

## Roche on Boulard (2014)

Boulard, Stéphanie. *Rouge Hugo*. Paris: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2014. Pp. x + 413. ISBN: 978-2-7574-0604-5

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In this dense and intense study, Stéphanie Boulard orients and organizes her reading of Hugo's fictional *oeuvre* around color. She argues the ways in which the various manifestations of the color red, in particular, carry forward Hugo's ongoing reflection on the necessary violence of the Revolution and point at the same time to the vitality and creative impulses at work (hence the title, *Rouge Hugo*). While Boulard treats motifs and themes well known to those familiar with Hugo's fiction—from the guillotine, sewers and slang, to monstrosity and paternity—the approach has a freshness that is further bolstered by regular exploration of Hugo's graphic corpus, called upon here not simply to illustrate Boulard's argument, but to underscore the deeply dynamic interplay among modes of expression.

The body of the study is divided into seven sections, in which Boulard endeavors to show the myriad ways in which the specter of 1793 serves as a generative force in Hugo's fiction, probing the metaphorical relationships between blood and ink, between the exacting tools of guillotine and pen, and their linguistic and visual mutations.

The first section ("Dame guillotine") develops Boulard's argument of the centrality of the red of the guillotine to and in Hugo's fiction, and of the prominence of heads and faces in his work—heads deformed and distorted, heads as seen through a very particular art of the portrait, phantom faces, and the new and real self-portraiture that was photography, ably understood and employed by Hugo for symbolic and commemorative purposes. Sections two and three ("La coupure aux lèvres" and "L'impie-oeuvre") undertake close readings of *L'Homme qui rit* and *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, respectively. Focusing her attention on the characters of Gwynplaine and Gilliatt, Boulard explores how the cutting or wounding of each—Gwynplaine through his imposed facial deformity and Gilliatt through his encounter with the natural perils of *Les Douvres* and the octopus—insistently drives each narrative on multiple levels.

In the next three sections of the study ("Notre-demoiselle," "Le tout-à-l'égout," and "L'argot de Hugo"), Boulard looks at the ways in which the dominance of red is countered—or completed—by the presence of green in Hugo's fiction: the green of femininity, as embodied in Esmeralda of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and the green of language, as displayed in the secretive workings of slang. She also examines the relationship between the flow of the guillotine's refuse and that of the sewer, contending that these two objects of obsession each form and respond to the Hugolian principle of engulfment. Boulard's treatment of these topics, like those before them, is characterized above all by the intimate nature of her reflection; if she is writing for a reader, it is one who shares her fascination and familiarity and thus indulges her in what feels at times like an intensely personal conversation with herself, underpinned by an only partially revealed theoretical frame (Hélène Cixous, Philippe Bonnefis, and Jacques Derrida, principally) and supported by occasional contextual references to critical works.

The study's final section ("H") also serves as its conclusion. Here Boulard considers the mysteries and significance of the name in Hugo's fiction and drawings. Analysis of the naming practice and principle employed by Hugo in creating his characters is followed by an evaluation of the ways in which his own name is self-reflexively grafted throughout his body of work, resulting in a complex dynamic between filiation and genealogical and literary heritage.

*Rouge Hugo* adds importantly to recent and past Hugo scholarship; it is a smart study anchored in Boulard's deep fluency in the work. If its inward quality is on the one hand the study's virtue, it is, on the other, its shortcoming in that it closes itself off from a larger critical dialogue. *Rouge Hugo* does not situate itself in relation to what has come before, nor does it engage with Hugo scholarship outside of France, most notably the multiple works of Kathryn Grossman. Why is another book on Hugo's fiction needed? What is said here that hasn't been said elsewhere? Boulard surely knows the answers to these questions; acknowledging the study's place in this critical heritage would have strengthened the otherwise rich reflection.

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