

## ■ reviews

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# Mercè Rius: *D'Ors, filósofo [D'Ors, Philosopher]* Publicacions de la Universitat de València, València, 2014, 297 pp.

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Twenty years of ceaseless dedication has enabled the author to deepen and clarify her perspectives and intuitions about Eugeni d'Ors, with respect both to his membership in the philosophers' guild and to the affinities of many of his considerations and approaches with some of the strands that run through the philosophy of the twentieth century. Without any aim to justify an interplay of influences, a certain air, spirit or "angel" gives the author license to weave a number of suggestive selective affinities.

Within the upheavals of our cultural and academic world, the specific treatment of d'Ors's philosophy, which has had a positive reception at different stages and in certain political quarters, contrasts negatively with an insistent disaffection, on political grounds, within certain other academic and cultural arenas. Now is not the time to address this matter, so let us try to remain at a certain distance.

An initial reception of d'Ors's philosophy included not only the immediate discrepancies of Ramon Turró, Jaume Serra Hunter and Tomàs Carreras Artau, among others, but also the critiques of his own followers and closest collaborators, such as Joan Crexells, Josep M. Capdevila and Alexandre Galí, to name but a few. From the perspective of his philosophy, attention should also be given to the early reactions from the Church and left-wing politicians. Since the Spanish civil war (1936–39), every attempt to reclaim what might go by the label, even vaguely, of "Catalan philosophical thought" has included the figure of d'Ors (whether the approach was that of Alfred Badia, Alexandre Galí, Josep Ferrater Mora or Eusebi Colomer), and they have treated him—if in no other way—as an inescapable piece of the story. In many cases, this recognition was not without criticism or effusive praise and it typically took place on the same controversial ground that d'Ors had staked out for himself. In this case, the adjective "controversial" is perhaps necessary in order to do justice to the truest

sense of the man's pugnacity. D'Ors's work always kept to an extraordinarily violent terrain, one of cultural violence, peopled by insiders and outsiders, the blessed and the damned, so it is hardly strange, though it pains us, that even today his reception should be situated on that same terrain. Ironically, it is a sign of his success.

At this point, though, would it not be useful to entertain the first steps towards a comprehensive d'Ors, adopting an approach that eschews the ground on which he situated himself, in order to understand the man and his ground better? Being unable to do so would be a sign of our academic immaturity if you will. But if that is genuinely where we are, perhaps we could at least agree on some foundations for such a treatment: "the complete d'Ors" might be a start. The publication of his oeuvre in a Catalan edition is not only imperative but also indispensable to obtain a rounded view of d'Ors. Recognition here needs to go to work being done to recover d'Ors's unpublished writings currently scattered in various archives. One example is Xavier Pla's edition of *La curiositat [Curiosity]*, Quaderns Crema, Barcelona, 2009. Work also needs to begin on d'Ors the individual.

Gaining a fuller view of d'Ors, we will be better able to resituate the pieces of his biography, his output, and his varied and complicated reception. One line of reception, the one in the arena of Catalan academic philosophy, has been woven out of a number of strands, including but not limited to those of José M. Valverde, the students of Emilio Lledó, the Col·legi de Filosofia (a philosophical society formed in the years of the country's transition to democracy) and others committed to restoring the autonomy enjoyed briefly by the University of Barcelona during the Republic. Leaving aside any links that all this may have had with d'Ors's own agenda from the nineteen-forties until his death in 1954, the book currently in our sights is a good example of an ongoing reception within the context of a philosophical assessment of the man's work. Following her teacher and director of studies Xavier Rubert de Ventós, Rius nevertheless strikes out in new directions, offering in *D'Ors, filósofo [D'Ors, Philosopher]* an assortment of her own studies of the man since the appearance of her monograph *La filosofia d'Eugeni d'Ors [The Philosophy of Eugeni d'Ors]* (Curial, Barcelona, 1991). Both books fall within what I call a "philosophical assessment", though if we accede to the author's intent, the label "reassessment" might be more fitting, especially in the case of the second volume. This is because a major part of Rius's contribution is to show how the spirit of d'Ors (his "angel") can be linked to European philosophical concerns and formulations that occupy much of the twentieth century. A characteristic feature of Rius's reception is that she hones in quite early (on page 19 of each of the two books) on a time and place that coalesced in one of d'Ors's heteronyms and in a single work: Xènius and the *Glosari [his Glossary]*. This is the perspective needed to

understand and receive what Rius's latest book has to offer in its two diverse sections.

The first section contains five studies that have previously appeared in a variety of publications and are here revised and translated into Spanish. The studies present overviews (chapter I.2 frames what Rius calls a “cultural project” that she has published before under the title of “The Philosophy of Eugeni d’Ors”), offer analyses of some of d’Ors’s works (chapter I.3: *Oceanografía del tedi* [*Oceanography of Tedium*]), and explore central motifs (chapter I.1 looks at Xènius and the “heart of the city”; chapter I.4 focuses on “angels, not dragons”). Particularly notable perhaps is the crucial fifth chapter (“The Secret of Philosophy: a Final Balance”), which shows the extent to which d’Ors’s philosophy, viewed as a whole, can be thought of as reflecting a will to system, based on his 1947 work *The Secret of Philosophy*: on balance, Rius finds a reiteration of the fragmentariness, which she values positively, and of the fractal nature typical of d’Ors’s approach. It should not be forgotten that d’Ors’s *The Secret of Philosophy* first appeared in print two years after the book by José Luis López Aranguren entitled *The Philosophy of Eugeni d’Ors*. Rius takes stock of d’Ors’s readings and his journey of discovery and meditation, and she engages in dialogue with his text, bringing a wealth of in-depth knowledge.

In the second section of her book, the “angel” or spirit moves with greater freedom. To d’Ors’s pyrotechnics, Rius adds her own skill at finding connections with contemporary philosophy. Enriching his prose, she weaves an entire cloth of new resonances and references. A venture of this kind, centred on rereading and comparative reading, proves nonetheless familiar in a standardised cultural tradition. *D’Ors, filósofo* by Mercè Rius shows how to write philosophically about someone else’s philosophical writing—in a spirit of renewal, not as a restorer of mummies in a museum. This brings us full circle, though, in that looking at matters as they are looked at by guests at a party or festival that is no longer their own, does not mean ceasing to grasp that the party or the writing was once authored or celebrated by somebody.

*Translation from Catalan by Joel Graham*

