

assertion of testimony within literature. Friedemann's analysis of Wiesels *La Nuit* trilogy asserts that after the word there is silence, and after silence, the gaze: from Moshe the Badle, whose Cassandra-like visions haunt the text, to Elisha, who in the aftermath of Auschwitz faces down his fears. The weight of the past literally obliterates the present and shapes the future in Wiesels' world. References to laughter are four times more common than tears in Schwarz-Bart's *Le Dernier des Justes*. Friedemann's analysis thus also affirms the poignancy of the tragicomic within *desastre* writing in its examination of instances of laughter, irony, sarcasm, and humour. The analysis of Langfus's *retour* to the theme of silence, events are once again untranslatable, and words struggle to provide meaning. Friedemann's success arises from the fact that he provides an analytical alternative to the idea of the indescribable, suggesting that within the varied pathways for author-witnesses of *desastre*, even silence can speak.

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doi:10.1093/fs/knq082

Disaccords parfaits: la réception paradoxale de l'œuvre de Milan Kundera. Edited by MARIE-ODILE THIROUIN and MARTINE BOYER-WEINMANN. Grenoble: Editions littéraires et linguistiques de l'Université de Grenoble, 2009. 361 pp. Pbk €30.00.

Following from an international conference held in Lyon in 2007, this collection of articles examines the current role and status of Milan Kundera's work by focusing on its reception both in what is now the Czech Republic and in France, the writer's home since 1975. Do we still read Kundera, and, if not, why has our interest in his writing waned? Conversely, has he become a 'classic' author popular amongst generations with no first-hand experience of Communism and hence able to read, for example, *The Joke* outside a political context? These are the questions that Marie-Odile Thirouin asks in her introduction to the volume. Divided thematically into four parts, the collection opens with a discussion of two notions pivotal to the writer's thinking, *Wahlverwandt* and Central Europe, which are instrumental in lifting Kundera's work out of the 'petit contexte national' (p. 33). The other three parts address, respectively, the responses to the author's Czech and French writings in his homeland; the tension between Kundera and his publishers, translators, and critics; and, finally, the (mis)readings of the writer's work. Unfortunately, in the absence of new material, little of what the contributors say is original: Kundera's publications have appeared since adopting French in 1986 are notably less complex than those he has written since. Nevertheless, some aspects of Kundera's work emerge here with a new freshness, as exemplified by Martine Boyer-Weinmann's essay linking the author's vituperations against those allegedly mishandling or misinterpreting his work with his protagonists' characteristics fits of anger, and Denis Reynaud's illuminating examination of the writer's evolving relationship with the heritage of the Enlightenment and especially with Diderot. Readers with no knowledge of Czech should find useful Martin Hybler's comprehensive introduction to Kundera's early writings, which, with the exception of the play *Magjitelé kámen* (*Les Propriétaires des clés*), the author, embarrassed by his youthful propensity for lyricism and his correlated Communist leanings, has 'purged' from his and essays. Kundera's efforts to control the reception of his work and to redraw the contours of his output by tirelessly rewriting and retranslating his novels is also the subject of Vladimir Papoušek's Derridean analysis of the author's (by definition) futile attempt to 'fix' the meaning of his writing, which, for deconstructionists, is always equivocal and in flux. Thus the main achievement of this volume, which, as a collection of conference papers developed into articles, suffers from the usual downsides of

concern that Esperanto might supplant less than unprejudiced, that what extent the 'culture of anti-war period also remains unclear. For s of New York, seemed to embody a future, there is much focus on the 're chapters' (p. 161). The section on the future has brought me back to the 20th century' (p. 76), also reflects the ess than sanguine as to the nation's and devastation. In this case as in her traumatic events. Instead of a to be a widespread anxiety about the French society. The future thus break with, the immediate past. is reinforced.

