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Charles Rearick, *Paris Dreams, Paris Memories: The City and its Mystique*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2011. 296 pp. \$24.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN-10: 080477093X.

Review by Roxanne Panchasi, Simon Fraser University.

Following author Julian Green's suggestion that we think about Paris "in the plural" (quoted by Rearick, p. 1), Charles Rearick has written a rich and entertaining history of the French capital's predominant myths and "image-making" from the nineteenth century to the present. *Paris Dreams, Paris Memories* is at once a study of historical love letters to the city and a scholarly homage marked throughout by the author's own affection for the Parisian past and present. Drawing on a range of material—Paris guidebooks and histories, literary works, the popular press, government documents, and an impressive array of secondary works—Rearick's is a book that only someone with decades of experience studying France and traveling to its capital could write.

In his introduction, Rearick promises a history of Paris as a "world" of its own, an examination of "social representations," their origins and persistence in the Parisian, broader French, and international imaginaries (p. 1). Divided into six chapters, *Paris Dreams* is organized chronologically while taking up a set of recurring themes. Beginning with the question, "What has made Paris so beloved?" (p. 8), Rearick's first chapter explores the origins of five key figures that resonate throughout the book: "the city of light," "old Paris," "the capital of pleasures," Paris "as a woman," and "Paname," the city as a village/collection of villages. Reaching back to the Middle Ages, but focused on the nineteenth century, the chapter outlines imaginative visions and versions of the city that became essential to the Parisian mystique by the early twentieth century.

The "city of light" referred metaphorically to Paris as a center of Enlightenment culture and civilization even before the gas and later electric illumination of city streets that spread with Haussmannization in the mid-nineteenth century. While Paris historically had been a site of architectural deterioration, physical and social ills, its lovers insisted on the city's intellectual and cultural refinement above all else. As Haussmann's renovations sought to transform Paris into the "capital of the world," defenders of "Old Paris" clung with great devotion to the disappearing neighborhoods and winding streets of their "authentic" city (pp. 19-22). Images of decay and darkness, such as those captured by the early-twentieth-century photographer Eugène Atget, could become emblems of a bygone world destroyed by barbaric projects of urban renewal and reform.

This tension between the city's "tradition" and "modernity" runs throughout Rearick's history of Paris from the Second Empire to the present day. As new forms of leisure and culture proliferated in the late nineteenth century, Paris's "reputation as a mecca of hedonism" (p. 27) reached new heights (and lows), using and contributing to the development of new media and forms of commercial exchange. According to Rearick, the pleasure tourism of areas like Montmartre staged a Paris where visitors could realize and be consumed by their desires. Rearick goes on to consider gendered representations of the city and its female inhabitants as "light-hearted, seductive, [and] fashionable" (p. 37). Finally, the chapter turns to "Paname," a village image of Paris evoking a traditional France of multiple regions and vernaculars.

Rearick's subsequent chapters follow the history of Paris from the First World War to the present. In chapter two, the author traces the persistence of memories of turn-of-the century Paris from 1914 to 1960. Fixated on areas like Montmartre and Montparnasse, a certain longing for the Paris of the Belle Epoque took shape in the decades after the war. Nostalgic representations of "the familiar old Paris of small local worlds" (p. 52), sighed their cultural sighs for narrow streets, historic buildings, and communities, as well as the old *fortifs* demolished in the interwar period. Rosy portraits of the Belle Epoque capital proliferated during the Depression and political crises of the 1930s. Rearick notes an emphasis in various sources on the "negative beauty" of a lost age with its lower standard of living and lack of modern conveniences (p. 59). Influenced by authors such as Paul Morand and filmmakers like René Clair, admirers of the Paris of 1900 engaged in a "willful forgetting of [the] era's hatreds, poverty, and crises" (p. 68). According to Rearick, as another war approached, "visions of an ever beautiful, felicitous Paris were particularly alluring and consoling" (p. 71).

Under the German occupation, Paris survived relatively unharmed in architectural terms while residents reverted to lives of quiet urban existence and "everyday life...slipped back in time to the turn of the century" (p. 74). Nostalgia for the Belle Epoque intensified in the wake of war, as the Liberation brought not just euphoria, but hardship, continued shortages of goods, and civil strife. Images of the city's pre-1914 golden age of grandeur drew attention away from the painful memories of wartime occupation and collaboration into the 1960s, all the while playing a vital role in the expansion of postwar tourism and consumption.

Rearick's third chapter examines the period from the end of the Second World War to 1980. Focusing on urbanists who sought to modernize the city and plan its future, the chapter returns to "Paname," a central trope used by preservationists who criticized postwar efforts to update the capital. Projects such as La Défense exhibited an enthusiasm for urban modernity and took inspiration from American economic prosperity and approaches to cities. Other plans--the construction of the Tour Montparnasse in the 14th arrondissement, the overhaul of parts of the 13th and 20th arrondissements--remade key areas of the city under first, the de Gaulle, and then the Pompidou administration. According to Rearick, the renovation and extension of Paris beyond its traditional physical boundaries went hand-in-hand with the demographic revolution of the postwar period, "plac[ing] new demands on the state and the administration of the metropolitan area" (p. 100). As RER lines connected the city center to a "Greater Paris" and its suburbs, the international popular and youth culture of the 1950s and 1960s also absorbed images and ideas from the world *extra muros*.

