

Book Reviews

Roberta Johnson. *Crossfire: Philosophy and the Novel in Spain 1900-1934*. Lexington: The UP of Kentucky, 1993. 234 pp.

Scholarly book reviews, the present document being a case in point, inevitably incur excesses and shortages in their drive to represent a given text to the larger professional community. To read or not to read? To buy or not to buy? Such questions of time and money management compel us to review a text or to read someone else's review. Having postulated some shared motives, then, allow me to dispense with the crucial answers early on.

Anyone working in the areas of late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century Spanish prose (or both, as is more often the case), and/or anyone at all interested (as we all must be in this age of "post" theories) in the intersection between philosophy and fiction, will want to own a copy of Roberta Johnson's *Crossfire: Philosophy and the Novel in Spain 1900-1934*. More importantly, anyone committed to the profession of Hispanism as we move toward the end of this century will want to read Johnson's text cover to cover in order to bear witness to the incontrovertible fact that our profession continues to maintain high standards; that painstaking archival investigation, our academic bread and butter, continues to yield immeasurable intellectual and cultural riches; and that Hispanists, perhaps more than ever, have a great deal to say about literature and its increasingly productive relationship with other disciplines. In short, buy the book and read it.

On to the requisite review. Elegantly written and meticulously researched, Johnson's *Crossfire: Philosophy and the Novel in Spain 1900-1934* proposes to trace the "rapprochement" between fiction and philosophy within Spain during the first three decades of the current century. The choice of 1900 as the starting date corresponds to the emergence of the Generation of 1898, which counts among its illustrious members Unamuno, Baroja, and Martínez Ruiz, each of whom produced a philosophical novel, or a novel that discursively emphasizes philosophy, in 1902. After an introductory overview, Chapter 1 details the intellectual and aesthetic exchanges, the crossfire of the book's title, among the individual members of

this generation, as well as between the Nineteen Eighters and their literary and philosophical predecessors. Unamuno's *Amor y pedagogía*, Baroja's *Camino de perfección*, and Martínez Ruiz's *La voluntad*, the three philosophical novels published in 1902, all provide successful examples of the ways in which the members of the Generation of '98 moved beyond the reigning ideas of their forebearers. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 expand and specify the relational network that constitutes this generation by discussing the three authors and their respective novels, as well as their influences, debts, differences, and hostilities to and from one another, and their contemporaries.

Johnson returns to Unamuno and Baroja in Chapters 5 and 6 by way of foregrounding the contentious and at times openly hostile philosophical debates between the members of the generation of '98 and José Ortega y Gasset, who came into his intellectual own between 1907 and 1914 and paved the way for a new generation of writers, known as the Generation of 1914, which included the likes of Pérez de Ayala, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Miró, Salinas, Chacel, and Jarnés. Chapter 7 focuses on the basic philosophical tenets and literary characteristics of this second generation, which was formed around Ortega's literary metaphysics but soon exceeded his specific preoccupations, as evinced by Pérez de Ayala's work, which provides the core of Chapter 8, as well as Juan Ramon Jiménez's *Platero yo* and Miró's *El humo dormido*, the subjects of Chapter 9.

These three authors were united with the younger members of their generation through a shared insistence on a philosophy of language, which metamorphosed into the vanguardist philosophical novel during the 1920s and '30s. Salinas's *Vispera del gozo*, Chacel's *Estación: Ida y vuelta*, and Jarnés's *El profesor inútil*, all of which were written for and/or published by Ortega's Nova Novorum series in 1925-26, comprise the nucleus of the final chapter, as the philosophical novel ran headlong into the oncoming Spanish Civil War, but not before it had left an indelible imprint on the twentieth-century Spanish novel. *Crossfire* concludes with a brief post-script encapsulating the major achievements of the philosophical novel, as well as its relationship with its postwar successors.

