

Book Reviews

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Inverses: Littératures, arts, homosexualités, 11 (2011). Dossier « Les femmes en littérature au début du XX^e siècle » [Women in Literature in the Early 20th Century]. Châtillon : Société des amis d’Axieros.

A journal published annually, *Inverses* has for some years been presenting theme-centred dossiers devoted in most instances to countries or authors. The dossier featuring “Women in Literature of the Early 20th Century” is concerned not with female characters in fiction, but with the works and careers of women writers who are today largely unknown or forgotten, with one important exception. The nine articles of the dossier offer in this way a generally broad and diversified palette of trajectories of women in the literary domain. Although it is problematic to make comparisons between the Boulangist and anti-Semitic Gyp and the surrealist Valentine Penrose, or between emotive Georgette Leblanc and the cerebral Aline Mayrisch de Saint-Hubert, associations can nevertheless be forged between these authors through the chance factor of their common inclusion in a theme-based edition of the journal. First of all, homosexuality which, though constituting the journal’s general ambit is nevertheless not an obligatory component, emerges as a central element in the literary outputs or lives of several of the authors, who stand out by their sexual freedom. In this respect Maria Olga Morais de Sarmiento frequented the salon of Natalie Barney, as did Lucie Delarue-Mardrus. The latter, through the poetic form she adopted and her nature-directed inspiration, can be aligned with Marie Dauguet and Anna de Noailles. In other respects, the literary movements of the period created links between these women writers, particularly through the intermediary of André Gide, who was a friend of Aline Mayrisch de Saint-Hubert. The author of the *Faux-Monnayeurs* [The Counterfeiters] perfectly embodies the linkage between the symbolist period, which Georgette Leblanc helped illuminate, and the era of surrealism in which the talent of Valentine Penrose came to the fore. The genre of autobiography is also one of the elements shared in common by several of the writers under consideration. The only two not fitting easily into these categories were the youngest of the set: on the one hand the discreet Clarisse Francillon, although being a friend of Colette Audry and Guillevic, who devoted herself particularly to the socialist movement in politics, and on the other the transgender Hungarian sculptor Anton Prinner, who remained outside of women’s circles and the literary milieu in general. Finally, it is very largely literature in French that is being addressed in this dossier: there are six Frenchwomen covered, one Swiss and one Luxemburger, along with an American woman and a Hungarian both writing in French. The Portuguese Maria Olga Morais de Sarmiento is the only one to have published in a different language.

We trust we will be forgiven for not following the alphabetical order of the article-writers’ names by beginning with the earliest of the authors presented: Marie Dauguet, who was born in 1860. Patricia Izquierdo, who is a specialist in the poetry of the Belle Époque, brings attention to the “Virgilian paganism” of Dauguet’s bucolic collections that celebrated a union with nature (one of them indeed was entitled *Pastorales*). Rejecting religion, her poetry has a mystical quality reached through a syncretism of Christianity, Mithraism and Buddhism. Esteemed very highly by

the Goncourt brothers, Marie Dauguet was nevertheless to be eclipsed by her fellow woman poets Lucie Delarue-Mardrus and Anna de Noailles. It is to these latter, to whom she adds Gyp, that Nelly Sanchez directs her study in the only comparative article of the dossier, linking them through the genre of which all three were distinguished practitioners: autobiography. Drawing on different sources of inspiration, these three women published, between 1927 and 1938, life narratives of quite distinct natures: memories of childhood for Gyp, a disconnected chronology in Anna de Noailles and organized memoirs by Delarue-Mardrus, accentuating particularly her literary career.

At that time, one of the main salons was that presided over by the American heiress Natalie Barney. Melanie Hawthorne (who wrote a preface for Renée Vivien's *Une femme m'apparut* [A Woman Appeared to Me]) approaches her biography of the woman whom Remy de Gourmont called the "Amazon" from an unusual perspective: that of marriage. Taking as her point of departure an erroneous death-notice which attributed a husband to her, Hawthorne lays out the various marriage proposals and the "would-be marriages" of that inveterate single woman up until her final but purely symbolic marriage that was recently detected by Francesco Rappazzini in the biography of Élisabeth de Gramont. The article by Fernando Curopos (author of an article on "homotexualities in Portugal" in the previous number of *Inverses*) also adopts a biographical approach to try to encompass what was passed over unsaid in the *Memoirs* of Maria Olga Morais de Sarmiento (otherwise Olga de Moraes Sarmiento). By revisiting the list of people frequented by Morais de Sarmiento, among whom were Natalie Barney and her women friends, and by referencing other sources, Curopos draws the thread of her unconfessed but mutually shared passionate relationship with Hélène de Zuylen, who had lived with Renée Vivien. A whole undisclosed little world comes through in pages which the moral climate of Portugal in that period compelled to discretion in order to project an image of irreproachability.

It is the life story of Georgette Leblanc that Annpól Kassis (author of *Les Disparues de l'Amphitrite* [The Lost Women of the *Amphitrite*]) revives, drawing upon Leblanc's *Souvenirs* [Memories] and *La Machine à Courage* [The Courage Machine]. Georgette, the sister of Maurice Leblanc, was a singer who became the mistress and muse of Maeterlinck and the principal actress of his plays. She led a life intensely dedicated to both art and love, departing France finally for America where she worked for the press magnate William Randolph Hearst, acted in films for Maurice l'Herbier and had love-affairs with Margaret Anderson and then Monique Serrure ... Her life was the stuff of novels.

