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Gesa Stedman, *Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century France and England*. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2013. xii + 293 pp. Tables, figures, bibliography, and index. \$134.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-7546-6938-8.

Review by Hassan Melehy, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Transnationalism, transculturalism, and translingualism are often cited these days as scholarly imperatives. Yet specialists of the early modern era, at least in the Anglophone world, tend to remain in the paradigm of focusing on a single nation. To this current state of disciplinary provincialism, Gesa Stedman's *Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century France and England* comes as a welcome antidote. Comprehensive in its scope, this book is erudite and well-researched, regularly addressing literary texts but also offering many stimulating pages on representations in image and word of royalty, nobility, and bourgeois customs and habits, including those connected with dance, food, and fashion. Her book is genuinely cultural in its coverage, approaching its subject with a carefully considered array of methodologies borrowed from multiple disciplines. As Stedman writes at the end of the introduction, "With this investigation, I aim to combine cultural studies and literary studies, to the mutual benefit of both" (p. 21). Although her especial adeptness with textual analysis reveals her training as a literary scholar, her willingness to take on the historical dimensions of her material, from the dual perspective of its status as events and its place in the *longue durée* of the seventeenth century, demonstrates an unusually accomplished interdisciplinarity.

What makes her study so compelling is its emphasis on seventeenth-century apprehensions of cultural exchange in England and France. She focuses not simply on phenomena in which the matrix of one culture conditions the representation of the other but more so on representations of the actual process of transfer, where one culture is negotiating its relationship to the other. In this endeavor, she shows impressively detailed knowledge of broad aspects of the cultures of both England and France. She devotes more space to English representations of French culture, but the reason for that has a factual basis. Prior to the eighteenth-century French phenomenon of *anglomanie*, the English side of the Channel showed much more fascination with, as well as more anxiety over, what happened on the opposite shore than did the French side. Although this fact is implicit in Stedman's presentation, at the outset she makes the programmatic announcement that "the seventeenth century invites a look at the connection between England and France from both sides of the Channel" (p. 16). She gives insufficient attention to explaining the predominantly one-way direction of this cultural traffic, however, leaving her book open to criticisms from those who, coming to the subject without extensive prior knowledge, might find her approach more Anglocentric than it actually is, and perhaps unfairly declare the title inaccurate. When Stedman does give vigorous treatment to the reciprocal gaze between England and France, notably in her second chapter, to which I will return, she demonstrates her capacity to view the two cultures both in their self-representations and through a foreign lens, that is, as thoroughly implicated in exchange. Such acumen is patent in the entire book.

Stedman's first chapter is an introduction outlining the theories of cultural exchange on which she draws. This is a fine resource for the Anglophone world, where the key works on cultural exchange by critics such as Hartmut Kaelble, Michel Espagne, and Michael Werner, published mainly in French and

German, remain relatively unknown.[1] Stedman thus provides an additional reminder of the shortcomings of the predominantly monolingual approach to English studies in the Anglophone world and the cultural hermeticism of much Anglophone literary theory. A major issue that she raises in this chapter is one to which she returns elsewhere, namely the problem of the relationship between the non-textual and the textual, between an event and its representation. She provides an explanation for the methodological bracketing of the event in the privileging of its representation: “the non-textual, non-discursive world is mediated precisely by texts and images and there is no other possibility (apart from studying artefacts) to access the past” (p. 7). This certainly is a major part of why criticism in the twentieth century shifted its focus to the textual and the discursive, but it isn’t the whole story. Schools of thought ranging from the Bakhtin Circle to deconstruction go further, regarding discourse as pervading even the matter that it addresses and depicts, since in its transmission in language and imagery, the latter already has a semiotic function.