Earlier I alluded to the necessary accrual of shortages and excesses in a review of this type. Excesses may occur in the guise of familiarity, objectivity, or enthusiasm (or all three). Although I have perhaps unwillingly embraced excess, I am much more concerned with the apparent shortages of my review. How does a reviewer do justice to the staggering amount of archival research that makes up *Crossfire*? Or the author's complete control not only of all of the literary and cultural material, but of virtually the entire Western philosophical tradition? Or the clarity and consistency that distinguish the book's organization and presentation? Or, finally, the exquisite equilibrium between authors, fictional and philosophical texts, sociohistorical events, journals, conversations, letters, and time periods?

Although my review is limited by both excesses and shortages, Johnson's book, thankfully, is not. Rather, it is a model of intellectual precision, balance, and professionalism. Final words: buy *Crossfire*, read it, use it in your classes and for your research. Thanks in part to Roberta Johnson's recent efforts, Hispanism is alive and well.

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Michael Lucey. *Gide's Bent: Sexuality, Politics, Writing*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. 238 pp.

In this ambitious and brilliantly argued study, Michael Lucey examines the links between "Gide's literary techniques, his portrayal of his own homosexuality, his discussions of sexuality more generally, and his involvement in and writing about politics" (17). True to the spirit of Gide as self-proclaimed "inquiéteur," Lucey focuses on the "discomfiting effect" of the "alliance of politics, sexuality and literature" (3) in Gide's works. Lucey is at his most provocative when he analyzes the manifestations of this discomfiture in Gide's biographers and critics. For *Gide's Bent* is more than a lucid reappraisal of Gide's works: it is also an unsparing attack on critics who—when they are not overtly homophobic—at least ignore the writer's theorization of sexuality. Lucey's analysis is productive both critically and politically, for it addresses hostile and reductive tendencies in Gide scholarship and invites further reassessment of Gide's œuvre.

If Lucey's readings are marked by his political stance, they are also shaped by the conception of sexuality which he elaborates in this study. Lucey argues against understanding sexuality as an "irrevocably forward-moving developmental concept" in favor of a model which "understands sexuality as a pulsative, intermittently observable experience that cannot be successfully captured by any narrative model" (18). This notion of "pulsation" might easily describe Lucey's approach, which eschews any single theoretical framework in favor of a series of readings of texts by Lacan, Melanie Klein, DeMan, and others. The scope and complexity of the book's theoretical underpinnings are impressive, as are the clarity and sophistication of Lucey's readings. *Gide's Bent* does not claim to be an exhaustive study of Gide's œuvre; rather, it offers a series of challenging, sometimes quirky close readings of well-chosen passages in which sexuality and politics are imbricated with writing. Lucey's command of the vast Gidean corpus is admirable, and he supports his readings of major texts with apposite examples from lesser-known works.

This book is divided into three sections, the first of which is largely devoted to the autobiographical *Si le grain ne meurt*. The opening chapter

considers the uneasy awareness of social inequality in Gide's descriptions of sexual encounters at home and in North Africa. Scrutinizing tense and temporality, Lucey illuminates Gide's failed attempts to write politics out of the sex scenes in *Si le grain ne meurt*. A second chapter examines Gide's understanding of his sexuality in relation to his mother. In a convincing reading via Melanie Klein, Lucey demonstrates how Gide resists an oedipalizing narrative, refusing castration anxiety and privileging the maternal as a point of origin.

In the second section, which deals with fictional and philosophical works, Lucey explores "the homophobia of Gide's critics and, indeed, his own homophobia" (17). In a chapter concerned primarily with the apparent homophobia and misogyny of the philosophical dialogue *Corydon*, Lucey focuses on issues of mimesis and contamination, and asks whether there are ways of reading which avoid reenacting the book's phobic stances. This call for a resisting reading is echoed in the following chapter, which is wittily titled "Without Delay: *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, Lacan, and the Onset of Sexuality." This title is, of course, a dig at the psychiatrist-biographer Jean Delay, whose often rigid and homophobic interpretations Lucey rightly criticizes. But "delay" also refers to deferral, to the indirect "*après coup* structures of experience" in which "sexuality always manifests itself" (118). Arguing that sexuality "stages itself in an intervallic space" (116), Lucey centers his reading on scenes of sleep and somnolence, on states of discontinuity and dispossession. This original approach produces some astute and highly nuanced readings of the novel.

