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Aurélie Barjonet, *Zola d'Ouest en Est: Le naturalisme en France et dans les deux Allemagnes*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010. 282 pp. 20€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-7535-1178-1.

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In *Zola d'Ouest en Est*, Aurélie Barjonet traces the reception of Emile Zola's works in France, West Germany, and East Germany, from the period immediately following World War II until 1978. Special attention is given to East Germany and to the role of Rita Schober as overseer of the German *Rougon-Macquart* edition published by Rütten & Loening from 1952 to 1976. Barjonet's overarching thesis is that the reception of Zola's novels moved from disdain to valorization in both the Eastern and Western blocs in the time period considered. Furthermore, by placing her study in the context of the Cold War, Barjonet traces the ideological conflicts that shaped and guided literary theory.

In the introduction, Barjonet recalls Engels's and Lukács's negative attestation of Zola's novels and the divide between Balzac's realism and Zola's naturalism. In the famous 1888 letter written to Margaret Harkness, Engels affirmed that Balzac was "a far greater master of realism than all of the Zolas *passés, présents et à venir*" (p. 18). Lukács was also critical of Zola's practice, finding in his work a lack of social analysis present in Balzac (p. 19). As the founders of a Marxist approach to literary theory, Engels's and Lukács's bias against naturalism became a particularly difficult obstacle on the road to a reevaluation of Zola's impact.

Chapter one considers the general climate of reception in the three countries concerned. Initially, Zola was championed across the board for his defense of Dreyfus, especially important in the context of the post-war era: "Dans les années 1940, Français et Allemands ont utilisé le combat de Zola en faveur de Dreyfus pour lancer des appels à la justice. Dans l'immédiat après-guerre, cette utilisation de l'écrivain réapparaît dans les deux pays pour condamner les crimes nazis" (p. 83). In East Germany, the control of the press by the SED—the Socialist Unity Party—limited the freedom of critics: "La liberté et la diversité de la presse n'y sont pas garanties puisque les informations sont dirigées par le parti.... Le parti, le SED, possède 90% de la capacité totale d'impression.... L'import de journaux ou d'ouvrages de l'extérieur est strictement contrôlé sous prétexte de se protéger de l'ennemi impérialiste" (p. 39). Of notable importance for literary criticism, formalism was rejected as a Western practice (p. 43) at least until the advent of brechtian studies in the 1960s which allowed for a larger engagement with literary form (p. 50).

In West Germany, the climate was quite different, as literary theory came to be dominated by existentialism and formalism (p. 53) until the 1960s when a new paradigm surfaced that considered historical, social, and political questions (p. 55). In France, three names dominate Barjonet's assessment of the era: Sartre and his intellectual stance reminiscent of Zola's role during the Dreyfus Affair (p. 62); Guy Robert and his study of Zola's *La Terre* based on a structural approach to the novel; and Jean Fréville, who provided a Marxist rehabilitation of Zola and thereby permitted a recuperation by the French communists of the naturalist writer (pp. 68-70).

Chapters two and three focus on East Germany and especially on Rita Schober's critical role in shaping the reception of Zola's works in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. These chapters are greatly enhanced by

interviews with Schober herself, who was able to clarify her positions and theoretical evolution (p. 87). At first, Schober followed Marxist directives and was inspired by Lukács's theories. In her habilitation thesis, for instance, Barjonet detects a certain indoctrination in Schober's overall argument: "Mais ce roman [*Germinale*] reste essentiellement étudié en fonction des thèmes et des personnages, et c'est là que l'endoctrinement se fait le plus sentir, puisqu'il est question de la haine de Zola pour les impérialistes, de la misère des ouvriers, et du regard attendri du romancier pour les mineurs" (p. 111). The year 1957 marked a turning point in Schober's critical journey as she espoused a more structural approach, thus departing from Marxist dogma: "L'analyse des travaux de Rita Schober permet de dire qu'elle adopte à partir de 1957 une ligne esthétique marxiste plus souple... elle approche désormais davantage l'esthétique de Zola par son style, plutôt que par son idéologie" (p. 151).

Finally, the East German critic adopted a humanitarian, utopian stance which Barjonet identifies in Schober's interpretation of *Le Docteur Pascal*. In a sense, the work of art is considered here in its transformative potential of the reader rather than as an object independent from its reception, what Barjonet calls "la fonction d'émancipation et d'humanisation" of literature. Barjonet draws a parallel between Zola's own evolution as theorist and Schober's move from orthodoxy to heterodoxy. Indeed, Zola's scientism corresponds to the hard Marxist line while his later utopianism shows affinities with a subjective humanism: "Zola et sa commentatrice marxiste ont en quelque sorte tous deux fait preuve de sectarisme par 'objectivisme trompeur', avant d'adopter des positions plus subjectives" (p. 177).

