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Redefining Resistance: The Poetic Wartime Discourses of Francis Ponge, Benjamin Péret, Henri Michaux and Antonin Artaud (review)

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French Studies: A Quarterly Review, Volume 60, Number 3, July 2006, pp. 413-414 (Review)

Published by Oxford University Press

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Comité National des Écrivains (to which they both belonged). Paulhan, however, showed himself to be more charitable (or less politically pragmatic) when it came to the rehabilitation of figures such as Rebatet and Céline in the early 1950s. From this point onwards, despite Mauriac's support for Paulhan's election to the Académie Française, relations between the two men cooled somewhat with the reappearance of the *NRF* (at a time when Mauriac was committed to *La Table Ronde*), the publication of *Histoire d'O* (which Mauriac attributed to Paulhan himself), and their very different positions with respect to France's policy in North Africa (with Paulhan opposing independence for the countries of the Maghreb). Throughout, as Flower astutely observes, it is Paulhan who seems to want to steer the exchanges and who proves the most conciliatory when disagreements arise. This handsomely produced edition, containing several facsimile reproductions and photographs, provides a very valuable contribution to the literary history of twentieth-century France.

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doi:10.1093/fs/knl066

Redefining Resistance: The Poetic Wartime Discourses of Francis Ponge, Benjamin Péret, Henri Michaux and Antonin Artaud. By ESTHER ROWLANDS. Amsterdam — New York, Rodopi, 2004. 200 pp. Pb $50.00; €40.00.

This book seeks to examine 'the way in which language may be defined as a locus of resistance' and 'reposition' the war-time discourses of four writers not normally associated with the French Resistance canon. Rowlands has in her sights the *Anthology of Second World War French Poetry* edited by Ian Higgins, who, she claims, treated Péret as a 'culprit' and gave 'minimal' attention to Ponge. Her study argues for the rehabilitation of writers whose work is characterized by 'reversal', 'inversion', 'abolition' and 'reconfiguration', poems where 'the subversive effect of style and resistance arise from polymorphism, movement and germinativity'. We are presented with Ponge and 'language turned against itself', Peret's annihilation of 'the logical limits of language', Michaux 'strangled by a language broken by centuries of compromise' (since exactly when?, we ask) and Artaud probing the 'extremes' of language in his wartime *Cahiers de Rodez*. We find ourselves in the suspiciously familiar and canonical company of Barthes, Lyotard, Foucault and Deleuze, along with the slightly more exotic Michel de Certeau and Ross Chambers. As far as polemic goes, this is fine. But alarm bells begin to ring when the reader stumbles upon the very rare allusions to the historical period supposedly in question: 'in 1939, Peret was imprisoned, in Rennes, by the Nazis'; 'illegitimate power' is a category into which 'any totalitarian regime, such as Nazism, Capitalism and Colonialism may, naturally, fall'; the other C-word eventually arrives when we learn that 'when the Communist revolution occurred in Russia, the Stalinist state accepted avant-garde, [sic] art only for a brief period, before enforcing its suppression of all modernist movements'. As for her attack on Higgins, when, in her reading of Ponge's 'L'orange', she writes that 'the functioning of the object is reliant upon its specificity, its sense of uniqueness and mystery, its relations between its impact on the human senses and its linguistic representability', it is difficult to see how such an assessment differs radically from that made

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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doi:10.1093/fs/knl069

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*