In a final section (which is rather less convincing than the first two) Lucey relates sexual subjectivity to the political intentions of the *Voyage au Congo* and *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* Using Lacanian notions of alienation, Lucey analyzes the constant frustrations of pleasure in Gide's account of his travels in the Congo. He relates this frustration to Gide's inability to escape his own social alienation—both as a gay man and as a privileged European tourist who was simultaneously "witnessing and furthering" certain aspects of the colonial enterprise (179). In a final chapter, Lucey turns to the overtly political *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* Evoking the "phobic" notion that "an aberrant sexual practice implies an aberrant political one" (185), Lucey suggests that, although Gide was backing off from communism, the "sly" erotic references in this text serve to reassert his homosexuality and affirm its radical potential.

Gide's Bent is coherently organized, and Lucey announces the goals of each chapter with exemplary clarity. The book contains a thorough and useful index, informative footnotes, and a bibliography particularly rich in works on psychoanalysis and queer theory. The author helpfully provides both the original French text and an English translation of all quotes from Gide, as well as selected quotes from other writers. There are a few small problems with the use of French verbs in Lucey's analyses ("s'effondre"

repeatedly treated as an infinitive [141]) and with the translations (a pleonastic “ne” rendered as negation [66]). It is somewhat disconcerting to find such mistakes in a study which relies so heavily—and to such good effect—on stylistic analyses. This is a minor quibble, however, given the import of Lucey’s groundbreaking work.

Gide’s Bent is a rigorous, original, and provocative study which deserves to be read by anyone interested in queer studies and psychoanalytic criticism, as well as by Gide scholars, among whom it will surely incite much fruitful debate.

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Alan Morris. *Patrick Modiano*. Oxford: Berg, 1996. viii + 228 pp.

This study of the French novelist Patrick Modiano (born 1945) is part of a series devoted to New Directions in European Writing. The only book-length study of Modiano’s complete *œuvre*, it is pitched less at specialists in modern French literature than at readers looking for a synoptic account of the techniques and themes of an author who is of undeniable importance on the literary scene in France, but who is still, some thirty years after the appearance of his first novel, little known in the English-speaking world. Morris’s book provides useful biographical information about Modiano, as well as a balanced overview of his career in fiction, but the intersection of these two lines of approach sometimes produces unfortunate results. Morris is perhaps too insistent in reading Modiano’s corpus as a purgative project—as the author’s lifelong attempt to exorcise personal and familial demons. Hypothesizing that “much of Modiano’s fiction is cathartic in impulse, a means of assuaging the pain caused by the tragic death of his younger brother, Rudy, the near-total absence of his father, Albert, and the troubling events of the German Occupation” (3), Morris imposes order on a body of work that continues to explore the difficulty of finding beginnings for endings and endings for beginnings. In a manner strangely at odds with the non- or even antilinear style of the texts he studies, Morris chronicles Modiano’s fictional experiments as so many stages in the author’s emotional growth. It may be misleading, however, to narrativize in this way the output of a writer whose work is premised on the adventitiousness of chronology, the made-upness of stories, and the inconclusiveness of experience.

Author of sixteen major prose works—and winner of the Prix Fénelon, Prix Roger Nimier, Prix de la Plume de Diamant, Grand Prix du roman de l’Académie française, Prix des Libraires, Prix Goncourt, Prix Pierre de

