

*The Ghost Lovers*, A Novel by David Orsini  
Reviewed by Lois A. Cuddy

Like other fiction by David Orsini, *The Ghost Lovers* is wonderfully written and crafted with a strong, dramatic plot; unforgettable characters who are haunted by the ghosts of the past; and a setting of natural beauty that is often in stark contrast to the violence and brutality of battle in war-torn Europe. Orsini has created a fast-paced and fascinating thriller that keeps the reader engrossed to the last line.

This novel takes place in France in 1944 as the French Resistance fights the Nazis and their Vichy puppets. Marc and Simone, the protagonists of Orsini's earlier novel *The Woman Who Loved Too Well*, are again working for the British and the French Resistance and are again in their own battle to settle the issues of a broken marriage, even as the values and the physical world around them are collapsing. This time, however, they are searching for a double agent who has caused the deaths of thousands of allies and Resistance fighters. The presence of Hans Mueller—a former Nazi-turned-Resistance ally and Simone's lover—complicates every aspect of their lives. It is not at all necessary to have read *The Woman Who Loved Too Well* to understand and appreciate this new novel; however, comparison between the earlier Marc and Simone adds enormous depth and emotional texture to the present narrative and shows what years of war can do to the spirit and character of even exceptional human beings.

Through his narrator and various points of view, Orsini's rhetorical skills and control of the English language unravel the complexities of both internal and external conflict: the emotional ambiguities of characters at war with themselves and the war's horrors that are real and immutable. Brutality (and the violence required by war) is sometimes mitigated by the characters' courage and the exigencies of time and place. In this novel nothing is presented with absolute clarity, as love becomes contempt, jealousy becomes rationalized murder, passion is transformed into cruelty, loyal patriots are twisted by necessities into enemies, and the calm beauties of nature are lost in the violence and terrors of battle. Even sunshine is clouded by antipathy and fear. It is a world upside down with nothing and nobody to trust as the author's rhetorical style intensifies the depths of those complications.

This is not a novel to skim quickly. The subterfuges used to gain information to destroy the enemies within the Vichy regime and to carry out those strategies are reflected in equally clever rhetorical devices that force a reader to read very carefully indeed. Who is loyal to the French and British forces, and who is a double agent willing to sacrifice friends and relatives for entrance to the Master Race? Does torture elicit truth, or does war abrogate all loyalty and truth? How does rationalization turn honor into deceit and

brutality? In attempting to answer these and other questions of Existential import, the characters in this novel struggle to find truth, only to be caught up in the personal and political disintegration of a world that is relative and contingent, irrational and (almost) devoid of humanity and trust. *The Ghost Lovers* is a novel worth reading.

Lois A. Cuddy received her Ph.D. from Brown University. She is Professor Emerita of English, Women's Studies, and Comparative Literature Studies at the University of Rhode Island. Her books include *T. S. Eliot and the Poetics of Evolution* and *Evolution and Eugenics in American Literature and Culture, 1880-1940*. Her articles, about authors as diverse as Emily Dickinson and Edith Wharton, T. S. Eliot and Nathaniel Hawthorne, Eliot and Homer, and Samuel Beckett and Dante, have appeared in journals in the United States, Canada, and Europe.