

H-France Review Vol. 7 (August 2007), No. 97

**Robert Stam**, *François Truffaut and Friends: Modernism, Sexuality, and Film Adaptation*. New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 2006. xvi+239 pp. 25 b&w photographs, chronology, notes, and index. \$23.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN: 0-8135-3725-8.

Review by Marja Warehime, University of South Carolina.

Robert Stam's contributions to film studies have been numerous and distinguished. His recent work on filmic adaptations of novels segues to *François Truffaut and Friends*, whose core is an analysis of the links between two novels and two films: François Truffaut's adaptations of Pierre Henri Roché's novels: *Jules and Jim* and *Two English Girls*. Much has been written about Truffaut as a key figure in New Wave cinema (1959-1962), however Stam's book does not focus exclusively on Truffaut, Roché, or their "friends"—although two of Roché's contemporaries, the German writers Franz and Helen Grund Hessel, are key figures in this "work of contextualized film and literary analysis...that constantly crosses the borders between art and life" (p. xi). While, on one hand, Stam attempts to evoke the larger history of "bohemia, the arts and sexuality" through the transnational love triangle formed by Roché and the Hessels, he also sketches out multiple avenues of approach to the constellation of lives, texts and films that he interrogates, suggesting that the reader might see in them "one small instance of the gendered nature of modernism as it was lived by men and by women," as well as a "gesture toward a study of friendship" (p. xiii), "a meditation on the bookishness of sexuality and the erotics of bibliophilia" (p. xiv), or alternatively as a meditation on translation in a very broad sense, all of the principals having been engaged in some form of translation, whether literal, or from one set of cultural codes to another, or, like Truffaut, from one medium to another (p. xv).

As a form of social and cultural history, *Truffaut and Friends* could not be more different in conception from a more modernist project such as Roger Shattuck's *The Banquet Years*, which studied a discrete slice of national history, even though the two studies are linked by their focus on the avant-garde and both crystallize around four key figures. [1] *Truffaut and Friends* ranges from Europe to the New World and over the more than a hundred years that stretch from Roché's birth in 1879 to Truffaut's death in 1984. It traces the complicated sexual and emotional entanglements of the principals and explores "the biographical overtones and historical reverberations of texts" (p. xi).

Taking Truffaut's adaptation of *Jules and Jim* (the film that "catalyzed [Truffaut's] filmic vocation") as his point of departure, Stam situates the origins of the film in a "cross generational identification" (p. 3) that brought Roché and Truffaut together as men "who loved women" (p. 195) but remained fundamentally misogynist, their affective lives definitively marked by a problematic relationship with their mothers. Stam then deftly summarizes the New Wave's position on adaptation as it was articulated by Truffaut, noting in particular Truffaut's sense that the notion of "fidelity" to the source text was "a false problem" (p. 13). It is, of course, precisely a highly personal and unconventional notion of fidelity that marked the romantic triangle of Helen, Franz and Henri-Pierre Roché and which inspired Roché's *Jules and Jim*. Roché (diarist, novelist, Don Juan, collector of *objets d'art*) was the model for Jim, while the writer, editor, and translator Franz Hessel (friend and collaborator of Walter Benjamin) was the prototype for Jules. Hessel's wife, journalist and writer Helen Grund Hessel, became Catherine (Kate in Roché's novel). Their work, their travels, and transnational love affair, which began in the 1920s, brought them into contact with many important figures in French and German arts and letters.

The link Stam establishes between sexual and textual experimentation emerges most clearly in the

chapters devoted to Roché's and Helen Hessel's journals, although his analysis of the style and imagery of their journal writing confirms gender stereotypes. He describes Roché's writing as "straightforward," "instrumental," "moving like a locomotive," its imagery dominated by "divinely hard erections" and Helen's as "fragmentary," "associative," her imagery "fluid" and "aquatic" (p. 140). Roché's conception of polyphonic writing, which grows out of the diaries, emerged at the end of the affair with the Hessels. Roché envisioned a "collective novel" consisting of each participant's account of the relationship together with the others' reactions to these accounts. If this project was never realized, Roché does later make more limited use of polyphony by juxtaposing different diary accounts in *Two English Girls*. Stam places this polyphonic conception of writing within broad currents of artistic modernism ranging from Eisensteinian montage and Cubist collage to the play of different voices in the work of Dostoevsky and the dialogics of Bakhtin, although it is clear that Roché's novels, like Truffaut's films, never consummate a break with conventional forms.