Monaco, Prix relais H du roman d'évasion, and Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres—Modiano burst on the scene in 1968 with *La Place de l'étoile*, a brilliant first novel that articulated what proved to be many of the author's most abiding concerns. As Morris discusses in Chapter 1, "The Birth of a Novelist" (6-12), Modiano's mother was a Belgian actress/model/chorus girl of Hungarian and Flemish stock and his father was a "juif cosmopolite" 'cosmopolitan Jew,' with geographical and ethnic roots in the eastern Mediterranean (specifically, Greek and northern Egyptian) *apatride* "stateless" communities. Further, Modiano's father played an ambiguous role during the *années noires* "black years" of the Occupation, having apparently befriended (or been befriended by) some of the more notorious French *gestapistes* "collaborators with the Gestapo" (see also 41-42). All this has given the author what he himself once described as "le sentiment de ne pouvoir [se] rattacher à aucune tradition, à aucun passé national ou historique; le sentiment d'être un déraciné" 'the feeling of not being able to connect oneself to any tradition, to any national or historical past; the feeling of being an exile' (8). According to Morris, Modiano's solution was to create surrogate existences—to fashion (semi-) false autobiographies—in his fictions. Indeed, Modiano's texts, from his first novel on, can be said literally to obsess on the issue of identity, on the problems and potentials of efforts to constitute a self in historical, political, cultural, religious, psychological, or for that matter literary terms.

Chapter 2, "A Novelist's Occupation" (13-62), discusses how Modiano's first three novels—*La Place de l'Étoile* (1968), *La Ronde de nuit* (1969), and *Les Boulevards de ceinture* (1972)—explore the legacy of the German Occupation of France during World War II. In particular, these texts examine what a history of collaborationism means for French Jews. Thus the protagonist of *La Place de l'Étoile*, Raphaël Schlemilovitch, figures as "the impossible incarnation of *Le Juif* in the abstract, the totemic archetype of his people as a whole" (14). Yet Schlemilovitch's is a shifting, composite identity and through him Modiano destabilizes the boundary between self and other, *résistant* and collaborator, Jew and Fascist, as when the protagonist is suddenly transmuted into a Nazi and takes Eva Braun as his lover. More generally, Morris demonstrates how from the start Modiano's fiction has drawn on the key innovations of the *nouveaux romanciers*: fragmentation of the narrative voice; kaleidoscopic merging of geographical locations, historical periods, and characters; active cultivation of contradictions in plot and chronology; use of parody, pastiche, and quotation to create a multifarious style. Modiano has appropriated these techniques, however, as exploratory instruments, vehicles for investigating what it means to be both Jewish and French. Likewise, *La Ronde de nuit* centers on questions of (Jewish) identity *vis-à-vis* the Occupation. Again Modiano experiments with novelistic form to convey the narrator's tortured search for self; again a network of intertextual references (relating to

fine art, popular music, and literature) allows the narrator to fabricate a life story with the accent on *story*. With *Les Boulevards de ceinture*, the focus turns to collaborationist journalism, here intermixed with a different aspect of the identity problem: the narrator Serge Alexandre's search for his father. Morris makes suggestive connections between Alexandre's quest for a paternal figure and Freud's theory of the *Familienroman*, a fantasy structure created largely out of literary materials by children who seek to offset deficiencies in their actual family life (35ff).

Chapters 3 (63-99) and 4 (100-19) examine Modiano's next five novels: *Villa Triste* (1975), *Livret de famille* (1977), *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* (1978), *Une jeunesse* (1981), and *De si braves garçons* (1982). Morris argues that whereas the first three of these novels develop concerns that are continuous with Modiano's previous fictions, the other two represent, at least to some degree, a break with novelistic precedent. With *Villa Triste* the scene does shift from the *années noires* to the war in Algeria; but the focus remains on organizations of secret police, the issue of identity (again mediated through a structure approximating the *Familienroman*), the destructiveness of time and the nostalgia for lost youth, and the power (as well as the incapacity) of memory to resurrect the past. *Livret de famille* extends and refines the quasi-autobiographical impulse informing previous works. And with *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, probably Modiano's best-known novel outside France, Modiano uses a private detective protagonist/narrator, Guy Roland, to highlight elements of the *roman policier* that were present but less prominent in his previous works. As an amnesiac, Guy must apply his powers of detection to the problem of reconstructing his own past. To this extent, argues Morris, Guy functions as a stand-in for Modiano himself: "by engaging in research, consulting archives, accumulating documents, interviewing key contacts, and finally using his imagination to paper over any gaps, Guy is able to use the pasts and the memories of other people to construct a past and a memory for himself" (86).

