

Dominique D. Fisher and Lawrence R. Schehr (eds.), *Articulations of Difference: Gender Studies and Writing in French*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. 271 pp. Works cited and index. \$55.00 US (c1). ISBN 0-8047-2974-3.

Review by Carolyn A. Durham, College of Wooster, for H-France, July 1998.

The title of *Articulations of Difference: Gender Studies and Writing in French* was selected to emphasize what the editors of this collection of fifteen essays on homosexuality in French writing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries perceive as the distinctiveness and the originality of the volume: "In that title, beyond gender and genre, is the idea of new production, new worlds, and new ideas" (p. 14). In their introductory essay, Dominique D. Fisher and Lawrence R. Schehr stress their effort to include essays which use multiple approaches to a variety of material in order to provide a plural reading of representations and theories of homosexuality. Although there is much of interest in this collection of essays, including considerable diversity within a specific literary context, the volume is far less varied both in terms of the type of texts studied and of the theoretical framework within which they are read than the title and the introduction might lead the reader to believe.

With one exception, all of the contributors to the volume are professors of French or Comparative Literature who engage in close textual analysis of predominantly canonic literary works within a context strongly influenced by poststructuralist theory. Although the essays as a whole offer consistently complex, interesting, and often innovative readings of important texts, they will appeal primarily to literary scholars who are specialists in the field. Many of the essays assume an in-depth knowledge of the work of the author under discussion and almost all require a comfortable familiarity with the language and concepts of contemporary French textual theory. The editors of the volume acknowledge its predominantly literary focus as central to the exploration of "self-conscious, written language" as "a privileged means to understanding" the evaluations of the representation of homosexuality in modern French writing" (p. 1). Although the writers--e.g., Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Marcel Proust, Jean Genet, Stendhal--and the theorists--e.g., Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Rene Girard--whose names recur most often in this collection do indeed constitute "a canonic list to be sure", as the editors acknowledge, there are some interesting surprises as well that at times broaden the audience to whom these essays can be expected to appeal.

One of these moments of clear general interest to scholars and teachers in a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields is the introduction to *Articulations of Difference*. Fisher and Schehr focus on the development of gay and lesbian studies or what they believe one "might more properly call gender studies" (p. 5) as an academic

discipline. This simultaneous appropriation and limitation of "gender studies", which informs all of the essays in this collection, is sure to prove somewhat surprising and controversial for feminist scholars in particular. In a cross-cultural battle of metaphors, the editors argue that the preference for the metaphor of the closet, characteristic of the English-speaking world, over the metaphor of public and private spheres, characteristic of the French-speaking world, has significantly shaped both gender studies and our understanding of homosexual writing. Notably, the publication in 1995 by the Modern Language Association of *Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature*, edited by George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman (New York, 1995), marks both "the official acceptance of queer theory by the institution" (p. 7) and the simultaneous reduction of "literature" itself to a specifically and exclusively Anglo-American tradition. In contrast, Fisher and Schehr offer "the reader attuned to what one might grotesquely call a non-Anglo-American bias" (p. 8) an anthology for the 1990s, which restores to prominence the theoretical foundation of gender studies in European and especially French thought. The editors hope that speaking of public and private spaces rather than closets will lead to a new stage in the development of gender studies in which the identity politics of the American academy will be reconfigured to acknowledge literary and cultural difference.

The first essay in the volume comes closest to illustrating the editors' contention that precisely because canonic French literature of the last two centuries did not "closet" or marginalize homosexuality, "a bold step might be taken to view non-homosexual literature through the optics furnished by gender studies" (p. 15). David Bell interprets Jean Baudrillard's *De la seduction* as a partial rewriting of *De l'amour* by Stendhal, "the straightest of novelists" (p. 18). Of more interest to social and cultural historians will be Bell's useful contextualization of Baudrillard's description of seduction within an intellectual history of the late 1960s and 1970s shaped by Marxism, Freudianism, and feminism. The next two essays focus on the complexities of the discourse of homosexuality in Charles Baudelaire's poetry. Dominique Fisher's observations on the historical development of the terms *homosexual* and *lesbian* will be of general interest as will her discussion of the Baudelairean imaginary in relation to the feminization of culture within modernism. Fisher presents the thematic and the allegorical functioning of Baudelaire's poem addressed to Sainte-Beuve as generally typical of the numerous poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* that can be linked to lesbian motifs. Whereas Fisher interprets the lesbian motif in Baudelaire within the framework of the destabilization of the masculine subject, John Barbaret uses Rene Girard's notion of the erotic triangle to discuss Baudelaire's performance of the homoeroticism of everyday life in such poems as "Les Foules". The fourth essay, "Gay Incipit, Botanical Connections, Nosegays, and Bouquets", is by the late George H. Bauer, to whose memory the entire collection is dedicated. In an essay consistent with the insightful and charmingly quirky voice that characterized all of his work, Bauer introduces *Les Fleurs*

*animees* by the nineteenth-century illustrator J. J. Grandville as the first stop on a guided tour of gay fauna and flora. As a secret code for homosexuality, the language of flowers connects writers and artists as varied as Baudelaire, Andre Gide, Marcel Proust, Jean Genet, and Robert Mapplethorpe.

