

Recensioni, Reviews, Rezensionen

Dina Al-Kassim: *On Pain of Speech*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010

Dina Al-Kassim's book is an investigation of the phenomenon of the "literary rant", which the author describes as a "complex of address, entreaty, and attack that characterizes the haphazard and murky speech that only sometimes gathers itself into a counterdiscourse"(3). Essentially, it is a rare kind of literary discourse, to be found in texts that belong to the margins of the canon, that defies current notions of intelligibility, flaunts its absence of "masterful" control, is ambiguous as to who or what it is addressing and displays a general aggressiveness towards the status quo. The author regards this phenomenon as politically relevant, drawing on Michel Foucault's notion that a "counterdiscourse", i.e. a discourse that challenges the current system of power relations by openly "speaking the truth" (*parrhesia*) to them, is actually not a threat to said power relations, but a function of them; because it relies on the same type of language ("sovereign speech") in which power expresses itself, counterdiscourse has no real "revolutionary potential". The "rant" evades this trap because of its lack of "control", which comes to the surface in its refusal of being "reasonable": it attacks everybody and everything, and it does so from an unreal position of enunciation: it "imagines the power to speak in its own name where no such power is granted", says the abstract¹. Because of this "madness", the rant bypasses the sanctioned modes of expression, and is therefore "revolutionary".

The book is divided into two parts: the first is a purely theoretical section, in which the author puts forward a somewhat rambling series of considerations on various aspects of the "politics of address", drawing eclectically on poststructuralist theorisations, especially Judith Butler's, to discuss some instances of "rants" from outside the canon, in which the writers addressed "the Law" itself from marginal positions. The second part consists of three case studies, arranged in an order that suggests a progression from failure to triumph of this literary form: Oscar Wilde's *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray and his letter “De Profundis”, Jane Bowles’s novel *Two Serious Ladies* and her letters, and the Tunisian writer/cultural theorist Abdelwahab Meddeb’s novel *Talismano*.

The main interest of this book for English studies lies perhaps in the discussion of Oscar Wilde’s career, which the author divides into two halves: his literary production before the trials, which she sees as characterised by the employment of counterdiscourse, underpinned by Wilde’s illusory belief to be able to criticise power structures from within, and Wilde’s successive “abjection”, epitomised by the ranting “De Profundis”. In the first part Al-Kassim analyses mainly *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, drawing on Freud as well as on many luminaries of the postmodern canon, especially Foucault and Butler. She begins by taking issue with Eve Kosofski-Sedgwick dismissal of the theme of narcissism in the novel as a mere “camouflage” for homosexual desire, a reading which she indirectly qualifies as “paranoid”. The *pars destruens* is fair-minded overall, if overly generous in leaving out of the discussion the fact that the “paranoid” part is actually Kosofski-Sedgwick’s main argument. She then argues that there are more suitable ways of analysing the text as an unstable series of identifications on Dorian’s part, who, she interestingly notes, is reminded of his own likeness to his mother at the very moment in which Lord Henry’s speeches open up to him possibilities he had not thought of until then; the author characteristically assumes that these “possibilities” are invariably (homo)sexual in nature. When it comes to produce her own readings, Al-Kassim fills the greatest part of the chapter with a series of scattered observations on the novel, mainly in a psychoanalytical vein, and mini-essays on theoretical points, without a clear thread, which weighs down reading.

Generally speaking, it can be sensed that Al-Kassim has little patience with the primary texts, and prefers to focus on the theoretical aspects of her argument. Though she does structure the discussion around quotations, the relative discussions often have very thin connections with the “words on the page”. It is often the sign of a thin argument when a discussion is crowded with “shouting” adverbs like “clearly”, “evidently”, “unquestionably”, which take the place of actual argumentation; Al-Kassim tends to do this especially where evidence would be most needed. For example, it is a crucial issue in the history of reception whether or not contemporary readers did experience *Dorian Gray* as a “homosexual novel”: the author’s answer is that there was an “evident recognition”(66),

