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Margaret Attack, Alison S. Fell, Diana Holmes and Imogen Long, eds. *French Feminisms 1975 and After: New Readings, New Texts*. Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2018. vii + 255 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$69.95 (pb). ISBN 978-1-78874-138-5.

Review by Annabel L. Kim, Harvard University.

In 1975, at the height of the MLF, or Mouvement de Libération des Femmes, a collective volume entitled *Les Femmes s'entêtent: mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent*, was published by Gallimard.<sup>[1]</sup> This collectively authored text, a heterogeneous anthology of literary, sociological, political, and critical writing, was animated by a shared purpose: a radical revolt against the oppression of women. In 2015, Women in French UK held a conference, "*Les Femmes s'entêtent: Feminism, writing, art and film 1975–2015: bilan(s) et avenir(s)*," to take stock of where French feminisms were forty years later, and, as the editors of *French Feminisms 1975 and After* put it in the introduction, "take forward the social, political and cultural agendas of this important volume" (p. 1). *French Feminisms 1975 and After* is the first of two volumes of selected papers to be published from the conference, and deals with "imaginative writing," or literature. The second volume, *Making Waves: French Feminisms and their Legacies 1975–2015*, based off the title, appears to deal more with political and theoretical reflections on how feminism in France has developed over the last four decades in ways that do not take literary texts as their primary objects, as is the case in this first volume.

In keeping with the spirit of the original 1975 text, *French Feminisms 1975 and After* is heterogeneous, operating more as an anthology—a collection of diverse materials that aims to convey the wide range of perspectives present within the field of French feminist studies—than as an edited volume that is driven by a single, unified conceptual through-line.

The volume is bookended by an introduction and conclusion. The introduction, "Epistemologies, Politics, Fictions," gives an overview of the history of the MLF and attempts to map out what French feminism became after the heyday of the MLF, thereby setting the various interventions of the volume against the backdrop of 1970s French feminism and its emphasis on questions of representation and language. The conclusion steps back from the individual contributions and articulates what the editors hope the reader might come away with from reading the volume, calling on readers to continue advancing our understanding and use of French feminisms in the contemporary moment.

The first essay in the volume, Chloé Jacquesson's "*Le Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes (1976) de Monique Wittig et Sande Zeig: une entreprise littéraire du savoir féministe ?*," demonstrates the interrelation between the *Brouillon* and the feminist historical context of the MLF. Jacquesson argues convincingly that the *Brouillon* not only was shaped by its historical moment but worked to shape history by reshaping the very language by which we come to understand reality and arrive at knowledge. Jacquesson shows how the *Brouillon's* epistemological and political stakes are marked by futurity and her essay serves as a welcome *mode d'emploi* for the *Brouillon*.

The second essay, Emma Murdoch's "(Re)Reading Trauma and Schizophrenia in the Work of Emma Santos," undertakes a reading of this relatively unknown author not through the lens of *écriture féminine*, which, as Murdoch points out, produces an overdetermined reading of Santos's work that does not adequately account for "the trauma that structures her work [and] her position *in* and critique *of* the psychiatric system" (p. 75). Murdoch identifies Santos's poetics as a *speaking* of a specifically feminine trauma, both physical and psychological. Murdoch thus turns away from Cixous and *écriture féminine*'s emphasis on writing the body to Luce Irigaray instead and her notion of *parler-femme*, a speaking (as opposed to writing) of the body.

The following three essays all treat H el ene Cixous. Beatrice Ivey's "H el ene Cixous *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs r eves*: Gendering Memories of Colonialism in Algeria and India" reads Cixous's play about India and its partition into Pakistan for the way it allows us to understand Cixous's Algerian past. Examining a lesser-known work, Ivey elucidates the continued importance of the paternal in Cixous's work and thought, where the paternal serves as a figure of non-belonging that enables us to think through the complicated postcolonial relation Cixous and others have to a non-homeland. Martina Williams's "Looking Again at *La Jeune N ee*: Feminine Poets in H el ene Cixous's *Voile noire voile blanche*" takes *La Jeune n ee* as a key text conceptualizing *écriture féminine* and uses it as a backdrop for her reading of *Voile noire voile blanche*, a play about Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, which shows how Akhmatova's character can be read as an unlikely exemplar of *écriture féminine*, one that crystallizes the political and ethical stakes of writing and publishing poetry under oppression. Maribel Pe alver Vicea's "La sc ene 'primultime' de la mort: corps mourant, corps parlant ou les m ecanismes de la greffe scripturale dans *Hom ere est morte...* d'H el ene Cixous" takes the reader through close textual analyses of Cixous's anticipatory grief of the loss of the mother as a way of making sense of and interrogating ideas of authorhood, and works through several of Cixous's strategies for writing the maternal death.

The sixth essay, Gabrielle Parker's "The Gendering of Space: A Study of Mich ele Perrein's *Gemma lapidaire* (1976) and Ying Chen's *Esp eces* (2012)," compares a French writer from the MLF generation and a contemporary Chinese writer expatriated to Canada to examine how both writers use their female protagonists to think through the question of patriarchal oppression in spatial terms, where, for Perrein, space is always the territory of masculine domination, one to be revolted against, while Chen explores the ways in which women, even while dominated, can find ways of subverting such masculine appropriation.

