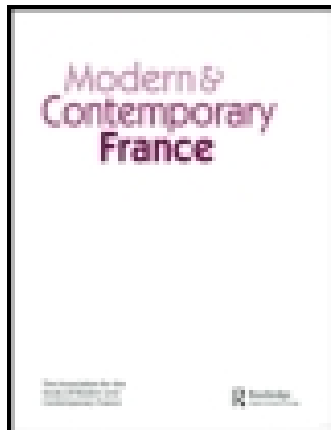


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### New departures: Re-reading the Occupation in the 1990s

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social history, though specialists will clearly learn less from the Bordier than they will from Viseux.

#### Notes and references

1. Quoted by Roger Magraw in his excellent two-volume *History of the French Working Class, 1815–1939* (Blackwell, 1992), vol. 2, p. 99.
2. Noting, however, that the system was not entirely useless in the mines, Viseux remarks: 'Le système Bedaux, système d'organisation bien supérieur au système Taylor, avait permis de découvrir, entre autres, que l'effort fourni par les jeunes filles au moulinage était supérieur à celui demandé aux hommes au fond. (Rappelons que le travail au fond était interdit aux femmes, car trop dur, depuis plus d'un demi-siècle.' (p. 313). *Moulinage* was the job of removing the *berlines* full of coal from the cage at the top of the pit and replacing them with empty ones to be sent back down.

## New departures: re-reading the Occupation in the 1990s

Claire Gorrara: Lincoln College, Oxford

Morris, A., *Collaboration and Resistance Reviewed: Writers and the Mode Rétro in Post-Gaullist France* (Berg French Studies Series, 1992), 200pp., £35.00, ISBN 2 08496 634 X

Muller, A., *La Petite Fille du Vel d'Hiv* (Denoël, 1991), 116pp., 75F., ISBN 2 207 23826 1

Ramond, M., *L'Occupation* (Editions des Femmes, 1991), 205pp., 92F., ISBN 2 7210 0400 X

The continuing reverberations of the Occupation in many areas of contemporary French life have been the subject of a number of studies in recent years, the most notable being Henri Rousso's *Le Syndrome de Vichy*.<sup>1</sup> The murder of the former head of Vichy Police, René Bousquet, in June of this year, just days before notification that he would soon face trial for crimes against humanity, is just one of the many 'affaires' which has kept the traumatic memory of the war years fixed in the public eye. This situation is not about to change in the near future, for the 50th anniversary of the Liberation in 1994 is sure to mean that interest in 'les années noires' remains high. It is within the context of this general re-evaluation of the Occupation that Alan Morris has produced the first detailed analysis of the 'mode rétro' – the literary and cultural reappraisal of the Occupation which emerged during the 1970s in France.

Alan Morris has reworked and restructured his 1985 doctoral thesis to provide a focused and cohesive study. He discusses a wide range of texts from the 1970s and early 1980s, aiming both to characterise this 'mode' in its written form and to examine in depth the contributions of four young authors.

In the first of two main sections, Morris begins by presenting the heritage of the Occupation from 1940 to 1969 in its literary, historical and social context. He looks at the predominance of a Gaullist 'myth' of the Resistance which endorsed heroic images of the French people's opposition to their German occupiers. This is followed by a discussion of the challenges to such an interpretation in the 1970s, in particular the rehabilitation of collaboration which led to a vogue for the work of well-known collaborators. The section ends by proposing two main reasons for the emergence of the 'mode rétro' at this point in French history: the changing political climate with the demise of de Gaulle, and the coming of age of a whole generation of writers who had been excluded from familial and collective memories of the war.

The second section of the study moves on to focus on the work of Pascal Jardin, Marie Chaix, Evelyne Le Garrec and Patrick Modiano, the children of wartime collaborators. Their quest to explore the heritage bequeathed to them by a collaborating father is viewed as an attempt to create a personal myth of the Occupation, often running counter to accepted representations of collaboration. It is in this section that Morris produces some of his most perceptive comments on the literary strategies employed by such writers. Able only to piece together a picture of the Occupation from the memories of others and documents of the period, these writers produce texts which reveal the fragmented and troubled identity of a generation cut off from its parental roots in the war years. Morris convincingly expounds the structures of a filial quest for rediscovery both of the shameful father figure and the complex identity of the daughter/son.

Morris's text certainly gives the reader a good selection of literary and non-literary sources from which to view the impact of the 'mode rétro'. The extensive material available for discussion inevitably requires the author to be selective, although I do feel that the bibliography could have been extended to include works such as Margaret Atack's *Literature and the Resistance – Cultural Politics and Narrative Forms 1940–1950*.<sup>2</sup> The clear focus of the study on content rather than form in the texts also means that Morris does not always fully address questions of narrative structure and literary technique, although the chapter on Modiano is an exception. A more formal perspective would have allowed him to explore the generic indeterminacy of many of the texts, neither clearly autobiographies nor historical documents, and to discuss in more detail the relationship between author and her/his narrative self which proves to be such a fascinating aspect of these accounts.

Equally, although Morris chooses to examine in depth two texts by women writers in the second section of his study, he has very little to say about the issue of gender and the 'mode rétro'. His comments on feminist perspectives in Marie Chaix's *Les Lauriers du lac de Constance*, and Evelyne Le Garrec's *La Rive allemande de ma mémoire* can appear to misrepresent a women-centred reading of the texts.<sup>3</sup> Both authors are in fact highly conscious of the father/daughter relationship as perceived within patriarchal society and are particularly attentive to the gender politics of Vichy ideology. Le Garrec's text, especially, develops the notion of an alternative matrilineal heritage, able to counter the debilitating effect of the collaborating father's political past on the narrator/daughter's sense of identity. The vital importance of the figure of the mother and women-centred communities for the identity formation of the narrator/daughter under-

lines the feminist concerns of these women writers and points to the influence of the burgeoning French feminist movement of the 1970s on their texts.