Although I wouldn’t insist that everyone adopt such a position, Stedman stops short of acknowledging it, instead responding to the somewhat simpler version that she proposes: “But it is possible to distinguish between an event which occurred in the past and its representation. This perspective allows me to analyse the specific qualities of the verbal or visual strategies by which the event is represented without confusing this text or picture with the event itself” (p. 7). As Stedman words it here, the limitation of her position is its failure to account for the reciprocal relationship between event and representation, and also for the fact that the representation is part of the event’s very constitution and has everything to do with shaping it, as Jacques Rancière among others has argued.[2] However, Stedman’s formulation on this point doesn’t govern her work dogmatically. In fact, her statements at the outset of chapter four on the role of representation, in which she emphasizes its imbrication with the material processes of cultural exchange, differ notably from her statements in the introduction. In the second, third, and fourth chapters, largely because of her genuine critical enthusiasm, she treats literary and cultural representations as partly constitutive of events.

Stedman’s second chapter, “*A wise and happy mediator? Queen Henrietta Maria as Cultural Ambassador,*” stands out as the section of the book in which she most vigorously offers an examination of the reciprocal gaze between England and France, approaching texts, maps, and other phenomena as part and parcel of the occurrence of events. In Stedman’s treatment, Charles I’s French-born queen and her environment become a site of cultural exchange—quite literally, since as party in a royal marriage Henrietta Maria was fulfilling a diplomatic role, that of cultural ambassador. Stedman raises the issue of gender in connection with Henrietta Maria in order to underscore the limitations on feminine agency in the seventeenth century, which necessitated that a cultural ambassador hold aristocratic status. Stedman characterizes the person performing this role as having “a mission or an errand to fulfill, requiring a certain degree of conscious reflection of one’s own culture, and more importantly, of one’s own role as a promoter of that culture” (p. 24). But as much as this role is related to Henrietta Maria’s personal agency, it also stems from her function in the representational systems of English society. Hence, with explicit reference to Ernst Kantorowicz, Stedman analyzes “the queen’s two bodies” (p. 25).[3] Henrietta Maria becomes an extended social network in which English culture is defined against the commonplace French qualities of “femininity and foreignness” (p. 45), as well as anxieties over the encroachment of Catholicism. These responses come in the form of depictions of her marriage to Charles, various images of fashion, and the court spectacles in which she acted, alongside her husband’s theatrical promotions of his monarchy (p. 49). In connection with all of these, Stedman demonstrates Henrietta Maria’s active introduction of French customs and mores into England, as well as their dissemination especially through English writings that alternately accommodated and vilified her foreignness.

Continuing the survey of different realms of cultural practice that makes her study so engaging, in chapter three, “*So much æmulation, poverty, and the vices of swearing, drinking, and whoring: Charles II and Anglo-French Culture at the Restoration,*” Stedman examines the culture of the royal court during the period in which John Dryden saw “a second Norman conquest” (pp. 62–63, 67–68) and Samuel Pepys

made the complaint quoted in the chapter's title, aimed at the weakness supposedly ensuing from the introduction of impure elements into English culture. Stedman deftly extends her "king's two bodies" approach by analyzing the material conditions of Charles's importation of French culture into court and social life as well as written and visual reactions to it. In her increasing reliance on written texts, especially the diary of Pepys and some of the plays that interested him, she allows her study to settle into a literary framework, while maintaining the strong cultural and historical orientations that give it force. She finds particularly illuminating documents to focus on, not the least of which are a landmark cookbook and writings around cooking as cultural interaction, entailing both praise and disdain. In the 1653 translation of Pierre de la Varenne's *The French Cook*, the translator, identified as "I.D.G.," openly declared the superiority of French cooking, promoting and commenting on the transfer that the publication of the book enacted. Textual evidence from both Pepys and his patron, the Earl of Sandwich, indicate that among at least some of the nobility, the notion of French culinary superiority was attractive as a source of social status. Judged from the perspective of Huguenot refugee Maximilien-François Misson, however, it was English resistance to the spread of French cooking that marked persistent English backwardness. Going into dish-specific detail, Stedman presents an array of cookbooks and literary works with which this rather broad battle was waged. She finishes the chapter with a return to the anxieties of cultural exchange, manifested in reactions to Charles II's French mistresses, postulating that the creeping social malaise of vice, feminization, and suspicions was the deliberate project of Louis XIV to undermine English society. Charles's francophilia, embodied in his relationship with Louise de Kéroualle, became the linchpin in political criticism, as exemplified in the dialogue "Britannia and Raleigh" (from 1674 or 1675), which xenophobically appealed to personifications of old-time Englishness in order to indict Charles's absolutist leanings (pp. 105–106).