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Die Schwarz-Bart, Jorge Semprun, Elie Wiesel, 2007. 174 pp. Pbk €19.00.

the shape of the language used by us task, given the (over-)use of the notion that literary representation it which beggars description. The e writings, which Friedemann is at 'desastre' rather than 'Shoah' or a useful distinction, it is less than problematic in the context of his dispartially on pp. 152–54). André re texts inescapably imbued with in Nazi Europe. This criticism study of a writing beyond words. I task facing the author-witness of being limited or controlled by an e Semprun as prime examples e the authors, having confronted ledge, find their efforts frustrated 'space humaine, published just after ing the literary word to strike out r of biblical proportions: in the offered slightly in that he waited a (1963) and still longer before the onse, Friedemann shows, was to owed for the later contemplative memory, and the self-conscious

such a publication (the varied quality of the essays, repetitions, and so on), lies in stressing the cruelty of the predicament of exile authors, who are simultaneously reproached by their compatriots for betraying their native language and culture, and potentially misunderstood by their new public, whose cultural background, experience, and sensibility differ unavoidably from the authors' own.

doi:10.1093/fs/knq070

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Emmanuel Levinas. By SEÁN HAND. (Routledge Critical Thinkers). London: Routledge, 2008. xiv + 138 pp. Pb £12.99.

In this concise introduction Seán Hand consolidates his reputation as one of the leading commentators on Emmanuel Levinas's work. Hand's contributions to Levinas scholarship — most notably the edited volumes *The Levinas Reader* (1989) and *Facing the Other* (1996) — have long established the wide-ranging and erudite nature of his engagement with the Lithuanian-born philosopher's œuvre. Conforming now to the remit of the Routledge Critical Thinkers series, Hand outlines in clear expository style both the intellectual and the socio-historical contexts for Levinas's life and writings in order to introduce the key issues of his philosophy in eight short but well-structured chapters. The book begins with a brief biography before taking readers through Levinas's formative encounter with the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, which was to remain important to him throughout his career even as he gradually took more distance from their work to found his own original ethics. Separate, successive chapters are then devoted to the two best-known texts, *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being* (1974), before Hand examines in turn Levinas's views on the work of art, his Talmudic readings, his relation to politics, and his legacy to contemporary critical thinking. In addition to guiding readers skilfully through the most salient concepts and arguments of *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, Hand also attends to expression and style: he addresses the ethical ambition of the earlier text that fell short because it was written in the language of ontology, and he discusses the contorted, demanding prose of the latter, which sought to perform the very ethics that the first book aimed to describe. The chapter on the artwork is particularly impressive, since it takes on board the arguments of the contentious early essay 'Reality and its Shadow' (1948) without allowing its negative vision of the aesthetic dimension to occlude the more enabling relation between ethics and aesthetics that does eventually emerge through Levinas's work. The chapter on politics is also noteworthy for the attention paid to infrequently discussed post-war writings. Hand's defence of Levinas against his critics is compelling, especially in the section devoted to his legacy, in which critiques of Levinas by Badiou and Žižek are subjected to incisive counter-arguments. Yet this is no hagiography. Hand's remarks on Levinas's problematic treatment of the feminine, for example, show a necessarily critical take on his subject that will reappear in modified form in the more fractious context of Levinas's discussion of Zionism and the State of Israel. Here and elsewhere, Hand's judicious remarks encourage ethical vigilance towards whatever we read, Levinas's ethics included. The text concludes with a helpful annotated list of further reading, which will be an invaluable resource for its target student audience. The book succeeds in presenting challenging texts in introductory fashion without oversimplifying their complexity. Indeed, Hand makes the writings of this difficult thinker enticing and accessible simply by explaining why Levinas's work is so important.

doi:10.1093/fs/knq068

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Phenomenology or Deconstruction?
Ricoeur and Jean-Luc
University Press, 2008

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doi:10.1093/fs/knq076

Mythologies at 50: Barthes and I
of Nottingham French Stu
2008. iv + 88 pp. Pb £2

Despite his obvious talent f
turned into a monument. An
most popular work, *Mythologie*