conveys the need for this interdisciplinarity “to aid humanity as a guide in attaining understanding and enlightenment by establishing connections to our world and with others... to express and bring about harmony” (148). Gomolka speaks to a need for inclusion which “promotes interdepartmental and intercultural connections that can be leveraged within and without French and Francophone studies to more fully understand the pluralistic modes of being of LGBTQ persons of the past, and those of today, in and outside of the Francophone world” (150).

The articles specifically demonstrate 1) why interdisciplinarity, diversity, creativity, and self-discovery are crucial to *rethinking the French classroom*, and 2) how to actually do it, showing concrete strategies and ideas, instead of vague notions. The editors say it best: “Teaching matters. Teaching French and Francophone women’s texts (in the largest possible sense of the word) matters” (1). This reviewer would add that these conversations, and this volume, matter.

Viet Thanh Nguyen. *The Committed*. Grove Atlantic Press, 2021. 345p.

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A sequel to the Pulitzer-winning *The Sympathizer*, *The Committed* picks up with our anonymous narrator who wryly calls himself Vo Danh, punning on Odysseus’s Nobody and commenting on dehumanized, nameless modern refugees. He alerts his readers that he pens this second manuscript in Paradise. After their re-education under the