Clearly Morris's aim is not to incorporate a detailed discussion of questions of genre and gender into his study and his well-researched and informative work should be a welcome addition to reading lists for those both teaching and studying the Occupation in French literature. However, in order to look at more recent literary responses to the Occupation, I would like briefly to examine two texts which highlight how studies of genre and gender can bring different perspectives to an understanding of the continual evolution in narratives of the Occupation.

Annette Muller's *La Petite Fille du Vel d'Hiv* is representative of a renewed interest in testimonies of the Occupation which portray the experiences of 'les obscurs et sans gloire' – the 'people' of the war years rather than their leaders. The text is a harrowing account of the author's experiences as a young Jewish girl rounded up with her family by the French police in Paris on the 16 July 1942 and held in the Vélodrome d'Hiver. Annette and her youngest brother are separated from her mother and sent to the camps of Beaune-la-Rolande and then Drancy to await deportation. The narrator and her brother are finally saved from the fate of most of the other 4000 detained Jewish children, due to the intervention of her father who manages to obtain their release through influential contacts.

The text deliberately distorts the distinctions between historical document, autobiography and fiction with its testimonial style as nine-year old Annette becomes a witness to the persecution of defenceless sections of the Jewish community. The first person narrative account of life in Paris prior to and during the war years can be read as a piece of social history and yet the text also demonstrates sophisticated writing techniques. The author's choice of a child's perspective from which to view events allows the seemingly artless juxtaposition of scenes and characters to produce ironic effects, forcing the reader to condemn the attitudes of some French men and women, particularly the Vichy government and its agents. Any reader with a knowledge of the legacy of the Occupation in French political life cannot but be drawn to see how Annette Muller's account of the involvement of French Police in the rounding up 12,000 Jews in 1942 is an indirect intervention in contemporary debates on the responsibility of the French nation for such atrocities.<sup>4</sup> Reading the texts with such debates in mind adds another dimension to its importance.

Michèle Ramond's *L'Occupation* approaches contemporary representations of the Occupation from a very different perspective. The author does not wish to give a realistic portrayal of life under Vichy and German rule but rather to challenge the authority of mimetic linear narratives of the period. The formal experimentation of 'l'écriture féminine' is reworked to provide a highly individual and impressionistic vision of the war years where narrative patterning rather than plot development directs the reader's understanding. The text moves away from a normative representation of experience to allow contradictions and oppositions to coexist as part of a project to defamiliarise and question accepted interpretations of the Occupation. Dependant on allusion and analogy as central literary techniques, Ramond inscribes women's biological experiences into the very texture of the narrative with the result that the text invents another reading of the Occupation, expressing the impact of historical events on an individual female consciousness.

These two texts show the diversity of formal approaches to literary representations of the war years in contemporary France. From testimony to 'l'écriture féminine', the writers illustrate how questions of genre and gender are essential for an understanding of new departures in writings on the period. Morris has certainly opened up the study of the 'mode rétro's literary expression and helped create an intellectual climate in which research into narratives of the Occupation in the 1980s and 1990s can be fruitfully explored. It is now up to other researchers to follow his lead.

### Notes and references

1. ROUSSO, H., *Le Syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours*, (Seuil, 1990).
2. ATTACK, M., *Literature and the Resistance – Cultural Politics and Narrative Forms 1940–1950*, (Manchester University Press, 1989).
3. LE GARREC, E., *La Rive allemande de ma mémoire*, (Seuil, 1980); CHAIX, M., *Les Lauriers du lac de Constance*, (Seuil, 1976) and *L'Age du tendre*, (Seuil, 1979) which develop further a women-centred reading of the narrator/daughter's search for identity.
4. After the success of her book, a short documentary was made about Annette Muller's experiences to coincide with the anniversary of the Vélodrome d'Hiver incident – *La Marche du siècle – il y a cinquante ans: la Rafle du Vel d'Hiv*, (FR2 Centre, June 1992). The commemorative ceremony itself was surrounded in controversy as Mitterrand was whistled at by the crowd for his remarks that the Republic was not accountable for the activities of the Vichy regime. This led the 'Comité Vel D'Hiv 42' to ask for State recognition of Vichy's crimes. A compromise seems to have been reached with the introduction, this year, of a national day for commemoration of the racist and antisemitic persecutions committed under the Vichy regime on the 16 July.

## Rehabilitating the *Réfractaires*

Rosemary Chapman: University of Nottingham

Maricourt, T., *Henry Poulaille* (Manya, 1992), 276pp., 129F.

Redfern, W., *Feet First: Jules Vallès* (University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1992), vii, 232pp., £12.00

In his introduction Maricourt draws a parallel between Poulaille and Vallès: 'Il est vrai, toutefois, que Jules Vallès, parmi quelques autres, l'avait précédé sur le chemin de l'éviction, cet exil commun à tous les réfractaires, et que sa réhabilitation a été tardive'. Vallès is now well on the road to rehabilitation (if two Pléiade volumes serve as a measure). The appearance of the first full-length biography marks another stage in Poulaille's recovery. The two works offer interesting comparisons, both between their subjects and between the format and chosen approach of their authors.