Chapters 5 and 6, devoted to non-literary texts, will be of greatest interest to intellectual historians. Nigel Smith examines nineteenth-century medical discourse through the work of Ambroise Tardieu and Francois Carlier as well in as the Larousse dictionary (1866-79). Smith's provocative thesis is that texts whose ostensible purpose is to affirm bourgeois society's repulsion for homosexuals and their acts can in fact be read as homoerotic texts in their own right. In the process, Smith also engages in a critique of Michel Foucault's discussion of screen- discourse in *The History of Sexuality*. Vernon A. Rosario's essay also discusses nineteenth-century medical discourse in the works of Jean-Martin Charcot and of Valentin Magnan, who first introduced the concept of *inversion sexuelle* into French. Although Rosario, himself a resident in psychiatry, is particularly interested in the intersection of scientific and literary discourse, his essay focuses on the moral climate of nineteenth-century Europe and his discussion of "the novelizing and fictioning" (p. 116) of homosexuality by Marc-Andre Raffalovich and J. K. Huysmans draws directly upon "the *pharmakon* of history itself. Of all the human technologies, none is more inherently dependent on fabricating and forgetting than history" (p. 118).

The majority of the remaining chapters in *Articulations of Difference* will primarily interest literary scholars and, at times, highly specialized ones. For that audience, the writers of these essays offer close readings of often little known texts which frequently alter the dominant interpretation of the author in question. Charles D. Minahen's reading of Paul Verlaine's posthumous *Hombres*, which was not included in the Pleiade edition of the poet's complete works until 1989, challenges the cliched view of Verlaine as a late Romantic master at evoking melodic and bittersweet *etats d'ame*. Minahen describes *Hombres* as an explicitly pornographic work in which Verlaine uses his characteristic religious vocabulary to flaunt the twin taboos of homosexuality and paedophilia. Melanie Hawthorne's essay discusses Liane de Pougy's *Idylle saphique* (1901), an autobiographical *roman a clef* in which Pougy describes her affair with the American Modernist Natalie Barney, within the context of Jessica Benjamin's work. This is one of very few essays in this collection to draw explicitly upon feminist theory. Garrett R. Heysel attempts to rectify the lack of critical attention to the poetry of Rene Crevel--usually cited and then dismissed as the only openly homosexual member of the surrealist group. *Mon corps et moi* (1925), in particular, engages questions of desire and the body currently of general interest within gender studies. Alphonse Lingis argues that Jean Genet's five books are essentially "nothing but love songs" (p. 167); although Lingis's essay is unusually

accessible compared to others in the volume, it adds nothing new to our understanding of Genet. Martine Antle discusses the impact of the photographic media on the French novel of the 1980s and the 1990s by a reading of strategies and metaphors of framing in Marguerite Duras's *Blue Eyes, Black Hair* (1986) and Herve Guibert's *L'Homme au chapeau rouge* (1992). Somewhat surprisingly, this is the only essay in the collection which analyzes Guibert in any detail and none mention Guy Hocquenghem other than in passing. These are the two novelists whose work has been most influential in establishing anything that might be considered "mainstream" gay literature in France. However, Laurence M. Porter's essay does focus on Elvire Murail's *Escalier C*, a 1983 novel set in a fictive pre-Aids Greenwich Village, as a non-threatening and sympathetic portrayal of sexual self-acceptance, regardless of sexual orientation, in the tradition of Marguerite Yourcenar's work.

Chapters 13 and 14 afford examples of particularly rich literary analyses, which also suggest that recent laments over the state of stagnation of the French novel have ignored the work of at least two contemporary novelists. Laurence Enjolras follows an overview of the state of lesbian studies in contemporary France with a reading of Helene de Monferrand's *Les Amies d'Heloise* (1990), an epistolary novel likely to constitute a fascinating discovery for anyone unfamiliar with it, whose multiple intertextual allusions refer us back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761) and Chodorlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). Similarly, Robert Harvey's long, highly detailed, and intricate reading of Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child* (1985) does justice to this highly complex and enigmatic novel. Although Harvey focuses on only a single text, the range of the novel and its intertextual relationship with the work of Jorge Luis Borges result in a wide ranging discussion of a variety of different kinds of discourses and of the ambiguities and the instabilities of the textual construction of sex, gender, and sexuality. Although Ben Jelloun is of Moroccan origin, the final essay in the collection is the only one which alters the overwhelmingly *metropole* focus of the volume as a whole. In the context of postcolonialist theory, Mireille Rosello applies Homi Bhabha's concept of the "in-between" to a discussion of the "national-sexual", the relationship between sexuality and gender and social and national identity, in the writing of two contemporary Quebecois novels, Michel Tremblay's *Le Coeur eclate* and Daniel Sernine's *Chronoreg*.

The fifteen essays included in *Articulations of Difference* provide consistently well-written, densely argued, and sophisticated readings of a variety of literary and theoretical texts. Read from beginning to end, Fisher and Schehr's anthology also allows for a deeper understanding of the discourse of homosexuality as it has been constructed over the past two centuries in the French-speaking world. Despite the potential importance of this contribution, however, it is doubtful that the book can

realize the broader curricular goals outlined by the editors, who hope that this volume will help reshape gender studies within French Departments and humanities programs in general. Most readers can be expected to read the essays selectively in accordance with their own particular intellectual interests and background.

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