

Murata, Kyoko. *Les Métamorphoses du pacte diabolique dans l'œuvre de Balzac*. Préface de Nicole Mozet. Université Préfectorale d'Osaka: Osaka Municipal Universities Press; Paris: Klincksieck, 2003. Pp. 328. ISBN 2-252-03442-4  
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The title of this volume is deceptively modest. Although Murata never loses sight of her focus on pacts and contracts in Balzac, she also marshals her impressive knowledge of Balzac's texts, *avant-textes* and secondary critical material, in order to

mobilize and contextualize the Balzacian pact in two particular ways. On the one hand, Murata shows how the pact reflects and inflects the Balzacian *œuvre* as it evolves from the "premiers romans" to *La Cousine Bette*: the working of the pact turns each text into "une œuvre-charnière" reflecting important shifts of emphasis and direction. On the other hand, the changing nature of the pact reflects key historical or socio-political developments in France from the Revolution to the first Empire and to the various avatars of the Restoration.

After a number of short introductory chapters distinguishing pacts, contracts and treaties – for Murata is invariably sensitive to the vocabulary and the language of the *Comédie humaine* – Murata shows how the more explicitly diabolical pacts of the "premiers romans" and *La Peau de chagrin* compensate for a post-Revolutionary vacuum in characters such as Raphaël de Valentin. In later, more firmly realistic texts, however, such as *Melmoth réconcilié*, it is economic disempowerment rather than metaphysical *Angst* which leads to characters' receptivity to a compensatory pact. Elsewhere, the emphasis on diabolical and then economic pacts changes again – into a series of "feminized" pacts which themselves can be seen as either positive, as between Félix and Henriette in *Le Lys dans la vallée*, or more negative, as in novels such as *Le Contrat de mariage* and *La Cousine Bette*. Thus, in a fascinating gender twist, "le pacte féminin" displaces or replaces the essentially masculine "pacte diabolique."

Even more interesting, perhaps, are Murata's subsequent analyses of the various contracts between Vautrin, Esther, Nucingen and Lucien in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. Here again the accent is on a feminized pact, with the combined, if ostensibly competing, power of a devirilized banker and irresistible courtesan disempowering the seemingly omnipotent Vautrin: "Ainsi Esther, de par son statut de courtisane, ébranle le principe masculin, incarné par Vautrin" (254). Against a background of further, irrevocably disempowered masculinity in *La Cousine Bette*, the "pacte féminin" further divides, with, on the one hand, the pact between Bette and Valérie, and, on the other, the pact between Victorin, Madame Nourrison and a differently feminized Vautrin, in his final incarnation as an androgynous mother: "la nature de Vautrin vacille entre l'autorité paternelle et le dévouement maternel" (281). For Murata, however, it is the maternal Vautrin who is Vautrin's last incarnation – incorporating the (masculinized) diabolical pact into a (feminized) angelic pact and thus turning the earlier examples of diabolical, economic or even feminized dispossession into a moment of maternal protection and enhancement. Since, moreover, unlike many earlier contract-holders, Vautrin intervenes in order to create, he confirms the links between the maternal and the creative power of literature: "Ce qui compte ici, c'est que la création artistique s'attache étroitement à la maternité, plutôt qu'à la paternité" (284). It can be seen that Murata's work, which seemed as if it might be limited to a rehearsal of legal arrangements or familiar literary topoi, in fact offers an original, well-argued and dynamic reading of Balzac together with a range of suggestive insights into the relations between gender, history and literature. This is a clear, thoughtful and thoroughly rewarding volume.