It is through her relationship with another symbolist (even if he did not remain so very long), André Gide, that Aline Mayrisch de Saint-Hubert is known, both as a correspondent and especially as the immediate recipient of Maria van Rysselberghe's *Cahiers de la Petite Dame*. Mirande Lucien, a specialist in the works of the Belgian novelist Georges Eekhoud, brings out the independence of Mayrisch de Saint-Hubert, a woman of well-to-do society in Luxembourg. Reading through her letters to André Gide, Jacques Copeau or Jean Schlumberger, Mirande Lucien provides an excellent analysis of the vision of the world of this demanding and wilful personality.

Becoming recently better known through the publication of her *Écrits d'une femme surréaliste* [A Surrealist Woman's Writing], Valentine Penrose is the subject of an article by Nicolas Berger, a specialist of Renée Vivien. Following on Georgiana Colville, he compares the poems of the wife of Roland Penrose with those of Alice Rahon-Paalen, with whom she most certainly had a love affair, noting how the poems of one echo those of the other. Surrealism's anticonformity stands out prominently both in her liaisons with other women and in her poetry, as in her interest in witchcraft or in her expression of a dark eroticism, particularly in her novel *La Comtesse sanglante* [The Sanguinary Countess].

Catherine Dubuis directs an attentive study into Clarisse Francillon's novel *La Lettre*, examining the leit-motifs of letter, almond and asphodel to which she brings a thoroughly convincing reading.

Nevertheless, one of her conclusions is somewhat surprising when she declares that despite its amorous intrigues between women, “*La Lettre* is not a Lesbian novel” because it does not pursue a radical goal and has a universal applicability. Yet the work’s universality is not incompatible with a designation as a Lesbian novel, a categorisation which can be purely descriptive and not necessarily associated with a militant perspective. Some further reflection on this issue remains to be made.

For his part, the biographer Francesco Rapazzini, in choosing to investigate the complex and mysterious personality of the Hungarian sculptor Anton Prinner, encountered a number of difficulties. Prinner, the author of *La Femme tondue* [The Shaven-head Woman] in 1945, was in fact born Anna Prinner, and did not take on a male identity until arriving in France. Once adopted, however, he retained this identity until his death, when his true biological sex came as a revelation to many of those close to him. Picasso, who was not deceived, called him “Monsieur Madame”, but referred to him in the masculine form, an approach not taken by Francesco Rapazzini who not only consistently employs the feminine pronoun but sees in Prinner’s masculine identification a form of “self-hatred”. “She fuses Anna into Anton, her reality into her wild imagination”: this categorical view seems as anachronistic as it is reductive. Finally, “she is incapable of loving”, he rashly declares, even though he mentioned Prinner’s long liaison with the sister of a fellow artist. While the article does demonstrate great historical knowledge and very detailed scholarship, it would have gained considerably by including a greater degree of historical research on gender and reflection on transgender.

By bringing forward different portrayals of women grounded in thorough research, these articles allow these women writers to emerge from the shadows. This dossier can justly be placed alongside other recent investigations into the works of authors like Renée Vivien or broader studies on the history of women’s literature. On the whole the approach is biographical, but can also be literary, as in the in-depth analyses undertaken by Nicolas Berger, Catherine Dubuis or Patricia Izquierdo. Mention should also be made of the occasional photographs which illustrate the dossier and add a complementary element to the knowledge of the artists.

The journal also contains three other articles not part of the dossier but which are of particular interest. Florian Fraissard provides a comparative reading of love poems of Virgil, Shakespeare and Luis Cernuda. The situation of the addressee and her/his sexual identity or androgyny are studied, along with the sufferings that result from the non-reciprocation of desire. The poetic space thus deals both with the desire and the separation from the beloved. These poems also show up the variable perceptions of homosexuality according to era. In second place, the Sinologist Laurent Long brings attention to a text of Berthold Laufer dating from 1908 (translated from the German by Jean-Pierre Dutey). In it Laufer, a German anthropologist, describes a nineteenth-century Chinese painting representing a homosexual scene. Laurent Long introduces Laufer and his position on homosexuality. Thirdly, Vincent Simonet takes up the task of serving the memory of a neglected author, Matthieu Galey, by re-reading his *Journal*, a brilliant exercise in writing, and extracts from it useful information on the literary life of the years 1950–1980, when the literary critic adopted the role of a moralist while at the same time revealing feelings associated with his own private life.

This number of *Inverses* also includes an extract of the play entitled *l’Entrevue de Taormine* [The Taormina Discussion] by Thibault d’Antonay and Patrick Tudoret, which projects a fictitious encounter between Oscar Wilde and Jean Lorrain. It concludes with two warm acknowledgements of writers now deceased. Yvan Quintin notes the thirtieth anniversary of the death of François Augiéras, quoting his traveller’s stories in order to bring out his voice again. Michel Renouard announces the passing of Francis King in July 2011 and recalls his books, located in India or Italy, which Renouard regularly reviewed in the journal.

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