THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1900–1945

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I. Essays and Studies

Richard Griffiths, The Use of Abuse: the Polemics of the Dreyfus Affair and Its Aftermath, Berg, 1991, 212 pp., looks at the language of polemics and stylistic techniques in contemporary writings, mainly journalism, on the Dreyfus Affair, along with their reception and their implications. In such an ideological minefield, G. treads carefully and objectively, showing how the polemical language of popular abuse relied on an existing, demonstrable “culture”, principally aided by the growth of the popular press; he points to an increasingly vicious circle that involved a recycling of the people’s prejudices through the press, and back to the populace, via the press; the language used by authors is seen to modulate in some cases (Zola, Bloy, and Péguy are given special treatment), thereby reflecting their changing tactics and attitudes. Elaine Tonnet-Lacroix, Après-guerre et sensibilités littéraires (1919–1924), Publications de la Sorbonne, 1991, 374 pp., presents a well-documented, informative and readable panorama of French literary and aesthetic life in the relatively short period of six years (1919–24); featuring major and minor writers of that era in a wide-ranging, thematic ‘counterpoint’ structure, the study examines the effect of the Great War on society and its authors; it is particularly lucid on the prevailing tensions and ambiguities (decadence and order, philosophical doubt and ideological commitment, ‘littérature gratuite’ and an awareness of the world’s problems, the crisis of traditional values and a return to religious faith, Dada and Action française, the generation conflict); the broad compass also takes in the major literary, artistic, and social movements: pacifism, Cubism, Surrealism, escapism, psychoanalysis, feminism, concluding that the war acted as a catalyst for, or modifier of, the preoccupations of the prewar period. RSH, 227, devotes its entire issue to ‘Primitivismes’, including, amongst others, Symbolist painters and Péguy (See also Peguy). J. Bessière, ‘Primitivisme littéraire et rhétorique temporelle et scripturaire. A propos de Segalen, Michaux, Butor’ (143–63), develops the argument that literary primitivism, as characterized by Segalen, Cendrars, Michaux and Butor, defines a specific temporal and scriptural approach. Textyles, 1991, no. 8, 391 pp., has a special issue on Belgian Surrealism, a little-known phenomenon until recently, and contains P. Aron, ‘Les groupes littéraires en Belgique et le Surréalisme entre 1918 et 1940’ (9–27), which identifies the relatively discrete development of Belgian Surrealism and its
divergence from Breton's movement in France (particularly in its left-wing political commitment and its 'littérature prolétarienne'); this is followed by a section on the Belgian Surrealist writer Paul Nougé in which articles analyse, among other aspects of his work, literary style (D. Laroche, 39–51), subversion of intertextual publicity that aimed to create a circumstantial effect rather than a traditional, permanent 'œuvre' (M. Biron, 53–70), and the possible affinities between Desnos and Nougé (M. Frédéric, 89–105); other Belgian Surrealists featured are Scutenaire, Chavée, Goemans, Dumont, Colinet, Bourgoignie, Lecomte, Dotreman (linked with Artaud) and Magritte. The review also contains articles on aspects of Surrealism in the cinema, amongst Brussels musicians, and on teaching Surrealism as literary history in the Belgian education system. Mélusine, XIII, ed. Henri Béhar, L'Age d'homme, 330 pp., is entitled Le Surréaliste et son psy, and demonstrates, above all, the wide variety of responses that the harnessing of psychoanalytical theory and practice drew from Surrealists such as Breton, Aragon, Eluard, Tzara, Crevel, Queneau, Roussel, Daumal, and 'le Grand Jeu'. To some (Leiris, Souplant), psychoanalysis appealed simply as a fashionable theory, while to others (Breton, Crevel, Tzara), it provided the opportunity to enrich their poetic art with a quasi-scientific, theoretical underpinning as the means to destabilizing society and liberating the individual by transgressing the limits of the 'psy', rather than aiming, as do practising psychoanalysts, at therapeutic rehabilitation. P. Nicholls, 'From fantasy to structure: two moments of literary Cubism', FMLS, 28:223–34, suggests that the poetry of Reverdy exemplifies a literary Cubism that is 'absolutely modern', in contradistinction with the first 'moment' of literary Cubism, illustrated by Cendrars, with its reliance on the unconscious and on 'fantaisie'. Poetry in France: Metamorphoses of a Muse, ed. Keith Aspley and Peter France, Edinburgh U.P., 275 pp., includes studies of the poetry of Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Queneau, of Surrealists like Breton, Aragon, Eluard, Desnos, and Péret, as well as 'high formal poetry' by Valéry, Saint-John Perse, Emmanuel, Jouve and Char. NFS, 31.2, ed. R. Chapman: Culture and Class in France in the 1930s, 114 pp., contains articles that centre principally on the problems of class and conflicting ideologies in the 1930s; M. Cornick traces the shifting ideological affinities of NRF intellectuals in the 1930s (1–15); A. Roche discusses the ideological ebb and flow as it is reflected in reviews of art exhibitions between 1934 and 1936 (16–24); W. Klein contributes to knowledge of Léon Moussinac, champion of an "alternative type of revolutionary-humanist avantgarde theatre", principally for the working-class, between 1926 and 1936 (25–38); S. Reynolds focuses on the issue of gender relations among the