and she cites as evidence a reviewer who made a sneering comment to the effect that Wilde seemed to be writing for “outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys”, alluding to the scandal of the discovery of a male brothel a few years earlier. Yet, as an inspection of the reviews of the novel may bring out, the most striking thing about this comment is that its author was the *only* one in this array of prudish and prurient reviewers, bent on looking for scandal, who made anything like a recognisable reference to homosexuality; to cite this as evidence of a widespread recognition is at the very least misleading. In the same way, a quick read through *The Picture of Dorian Gray* would be enough to show that there is nothing “obviously homosexual” in it; there are innuendos, applicability, half-allusions, but certainly nothing to justify this very common assumption, which the author of this study shares, and which is born of an imposition of later models (Al-Kassim insistent use of the word “gay” is symptomatic) on a cultural situation that was significantly different in this respect, as has been shown by studies such as Alan Sinfield’s *The Wilde Century*. Acknowledging the extent to which our own cultural expectations shape our readings is not the sign of a “reactionary” unwillingness to cope with the more challenging aspects of a text, but a reminder not to obliterate differences for the sake of a convenient argument.

The analysis of “De Profundis” follows more (comparatively) traditional lines; the author analyses Wilde’s identification with Christ in terms of “rebuilding of the subject”, through a model taken from the very centre of the society that had ruined him, which he “colonises” with a new set of connotations. Al-Kassim tends to describe Wilde’s attitude in the writing of this letter as a conscious ideological project, namely that of “free[ing] the sovereign subject from received ideological forms, to overcome resentment, and to establish a socially generated sexuality in bonds of male affiliation”(98). Whether or not Wilde had this in mind as he was writing his long love/hate letter in the depths of Reading Gaol, the discussion does a fair job of analysing his more general ethical remarks in terms of a racial rhetoric taken from Darwin, which juxtaposes the “creative Celtic spirit” to the “absence of imagination of the English race”; this may plausibly be said to constitute a counterdiscourse with respect to the prevailing models, which were used to justify British domination in Ireland in terms of racial superiority. Again, it should be noted that the main interest of the discussion lies in its account of the cultural context.

The second case study revolves around Jane Bowles; the author briefly concentrates on the “rants” of the two lesbian main characters when, at the end of *Two Serious Ladies*, they find themselves defeated and resigned, but the main part of the discussion deals with Bowles’s own letters, in which the writer analysed the pain of and dissatisfaction with her partly mercenary relation with a Moroccan woman and expanded on the frustrations related to her own writer’s block. All these speeches, Al-Kassim argues, are expressions of humiliation, and do not lead to any kind of empowerment. Bowles’s fiction and life, taken together without acknowledging the distinction, are characterised as being “complicit [...] with colonial and racial narratives”(123). Bowles’s biographical data are expounded at great length, presumably because they are less widely known than Wilde’s, and the discussion often takes a decidedly psychoanalytic turn. Bowles’s alleged failure to construct a symbolically adequate narrative in both her narratives and her life is attributed to her overlapping of three distinct categories: the primitive, the regressed feminine and the oriental. In this section, too, it is arduous to identify anything like a clear thread, with the author often pausing to deliver a lengthy exposition of theoretical points, such as Freud’s views on fetishism, whose relevance for the cases in point is not argued clearly.

The third case study concerns Abdelwahab Meddeb’s relationship with and rewriting of Lacan, which gathers itself into postcolonial critique. The writer infuses the French of his novel with the rhythms of the Arabic dialects of the area, which is, in postcolonial terms, a kind of recolonisation which does not seek to impose one literary tradition over the other, but to propound the idea of a proudly hybridised Maghreb. Of course, that is not the end of it: *Talismano*, the author argues, is successful in producing an “intervention” in the politics of address, “by harnessing the rant as symptom and turning it into a source of a poetics of resistant writing that is theorized in the novel under the sign of calligraphesis” (182) (that is, a relocation of Western concepts into Maghrebin culture, allowing the latter to shape them in turn, and aiming at a utopian “allography”). This chapter, too, includes a lengthy theoretical section that attempts to demonstrate that Lacan’s take on Koranic law was vitiated by his assumption that it was somehow more “primitive” than its Western counterparts. Meddeb, the author argues, “rants” deliberately and parodically, and thus is able to turn the “symptom” of political “abjection” into an “intervention”, although she is sceptical about its claims to “subver-

siveness”, as the term does not take into account the postcolonial specificity of the text.