Stam's best and most developed chapters focus on the rich interconnections between Roché's novels and Truffaut's adaptations of them. Stam devotes a chapter to each novel, then traces its translation by Truffaut into filmic form, using material from Roché's and Helen Grund's diaries and letters to connect Roché's life and work to Truffaut's own "oedipally inflected family romance" (p. 179). The book's coda is provided by an analysis of Truffaut's 1977 film, *The Man Who Loved Women*, which, although not an adaptation, was no doubt partly inspired by Roché. The film recapitulates (in a half humorous, half nostalgic mode) many of the themes and figures characteristic of the Truffaut/Roché films, including the determinant mother-son relationship, the love-death nexus, the central male figure who is a seducer, a collector, and a writer (most frequently of his own memoirs) whose literary/creative success provides some compensation for his ultimate failure at love.

Stam's work is clearly and elegantly written, theoretically sophisticated, and enriched by his wide-ranging knowledge of literature and film. If the book has a weakness it is inherent in Roché himself, who (despite the fascinating photographic portrait in the round which Stam reproduces in the text) remains oddly one-dimensional, absorbed by his amorous pursuits, obsessively recording them in diaries that were "a vital necessity and a kind of erotic pulse taking" (p. 178). If Roché dreamed of writing the story of his life "like Casanova, but in a different spirit" (p. 26), it might have lacked the generous humanity, depth, and range that draw historians to Casanova's life as the portrait of an age. Truffaut did envision publishing Roché's diaries, but, as Stam reports, the typist he engaged to transcribe them refused to finish the work because it "made her sick" (p. 101).

Stam wryly observes that "artistically inclined individuals tend to regard episodes in their sexual lives as epoch-making world historical events" (p. 117) and if this is a rule, Roché is no exception. Although history is by no means absent from Stam's work, it emerges most powerfully in the figure of Franz Hessel, whose Jewish origins were blurred by his family's conversion to Protestantism, although this did not save him from anti-Semitism. Hessel was slow to recognize that he was at risk in Nazi Germany, but at Helen's urging left Berlin in 1938 for France, where he was later arrested and imprisoned as an *ennemi citoyen*. Stam quotes Hessel's fellow prisoner, Leon Feuchtwanger, who characterized Hessel as "this sweet little man who lived at Milles [the prison] as if [he] were in the middle of cosmopolitan Berlin" (p.49). Roché was apparently deeply touched by Hessel's early death, his friend's health broken by his incarceration, but he was not "especially sensitive to the evils of anti-Semitism," writing of *Mein Kampf*, "Very powerful. A book of action. I understand its success" (p. 50).

In fact, it is Truffaut who lends Roché's *Jules and Jim* its historical depth and creates a sense of the powerful impact of world historical events on individual lives. He sets the beginning of the film in 1912 to bring it closer to World War I and uses archival materials (news reels and archival footage) to infuse the film with the sense of the importance of the two World Wars, which merely served as a backdrop to the novels. If *Two English Girls* (the novel), set in the years between 1899 and 1914, repeats the pattern set by *Jules and Jim* (a transnational friendship/romantic triangle whose backdrop is international

conflict), Roché's work here turns more inward, focusing on the sexual initiation of his three characters, who become a world unto themselves, drawn to solitary pursuits, either masturbatory or literary and artistic. In this novel, the difference in national background merges with the gender differences, making the two sisters a foreign country that the continental lover will inevitably leave, sublimating his loss in letters and novels. Not that Roché was above publishing the revealing letters of one of the sisters. Stam reports that Picasso "famously said of Roché that he was 'very nice,' but in the end 'he was only a translation'" (p. xvi). By "translating" Roché's work, Stam and Truffaut have brought it a broader public and perhaps endowed it with greater generosity and a larger spirit than Roché himself demonstrated.

## NOTES

[1] Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I. Alfred Jarry, Henri Rousseau, Erik Satie, Guillaume Apollinaire*. Revised ed. (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1986).

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*H-France Review* Vol. 7 (August 2007), No. 97

ISSN 1553-9172