This focus on such documents and artifacts lays the ground for the primarily textual focus of the fourth chapter, "*Vanquishing our pens as our ancestors have with their swords: Textual and Visual Representations of Cultural Exchange.*" This is Stedman's longest, constituting more than half of the book. She begins by extending her comments on the role of representation in the study of cultural exchange, explaining theoretical notions of plot that allow her to consider the relationships between texts and reality. Crediting feminist narratology, she engages the concept of "cultural plot," through which the cultural stakes and investments of literary narrative may be illuminated. Again, her presentation of structuralism (in which she includes deconstruction) leans toward the caricatural, since many critics, chief among them Foucault, Derrida, and Ricoeur, were well aware of the problems of the relationship of language to reality and took measures to emphasize them. But the only place where this somewhat unnecessary argument poses a problem with her investigation is when she addresses the relationship of literary characters to real persons. Although she is right to contest a rather obtuse statement that she quotes, to the effect that "literary characters...do not refer to concrete persons of flesh and blood" (p. 209), it is an error to take this position as representative of generalized structuralism. Even if "literary characters are transformed into persons in the reader's (or audience's mind)" (p. 211—Stedman is paraphrasing Herbert Grabes), an analysis of this process begins with nothing else than the idea that this transformation involves processes of representation, an idea that hardly entails deploying "a lot of theoretical and analytical armour" (p. 212).

I qualify such argument as somewhat unnecessary not simply because it engages unrepresentative positions that need not be taken so seriously, but also because, as with Stedman's opening valorizations of events apart from their representations, it doesn't end up holding sway in her analysis. She does a wonderful job of examining English literary depictions of French characters and culture, usually through satire and comedy, covering the work of, among others, Samuel Butler, John Dryden, James Howard, Samuel Pepys, John Evelyn, George Etheridge, and Ben Jonson. Stedman's appreciation of comedy is particularly sharp when she examines the splendid and splendidly named Mrs. Finical Fart in Robert Howard and the Duke of Buckingham's *The Country Gentleman* from 1668–69 (pp. 244–46). One thing that Stedman could have included is a theory of satire as a response to and effect on cultural phenomena. She partly does so in her fine section on the theory of metaphor (pp. 235–42).

Whatever issue I take with Stedman's book—and my intention is to raise points of discussion rather than signal shortcomings—my overall assessment is that it is an excellent contribution to the emerging field of early modern Anglo-French cultural relations, all the more so for being so interdisciplinary in its approaches and scope. It offers a lesson to Anglophone institutions that have seen, alongside the shrinkage and absorption of comparative literature programs, a galvanization of the national literatures, as anachronistic as such divisions may be with regard to the early modern period. Ashgate deserves credit as one of a very few presses in the Anglophone world to give broad attention to transnational early modern studies, while most publishing houses, out of concern with sales, shy away from it. The one thing that keeps Ashgate a hair's breadth away from being a roundly top-notch press is its copyediting practices. Although Stedman, a native speaker of German, writes superbly in English, her text is also marked by a few grammatical oddities and unidiomatic usages. It isn't only the work of nonnative speakers that needs this kind of care. When Ashgate can provide the complete work of editing to all the titles in its exceptional lists, it will do full justice to them.

#### NOTES

[1] Key works by these authors are: Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, eds., *Les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988); Espagne, "Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle," *Genèses. Sciences sociales et histoire* 17 (1994): 112–21; and Hartmut Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich. Eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1999).

[2] Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[3] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

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