As a series of essays in cultural studies, this book might be of some significance to those interested in postcolonialism, politics of address, psychoanalysis. As literary criticism it falls short of the mark, mainly because of its insistence on imposing its theoretical grids on the texts in order to look for preconceived notions of “discursive radicalism” or its opposite in them. It might be interesting to attempt a thoroughly Foucauldian analysis of this kind of approach to writing, in order to trace its genealogy in terms of the circulation of discursive power in the academic market; once one starts thinking about just what dense, difficult books like this one, packed with jargon and esoteric references, achieve in fact, especially in terms of the exclusion of potentially interested readers, perhaps their own “politics of address” will not seem so “radical” after all.

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Note

- 1 Available on <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520259256>

Oscar Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray. An Annotated, Uncensored Edition* (Nicholas Frankel ed.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011

Readers looking for naughty bits are of course bound to be disappointed by this latest edition of Wilde’s novel. They may be justified in looking for them, though, by the pointlessly sensationalistic subtitle of a publication which is, strictly speaking, the annotated edition of the final draft that Wilde sent to *Lippincott’s Magazine* in 1890, and which underwent a few editorial interventions before being published. It must be stressed that the subsequently-altered lections that appear in Wilde’s typescript have

already been published in print, as variants, in the 2005 OUP edition of the novel (Wilde Picture 41-42). As the editor Nicholas Frankel acknowledges, modification of the authorial drafts was standard fare in magazine publications at the time, and the number of changes in the case of Wilde's story is by no means unusual. The *raison d'être* of such a publication as the present one is therefore the claim that the import of these changes is significant enough to distort the authorial intention.

This is of course completely legitimate, and it is commendable that this project was undertaken in the first place. However similar this version may be to the 1890 text, the differences between these two texts on the one hand and the familiar 1891 text are significant, and of public interest; as a heavily annotated hardback priced at \$35, though, this edition is more likely to appeal to academic libraries than to the general readership. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to judge it as an academic edition, and to evaluate it for the new insights and materials it provides to scholarship. There is a general introduction, a textual introduction, notes at the margins of the text and many illustrations.

Actually, the title provides a reliable clue as to the original sin of this edition, namely its disproportionate and methodologically dubious reliance on homosexuality as an all-purpose interpretive category for Wilde's writings. This is especially evident in the general introduction, three quarters of which are taken up a discussion of the subject, presumably in an attempt to justify the label "uncensored edition". Actually, as the appendix (which collects all the variant readings) brings out and as Frankel himself admits here and there, the ratio that the editors of *Lippincott's Magazine* followed was that of cancelling or mitigating references and allusions to sexual matters, whether homosexual or heterosexual. Nonetheless, the introduction concentrates almost exclusively with the former, in accordance to the familiar protocol according to which since Wilde has come down in history primarily as the archetypal homosexual, then his writings must be considered primarily through that lens.

The consequences of this attitude are far-reaching and, as a rule, they hardly make for reliable criticism. For one thing, it feeds the tendency to erase the distinction between Wilde's life and work. Frankel's introduction contains several examples of the resulting sweeping rhetoric, which goes like: "In his *life and writing*, Wilde was playing a dangerous game of playing and revealing his sexual orientation" (21, my italics). "*Like Dorian*, [Wilde] was harbouring his own secrets." (11, my italics) Similarly, the

tension between hedonism and morality in the novel is unwarrantedly personalised into a dialectical tension between Walter Pater and Wilde: “Wilde seems intent on showing up Pater for his timidity and on pushing the philosophy of “the new Hedonism” (30). Frankel then denies that the novel is “a condemnation of aestheticism” because “Wilde never ceased to be an aesthete in his writings and pronouncements” (31), thus having the meaning of a text derive, in an unapologetically Victorian fashion, deterministically from its author’s biography.

Secondly, this reliance on biography also tends to smuggle into criticism the assumption that since “we” already know what we are looking for, we might as well take for granted that it is indeed there. The result is a hyper-determined reading in which everything can potentially mean the same thing: “Today we can easily recognize these references to unhealthiness, insanity, uncleanness, and ‘medico-legal interest’ as coded imputations of homosexuality.” (7). Actually, “construct” may be a better word than “recognize”: the idea that Wilde’s was an “obviously homosexual” novel comes from the unwarranted superimposition of current critical fashions to a different cultural situation. Frankel’s insistent appliance of the words “code” and “encoding” to describe what most current criticism sees as “homosexual content” assumes both an authorial intention which is by definition irrecoverable and a critical recognition for which there is scant historical evidence, and which would need to be thoroughly argued, not asserted; it also brings about the mushrooming of more dubious analogies: the painting is “cloaked and locked away”, “similarly” (10-11) to the way this all-pervasive “homosexuality” is allegedly coded in the language of the novel.

