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Ruth Hemus, *The Poetry of Céline Arnauld: From Dada to Ultra-Modern*. Oxford: Legenda 2021. 184 pp. £75.00, \$99.00, €85.00. (hb). ISBN 978-1-781888-31-5; \$0.00. (eb). ISBN 978-1-781888-33-9.

Review by Elizabeth Benjamin, Coventry University.

I first encountered the work of Ruth Hemus when I was working towards a doctorate on Dada and Existentialism. Her text *Dada's Women*<sup>[1]</sup>, and in particular its chapter on Sophie Taeuber, was crucial to my own work, not least because it was one of a very small number of texts dedicated to highlighting the role of female Dadas (joining Nadia Sawelson-Gorse, Paula K. Kamenish, Britte Jürgs, Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo <sup>[2]</sup>); the majority of other published texts on the subject were at best neglectful, and at worst completely distorting of these artists' contribution to avant-garde movements. It should come as no surprise that *The Poetry of Céline Arnauld* is equally of value to the field, and is an excellent addition to Hemus's own works. The monograph, focusing on Arnauld's creative output, tracks her artistic trajectory across her lifespan, from her early experiments, through her collaboration within and outside of Dada, to her post-Dada development as a writer. The conclusion analyses the constraints and obstacles imposed on Arnauld, constituted by what Hemus characterises as the "triple margin" of gender, nationality, and ultra-modernity (p. 151).

While Dada's women have gained better treatment in recent years—particularly following the movement's 2016 centenary—there is still much scope for improvement of their representation in academic and public spheres alike, and Hemus keeps this conversation moving in a positive direction. As she rightly states: "Anniversaries offer opportunities to rehearse what we know of events and people but also to review our perceptions. The centenary of Dada's beginnings in Zurich gave rise to prolific and multiple revisionings of Dada that took an open and often radical approach to manifestations and participants" (p. 6). As with other important contributions to the post-2000 "rehabilitation" of women artists, Hemus's work repositions Arnauld—beyond partner, wife, associate, or adjunct to a Dada man—as an artist in her own right. Hemus describes Arnauld as a "paradox" (p. 1), difficult to place and crossing disciplinary boundaries—a characterisation in line with Arnauld's own desire not to be shoehorned into alignment with a particular movement among those with which she associated. This approach is welcome and allows for the *œuvre* and career of such creatives to be appreciated in greater fullness, something that is particularly important in one as prolific as Arnauld. Hemus uses the poet's work as a framework for the structure of her own book, which allows Arnauld's voice to take centre stage.

Chapters are short so as to allow for better focus on individual texts or moments in Arnauld's life and career, and Hemus highlights the value of looking at texts (notably poems) both serially and collectively, as well as within the overall legacy of the artist. Translations have been carefully and judiciously rendered to afford maximum comprehension of the multifaceted and often deliberately difficult texts and phrases, and explanations are given when translation loss occurs, which assists the non-francophone reader while adding points of interest for a reader comfortable in the original language. Close textual analysis is interspersed with contextual detail and discussion, which makes for an engaging read facilitated by the style in which the text is written. Hemus's own interest in the subject shines through in the sense of intrigue she weaves through the text while maintaining academic rigour throughout. Her intermittent discussions of her own research process provide key insights into the work, and cement its integrity; in particular, she highlights the need to look at texts in different contexts, specifically in their original contexts where other editions or anthologies may exist. This practice, she notes, "is an important, active counterpoint to the necessarily historicised summaries of the avant-garde that can result in thinned-down and ossified versions of fertile diversity" (p. 95). She also very successfully devotes each chapter to a particular text while reading across Arnauld's works, themes, and aspects of identity in order to offer a comprehensive broader picture.

The book's first part delves into Arnauld's early experimental works, and considers in turn *La Lanterne magique* (1914), *Tournevire* (1919), *Poèmes à claires-voies* (1920) and *Point de mire* (1921). In doing so Hemus explores the state of Dada at its centenary, drawing out more of its inter- and multi-national nature, as well as diversifying Arnauld's legacy by highlighting the many aspects of her identity that affected her life and works. Given that the discussion so deftly unpicks the complexities of identity-building through names, it seems somewhat problematic that Arnauld is referred to as "not what her name suggests" (that is, through the adoption of a French-Catholic name to replace her original Romanian-Jewish one), as well as referring to her birth name as her "real name" (p. 14); Arnauld's adopted aspects of her identity—and her ability to avoid stigmas and dangers attached to her hereditary ones—may have been considered very real to her, whether it be through this identity being a chosen one, or especially in light of their role in her literary assimilation and indeed her very survival. Nonetheless, Hemus's discussion of biographical detail is crucial to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of a person for whom there is very little detail available. Hemus refers to Arnauld as "a remarkable, untapped case study of a Jewish, Romanian-born émigré who infiltrated the Parisian literary scene at an explosive point in individual and collective experiment" (p. 17), and goes on to underline the necessity of looking to her work for biographical information, since she proves otherwise fairly elusive.

