

plague to rats or other rodents, this essay asks us to believe that this “failure” in observation redounds simply to people before the nineteenth century being incapable of seeing millions of rats that must have strewn their streets, and of drawing connections between them and the disease (270). Yet in subtropical zones such as India and China, where *Yersinia pestis* struck before Yersin cultured the agent, natives had no difficulty seeing rats drop from their rafters, realizing that the plague season had begun, and that it was time to abandon their huts.

More positively, this collection will stimulate new research on the plagues from 541 to 750, not only on questions of the disease and demography, but also on the plagues’ social and cultural consequences, a matter of interest to everyone concerned with pandemics.

———Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., University of Glasgow

Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005.

DOI: 10.1017/S0010417508001047

This history by two scholars of literature and film is a series of essays on the patterns and “tones” of French culture in the late 1920s and the 1930s. The Popular Front (1935–1938) comes in only as background, and its cultural programs (the subject of Pascal Ory’s 991-page *La Belle Illusion*) are not discussed here. Breaking with what the authors call “standard history” or “the straight story,” this study zigzags back and forth across the years between the wars (and even later), pausing to examine selected movies, cinematic themes, canonic novels, literary careers, and the diverse political stances taken by cultural leaders. The authors’ model for this anti-narrative history is Alain Resnais’s film of 1974, *Stavisky. . .*, which they analyze at length, praising its multi-perspectival, ambiguous evocation of a period. Accordingly, they focus on episodes and fragments from different cultural strata, uncovering unexpected coincidences and similarities that constitute the “harmonics” of the past (as Sergei Eisenstein and Resnais put it). Their method also owes much to some Surrealists’ ideas, counterbalanced by a Structuralist interest in cultural regularities. Still another model invoked throughout is the non-linear format of a newspaper, with parallel columns juxtaposing unrelated stories on a given day.

Part I, titled “Streetwork,” begins by telling how distinguished publishing houses, writers, and the press made new efforts to reach a mass public with photo-filled dailies and tabloids such as *Détective*. Illustrious writers on the Left threw themselves into organizing an antifascist movement in the wake of the February 6 (1934) riots. Intellectuals across the political spectrum

analyzed the emerging crisis and set forth their commitments in a stream of journals and books, including the leading literary journal *Nouvelle Revue Française*. The novelists the authors deem most significant, Louis-Ferdinand Céline and André Malraux, took opposite paths—one disgustingly rejecting political action, the other plunging into antifascist struggles in Paris and Spain. Reacting to the passions of both Right and Left, writer Denis de Rougemont pleaded brilliantly for “passionate moderation” in politics as well as love. Jean Renoir brought to the screen his vision of wartime Frenchmen and Germans interacting without zealotry and hatred (*La Grande Illusion*, 1937) and common people making a humane, practical revolution (*La Marseillaise*, 1938).

The second part of the book examines some forms of popular and visual culture that were the “atmospheres” of Paris. A chapter on popular entertainment tells of the loss of intimacy and “authenticity” as sound movies and the music hall triumphed over the café-concert and theater. An essay on the “look of Paris” explicates the modern-luxury style known as art deco, which Hollywood movie stereotypes helped keep in vogue long after the 1925 Paris Exposition. As counterpoint, nostalgia for the “authentic Paris” of the shabby quarters found expression in “poetic realist” films (notably of Marcel Carné) and photography (Brassaï and Kertész). Providing relief from the constraints of Paris were fantasy-rich movies featuring French adventurers in the exotic colonies. A final chapter elucidates the “aesthetic utopias” of luminaries from Surrealists Buñuel, Dalí, and André Breton to Michel Leiris and the one whom the authors most clearly admire: filmmaker, art theorist, and man of action André Malraux.

———Charles Rearick, University of Massachusetts, Amherst