The seventh essay, Stephanie Schechner's "Marguerite Duras and Mireille Best: A Forgotten Literary Legacy," like Parker's, brings together an unexpected pair of writers. Schechner introduces the work of a relatively obscure French writer, Mireille Best, and compares her to Duras, seeing in both writers a shared fragmentary style and approach to memory and sexuality, which are treated as ambiguous and fluid. Schechner, in drawing this comparison, aims to bring Best out of the rigidity of a category like "lesbian writer" and show how Best's  uvre can be seen as being as capacious and complex as Duras's.

The penultimate essay, Annick Durand's "Transgressing the Rules of Autobiography: Nina Bouraoui's *La Voyeuse interdite*," evokes contemporary France's continued interest in questions of Muslim women's oppression, which Durand characterizes as rich fodder for the publishing industry. She takes up Franco-Algerian writer Nina Bouraoui's novel, *La Voyeuse interdite*, which confronts orientalist tropes and fetishes by letting the reader into the mind of its narrator, a cloistered Mauresque Algerian woman, who engages in voyeuristic behavior even as she is herself the object of the male gaze. Durand argues that the novel is "a very effective pamphlet against Muslim Fundamentalism" (p. 210) because of the way Bouraoui blurs the boundary between fiction and autobiography, setting up her novel to be read as autobiography: its tone, which promises to deliver up the truth, imbues it with a kind of documentary power where the reader cannot help but be outraged by this Muslim iteration of patriarchal oppression. Durand sees the question of generic identification or mode as a way of making sense of the question of Bouraoui's own identity as a person caught up between Algeria and France, belonging fully to neither.

The final essay, Margaret Atack's "Body, Narration, History: Valentine Goby's Occupation Novels," takes up a contemporary writer, Goby, and examines her novels that deal with the Occupation. Goby, who writes in what Atack describes as the historiographical turn of French fiction (epitomized by highly publicized authors such as Yannick Haenel, Laurent Binet, and Jonathan Littell), foregrounds the female body in her stories of the Occupation (the novels Atack discusses feature as protagonists a young woman who is impregnated by a German soldier and shamed and punished for her collaboration, a woman who is receiving an abortion and her abortionist, and a woman who gives birth in Ravensbrück). Atack shows how, in Goby's work, writing history is intimately tied to writing the female body, each bound up in materiality.

The volume is quite diverse and heterogeneous: even for specialists of modern and contemporary French feminist literature, many of the names will be unfamiliar, as the volume foregrounds writers who, like Santos, Perrein, Chen, and Best, are not the sort of household name that Wittig and Cixous are. What made the MLF such a singular and vibrant movement was its diversity and its attempts to eschew hierarchy, its embrace of dissent. And yet, despite its egalitarian drive, certain names, like Monique Wittig and Christine Delphy, for instance, came to be viewed as cofounders despite the movement's insistence on collectivity. This volume, in resisting as much as it does the star economy that exercises an outsize impact on the ways we tell and teach feminist stories, embodies the egalitarian impetus of the original movement that it is explicitly in dialogue with.

There are some issues that I found with both individual essays and the volume as a whole that I'd like to touch upon, however. For instance, despite her essay's title, Murdoch's reading of Santos focuses more on trauma—In particular, the trauma of a coerced abortion—than on schizophrenia, and I would have liked to see a discussion of the question of mental illness and its sexual specificity. Parker's essay, while an interesting introduction to the writers she discusses, jumps straight into the texts when a setting up and problematization of the question of space would have been useful. In addition, it would have been nice to see Chen's non-Frenchness more clearly dealt with—how does a Chinese expatriate to Canada who chooses to write in French fit in with what we call French feminisms? Schechner's claim for Best's literary debt to Duras seems overstated and her best evidence for an explicit debt is tucked away in a footnote toward the end of the essay, where she cites Best evoking Duras in an interview.

On a broader note, I found myself wishing for the sort of structure and through-line that a less anthological edited collection usually has, and couldn't help but wonder why the essays were organized as they were, as there was no clear organizing logic, be it alphabetical, chronological, or thematic. Again, by recreating the heterogeneous, eclectic, and anthological ethos of *Les Femmes s'entêtent*, which could be seen as its inspiration, the volume taps into a certain kind of feminist energy. But why devote so many essays to Cixous? My readerly sensibilities could have used some more explanation for why these particular essays were selected for publication together.

The question of readership and readerly sensibility is an interesting one with regards to this volume as it wasn't entirely clear to me who the intended audience was. On the one hand, it felt quite intimate, as if addressed to those at the conference (which I myself attended), or at the very least to an audience of specialists in French feminist studies. On the other hand, with the sort of contextualization and setting up the introduction sought to do, it felt like the volume was addressed to a much broader, general audience, and the introduction at times felt like it was aspiring to act as a guide or introduction to contemporary French feminist studies. This tension between speaking to those already in the know and to those whom one wishes to bring into the feminist fold, as well as the tension between accounting for both the feminism of the 1970s and of the twenty-first century, led to an uneven introduction that, in telescoping between the broad contextualization an undergraduate might need and the kinds of historiographical narrative that a specialist expects, omitted or distorted certain things. In particular, the relation between feminist studies and activism and queer studies and activism is never mapped out or fully articulated, despite the way the introduction foregrounds French queer feminism (p. 3) and

places the entire volume under the theoretical and political shadow (or light) of queer feminism, where queer comes to stand in for the contemporary, such that a contemporary feminism is assumed to be queer.