With the publication of *Une jeunesse* in 1981, Modiano seems to move into new territory. The Occupation no longer plays a central role, characters cease to be known by multiple aliases, and the time-line is easier to follow. Yet this novel, too, explores the destructive effects of time, features protagonists who are "rootless, disoriented orphans" (105), and develops an atmosphere steeped in uncertainty and menace. There is a similar combination of old and new styles and themes in *De si braves garçons*. Characteristically, Morris makes this biographical argument about the (partial) change in Modiano's technique: "the narrative has taken a step closer to realism, and if we consider this to be little more than a *symptom*, then its originating cause can relatively easily be surmised: the emotional *stability* which, more and more, is becoming a feature of Modiano's life itself" (113).

Chapter 5, "Tales of Crime and Mystery" (120-41), focuses on *Quartier perdu* (1984) and *Dimanches d'août* (1986); Chapter 6, "Childhood to the Fore" (142-67), discusses *Remise de peine* (1988) and *Vestiaire de l'enfance* (1989); and Chapter 7, "Towards a Final Exorcism" (168-204), centers on *Voyage de noces* (1990), *Fleurs de ruine* (1991), and *Un cirque passe* (1992). *Quartier perdu*, which Morris deems to be one of Modiano's best novels, is told by another narrator/detective whose aim is to clarify the past. Its encyclopedic richness is counterbalanced by the minimalism of the next novel, *Dimanches d'août*, which features only three main characters and which, like all of Modiano's forays into the *roman policier*, is really a pastiche of that subgenre. The next two novels investigate a subject that, according to Morris, was too painful for Modiano to write about before the late 1980s. This subject is childhood, and the novels that explore it include characters in search of paternal and maternal substitutes, narrators (in *Remise de peine*) whose world-view is childishly naive, and a present shot through with a paradoxically absent-but-living past.

The final three novels examined in the study embody, for Morris, "a movement toward an enduring, authorial exorcism" (168). These fictions continue to experiment with inconsistent chronology; fuse different historical periods, geographical locations, and characters; oneirically defamiliarize setting and atmosphere; feature ersatz families and detectives of the fugitive self; and refer metafictionally to other novels in the *œuvre modianesque*. Indeed, given the remarkably persistent nature of Modiano's chief concerns, one may get the sense that "just one, long (and as yet unfinished) monograph is actually being written, with each successive publication being part of the *magnum opus*" (193). It may well be the case that throughout his career Modiano has written one continuous fiction exploring the possibilities and limits of fiction (writing) itself. But it is a different, more perilous line of argument to claim that this fiction and its writing can be plotted against events in its author's life. For Modiano's texts have taught us to ask: what, after all, is an "event"? and what is "a" life?

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Claudette Sartiliot. *Citation and Modernity: Derrida, Joyce, and Brecht*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1993. xi + 173 pp.

At the beginning of her conclusion, Claudette Sartiliot states without exaggeration: "Even though this is not a book on Derrida, his figure is the most prominent and pervades the whole discussion of quotation." And she continues by asking some pertinent questions: "Why read Derrida with Joyce and Brecht? Why place Derrida before Joyce and Brecht?" (153).

Perhaps the answer to the second question is more easily dispensed with than the reply to the first one. "By placing Derrida together with Joyce and Brecht," the author claims, she "has placed him exactly where he likes to belong, that is[,] between the so-called 'aesthete' and the so-called 'political' writer, between aesthetic and philosophical or political concerns" (154).

To be sure, there have been sporadic attempts to read Bertolt Brecht in the light of postmodern and postructuralist approaches such as those by Roland Barthes and, most comprehensively, by Elizabeth Wright in her 1989 *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation* (Wright's book is not included in Sartiliot's bibliography). But on the whole such an enterprise harbors certain risks. Whereas the connection between Derrida and Joyce can be fairly easily established by virtue of the former's reading (and writing about) the latter, such connection seems to be more tenuous in Brecht's case. If, as Sartiliot concludes on the basis of a 1983 interview, "Derrida's relationship with texts is always also a dialogue based on a game and based on pleasure"—a game that aims at keeping alive "the memory of things, especially of texts and authors" (154)—then the question arises whether Brecht's appropriation of literary texts from the past served no other purpose than to preserve the literary heritage—a procedure that is veiled but not suspended through the dialectics at work in a Hegelian *Aufhebung*.

