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Dominique Kalifa, *La véritable histoire de la « Belle Époque »*, Paris: Fayard, 2017. 296pp. €20 (pb). ISBN 9782213655291.

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Two clever paratextual elements of Dominique Kalifa's book draw the reader in. First is the cover image, a black and white still from Jacques Becker's 1952 film, *Casque d'or*. It shows Simone Signoret, Dominique Davray, and other actors as "Belle Époque" characters pushed up against the glass storefront window of a bar, intently peering inside. The extreme close-up accentuates the artificiality of their "Belle Époque" look, constructed by hairstyles, make-up, groomed moustaches, hats, feather boas, scarves, and lace. Their fascination and collective stares, all directed to the same point, evoke our own shared curiosity about the "Belle Époque." The image stands out since the book includes very few visual examples. It emphasizes the constructedness of the Belle Époque as a historical notion that has transformed over time and reveals a great deal about the preoccupations of the generations that have defined it.

Second, the title Kalifa gives to his remarkable study is not a typical academic book title. It evokes the detective genre and criminal inquiries, both subjects of earlier work by the historian. Throughout the book, he likens his methods to those of a detective who stalks or hunts the Belle Époque through time ("Cette Belle Époque que je traque," p.81). Like the title, the book is accessible and engaging but rich with references for readers who want to pursue the new avenues that Kalifa opens. The author's reflections on his methods and scholarly process appear as dated journal entries at regular intervals in the text. They function like short intermissions, marked in italics, and further enrich an engaging study.

The book eschews the standard definition of the Belle Époque, that the period was so named retrospectively, sometime after the Great war, and that it was not necessarily a happy time for all. Instead, Kalifa traces the origins and changing meanings of the expression over time, examining the representations of the chrononyme (a name given to a temporal designation) in novels, films, songs, and the visual arts to show the changing "imaginary" of the Belle Époque.

Kalifa's study progresses chronologically, divided into three parts with titles used to designate the Belle Époque that can all be superimposed on the past but reflect a shift in the perspective held of the period by those who used them. In "L'Époque 1900" we learn that, contrary to expectations, the expression "Belle Époque" did not exist at all in the first decades of the twentieth century. When was nostalgia for this period first felt and for what period, exactly? Nostalgia might have constructed the imaginary of the period as early as the end of the Paris exhibition of 1900, when the fairgrounds were dismantled and visitors were left with their memories. Most would argue that it was during the 1920s, after the war, when Montparnasse came to replace Montmartre, that there was nostalgia for the Moulin Rouge and the cultural vitality of the immediate pre-war years. Kalifa is more specifically interested in when the expression "Belle Époque" was first used to designate the years around 1900. His extensive scouring of literary, artistic, cinematic, and musical sources reveals that an imaginary of the "époque 1900" began to emerge in the early 1930s. Paul Morand's book *1900* (1931) offered a first example of delimiting the

period. Roger Martin du Gard's *Les Thibault* (1936) also referred to an era bookended by the end of the Dreyfus affair and the beginning of World War I, and Abel Gance's popular 1939 film *Paradis Perdu* repeated and further cemented the idea of a joyful pre-war period.

In the second part of the book, Kalifa shows that the imaginary of the Belle Époque began to take firm shape during the Occupation and the Fourth Republic. A radio show called "Ah, la Belle Époque" heard on Radio-Paris beginning in 1941 played a decisive role. Animated by André Alléhaut, the popular show evoked a carefree, peaceful time through music, and the host made frequent reference to "la Belle Époque" in his commentary. In 1943, the radio show became a live musical theatre spectacle and its success continued. The Belle Époque was thus born during the Occupation when the pleasure-seeking, luxurious life-styles associated with the era corresponded to a certain German idea of France. One might expect, then, that the nostalgia for the era would have ended with the armistice, but Kalifa shows that it was just gathering speed. He includes a list (pp.268-70) of the over sixty-seven films set in the Belle Époque that were made in France between 1943 and 1968. Kalifa suggests that the success of modernist art, literature, and music in the 1950s and 60s led to a renewed interest in the pre-World War I origins of these movements.

Finally, in "L'Épreuve de la 'fin-de-siècle'," Kalifa shows that in the years following 1968, the Belle Époque continued to fascinate, but the focus changed from society women, carriages, and haute couture, to the Belle Époque of marginalized groups. Women, gay and lesbian communities, and the poor gained attention from scholars and in popular media. Interest shifted from Feydeau to Jean Lorrain or Marcelle Tinayre, and popular worker's songs were revived. In the visual arts, Toulouse-Lautrec continued to provide a visual imaginary for the period. This is a different view of the Belle Époque again, one in which contemporary scholars, including Kalifa himself, will recognize their own positions and interests (in decadence, gender and sexuality, or crime and the underworld, for example). In another shift, Kalifa notes the emergence of an interest in regional postcards from the years around 1900, beginning post-1968 and through the 1980s. He provides a bibliography of titles, published roughly between 1973 and 2014, of a popular series of books about life in the Belle Époque in regional cities, towns, and provinces (pp. 271-79). The imaginary of the Belle Époque thus extends to all social classes and regions. Kalifa even finds evidence of the expression used, in French, to designate moments in Italian and Brazilian history.

Kalifa's book is a work of insightful, thought-provoking scholarship that sheds new light on the Belle Époque and its representations. It is particularly innovative in its reflection on history, how history is constructed (by official historians and the "general public"), how its constructions evolve, and how they reflect the outlook of the groups that have transformed it.

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