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David Gascoigne and Ana de Medeiros, eds., *Marie Nimier: Le sujet et ses écritures / The Self in the Web of Language*. Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, New York, Wien: Peter Lang, 2021. xii + 300 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$67.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781800791954; \$67.95 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781800791978.

Review by Lisa Connell, University of West Georgia.

Since the publication of her first novel *Sirène* in 1985, Marie Nimier has sustained scholarly attention for her use of memory, trauma, corporeal experiences, and autobiography to explore the vast concept of subjectivity. Indeed, as arguably one of the best-known contemporary French women writers to scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, Nimier has continued to enrich how readers can understand the points of contact between the external world and the internal world of affect, perception, and self-knowledge. Given the perennial interest in Nimier's four-decade-long writing career, it is no small task to offer innovative readings of her corpus and her primary themes of identity and subjectivity. Editors David Gascoigne and Ana de Medeiros accomplish just such a task with their edited volume.

Acknowledging Nimier's "abiding preoccupation with human identity as shaped in its constant evolution by many factors" (p. 1), the editors use Paul Ricœur's notion of identity to loosely federate the essays in their collection. [1] Described as a negotiation that takes place between two poles—that of "sameness," on one end, and the dynamic changes that influence "selfhood" on the other—Ricœur's theory, for the editors, elucidates the forces that allow an identity to remain recognizable even as it is subject to a surfeit of cognitive, historical, and sensorial experiences. Within Ricœur's index of fixity (and the stability it offers) and the transformative potential of experiences of place, gender, and history that generate selfhood, the idea of *l'entre-deux* is a rich concept that the editors deploy to particularly good effect. As a narrative space that serves to illustrate a character's movement between the poles of fixity and change, *l'entre-deux* provides a malleable framework for exploring Nimier's unpredictable evocations of the forces that trigger her characters' *prises de conscience*. In this way, the overarching idea of *l'entre-deux* allows the volume's contributors to pursue broadly divergent topics within a common goal of shedding light on Nimier's protean representations of subjectivity and subject formation. In another sense, as the editors explain, Ricœur's concept situates language as a key mechanism that at once reveals and builds the shifts between a stable and evolving sense of self. This focus thus helps create a cohesive volume that casts a wide net over disparate themes in Nimier's work without losing sight of the narrative stylistics that give shape to her singular voice.

Divided into five parts, the dual-language volume features a collection of fourteen highly readable essays that amply meet its goal of providing new insight into Nimier's narratives of identity. The volume also presents creative work by and about the author, including a new short story written by Nimier, a heretofore unpublished version of a text in her 2019 novel *Les Confidences* and its English translation, and a poem that reflects on the creative synergies surrounding the collaborative project behind *Les Confidences*. As we will see below, these creative additions to the volume underscore the shifts in the author's writing interests and suggest the kind of dialogue between Nimier and her readers that appears in some of her books.

"Un virgule six mètres carrés," the newest short story by Marie Nimier, inaugurates the collection of essays. With its plot centered on a young girl coming of age in the absence of her father, the story reprises a familiar theme for readers of Nimier. Its emphasis on writing, storytelling, and identity provides a compelling point of departure for the fourteen essays that follow, underscoring both the longevity and manifold representations of these central concerns for the author. Indeed, although Nimier returns to prevalent themes of marginalization, complex family ties, and quests for self-knowledge, she does so from the perspective of race and racism, which are relatively new areas of inquiry for the author. With her signature construction of complex characters that express sometimes trenchant and often poignant observations of the world around them and their place in it, Nimier intervenes in the increasingly diverse and evolving debate around French national identity and official narratives of France as a "color blind" nation.

Part one, "La filiation et ses complexes / Problematic Heritages," comprises four essays and centers largely on unresolved issues in relationships that haunt many of Nimier's protagonists. Adina Stroia casts a wide net in her chapter "The Other Nimier: Paternal Hauntology and Queer Politics in Marie Nimier's Works," which examines recurring and problematic paternal figures in several of Nimier's novels. From the vantage points of gender, marginality, and autobiography, Stroia traces the spectral influence of Nimier's father on her writing project to situate the fluid and porous boundaries between self and other within queer practices. Like Stroia, Marzia Caporale looks to the enduring significance of Nimier's father and his premature death through an intriguing comparison between Nimier's *Reine du silence* and Annie Ernaux's *La Place*. Framed by Barthes's theorization of writing about death as a means to refuse and attenuate the grief of loss, Caporale's chapter "À la recherche du père perdu: écriture du deuil et quête identitaire dans *La Place* d'Annie Ernaux et *La Reine du silence* de Marie Nimier" nimbly pairs these two novels in ways that elucidate the paradox of giving silence a voice, as well as the ways in which these projects of reconstructing a lost father contribute to their own processes of self-construction. Sylvie Vignes's chapter "Récits de filiation ou comment défaire les nœuds et renouer le fil: *La Reine du silence* de Marie Nimier et *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* de Delphine de Vigan" also offers a rich pairing of novels. Although it explores the evocative juxtaposition of death and writing readers encounter in the preceding chapter, Vignes succeeds in probing the rich stylistics of the narratives that serve to recuperate the lost parents of Nimier's and de Vigan's novels. In doing so, she proposes a cautiously salutary perspective on the violence and indifference that characterized Roger Nimier's relationship with his daughter Marie. Thierry Illouz's chapter "*Je suis un homme* ou l'édification du sujet" closes the first section and carefully maps out the tensions between the main protagonist's refusal and acceptance of the stories, histories, and people that shape his sense of self. His meticulous close readings of the main character, and chronological approach to his development, celebrate the novelist's task of crafting characters who not only

shed light on how the external and internal worlds connect, but who also invite readers to question these mechanisms.

Part two, “Écrire le moi sensible, sensuel/ Writing Sentience and Sensuality,” offers three chapters that build on Nimier’s longstanding inquiry into the body as a source of knowledge and identity formation. Carol J. Murphy builds her investigation into sight, the visible, and the unseen around Freud’s theory of the Uncanny and the metaphor of the kaleidoscope in her essay “Marie-Marie: l’optique kaléidoscopique dans *Photo-Photo*.” Despite using the Uncanny as a theoretical anchor for examining the seen and unseen in *Photo-Photo*, Murphy wants to escape a psychological reading of the novel, and effectively does so by connecting the refracted and reflected dimensions of the Uncanny to a broader kaleidoscopic metaphor of images from the past and present that shape identity. After Murphy demonstrates the power of sight, Marinella Termite directs readers to the influence of smell in “L’Odeur en papier: Anatomie d’un sens chez Marie Nimier.” Termite’s chapter looks to evocations of odors in a range of Nimier’s texts, providing scholars interested in the links between cognition, language, and writing a unique and rich resource from which to approach Nimier’s work. The section concludes with Christian Uwe’s chapter, “La Partition du désir.” Here, Uwe introduces readers to the powerful interplay between music and desire, corroborating the importance Nimier attributes to sensory experiences and (self)knowledge.

In the wake of the senses and the roles they play in the lives of Nimier’s protagonists, part three, “Le Sujet et la littérarité / The Subject in the Web of Literature,” turns to key narrative strategies—such as blurring generic boundaries and intertextuality—deployed by Nimier. Sure to be of great interest for scholars of autobiography, Patricia Hodges’ chapter exposes the tensions of representing personal truths and historical moments through the inherently creative and subjective tools of writing and storytelling in “Generic Ambiguity in *Les Inséparables*.” Hodges provides crucial moorings for grasping the prevalent autobiographical underpinnings in Nimier’s writing project. Lorna Milne’s chapter “‘Le roi assis’ and ‘la Reine du silence’: ‘Silent’ Intra-Intertexts in *Je suis un homme*” is a brilliant study of the palimpsestic rereadings and rewritings of several texts not only to explore the duality of the main character of *Je suis un homme*, but also to foreground intertextuality as a primary means with which Nimier counters the traumatic injunction to remain silent she experienced as a child. Floriane Blanchot follows a similar intertextual thread in her chapter “*La Plage* de Marie Nimier, un nouveau T-Beach?” Looking at the strong influence, conscious or not, of Marguerite Duras on Nimier, Blanchot traces the shared images and themes between *La Plage* and Duras’s *L’Amour* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, such as triangular relationships, beaches, and complex female protagonists, that potently link the authors and these works.

Blanchot’s essay also provides a segue to part four, dedicated entirely to studies of *La Plage*. Although at first glance “Un sujet qui se cherche: l’exemple de *La Plage* / *La Plage* and the Search for Selfhood” might risk redundancy, the essays in this section provide varied readings of the novel, quickly dispelling any hesitations readers might have about three successive forays into the same novel. Adrienne Angelo’s chapter “Reparative Revisions: Writing and Self-Creation in *La Plage*” enters into the novel’s psychological dimensions of self-discovery, guiding readers through Nimier’s careful, however ambivalent, presentation of the salutary nature of introspection. The chapter that follows, Jeanne-Sarah de Larquier’s “L’Histoire en partage dans *La Plage* de Marie Nimier,” examines the fluid spatial and temporal features of the beach, identifying them as part of a timeless locus of storytelling. Moreover, she investigates the novel

in part through the lens of surrealist poems and paintings, making a broader interdisciplinary connection between the novel's narrative aesthetics and elements of the Surrealist movement. David Gascoigne's highly original chapter, "*La Plage: l'abstrait, l'élémentaire, le charnel*," in part takes a scientific approach to the novel, first using geometrical and algebraic equations to elucidate the marked absences in the novel, to then follow the protagonist's evolving relationship to the earth, air, and water around her and her burgeoning awakening to sensory and erotic experiences.

The final part, "Nimier: dialogue et mises en scène / Nimier in Dialogue and Performance," reflects on Nimier's underexamined work for theatre. The inclusion of creative works by Florence Jou and Nimier returns readers to the author's world through her own words. The section's inaugural chapter, Ana de Medeiros's "Confessions as Theatre: Marie Nimier's *Les Confidences*," traces the figure of the confidant in French theatre from the seventeenth century to Nimier's configuration in her 2019 novel. In doing so, Medeiros brings a fresh perspective to longstanding questions about the author's first-person narratives as well as the collaborative work she has done with theatre and dance troops. Florence Jou captures the unpredictable nature of the exchanges between Nimier and the public in her poem "Enquête#Bifurcations3." The volume then concludes with a revised version of "Le Compas," a text written by Nimier for *Les Confidences* and translated by John Fletcher. Much like the short story that inaugurates the volume, this brief narrative exposes a sharper attention to the lasting impacts of France's colonial project than readers have previously seen from the author, hinting at, perhaps, new directions to come for this prolific writer.

This book promises to appeal to longtime readers of Nimier as well as newcomers to her writing. The collection of well-written essays offers creative and compelling readings of Nimier's work that can serve to introduce readers to the author's contributions to the field of autofiction, gender, and memory, to name only a few themes, or prompt new areas of inquiry for established researchers of her work. What is more, the inclusion of creative works not only allows readers to discover Nimier's newest texts, but also reflects the creative energies of an author whose writing project includes song, theatre, and dance. The volume balances the delicate undertaking of paying homage to and shedding critical light on Nimier's books. Above all, it demonstrates the protean nature of her work and the dynamic readings her books, be they her first novels or most contemporary pieces, continue to inspire.

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NOTES

[1] Paul Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

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