Even if it is not applied rigidly, the distinction between the aesthetic and the political, against which Sartiliot inveighs, perhaps allows us to indicate how the Brechtian theater, which includes both text and performance, differs from texts such as Derrida's *Glas* (Chapter 2) or Joyce's *Finnegans wake* (Chapter 3). In entitling the chapter on Brecht (Chapter 4) "In Praise of Plagiarism," Sartiliot justifiably draws attention to modernist and postmodernist texts' deliberate—and, in the case of Brecht, intentionally provocative—break with a literary tradition that treasured the "original" at the expense of the supposedly "derivative" and assigned to quotation the function of providing the "ground for . . . a contest [between the original and the derivative] to be performed" (4). True, by employing devices such as the famous *Verfremdungseffekt* (variously translated as "alienation effect" or "estrangement effect") and *Literarisierung des Theaters* (literarizing of the theater), Brecht may be said to engage in the same activity as Derrida, that is, the attempt "to change our conception of the world" (120). But the assertion that both Brecht and Derrida "stop at the level of critique" (120) ignores the activist element in Brecht's theater, a theater that includes language as its "subject" (128) but that aims ultimately at changes in social practice. To cite a few examples: the ending of *Puntila and Matti*, *His Hired Man* maps out the course of future (revolutionary) action; the parable play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* includes an explicit warning about future threats emanating from Nazism; and *The Visions of Simone Machard* ends with a prediction of victory for the (temporarily) defeated French.

These examples tend to contradict the statement that for Derrida as well as Brecht "it is not possible to express one's meaning through language: language is not the transparent means of communication it is supposed to be" (142). While this is by no means comparable to party hacks who believed in the efficacy of their simplistic slogans, one must nevertheless assume that Brecht was convinced of the communicability of his goals and of the possibility of conveying his intended message to the spectators in order to motivate them to act in a politically incisive manner. After all, Brecht employed the aforementioned *Verfremdungseffekt* and other strategies in his highly artistic epic theater precisely because he wanted to elicit a specific reaction from his audience; the incessant revisions of his plays, notably that of *Mother Courage and her Children*, served the same purpose.

In a similar vein, Sartiliot posits that Brecht participated in the "deconstruction of the subject" (122) and bases her discussion primarily on the play from the mid-1920s, *A Man's a Man*. (Whereas in the chapters on Derrida and Joyce essentially one text is in the center, in the chapter on Brecht a number of Brecht's plays are analyzed.) Although the protagonist Galy Gay may be an "empty signifier" (134), other Brechtian figures such as Matti in *Puntila and Matti, His Hired Man* or Vlassova in *The Mother* appear to demonstrate a stable identity that is grounded in their knowledge (gradually acquired by Vlassova) that a change in the sociopolitical system will end the individual's state of alienation.

In short, it is highly doubtful whether Brecht shared Derrida's premise of logocentrism and whether he can be productively subjected to a Derridean reading. Such a reading yields far more convincing results when applied to the texts by Derrida himself and Joyce. (Presumably, the present book originated as a dissertation under the direction of Derrida.) For instance, Sartiliot considers *Finnegans wake* "an extreme example" of the Derridean notion "according to which interpretation (reading and writing as a complementary process) is an endless process of dissemination" (81). Above all, Sartiliot's substantial introductory chapter, dealing with the fundamentally novel uses and functions of quotations in modernist and postmodernist texts, is cogently argued and clearly presented.

A bibliography and an index—albeit non-inclusive (important terms such as logocentrism and phallogocentrism are missing)—add to the user-friendly features of the book. Citations—of the academic variety—are given both in the original language and in English translation. Regrettably, there is a considerable number of *errata* in the German, *errata* that occasionally undermine the validity of the specific reading proffered (e.g., Buchmann=Büchmann [24], Eckel=Ekel [49]).

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