Part one brings together four texts to highlight the ways in which they are themselves unique but also contribute to threads in contemporaneous movements such as Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism, but also with links to Proust, Méliès, sea shanties, circuses and fairy-tales, as well as to the artist's own development across her life and career. Hemus successfully discusses *La Lanterne magique* despite there being no copies currently in existence—an exercise that is no mean feat and offers an engaging read. *Tournevire* is demonstrated to be unique for its positioning as a novel within an avant-garde that had not yet reached this point in its own development, and has for this reason been neglected in the literature. She thus positions works such as "Jeu d'échecs" and *Tournevire*: "Not entirely successful as written texts, they occupy a space between the avant-garde theatre of the early decades of the twentieth century in Paris and post-war absurdist theatre" (p. 32). Hemus connects and contextualises Arnauld's *Poèmes à claires-voies* using Apollinaire and verbal collage, while recognising the constant challenge of categorising the work

of women without benchmarking them against the (largely male) canon (p. 35). The volume of poetry *Point de mire* is analysed in great detail, with the aim of demonstrating Arnauld's avant-gardist principles—linking her work to that of Modernism, and particularly the Futurists and Surrealists—but also of uncovering shared themes and meaning across individual poems. Indeed, she notes that the very fact of the collection being so eclectic paradoxically gives way to reiterations of words and a kind of shared language across the set. These include some more contextually logical ones, such as those alluding to the battlefields, death, and grief of World War I, but also those of magic and reality, nature, light, and freedom.

Part two deals with another selection from Arnauld's output, this time specifically honing in on her interaction with the avant-garde movements of the early 1920s, and with particular focus on magazines and journals. Hemus provides a nuanced account of Arnauld's interaction with, and contribution to, Dada. In particular she highlights the fact that Arnauld herself pointed out the already-existing gender imbalance, in terms of representation and visibility, in the movement, to Tristan Tzara. Hemus indicates in addition a consistent “tension between Arnauld's individual poetic output and her participation in polemical group activities” (p. 61). That is, her prolific output outweighed her role as a member of the groups such as Dada and Surrealism into which she is routinely assimilated (in such a way moreover as to diminish her role in them), while her work in some ways stands as independent from and moves beyond these groups, whose dynamics she resisted in numerous ways, as Hemus discusses in chapter eight. While Arnauld had much in common with Dada's methods and approaches—“it is the free and playful use of images, fantastical qualities, and privileging and highlighting of the language material that are crucial to her Dada texts” (p. 72)—Hemus makes it clear that Arnauld's own production marked itself out with its own style.

Discussion of Arnauld's own journal, *Projecteur* (1920), is particularly interesting, in its continued linking of the artist to and situating of her within the Dada movement, sitting alongside its simultaneous underscoring of the fact that Arnauld was not to be definitively characterised by this association. Hemus draws out Arnauld's individual ambition and celebrates her success even as “apparently the only woman to have started up a journal within Dada circles” (p. 74), as well as demonstrating the ways in which *Projecteur* might be considered to change the way in which we might perceive the field of literature beyond Dada; in particular, she highlights Arnauld's insistence on references to film culture (p. 77). Through this detailed analysis of the journal and of Arnauld's interactions, Hemus comes to the conclusion that “Arnauld's resistance to assimilation gives weight to a contention that it is time to posit her not only as an energetic participant in the avant-garde's confrontation and subversion, but also as an agitator and innovator working on her own terms” (p. 83). This high praise of the artist certainly consolidates attempts to reposition Arnauld, and undoes some of the neglect of women artists and authors more broadly.

While other chapters have focused primarily on textual analysis, chapter seven gives greater space for an exploration of the personal and political interactions of artists within and without their movements. As movements such as Dada have traditionally been (allowed to be) dominated by male protagonists, so the documenting and discussion of the great disputes among key players have followed this gendered pattern. Hemus again draws Arnauld into the conversation, detailing her active part in what is classically defined as the schism between Tzara and Breton, and her proposal of a call for a splinter movement, “projectivism”. Hemus highlights Arnauld's prose contribution, “Les Faux Managers”, to the publication *Le Mouvement accéléré* as evidence of

Arnauld's frustration at the eternal issue of gender bias and male dominance within leadership, noting that "[w]here other texts mixed critique and comedy, seriousness and irony, this prose text is an unambiguous declaration of disgust at institutionalisation" (p. 87).

