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Possessions: Essays in French Literature, Cinema and Theory  
(review)

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*Possessions: Essays in French Literature, Cinema and Theory*. Edited by JULIA HORN and LYNSEY RUSSELL-WATTS. (Modern French Identities, 24). Bern, Peter Lang, 2003. 223 pp. Pb £28.00.

This book emerges from the fifth annual Cambridge French Graduate Conference held in 2001, and gathers together work by fledgling researchers and senior academics on the theme of possession. The result is a superb volume of articles, which covers the full historical range of French literary studies and includes cogent discussion of critical theory and cinema. The different contributions turn on issues of possession, dispossession and repossession from varied angles, expertly orchestrated by Julia Horn and Lynsey Russell-Watts. Gendered possession is a key concern of a number of articles. Susan Griffiths reflects on questions of ownership of the female body in the eighteenth century in the work of Crébillon fils. Valerie Worth-Stylianou's absorbing reading of the early modern texts of Louise de Savoie and Marguerite de Valois explores how women of the period take possession of their experience of pregnancy, birth and its aftermath through writing. And in the more recent context of the French New Wave, Fiona Handyside produces a lively piece on the possessive male gaze and the female star in *Jules et Jim*. Psychoanalysis is the privileged theoretical discourse for many contributors, whether the focus is on gender or on identity more generally. Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek aid James R. Simpson's persuasive analysis of authorial style and voice in the *Roman de Renart*. Joseph Harris's excellent study of the abbé de Choisy rethinks the psychoanalytic concept of identification as he considers the abbé's attempts to posit himself as the active subject and possessor of his partner's gender performances. Francesca Nicholson makes an eloquent Lacanian reading of the shared image of the glove in the work of Giraut and Castelloza. Katherine Griffiths's flowing article on Zola argues that his writing outstrips subsequent psychoanalytic conclusions on the formation of identity, by staging the return of a ghostly femininity. And Libby Saxton's stunning discussion of the filmic image and ethics after Auschwitz explores the surrender of possession with reference to other people's trauma, engaging with, but also moving beyond, the psychoanalytic mode. Dispossession is the concern of Jérôme Game and Sue Harris. Game performs a sophisticated comparative analysis of this concept in the work of Georges Bataille and Gilles Deleuze in order to redefine the self. Sue Harris makes a strong reading of Erick Zonca's *La Vie rêvée des anges*, highlighting depressing continuities in the dispossessed status of the female workforce throughout the twentieth century. Repossession is key to articles by Siobhán Shilton and Colin Davis. Shilton works with postcolonial theory and criticism to show how its emergence has enabled the recovery of aspects of travel that theory has previously failed to grasp. With characteristic lucidity, Davis's article focuses on the loss and repossession of theory, brilliantly pinpointing a moment of slippage in Jacques Derrida's *Limited Inc.*, at which theory slides into post-theory but still lives on. What will live on in the reader's mind long after they have put this book down is an abiding sense of the quality of current research in French studies.