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REVIEWS

Selling the Story: Transaction and Narrative Value in Balzac, Dostoevsky, and Zola.

By JONATHAN PAINE. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2019. xiv+320 pp. £36.95. ISBN 978-0-67-4988843-9.

This book proposes economic models for the output of three authors emblematic of the professional writer in the first age of commercialized fiction. An introduction, 'The Economics of Narrative', articulates a pragmatic approach, grounded in 'economic criticism' (p. 5), to 'narrative as a commentary on the conditions of its own production' (p. 3): these include the novel's nineteenth-century status as a periodical genre, and the 'professional turn' whereby 'writers [made] a living [. . .] from the business of selling narratives' (p. 10) to readers, more or less liable to 'buy' (p. 11) narratives depending on how convincing the 'prospectus' (of mimetic claims) put forward in them was. Three prospectuses are discussed in turn.

'Balzac: Narrative as Business' identifies the 'emergence of the novel as a commercial driver' (p. 41) and the retreat of prose narrative to the periodical press as pervasive themes in Balzac's writing, specifically in terms of their impact on it during the composition (1835–47) of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. The running theme of the 'prospectus' is derived from its recurrent use in Balzac's work, where (commercial) 'prospectuses'—like those of the mimetic fictions recounting their failure and exposure—routinely turn out to be false.

'Dostoevsky: Who Buys the Story?' focuses on *Brat'ya Karamazovy* (*The Brothers Karamazov*), which deploys an eclectic mix of genres to articulate Dostoevsky's concerns and enlist reader attention to them, in a struggle between assertion of an authorial view of the value of literary discourse engaged with complex philosophical questions, and the need to attract and retain readers in a literary marketplace. Iteration—an established novelistic device 'with proven commercial function' (p. 163), exploited (for example) by Balzac—is key to the resolution of this struggle. Persistently repeating the motif of the sum of 3000 roubles, *Brat'ya Karamazovy* contains dozens of full or partial retellings of its central story, iterations critically related to the commercial context of the contemporary publishing industry, in particular to serialization.

'Zola: The Business of Narrative' focuses on two commercially themed novels, *La Curée* and *L'Argent*, charting the fortunes of the emblematically acquisitive Aristide Rougon/Saccard. These novels' 'enhanc[ement of] narrative value' is grounded in the realization that 'narratives of business also become part of the business of narrative' (p. 183). The key context here is the return, during Zola's career, of prose fiction to book form, accompanied by increases in literacy and population. Critical also is Zola's journalistic background. *La Curée*'s appeal to readers lies in its use of the salacious stuff of mass-circulation journalism: 'excess as narrative device' (p. 220). Zolian naturalism typically deploys the 'power to create illusion rooted in the reader's own expectations', only for the purpose of violating what David Baguley terms the 'contractual relationship of shared conventional expectations'

(p. 203). Naturalism, however, can be seen as much as a sales tool as literary philosophy (p. 248), and Zola ‘may be closer to Saccard than he [. . .] admit[s]’ (p. 243). If in *L’Argent*, the Banque Universelle is ‘a story told, or a prospectus sold, by Saccard’ (p. 238), the novel itself, ‘the story of a crash’, is ‘the crash of a story’ (p. 242): naturalist narrative bursts its own bubble.

The business analogies are occasionally somewhat oversold in Jonathan Paine’s interpretative pitch, and claims for ‘the reader’, despite caveats, would have benefited from greater theoretical context. However, the arguments are grounded within a well-digested range of relevant criticism, to which this work—containing useful appendices, including the provision of original quotations—is a welcome addition.

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LARRY DUFFY

Assessing the English and Spanish Translations of Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu. By HERBERT E. CRAIG. New York: Peter Lang. 2020. viii+344 pp. £74. ISBN 978-1-4331-7934-1.

Proust’s aphorism that the task of a writer resembles that of a translator is the starting point for Herbert Craig’s study of English and Spanish translations of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Proust himself dabbled in translation, and he conceived of literature as the translation of phenomenal experience into language. Translation was thus important for the French writer, both as an activity in its own right and also as a metaphor for the alchemy by which life is transformed into art. Therefore, it is fitting that translations of Proust’s work receive their share of the scholarly attention that has been dedicated to this giant of French letters. Spanish and English are logical choices for such a study owing to the fact that the first translations of Proust’s work were published in Spain and the United Kingdom. But the choice is not justified by precedence alone. The number of translations produced in both languages and Proust’s influence in the Spanish- and English-speaking worlds are important reasons to examine the texts through which the French writer is known in these different cultures. Furthermore, the story of Proust’s reception in other languages is fascinating not simply because of what it reveals about those other cultural contexts but also because of what it discloses about Proust’s work itself. With his comparative analysis of these translations, Craig contributes an important chapter to the story of Proust’s reception and, in his dissection of translators’ decisions about how to render Proust in other languages, uncovers something of the essence of the Proustian idiom.

Craig works his way methodically through the volumes of *À la recherche* and contrasts the various translations of each—first English, then Spanish. Each chapter begins with a survey of the reception of the translations and goes on to present a comparative analysis based on a representative section of the text. The examination of Proust’s incipit is illuminating, as is the discussion of different translations of ‘Combray’, ‘Un amour de Swann’, and ‘Les Intermittences du cœur’. Craig’s