Thirdly, to read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the light of the Wilde trials almost invariably entails misrepresentation of both the novel and the trials. Frankel’s claim that “[t]hat *Dorian Gray* was used as evidence in Wilde’s court trials underscores again how incendiary the novel really was and how much Wilde risked in bringing it before the public” (20) obscures at least three points: that there is no causal relationship between the novel (or the critical reactions it got) and the 1895 trials; that during the first trial the alleged immorality of the novel was used only as a secondary accessory argument by Queensberry’s defence team, which had much stronger cards to play; that the “literary-jurisprudential” move was largely a failure, and that Wilde had a relatively easy time countering attorney Edward Carson’s rough biographism. The basic problem of this type of criticism,

indeed, is that it employs reading methods that are virtually indistinguishable from the attorney's own, in particular the assumption that to allude to something means to depict it, and that to depict it means to endorse it; that the moral implications Frankel draws are antithetical to Carson's is irrelevant as far as the method is concerned.

The textual notes, while far from untainted from biographism (it is not clear how the insistent comparisons between Dorian's story and Wilde's later career are helpful to an understanding of the novel) fare better in terms of reliability and usefulness, and indeed they seem to be the fruit of a painstaking labour of research. They cover extensively those elements of the cultural context that may not be familiar to modern readers, give a concise account of the most important of Wilde's sources and detail some of the intertextual echoes between this and Wilde's other works; a few new elements are brought to light, such as the types of flowers which were fashionable in the late-Victorian period, references to which are abundant in the novel, and which were sometimes substantially different from their modern counterparts of the same name. What really stands out, though, is the impressive collection of illustrations placed at relevant points in the text: from trivia such as the "Gladstone bag" that Basil carries, to illustrations for early-20th century editions of the novel, down to a series of "Pictures of Dorian Gray" painted by actual artists, this edition provides an excellent visual companion to the novel, which arguably makes up for the shortcomings of its critical apparatus.

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MAALEJ, Mohammed, *Isabelle Eberhardt, miroir d'une âme et d'une société*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008, pp.163, Coll. "Espaces littéraires"

L'Autore, professore universitario tunisino, studioso del genere epistolare, dedica il suo saggio a una nuova interpretazione delle 130 lettere che Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904), viaggiatrice russo-francese nel Sahara tunisino e algerino tra la fine del XIX e l'inizio del XX secolo, personaggio controverso ed eccentrico, scrive al fratello Augustin de Moerder, all'amico Ali Abdul Wahad, a Slimène Ehni, prima amante e poi marito, nel periodo 1897-1904, e che, per la maggior parte inedite, sono state raccolte nell'opera *Écrits intimes. Lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés*, curata da Marie-Odile Delacour e da Jean-René Huleu, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991)¹. L'intenzione dello studioso, dichiarata già a partire dalla prime pagine del saggio, è quella di ridare dignità al contenuto all'epistolario, sottovalutato anche da Edmonde Charles-Roux², la più famosa dei biografi di Isabelle Eberhardt, la quale non approfondisce l'analisi delle lettere, relegandole a una funzione secondaria rispetto a quella dei *Journaliers*, dei racconti di viaggio, e delle opere romanzesche, limitandosi così a una "représentation mythique de la relation qu'a eue la jeune slave avec le monde arabe et selon laquelle, entre Isabelle et le Maghreb, tout est fondé sur le coup de foudre, l'amour, la disponibilité, la fascination et bien d'autres idées qui mythifient ce lien sans chercher vraiment à l'analyser" (13). Partendo da questo assunto, le lettere della viaggiatrice sono analizzate come dei "textes qui n'ont rien à voir avec son oeuvre. Ce sont des textes à dominante descriptive, qui [...] puisent leur plus grand intérêt dans cette image qu'ils nous donnent de la vie quotidienne de l'épistolière, ses projets, ses contacts, ses penchants, ses soucis, et ses liens intimes" (62), e che sono importanti non tanto dal punto di vista sentimentale, quanto da quello di un rapporto profondo e multiforme con l'alterità araba, non privo di un aspetto lucrativo, e a tratti contraddittorio (come ricerca della felicità associata a un miglioramento delle condizioni economiche).