The introduction's discussion of queer theory on pp. 27-34 cedes too much ground to queer theory at the expense of feminism, and the introduction places feminism in queer theory's debt—"the impact of queer theory on feminism has been immense" (p. 28)—without acknowledging the way queer theory itself originates in feminism and would not exist without feminism. Indeed, the introduction, in its discussion of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler, two foundational thinkers for queer theory, does not acknowledge their rootedness in feminism (Sedgwick would not have been able to write *Epistemology of the Closet* without the work on gender done by feminist scholars, and *Gender Trouble* positioned itself as an explicitly feminist work). The introduction also describes Sedgwick and Butler as enacting a "rigorous and complex critique of what they describe as heteronormativity" (p. 28), which is somewhat misleading, as neither theorist ever uses the term: while Butler talks about "normative heterosexuality" as derived from Wittig's theorization of compulsory heterosexuality in *The Straight Mind* and Sedgwick evokes normativity in a deconstructive sense, as a way of thinking through how the world is ordered through binarisms such as homo/heterosexual, the now widely used term *heteronormativity* was popularized by the queer theorist Michael Warner in his introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet* published after both *Epistemology of the Closet* and *Gender Trouble*.

While such omissions/mischaracterizations might seem minor, they speak to a certain imprecision in the way queer theory's development is narrated, which perhaps attributes too much impact and influence to queer theory at the expense of feminist theory and thought. We can see further imprecision in the way the introduction discusses the work of Marie-Hélène/Sam Bourcier, a key figure in the development of a French-grown queer theory and the translator of Wittig's *Straight Mind* into French: the introduction, in speaking of Bourcier in the present, continues to refer to him as Marie-Hélène and *her* when Sam Bourcier now goes exclusively by the name Sam and by the masculine pronoun, an editorial decision that is rather surprising and erases the development of trans theory and trans studies (especially in the last decade) and makes the introduction feel somewhat outdated. Moreover, the essays themselves never really grapple with the question of queerness even if Monique Wittig, Mireille Best, and Nina Bouraoui are all authors who could be read as queer in light of their non-heterosexuality. Why emphasize queerness and devote so much time and space to discussing queer feminism only to treat the development of queer theory and work so imprecisely? This could have been avoided by focusing on feminism and centering it, as the discussion of the context of 1970s French feminisms did an admirable job of explaining why questions of language and thus imaginative writing are so important to French feminist movements.

All this aside, the volume remains a diverse collection that serves as an interesting cross-section of the sort of work being done within French feminist literary studies today, and enables readers to see the ways in which contemporary French feminist writing is necessarily related to its MLF forebears. The volume's refusal to impose a through-line and divide the volume up into neat conceptual axes that enable scholars to gut a book is perhaps the most fitting tribute to the original 1975 text and its utopian energy, which insisted on a feminist collectivity that cannot be reduced to its constitutive parts.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Margaret Attack, Alison S. Fell, Diana Holmes and Imogen Long, "Introduction: Epistemologies, Politics, Fictions"

Chloé Jacquesson, "Le *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* (1976) de Monique Wittig et Sande Zeig : une entreprise littéraire du savoir féministe ?"

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Emma Murdoch, “(Re)Reading Trauma and Schizophrenia in the Work of Emma Santos”

Beatrice Ivey, “Hélène Cixous *L’Indiade ou l’Inde de leurs rêves*: Gendering Memories of Colonialism in Algeria and India”

Martina Williams, “Looking Again at *La Jeune Née*: Feminine Poets in Hélène Cixous’s *Voile noire voile blanche*”

Maribel Peñalver Vicea, “La scène ‘primultime’ de la mort: corps mourant, corps parlant ou les mécanismes de la greffe scripturale dans *Homère est morte...* d’Hélène Cixous”

Gabrielle Parker, “The Gendering of Space: A Study of Michèle Perrein’s *Gemma lapidaire* (1976) and Ying Chen’s *Espèces* (2012)”

Stephanie Schechner, “Marguerite Duras and Mireille Best: A Forgotten Literary Legacy”

Annick Durand, “Transgressing the Rules of Autobiography: Nina Bouraoui’s *La Voyeuse interdite*”

Margaret Atack, “Body, Narration, History: Valentine Goby’s Occupation Novels”

Margaret Atack, Alison S. Fell, Diana Holmes and Imogen Long, “Conclusion”

## NOTES

[1] This Gallimard edition was itself a reprint of a special issue of the leftist journal, *Les Temps modernes*, headed by Jean-Paul Sartre and created to fill the void left by the dissolution of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, shut down after WWII because of its collaboration with German occupying forces.

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