These chapters also retrace the history of the *Rougon-Macquart* edition directed by Rita Schober. The original plan drawn by Rütten & Loening contained only a few titles of the family saga, to be chosen by Schober herself. Her classification of the different titles with arguments for or against publication provides an interesting historical document which reveals the ideological preoccupations of East Germany at the time. For *La Curée*, for instance, Schober argued for publication because of its portrayal of economic speculation, yet expressed a certain reticence due to "la sensualité exubérante de la description de l'inceste de Renée Saccard" (p. 120). Given the success of the first volumes published, Rütten & Loening decided to edit the twenty volumes of the *Rougon-Macquart* in 1956. This edition was bought and distributed by a West German editorial house, Artemis und Winkler, in 1974, thus establishing Schober's work as the standard German edition of Zola's masterpiece.

The last chapter comes back to the initial intention of Barjonet's study by giving more ample explanations about the reception of Zola's works in both France and West Germany. Barjonet delineates rather quickly the reassessment of his oeuvre in France by mentioning the most important players in this project, such as Sartre, Barthes, Deleuze, Borie, Mitterand, Duchet, and Becker, to name but a few. For Barjonet, one of the constant features of this period remains the devaluation of Zola's naturalism to privilege his imagination and inventive force, especially through the creation of myths. The section on West Germany is treated in the same cursory manner by evoking the works of Neuschäfer on popular literature and of Gumbrecht who applied a Foucauldian reading to Zola's texts. Both critics used a historical approach that contextualized Zola's project and thus avoided the trap of dismissing his naturalist theories as naïve. The rest of the chapter draws three comparisons between East and West Germany: the approaches used in literary criticism; articles of Zola in the press; and Rita Schober's edition of the *Rougon-Macquart* in the press. The corpus for this study is vast and comprehensive and includes various explicative graphs and inserts that organize in a clear fashion the amount of information presented. The volume closes with a short conclusion and annexes on the German editions of Zola's works from 1892 to 1989, a list of Rita Schober's scholarly production on Zola, and photographs of certain critics mentioned in the volume.

Barjonet's comparative approach is indispensable to understanding the role of Zola's studies outside of France. We stand to gain much from her example in applying her method to other countries. Furthermore, the scope of Barjonet's analysis permits a historical account of literary criticism during the period of the Cold War. Two main questions surface occasionally throughout the account. The first

one treats the elusive definition of naturalism and Zola's own contribution to history. Indeed, at least four different Zolas are defined by critics: 1) the intellectual who defended Dreyfus; 2) the polemist who dreamed of a scientific literary enterprise; 3) the naturalist writer incapable of surmounting his own theoretical corset; and 4) the lyric poet who was "plus que réaliste" and able to invent powerful myths. Given the ideological exigencies of each country, one Zola was occasionally emphasized over another: "...chaque bloc aura tendance à postuler deux Zola et à rejeter l'un pour valoriser l'autre : le réaliste contre le naturaliste en RDA, le 'plus que réaliste' contre le naturaliste en France et en RFA. A l'Ouest, la réhabilitation de Zola passera par la découverte puis la valorisation des mythes contenus dans son œuvre. Ce n'est pas le cas à l'Est qui ne développera pas de mythocritique pour des raisons idéologiques" (p. 27).

The other polemic separating West and East refers to literary theory, notably the division between a formalist approach under its many guises and a Marxist approach grounded in historical and economic analysis. The former becomes further nuanced through structuralism and the study of myths, both rejected by the Marxist camp as moves towards dehistoricization (p. 255). Furthermore, Barjonet's analysis suggests that in East Germany at least, the material conditions of critics coupled with Marxist ideological imperatives created constraints in critical choices and approaches. In her conclusion, Barjonet states that "En réalité, dans cette étude, c'est la critique marxiste, ses codes, ses verdicts, ses attentes, davantage que l'Allemagne divisée, qui aura fonctionné comme une culture réceptrice pour l'écrivain étranger" (p. 252). This insight could have been more systematically pursued, especially given the fate of certain critics, such as Lukács's arrest and imprisonment in 1956. By the same token, Western choices were also driven by ideological imperatives, but Barjonet does not dwell on this point, except to explain why certain novels have been more popular in one bloc than another (p. 146).

Aurélien Barjonet's *Zola d'Ouest en Est* was part of her doctoral thesis defended in 2007 whose scope was much larger than the present volume. The prose has an academic tone, but the study is meticulous and well-documented. For instance, in the final section which compares the reception of Zola's work in the German press, Barjonet has sifted through over 200 articles (p. 225). The chronological division of the chapters is not always followed as the content weaves in and out of the allotted period; a tighter organization in this regard would have rendered the evolution of Zola's reception more linear. That said, Barjonet's analysis represents a fine contribution to French studies and more specifically to Zola's critical corpus. She has done a great service to Rita Schober by placing her within the context of Zola's studies and giving her due credit for her impressive work. Moreover, her comparative approach commingled with her commentary on ideological constraints reveals the limits of our own critical approaches.

The volume's historical significance lies in its rehearsal of Cold War politics during which literary criticism was imbedded in ideological battles. In fact, though not completely expressing nostalgia for the period, Barjonet nevertheless closes her analysis with the following sentence: "Loin de nous l'idée de plaider en faveur des systèmes et encore moins des dogmes en littérature, mais il existe un intérêt certain à se pencher sur une période où la recherche était marquée par des questions fondamentales" (p. 257). It remains to be seen whether "des questions fondamentales" still mark our own critical approaches which, thanks to a historical perspective, will be discernable in the future.

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