Touching briefly on the events of 1968, Rearick sees important links between the development of a Greater Paris region and the political upheaval that ricocheted from students in Nanterre and the Latin Quarter, to workers at Boulogne Billancourt's Renault factory and beyond. Taking the transformation of Les Halles in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a central (in every sense of the word) case, Rearick shows how the destruction of the market's pavilions and debates over the site's future exemplified a long-standing struggle between the forces of modernization and preservation in the capital.

Shifting to the consideration of a "*nouveau Paris*" into the 1970s, Rearick examines changes in the city under the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in chapter 4. In the years following the "festive days" (p. 121) of May '68, many of the sites of "old Paris" seemed to be disappearing while the fight between preservation and modernity appeared to be dying down. Rearick notes the emergence of new movements and festivals in this period, acknowledging the work of gay rights and anti-racism activists and French Communists in developing new forms of popular engagement, urban community, and leisure. In 1977, Paris found in Jacques Chirac its first mayor since the Commune of 1871. It was Chirac who took up, once again, the notion of a Paris of neighborhoods and villages, becoming a central architect of the revival of Belle Epoque imagery into the 1980s.

The rhetoric of an “old Paris” did not, however, stop projects of revitalization, demolition, and dislocation in areas such as the Marais, Place d’Italie, Montparnasse, Bercy, and the Champs Élysées, nor did it seem to take into account the waves of immigration to Paris that had significantly changed the city’s demographics and culture in the postwar period. The “mixed city” (p. 135) that developed during Chirac’s mayoralty and François Mitterrand’s presidency struggled to address issues of sanitation, traffic, noise, and poverty, while striving to be the cultural capital of a new Europe. Rearick moves from the discussion of Mitterrand’s *grand projets* to conflicts over gentrification and ethnic segregation, including the escalation of tensions between the capital and populations in the suburbs surrounding the city. Paris on the eve of the twenty-first century was “a mosaic of world cultures as never before” (p. 145), a site of museums and memory as well as new forms of political contestation and violence.

Examining contemporary residents’ representations of the city, Rearick explores “Paris in comparison” in a fifth chapter devoted to Parisians’ assessments of their city’s “greatness” relative to other urban centers: London, Vienna, Berlin, Prague, and New York. Linger on “a Parisian reflex tendency to consider the city a world leader” (p. 172) and a capital of Europe, civilization, art, pleasure, et cetera, Rearick emphasizes the physical persistence of Paris through the wars of the twentieth century. Whether because of its beauty, its monuments, its rooftops, or the Seine that divides its banks, the Paris of this new century is still, according to Rearick, convinced of its own uniqueness and superiority, as well as its intelligence, creativity, femininity, and romance.

Insisting on the continuing vitality and wonders of contemporary Paris, Rearick’s final chapter takes on the question of the city’s “soul” and “spirit,” including further observations by everyday Parisians about their hometown. Acknowledging the ways in which images of an eternal, transcendent Paris have “serve[d] to gloss over some very ugly history” (p. 195), Rearick moves through a final set of images of the Parisian “atmosphere”: the “beautiful charming woman” (p. 188), the city as a snail, a heart, a collection of “secret” sites, nighttime pleasures, beloved neighborhoods, and rare vestiges of village life. The Paris dreams that Rearick explores are interrupted here by the realities of daily life in the twenty-first century city and its suburbs, memories and reenactments of 1900 by the painful histories of 1942, 1961, and, more recently, 2005. Still, in these final pages, “the city and its mystique” appear intact, as much for the author himself as for those many Parisian and other sources he consults.

There is much to love about Paris, its illuminated past, present and future. *Paris Dreams* is packed with intriguing citations, fascinating stories, and wonderfully textured descriptions of a village/mecca/world that Rearick himself has explored and clearly enjoyed over many years. But this particular version of the Parisian past and present looks a little too fleetingly at some of the profound and complex cleavages in the history of the French capital. Moments of political revolution and crisis—1871 and 1968 most prominently—appear here in faded relief. Rearick’s discussion of class seems underdeveloped, references to slum-clearing, the city’s poor residents, and the charm of “former ateliers in working-class quarters” (p. 224) notwithstanding. Gendered and sexualized imagery and actual women also figure in Rearick’s glossary of representations of Paris, its pleasures, and the *femme parisienne*. Yet, there is a surprising absence in these chapters of any serious engagement with the work of scholars of gender and sexuality, let alone an examination of the roles of women as historical agents and citizen-inhabitants of, rather than just figures for, the city. Immigrants, ethnic and racial others make appearances throughout *Paris Dreams*, but more as disruptions to picturesque, nostalgic landscapes of memory than as figures whose presence profoundly challenges many of the essentialist notions of Parisian (or French) cultural identity treated in the book. In the end, this study of clichés about Paris reinforces some of the very tropes it sets out to analyze.

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