Part three logically details the later moments of Arnauld's life and artistic production, with particular attention to their poignant aspects that in some ways set the path for the events that shaped her final years. These include questions of (be)longing and travelling, consistent with tropes in Jewish diasporic writing, and key to reasons for persecution, as well as night-time anxieties and identity crises, which in some ways may have pre-empted her isolation and later suicide. A first chapter more explicitly deals with notions of belonging through Arnauld's texts and context, again to draw out her uniqueness separate from the movements with which she is traditionally associated. Hemus also helpfully points to areas within Arnauld's work that might be read as more autobiographical than others (see e.g., p. 109), which is key to gaining greater understanding of the writer, since there is so little documentation about her. Again Hemus foregrounds the problematic nature of over-insistence on alignment with specific movements, noting at one point that a passage in "Diorama" "can be read justifiably as a metaphorical evocation of Arnauld's fraught and occasionally hostile interactions with the male-dominated Dada group" (p. 113). The subsequent chapter discusses the book *La Nuit rêve et Le Clavier secret*, almost a decade in production, drawing upon its aural and musical qualities. Hemus also suggests that this work "points to a feminist subversion of the romance narrative" (p. 118), and foregrounds the idea that Arnauld offers a fresh perspective on the treatment of (women's) madness (p. 123). What is most interesting about this analysis is the way in which it demonstrates Arnauld's diversification of approaches to madness, going well beyond traditional representations, "from a perception of it as an accomplice to creativity, to visceral expressions of symptoms of fear and anxiety" (p. 123).

In the final two chapters, Hemus draws strongly upon the importance of the passage of time to Modernism more broadly and Arnauld's work (and life) in particular. In the case of the latter, she underscores an additional important feature of the theme of nature. Here the biographical again takes on a more central role, as well as being used to demonstrate the ways in which Arnauld's writing, through its dominant themes of "lamentation and indignation," "offers rich clues to an environment of escalating tensions" (p. 139) that framed the events of the late 1930s in France and Europe. Looking at Arnauld's later work, Hemus continues to draw some parallels with the style and content of her Dada output, as well as with the work of other Dadas, yet notes a changing tone as Arnauld's context too changed; "The perils of the interwar period are laid bare" (p. 142). She provides a poignant reading of Arnauld's *Rien qu'une étoile, suivi de Plains-chants sauvages*, which would be her only output during the Second World War (as far as can be seen in terms of publication), as well as her last book. Hemus highlights the autobiographical elements of this work ("optimism has ceded to foreboding" (p. 140); "One stanza can be read as a love poem to Dermée." (ibid.)) as well as exploring biographical details themselves, charting themes of precarity, instability, and self-awareness, as Arnauld's context shifted between times of war and peace, safety and risk, including at one point escaping the occupied zone of France. As she writes, "Arnauld's struggle to make her voice read and heard is palpable in her writing" (p. 149).

This text is a long overdue—and very welcome—repositioning of Arnauld and her works in the artistic and academic spheres. Topics and texts are deftly and sensitively handled, all the while highlighting (and largely avoiding) the gaps into which one might fall in engaging in such treatment. As Arnauld was painfully aware of the likelihood of being lost to posterity, as well as

foreseeing some of the more caricatured historical representations of Dada, so Hemus is careful not to misrepresent or overstate her role in terms of her links to events and movements of the early twentieth century. Hemus mirrors Arnould's own recognition of multiple and varied influences on this artist's work, countering the traditional narratives of rejection of the past so characteristic of movements such as Dada (and the depiction thereof). *The Poetry of Céline Arnould* will be an essential addition to the library of scholars of the avant-garde, and, hopefully, a key player in the continued re-adjustment of the legacy of such movements to celebrate the important role of such "intolerable" (p. 156) and multifaceted individuals.

[1] Ruth Hemus, *Dada's Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[2] Nadia Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Paula K. Kamenish, *Mamas of Dada: Women of the European Avant-Garde* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015); Britta Jürgs, *Etwas Wasser in der Seife: Portraits dadaistischer Künstlerinnen und Schriftstellerinnen* (Berlin: Aviva, 1999); Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada and Modernity – A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo eds, *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elza von Freytag-Loringhoven* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

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