

## Book review

Patrick Cardon, *Discours littéraires et scientifiques fin-de-siècle*. Autour de Marc-André Raffalovich. Paris: Orizons, 2008.

Behind this title with such deceptive simplicity lies a passionate study of the birth of a new field of knowledge: the study of homosexualities. This book plunges deeply into the *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle*, a journal edited by Dr Lacassagne between 1886 and 1914. From this French school, as opposed to that of the Italian Lombroso, was born the modern discourses on homosexuality, which crystallized around the pioneer of this material, Marc-André Raffalovich (1864–1934).

We should be thankful to Patrick Cardon, a cultural activist for quite some time, for not having yielded to a militant temptation. His reconstruction of the emerging field of homosexual studies is never obstructed by an accusatory view leveled against the past. Contrary to the epistemocentrism typical of this field, of which Pierre Verdrager (2007)<sup>1</sup> has shown so well the inanity, the author prefers to give us the honest lay of the land of this new field of study in the midst of construction.

The textual sources used in this study come from the police, jurists, and doctors, whose objectives were to determine in a systematic way the individual responsibility of inverts, who were considered either criminals or prostitutes. Far from our clichés concerning the holy alliance between juristic repression and moralistic science, it is really about authors who were motivated by a sincere desire for scientific knowledge. Paradoxically, the *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle* brought the homosexual question up outside of medico-legal considerations. It dared to take up what Tardieu called “the repulsive tableau of pederasty.” It was Raffalovich who crystallized this discursive rupture. He separated homosexuality from prostitution and criminality. Having done this, he opened Pandora’s Box, from which a series of theories would spread.

Into these infinite labyrinths, Cardon is a steady guide. He frames the discourses by stressing a solid chronological and thematic structure without crushing or flattening them too much. And if at times he unmasks the rhetoric and the falsehoods of these authors, it is in order to reveal better the richness of their thought. Far from our customary habit, fiction and science are here on an equal footing. Chevalier, one of the authors from the *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle*, compared the dream-like *Salammbô* by Flaubert to the texts of Lacassagne just as Raffalovich applied his scientific theories to *Les Hors Natures* by Rachilde. It was a very fruitful exchange between the disciplines. Although some scientific writers, like Laupts, adopted a

pseudonym, Raffalovich, coming from the world of literature, gained a scientific reputation.

Cardon adopts the procedures of an historian in analyzing these two fields of study: science and literature. His detailed study of the texts – an eminently encyclopedic approach – shows us the origins of our perceptions and categories. If Raffalovich set up a decisive barrier between heterosexuals and homosexuals, he also opened up a continuum where all of men's and women's possibilities existed, both homosexual and heterosexual, prefiguring our dual contemporary discourse that oscillated between cold naturalism and identitary multiplicity.

In this confrontation of theories in the face of classification tables, there is a battle of words. We discover with amusement "inversion with exclusive agglomerations," "pre-existing spinal or cerebral" inverts, or "the penitentiary *succedaneum* of love" (once again the clinical meets the literary). The growing influence of German science allowed these terms to be used in order to clothe and legitimize realities that were only recently being taken into account. Berlin had become the capital of the sciences of sexuality, and above all, of the sexualities of minorities. Lacassagne and Ladame admired German scientific genius. For us, it is this rediscovery of scientific knowledge that is incarnate in the work of Magnus Hirshfeld, who was its most fervent activist and master. It is time to re-appropriate our own pre-Stonewallian European history and to overtake our lag behind Anglo-Saxon studies.

On the literary side, Cardon covers the Pantheon (Oscar Wilde and Paul Verlaine) as well as the forgotten individuals (Rachilde, Wilbrand, Burton, and others). He consecrates a very pretty chapter to Wilde, whose rivalry with Raffalovich was famous. We should remember that Raffalovich stole from him the beautiful and young John Gray, the inspiration for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It is an extraordinary love story that ended in a mystic union: Raffalovich had a church built in Edinburgh at which Gray officiated. They died in the same city in the same year, 1934, and they were buried next to each other.

A connoisseur of words, Cardon navigates easily the terrain of Queer Studies, juggling the categories of sex, gender, class, and race, but without forgetting the lessons of the past. Finally, this book allows us the opportunity to salute the birth of a new publishing house, Orizons, directed by Daniel Cohen, and of its promising upcoming collection: *Homosexualités: Approches transgenres*. The newness of this publishing house explains and permits us to pardon the misprints and typographical errors.

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Translated from the French by William A. Peniston

## References

Verdrager, Pierre (2007) *L'Homosexualité dans tous ses états*. Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond.