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Adina Balint and Sara Buekens, eds., *Les ambiances dans les littératures de langue française du XIXe siècle à nos jours*. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2024. vii + 224 pp. $39.00 C.A.D. (pb). ISBN 9782766304578; $32.00 C.A.D. (epub). ISBN 9782766304592.

Review by Jill Cornish, Baylor University.

*Les ambiances dans les littératures de langue française du XIXe siècle à nos jours* is a collected volume presenting an introduction and twelve essays on the idea of ambiance, which is based mainly on Bruce Bégout's *Le concept de l'ambiance* (2020) and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature* (2012). Adina Balint and Sara Buekens argue in the introduction that, although the notion of ambiance and its effects has been explored in philosophy and social sciences--as with Bégout's text, as well as Tallagrand, Thibaud, and Tixier's *L'usage des ambiances. Une épreuve sensible des situations* (2021)--there has been very little attention given to ambiance within literatures written in French from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The introduction argues for the study of ambiances at the intersection of theory and poetics within literature written in French. The authors contend that, until now, ambiance in francophone literatures has been relegated to the background, defined as everything that surrounds a subject; but this volume will bring to the forefront similar ideas as those of Gumbrecht in his reading "pour la *Stimmung*" (2012) within German literature, that is, sensation and atmosphere.

Contextualizing ambiance within its theoretical framework, the introduction identifies certain characteristics of literary ambiance that will apply to the case studies presented in the essays that follow. The term includes the emotions provoked by one's atmospheres; the "everyday" (as opposed to the "exceptional") quality inherent in one's ambiance that reveals one's experience of the world (p. 2); and ambiance as a relational tool for the narrator, as a mediator between the subject and the world, but which rejects dualisms and allows the narrator to perceive the world and its minute experiences. The authors conclude the section in which they discuss definitions of literary ambiance by arguing that the different approaches to ambiance--from place, to space, to affect, to senses--highlight the richness of this theme that will be explored in each essay. Indeed, the essays bring forth the three main axes or perspectives of reading ambiances established by Balint and Buekens: first, the historical notion of ambiance as atmosphere, milieu, and environment; second, ambiance as a driving theme connecting individual and collective experiences and the relationship between literary subject and spaces; and third, the techniques used in the writing of ambiance.

With such a broad term that is relatively new to the study of literature written in French, it is difficult to fully grasp an initial, working definition without some clear examples in mind. The theoretical framework cited, based mainly on Bégout's and Gumbrecht's respective works, left me wondering how the concept of ambiance in literary studies differentiates itself from similar topics also mentioned, like space, atmosphere, and environment. The introduction might have benefitted from providing a few more concrete examples to help define the topic at the beginning; however, the proceeding essays all served to clarify these more theoretical definitions given at the outset, particularly in the second essay where Bégout's definition of ambiance is cited again more fully and then examined in more detail.

The essays themselves are organized in three sections. The first section, "Écriture de l'ambiance/du sensible," explores the writing of emotions that characterize ambiances of amazement or violence. The second section, "Espaces ambianciels," explores the spaces related to ambiances, particularly of cities or countries of remembrance, and the different typologies therein (e.g., sad, nocturnal, or mysterious ambiances). The third section, "Ambiance et vie ordinaire," explores the representation of daily life through ambiances marked by solitude, vulnerability, and even joy. Although the title of the volume, as well as the introduction, suggest a chronological thread of ambiances in literatures from the nineteenth century through today, which is not expounded upon in great detail, the actual categorization by technique or theme is effective in drawing out comparisons for the reader among the literary works presented and rendering the various aspects and applications of ambiance to the study of literature in French more visible.

The first section concentrates heavily on the emotions produced by ambiances within the text, both for the characters and the readers. In the first essay, Aline Lebel maintains that the experience of evil ("l'expérience du mal" p. 19) for Marc Graciano's characters is revealed stylistically and narratologically through "l'écriture du sensible" (p. 13), which produces the kinds of affects (shock, despair, violence, etc.) that later allow for reparation, both for the characters in the novels and for the reader. The second and third essays expound on this sensation to explore ambiances of ghosts and specters within the novels of Lydie Salvayre and Roger Caillois, respectively. The temporal aspect of ambiance brings the three essays of the section together as they align the emotions of memory and stories with writing ambiances. As Corentin Bouquet and Jean Philippe Arias Zapata demonstrate, "l'écrit devient le corps de l'ambiance" (p. 39), an idea that Stéphane Neri pushes further, presenting a deeper understanding of ambiance through two main characteristics: "sa dimension incertaine et anti-dualiste" and "son 'attrait affectif'" (p. 50).

The second section of essays expounds on the aforementioned relationship between space, time, atmosphere, and ambiance. Florence Fix establishes the definition of ambiance versus atmosphere at the end of the nineteenth century in naturalist, impressionist, and decadent works by Zola, Huysmans, and Mirbeau, as well as Mirbeau's writings on Manet, Monet, and Van Gogh. The appearance of atmospheres in the novel, when written about by the naturalist, generate emotions in the narrator-esthete and the reader-spectator, emotions that last and have an atemporal impact on the observer. In this way, Fix argues that the term "atmosphere" is "une qualité de la nature," while the term "ambiance" is the transformation of this atmosphere into art and therefore represents "une capacité de l'individu à ressentir cette qualité [de l'atmosphère], et

pour l'artiste, de la restituer dans une oeuvre" (p. 77). Sébastien Roldan continues with an analysis of Alfred de Vigny's poem *Paris: Élévation* (1831) and Émile Zola's novel *Germinal* (1885) to argue that the ambiances created in both the poem and the novel enhance the reader's understanding of the historical moment of industrialization and progress, ultimately to underscore the precarious nature of this moment, replicated in the affect produced by the ambiance of nighttime fog. The final two essays in this section serve as case studies of literary ambiances in an effort to better understand a few lesser-studied works. Marianne Ducharme explores Gabriel Roy's *Cet été qui chantait* (1972), while Mattia Scarpulla examines Ying Chen's *Blessures* (2016) and Yara El-Ghadban's *Le Parfum de Nour* (2015). Ducharme performs a close reading of Roy's stories themselves, concentrating in particular on "Monsieur Toung" and "Jeannot-la-Corneille," to argue that ambiance applies both to the diegesis of the stories as well as to simple descriptions of that summer within the stories. In juxtaposing diegesis and description, euphoria and dysphoria, light and darkness, life and death Ducharme demonstrates that ambiance upholds these dichotomies while also unifying them through their production of affect on the narrator, character, and by extension the reader of Roy's text. Scarpulla, on the other hand, examines "ambiances somatiques," or the art of choreographic movements of daily life within the novels of Chen and El-Ghadban. These ambiances allow the characters of both novels to find contentment in their daily lives and avoid the negative emotions associated with the memories of the wars in the countries they have fled. Scarpulla's essay positions itself nicely within the organization of the volume as it speaks both to the spaces in which the characters find themselves and the dailyness of life, which will be the subject of the next section of essays.

The third and final section thus presents five more essays that act as case studies of ambiances within daily life in literary texts. Agnieszka Loska's analysis of single motherhood in Virginie Noar's *La nuit infinie des mères* (2021) and Carole Fives's *Tenir jusqu'à l'aube* (2018) is a convincing example of how an understanding of ambiance in literature can raise awareness of the difficulties of real life and can highlight novelists whose work helps us see others and make those others feel seen. Zineb Amermouch's essay on Leïla Slimani's novels demonstrates how different ambiances affect the characters, how they are tied to characters' memories, and how they draw attention to the socio-political situation of colonial and postcolonial Morocco in the 1950s and 60s. Claire Massy-Paoli juxtaposes the ambiance of the quotidian and the ambiance of music in Christian Gailly's "tétralogie" of novels to underscore the inextricable link between the two for Gailly, himself a musician turned writer. Etienne Tancré presents a convincing study of ambiances in Alain Damasio's contemporary science fiction novel *Les furtifs* (2019) to demonstrate how ambiances appear not just in the diegesis of the novel, but also as spaces created for the reader drawn into the "ambiance de vertige et d'émerveillement" inherent in the science fiction genre itself (p. 185). Finally, Aude Leblond cites many examples of authors writing about reading--such as Clémentine Mélois, Pierre Bayard, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Marcel Proust--and analyses the ambiances created by readers who remember their reading of literary works. These ambiances are constructed from a combination of the space within the story and the readers' surroundings during their reading.

While all the essays in the volume are well crafted and add important distinctions to the study of literary ambiances, a few stand out as particularly memorable for their nuance and critical contributions to the field, as well as for being enjoyable and interesting reads, even for readers unfamiliar with the primary texts on which they are based. Though nearly all the essays cite

Bruce Bégout's definition of ambiance, particularly with regard to its "tonalité affective," the second essay by Bouquet and Zapata presents the clearest and most concise discussion of ambiance through a thorough examination of Bégout's text, then a masterful application of that definition in a reading of Salvayre's novels. Next, Scarpulla's addition of choreography and dance theory to the discussion of ambiance was adept and well-situated within the volume. He delivers a strong conclusion that speaks to the power of personal connection to heal the wounds created by the ambiances of exile. Then, Massy-Paoli's essay on Christian Gailly stands out as a profound textual analysis full of nuance and humor that leave the reader wanting to read Gailly's novels. Similarly, Tancré's essay on Alain Damasio's science fiction is as convincing as it is entertaining, giving the reader unfamiliar with his novel wonderful context for the literary discussion and the impetus to read more of Damasio.

Readers of this volume will undoubtedly appreciate the variety of essays and texts discussed while not feeling overwhelmed by the breadth of periods and genres covered. Scholars in the field of francophone literatures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially those centered on topics such as space, place, temporality, and memory, will appreciate the interdisciplinarity and exemplary close readings of texts in the volume. Graduate students will find this text helpful as an example for how to engage a topic from a variety of time periods and perspectives, while even advanced undergraduates in francophone literatures courses might find individual essays helpful as introductions to new texts and clear presentations of close reading. The organization of essays is cohesive and while each essay can stand beautifully alone, they are nevertheless enhanced as a collection, allowing the reader to piece together characteristics of such a complex topic such as ambiance.

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