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Abstract

Review of Claudia Jacobi. *Proust dixit ? Réceptions de La Recherche dans l'autofiction de Serge Doubrovsky, Carmen Martín Gaité et Walter Siti*. Bonn UP, 2016. 299 pp.

Keywords

Proust, autofiction, Claudia Jacobi

Claudia Jacobi. *Proust dixit ? Réceptions de La Recherche dans l'autofiction de Serge Doubrovsky, Carmen Martín Gaité et Walter Siti*. Bonn UP, 2016. 299 pp.

Claudia Jacobi's first book is a revision of her doctoral thesis, which she completed as part of the Trinationnal Doctoral Program in collaboration with the Universities of Paris Sorbonne (France), Florence (Italy), and Bonn (Germany). In a similarly international vein, her work examines the autofiction of French author Serge Doubrovsky, Spanish author Carmen Martín Gaité, and Italian author Walter Siti, investigating their references to Marcel Proust's masterpiece, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*). Jacobi treats the writers individually, dedicating to each one an extensive section that is broken down into several subcategories arranged by theme.

The strength of this book is Jacobi's ability to analyze in depth the history of autofiction within three literary traditions using a comparative approach. Focusing on the figure of Proust, Jacobi situates *La Recherche* as a starting point and shows how different traditions reinterpret the genre and make unique use of the Proustian source. She draws attention to Proust's role in shaping autofiction. The way in which autofiction overturns the foundation of traditional autobiography, challenging the literary mimesis, seems to reflect the existential (but also moral and social) crisis of the individual in the twentieth century.

In order to better define autofiction, Jacobi highlights its distinguishing features, including the fact that it challenges the concepts of homonymy and referentiality associated with traditional autobiography. She also fills in the cell that Philippe Lejeune had left blank in the table in *Le pacte autobiographique* (*The Autobiographical Pact*, 1975), a cornerstone of autobiographical studies, where he explores the paradoxical co-existence of fiction and factual reality. Jacobi sees Proust as appropriating all of these aspects of autobiography and autofiction and thus situates him as the original source of autofiction *ante litteram* due to the at once autobiographical and fictional nature of *La Recherche* and to the homonymy between the author and the main character, Marcel.

Memory is a theme that threads several of the chapters, including the sections examining the work of Martín Gaité, whose "memoire involontaire fantastique" (149) 'fantastic involuntary memory' is the first example of Spanish autofiction, according to Susana Arroyo Redondo and Marie-Linda Ortega. Drawing on Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic, Jacobi defines Martín Gaité's work as "autofiction fantastique" (144) 'fantastic autofiction,' in which historical events work as "magical" triggers of memory, echoing the way Proust describes epiphanies by resorting to religious terminology. Even though Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* (*The Back Room*) appears to be a clear rewriting of Proust's *Combray*, there has not been enough scholarship on this topic that points out the epistemological and aesthetic similarities between these texts. Building

upon her analysis of Martín Gaité, Jacobi reframes the phenomenon of autofiction in Spain as a literary reaction to Francisco Franco's death in 1975 and the end of censorship, which had prevented the spread of personal writings during his regime.

While fantasy pervades the chapter on Martín Gaité, reality serves as a unifying theme in the chapter on Siti, whose hyperrealism works in counterpoint to the "impressionist" nature of *La Recherche*. Even if autofiction in Italy emerges twenty years later than it does in France—*Scuola di nudo* ('School of Nude') was published in 1994—Siti steadfastly denies being influenced by Doubrovsky. Nevertheless, he mentions Proust as one of the "guides" who play an essential part in his creative process. Siti's language—that Jacobi translates as "plus réel que le réel" (189) 'more real than reality'—aims to be as direct and unfiltered as possible. In challenging Proustian "impressionism," this "hyperreal" language privileges a more distant perspective of the subject and reveals the profound epistemological shift taking place throughout the twentieth century.

In her exploration of reality through Siti's works, Jacobi also analyzes the idea of "télérealité" (191) 'reality show' that the Italian author defines as the mediatic impossibility to distinguish truth from fiction and thus the ultimate autofiction of modern times. This attention to multiple media contexts points the way to a deeper understanding of the genre. Here, Jacobi's study would be enriched by the inclusion of other forms of self-representation engaging with Proust, thus extending beyond the strictly literary and providing the reader with a better understanding for autofiction as a genre per se. One such potential avenue of inquiry would be the filmmaker Luchino Visconti, an attentive reader of *La Recherche*, whose cinema Gilles Deleuze famously defined as "Proustian."

Paving the way for scholars to explore genres beyond the literary, Jacobi's study also points to Proust's extensive impact on writers not treated in this book. For example, the appendix compiles declarations of Proustian influence by various autofiction authors ranging from Javier Marias to Philippe Vilain. While incredibly rich, the appendix is not complete, compelling Jacobi to invite scholars to expand on the current study and include authors from a variety of Francophone and Hispanophone traditions. This is a welcome invitation indeed, since many Proustian-inspired texts by authors such as Assia Djebar, Jorge Luis Borges, and Julio Cortázar can also rightly be considered canonical examples of autofiction. This monograph contributes substantially to studies on Life Writing and will be a valuable tool for scholars investigating the relationship between autobiography, fiction, and intertextuality in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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