A livello strutturale, il saggio è articolato in tre parti (a loro volta suddivise ciascuna in più sezioni), precedute da una "Introduction générale" (7-18) in cui viene presentata la figura di Isabelle Eberhardt, sottolineandone l'attualità, e l'approccio tematico scelto, alla confluenza tra la retorica e la stilistica, e seguite da una "Conclusion générale", e dalla "Bibliographie". Ogni parte presenta, dal punto di vista strutturale, la ripetizione del modello generale adottato per il saggio ("Introduction", sezio-

ni, “Conclusion”): questa reiterazione, per quanto a tratti un po’ troppo schematica, costituisce tuttavia un elemento che facilita la lettura e la comprensione del percorso critico adottato dallo studioso.

La prima parte (“Une Epistolière protéiforme” 19-66), suddivisa in tre sezioni, è dedicata agli aspetti specifici di quella che l’autore chiama la “lettre eberhardienne” (20), vista come espressione della “quête d’arabité” della viaggiatrice: nella prima delle sezioni l’autore esamina l’epistolario di Isabelle Eberhardt dal punto di vista del corpus, dei destinatari, delle dimensioni, della cronologia, e della “signature”, costituita dai vari pseudonimi (tanto maschili quanto femminili) da lei utilizzati nella sua corrispondenza. La seconda sezione precisa la natura e la funzione dei tre pseudonimi più frequentemente adottati dalla viaggiatrice: Nicolas Podolinsky, Meriem e Mahmoud Saadi. L’ultima sezione è dedicata alla descrizione e all’analisi dei molti termini arabi presenti nelle lettere, dal registro tanto letterario quanto colloquiale: la loro presenza, e la loro frequenza sono indice, secondo l’autore, non solo della perfetta padronanza della lingua araba da parte di Isabelle, ma anche della sua potente e profonda adesione ai valori culturali del mondo arabo.

La seconda parte (“La lettre d’Isabelle” 67-114), suddivisa ancora una volta in tre sezioni, analizza dettagliatamente le caratteristiche formali e contenutistiche delle lettere: partendo sempre dalla convinzione che “la lettre d’Isabelle attestée sa détermination à édifier son identité et son Moi arabes et musulmans” (67), lo studioso si propone di analizzare nella prima sezione il concetto di intimità e di applicarlo alle lettere di Isabelle, per passare poi, nella seconda sezione, all’analisi della natura assai varia di queste lettere, costruite a volte come “bollettini medici” sul precario stato di salute della viaggiatrice, più frequentemente come bollettini finanziari dell’altrettanto precaria condizione economica: si tratta di vere e proprie note di spese, o richieste di prestito di denaro, spesso essenziali, e caratterizzate da un pragmatismo sconcertante e da un linguaggio prosaico che toglie molto al loro valore letterario. Nell’ultima delle sezioni lo studioso descrive le caratteristiche delle lettere-confessione, in cui Isabelle, abbandonandosi non solo al flusso dei ricordi, esprime considerazioni amare sulla crisi dei valori del mondo occidentale che ha lasciato, e questo le permette “de se distinguer de ses semblables et d’affirmer ainsi sa propre éthique, celle de la femme libre qui ne peut se soumettre à une quelconque norme morale ou religieuse contraire aux principes dont elle est imbue” (99). Sempre in questa ultima sezione lo studioso descrive le

caratteristiche delle lettere d'amore che, seppur rare, nella quasi totalità indirizzate a Slimène Ehnni, e scritte sempre nei momenti di separazione, testimoniano, attraverso l'utilizzo di iperboli, e di un linguaggio a tratti criptato, accompagnato da rappresentazioni iconografiche altamente simboliche quali i disegni stilizzati di occhi, la continua ricerca di felicità di Isabelle Eberhardt, la sua passionalità, il suo bisogno quasi ossessivo di conferme.

