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The Drama of Fallen France: Reading 'La Comédie sans
Tickets' (review)

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by Higgins more than two decades ago. But the external world is of little consequence when what matters is ‘resistance’ to *langue*. So we are assured that in Peret’s ‘Pue pue pue/Qu’est-ce qui pue/C’est Louis XVI l’œuf mal couvé’ (written, incidentally, before the outbreak of war), ‘alliterative signifier and argotic signified, [sic] aspire towards the creation of a subversive, infantile chant which tears holes in the empirical’. But the curious and bemused reader may well ask: what was the impact of such childish gibberish on empirical reality? Did the screams of Artaud give the Gestapo and Milice sleepless nights? Why did Péret’s ‘Ah fromage voilà du bon pays/Voilà du bon pays au lait’ not enter French popular culture in the same way as ‘Celui qui croyait au ciel/Celui qui n’y croyait pas’? Sometimes it can be so hard to pin down a floating signifier.

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The Drama of Fallen France: Reading ‘La Comédie sans Tickets’. By KENNETH KRAUSS. State University of New York Press, 2004. xxii + 257 pp. Hb \$50.00.

In *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?*, Sartre used *Le Silence de la mer* to demonstrate the importance of audience for the meaning and understanding of a given text: Koestler in London had misread it, the French under occupation had not; nor could the kind of text Koestler sought have possibly been written for them in the early part of the Occupation. Focusing upon eight plays, Kenneth Krauss is similarly concerned to reveal the dynamic behind critical readings and misreadings during the Occupation, and the complexity of audience response. Krauss has written a nuanced and interesting study that pays careful attention to chronology and to the explicit avoidance of the ‘resistance *versus* collaboration’ polarization that fails to account for the shifting and multiple realities of the time. Both French and German censors had political agendas, as did the critics in the collaborationist press. ‘La Comédie sans tickets’ is Brasillach’s phrase for the kind of frivolous (boulevard) theatre that ignored the realities of the Occupation, such as ration cards, but he had his own ideas on what was proper realism. Krauss considers a range of journalistic and other writings to discuss the reception of the chosen plays and ascertain whether and in what sense we are dealing with a theatre of defiance smuggling resistance messages, or theatre as a site of collaboration, or both. In this context, the controversies, claims and counterclaims in relation to Anouilh’s *Antigone* and Sartre’s *Les Mouches* are well known, and Krauss devotes a chapter to each, relating them to the productions of Greek theatre that proliferated under the Occupation. He explores the gaps and divergences between intended and actual text, between the production text and the dramatic text, notably in relation to Barrault’s staging of *Le Soulier de Satin*. The extent to which sexuality is key to critical reception, in both intended and unintended ways, is explored in all the plays under discussion. Although Thewelheit’s work is not mentioned, Krauss is on similar terrain with his discussions of fascist aesthetics, homoeroticism and homophobia, complicated by the different ideological agendas of Vichy and the Germans in relation to sexuality and gender. There is a detailed analysis of Cocteau’s controversial *La Machine à*

écrire, dismissed as ‘inverted theatre’ by collaborationist critics (one of whom was physically attacked in Cocteau’s defence by Jean Marais), of André Obey’s *Huit cents mètres*, a one-act play of sporting prowess performed in the Roland Garros Stadium (followed by exploits of dashing young firemen), of the gender politics of Simone Jollivet’s *La Princesse des Ursines*, and the thematics of paedophilia in Montherlant’s *Fils de personne*. A final chapter on Truffaut’s recreation of the theatre under the Occupation, *Le Dernier Métro*, not only offers a fascinating reading of multiple levels of reception in the dramatization of the theatre audience(s) for a film audience, but treats it persuasively as a telling example of myth creation in progress, not least in the transposition of Marais’s action into a dramatic attack on a homosexual critic. Krauss wanders into author-based analysis at times; the high number of typographical errors in French and German titles, names and quotations is unfortunate, and the practice of capitalizing the initial letter of any word after a colon very disconcerting, but this is a study that contributes a great deal to understanding of cultural practice and production during the Occupation.

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L’Enchanteur réticent: essai sur Julien Gracq. By MICHEL MURAT. (Les Essais). Paris, Corti, 2004. 358 pp. Pb €22.00.

Cet ouvrage est une mise à jour du ‘dossier’ publié par Michel Murat aux Éditions Pierre Belfond en 1992 sous le simple titre *Julien Gracq* mais maintenant épuisé. La première partie est un essai dont le titre originel, qui résume avec bonheur le propos de Murat, a été retenu pour cette réédition, la seconde propose un dossier critique qui embrasse toute l’œuvre: notice sur chacun des livres de Gracq, y compris le volume *Entretiens*, datant de 2002, seul titre paru depuis 1992, suivie d’une chronologie et d’une bibliographie sélective, toutes deux mises à jour. Selon la formule des ‘Dossiers Belfond’, l’ouvrage est exempt de notes critiques et ne constitue donc pas un état des lieux de la critique gracquienne. La mise à jour de tous les renvois des citations au texte définitif de la Pléiade sera néanmoins utile aux futurs chercheurs. L’essai s’organise autour de cinq chapitres, subdivisés en thèmes plus précis, qui évoquent tour à tour les grandes lignes de force de l’univers de Gracq, certaines déjà bien connues, mais toujours réexaminées par Murat avec une grande acuité: les lieux et le rapport de l’homme au monde, le romanesque, la dimension critique, puis l’écriture, pour terminer sur un chapitre intitulé ‘le déserteur de l’avant-garde’ où les rapports de Gracq au surréalisme tout autant que sa posture singulière sur la scène intellectuelle et littéraire des XX^e et XXI^e siècles (y compris son rejet de Sartre) sont réévalués. Avec le recul du temps, on notera particulièrement la justesse des remarques sur l’actualité souvent mal connue de Gracq: ‘Il faut contester [...] la “marginalité” de Gracq par rapport à la littérature de son temps. Cette idée reçue procède d’une image de lui-même que l’auteur a construite avec soin’ (p. 194), et Murat de rappeler par exemple que son penchant pour l’autobiographie et l’écriture fragmentaire le rapprochent de préoccupations contemporaines. En définitive, c’est peut-être par sa vision de la femme (analysée par Murat sous la rubrique ‘masculin-féminin’) que Gracq se révèle le plus en