La terza e ultima parte ("Une vision du Maghreb" 115-151), suddivisa in due sezioni, prende in esame l'immagine del mondo nord-africano quale appare nelle lettere: la prima sezione è dedicata al rapporto di Isabelle con il Maghreb, considerato negli aspetti di "captive amoureuse" (116, nota 161 su questo richiamo, peraltro limitato al solo titolo, al saggio di Genet *Le captif amoureux*), di individuo alla ricerca di una nuova identità religiosa, di artista in cerca una nuova ispirazione letteraria, e di donna coloniale che si confronta con l'uomo arabo in quanto stereotipo di un preciso immaginario erotico. La seconda sezione riprende, analizzandolo più dettagliatamente, il tema della donna coloniale sedotta dalla sensualità dell'uomo arabo: come appare nelle sue opere, ma in particolare nelle lettere, Isabelle Eberhardt prova una forte attrazione fisica per gli uomini arabi, ne è sottilmente, ma inevitabilmente sedotta, e tale seduzione si esplica attraverso una seduzione di tipo intellettuale (quella per Ali Abdulwahab e Abou Naddara) e una seduzione prettamente erotica (quella per Khoudja e per il marito Slimène Ehnni). Il mondo arabo maschile resta il solo interlocutore epistolare di Isabelle, mentre non c'è traccia di scambi con il mondo arabo femminile.

Nella "Conclusion générale" (155-158) lo studioso, ricapitolando quanto detto nelle singole sezioni, sottolinea nuovamente che la scrittura epistolare "devient une forme de fusion avec l'autre" che permette a Isabelle Eberhardt di "accéder à une sérénité intellectuelle et morale qui a marqué toute son oeuvre" (158): quest'ultima affermazione, tuttavia, suscita perplessità in quanto non solo nelle lettere, ma anche nelle altre opere di questa viaggiatrice inquieta e tormentata (*journaliers*, racconti di viaggio, romanzi) la serenità sembra assente, o solo intravista, piuttosto che realmente provata.

La "Bibliographie" a chiusura del saggio, è articolata in 6 sezioni, ma risulta essere incompleta e disomogenea per le sezioni concernenti il corpus delle opere di Isabelle Eberhardt, i saggi biografici sulla viaggiatrice (ne sono stati citati solo 2, di cui uno senza indicazione dell'anno di

pubblicazione), i saggi sulla letteratura coloniale in lingua francese e i testi romanzeschi sulla colonizzazione francese e sul mito dell'Oriente nella letteratura francese del XIX secolo, mentre risultano ricche di informazioni bibliografiche le sezioni riguardanti gli articoli e le conferenze su Isabelle Eberhardt e i saggi sulla letteratura epistolare. L'ultima sezione, dedicata alla scrittura dell'alterità, per quanto anch'essa non completa, contiene l'indicazione di testi importanti per chiunque si accinga a studi inerenti le varie forme di tale scrittura. Per questa disomogeneità interna, e per le lacune rilevate, la bibliografia risulta essere uno strumento incompleto, e solo parzialmente utile, per chi intende approfondire la conoscenza e lo studio della figura e dell'opera della viaggiatrice.

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Note

- 1 Lo studioso si è servito dell'edizione apparsa nel 2003, sempre per i tipi della casa editrice Payot
- 2 Edmonde Charles-Roux è autrice di una monumentale biografia su Isabelle Eberhardt, pubblicata dalla casa editrice Grasset prima in due volumi, *Un désir d'Orient. Jeunesse d'Isabelle Eberhardt 1877-1899* (Paris: Grasset, 1988) e *Nomade j'étais. Les années africaines d'Isabelle Eberhardt 1899-1904* (Paris: Grasset, 1995), e poi unificata in un solo volume dal titolo *Isabelle du désert* (Paris: Grasset, 2003). L'Autore cita nella "Bibliographie" alla fine del saggio solo il volume pubblicato nel 1988.

FENNICHE-FAKHFAKH, Amel. *Fawzia Zouari: l'écriture de l'exil*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010, pp. 190

Amel Fenniche-Fakhfakh présente au grand public les aspects les plus intéressants de l'œuvre littéraire de la romancière tunisienne Fawzia Zouari.

Centrale dans les romans de Zouari est la notion d'exil: fascinée par la thématique de l'*entre-deux*, la romancière francophone considère le maghrébin émigré comme un être humain constamment hanté par "la

recherche d'un juste positionnement vis-à-vis de l'autre" (8). L'étude de Fenniche-Fakhfakh comprend trois parties: une analyse des lieux littéraires les plus représentatifs de l'œuvre de Zouari, intellectuelle partagée entre la France et le souvenir de sa terre natale; une réflexion sur les deux typologies d'émigré nord-africain décrites dans ses romans et enfin une dernière partie consacrée à la problématique de l'interculturalité, nécessaire pour accepter une condition existentielle "métisse" (180).

Dans son étude, Fenniche-Fakhfakh met en évidence la profonde relation qui lie Zouari à l'écriture: pour l'auteur tunisien "écrire, c'est avancer dans un brouillard où les mots sont eux-mêmes la lumière sur les vérités" (14). Écrire en français est "un lieu d'exil" (15), "un Djinn tyrannique" (16), une pensée adultérine qui pousse l'écrivain au-delà de ses limites temporelles et spatiales vers "la découverte de soi" (18). Déchirée entre la réalité et le rêve, le quotidien et le passé filtré par la "fiction narrative" (38), la romancière tunisienne se réfugie dans l'espace neutre de l'écriture, miroir de sa "schizophrénie" intérieure (30).

La lecture de l'étude de Fenniche-Fakhfakh permet au lecteur de découvrir l'enthousiasme qui anime les luttes pour la défense de la dignité du maghrébin émigré: intellectuelle *engagée*, écrivain militant, Zouari utilise ses romans pour dénoncer le racisme profond qui domine la société française. Marâtre plus que mère bienveillante, la France, nourrie par "un sentiment d'hostilité et de rejet" (96) envers les émigrés, conduit les maghrébins venus de l'Afrique du Nord vers une progressive dépersonnalisation. Apparemment intégré comme le personnage de Sadek de *La deuxième épouse* (2006) ou visiblement écrasé comme Ahmed dans le roman *Ce pays dont je meurs* (1999), l'émigré sent la nostalgie du village natal, symbole métonymique d'un monde arabe "ancestral" (56) hors du temps.

Fenniche-Fakhfakh met en évidence l'objectivité analytique de Fawzia Zouari, observatrice impartiale des "monstres" (51) qui menacent l'Orient et l'Occident: si la France semble hostile et raciste, le monde musulman est violé par les intégristes, "énergumènes avides de sang" (51). Différents, mais hantés par la même "agressivité" (99), les musulmans et les occidentaux pourraient résoudre leurs divergences seulement s'ils écoutaient "une autre voix" (100), une voix féminine, synonyme d'une "nouvelle version d'humanité" (100).

Fascinée par la richesse identitaire féminine, Fawzia Zouari, comme souligne Fenniche-Fakhfakh, considère la femme comme un simulacre de différents exils, une représentation en chair et os d'innombrables "dis-

jonction[s] et dislocation[s]” (113): “la séparation d’avec la mère” (113), symbole métonymique de la terre et de la langue originaire (voir aussi Marta Segarra *Leur pesant de poudre: romancières francophones du Maghreb*, 1997), le choix souffert de “migrer dans une autre langue” (140) fortifie la femme, héroïne moderne qui tente “l’expérience de se penser sans l’homme, indépendamment de l’homme” (115) et qui essaie de favoriser la coexistence de la langue française et de la langue maternelle “bêtes féroces destinées à se lyncher” (143).

L’étude de Fenniche-Fakhfakh met en évidence l’originalité de l’écriture de la romancière tunisienne: pour éviter de succomber sous le poids de la lutte intestine entre le français et la langue maternelle, Zouari invente une langue “autre”, autonome par rapport à la langue de l’ancien colonisateur et à celle originaire. Cette langue devient la véritable “maison de l’être” (150), expression du “dédoublement de la personnalité” (162) qui caractérise l’écrivain maghrébin. Apparemment conforme au code linguistique français, cette langue nouvelle garde un cœur arabe. Fawzia Zouari “remodèle” la langue française qu’elle utilise, la manipule et, comme souligne Amel Fenniche-Fakhfakh, la transforme en instrument linguistique hybride où l’extériorité formelle française cache une intériorité ancestrale arabe.

Née d’une profonde blessure identitaire, cette nouvelle typologie linguistique devient le symbole d’une mentalité plurielle et transculturelle, d’une “pensée migrante” (173), vecteur d’un “espace [identitaire] tiers” (175).

En conclusion, le mérite de l’étude de Amel Fenniche-Fakhfakh est d’avoir mis en évidence la modernité de l’idéologie littéraire de Fawzia Zouari: romancière *engagée*, interprète objective d’un monde qui observe les conséquences d’une “créolisation” (180) inévitable, Fawzia Zouari est l’un des modèles les plus représentatifs d’une génération d’intellectuels *de nulle part* qui cherche son chemin identitaire à travers “la langue de l’Autre” (180).

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