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Michèle Anne Schaal. Une troisième vague féministe et littéraire: les femmes de lettres de la nouvelle génération. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017.

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Abstract

Review of Michèle Anne Schaal. *Une troisième vague féministe et littéraire: les femmes de lettres de la nouvelle génération*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017. xv + 344 pp.

Keywords

Book Review, Michèle Anne Schaal, Une troisième vague féministe et littéraire: les femmes de lettres de la nouvelle génération

Michèle Anne Schaal. *Une troisième vague féministe et littéraire: les femmes de lettres de la nouvelle génération*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017. xv + 344 pp.

In *Une troisième vague féministe et littéraire: les femmes de lettres de la nouvelle génération*, Michèle Schaal analyzes the relationship between the significant resurgence of feminism in France during the 1990s and the concurrent emergence of a new generation of radical French female writers. The correlation between activists' organizations, manifestos, and academic essays of the period and that of the literary production of a notable group of prolific and subversive female writers, according to Schaal, is indicative of the groups' common interests and preoccupations. Both the young feminists and the new generation of writers were intent on challenging society's perception of gender roles and calling for true gender equality. Schaal contends that the intersection and overlapping of these diverse forms of dissent, which are rarely presented as having been united in an openly declared alliance, brought about the manifestation of a feminist and literary third wave in France.

Rather than "post-feminism," a term often associated with anti-feminism, Schaal prefers "third wave," which embraces the historical continuity of the movement while also distinguishing itself from its predecessors. Though the female body is a common concern for both third and second-wave feminists, third-wave writers often focus more closely on re-examining the relationship between body, violence, and sexuality. As a result, the third wave's exploration of abjection and of a rehabilitated pornography is put forth as an assertion of freedom in female sexuality. Both third-wave activists and writers adopt an ambiguous position on feminism. They condemn the second wave feminists' institutionalization as well as their essentialism, racism, and classism, and question heterocentric and Western-centric notions of feminism. They often feature multiple, at times contradictory, variations of feminism that are grounded in inclusion, diversity, and plurality. According to Schaal, the field of Gender Studies in the US, along with feminist, postcolonial, and queer theories, have all had a profound influence on the third wave. New words in French such as "l'intersectionnalité, la performance et l'hybridité" (27) 'intersectionality, performance and hybridity' are now part of the lexicon, activities, and narratives of the third wave.

Without claiming to be part of a specific movement or a literary school, the new generation of female writers gives voice to many of the third-wave feminist activists' concerns. Particularly along the four selected works—*Truismes* by Marie Darrieussecq (1996), Virginie Despentes's *Les Jolies choses* (1998), *Viande* by Claire Legendre (1999), and Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué* (2000)—Schaal recognizes two consistent analytical categories: gender and intersectional diversity. In these narratives, gender is never a neutral category. As *the male* remains the universal point of reference, the female characters are cast as *the other*. When

diversities such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, and social class intersect, the result is an intensification of this otherness. General consensus regarding a particular societal paradox unites these writers: in spite of belonging to a generation of liberated women who grew up in a secular country where women benefit from the achievements of feminism, their central characters routinely come from a place of economic disadvantage and often experience classism and gender discrimination. Schaal's corpus of writings closely reflects on third-wave feminists' commitments by representing themes dealing with alterity and gender performance, as well as hybrid identities and aesthetics. The representation of systemic violence upon the female body, Schaal affirms, mirrors the historical realities of women and minorities living in France the '90s. Writers respond to being characterized as *the other* by presenting the gendered self as more performative than biological, thus denying any correlation between anatomy and gender identity. Echoing and sometimes anticipating the sentiments of the female activists, these writers often portray characters in their plurality and contradictions while also privileging tropes of hybridity and intertextuality in both content and form.

Schaal's work comprises four chronologically organized chapters. In the first chapter, Schaal interprets Darrieussecq's *Truismes* as a work that anticipates most of the leitmotifs carried on by the new generation of writers, that is: the ambivalent relationship with the second wave, the primacy of the body, the problematic mother-daughter relationship, the postmodern aesthetic, the use of intertextuality and first person narratives, the paradoxical collision of women's exploration of new sexual identities and the persistence of societal interdictions. In chapter two, Schaal maintains that *Les Jolies choses* by Desportes anticipates and illustrates the new elements of a regenerated, more inclusive feminism as envisioned by young militants, academics, and working class feminists of the '90s. Desportes represents violence in all its facets and demonstrates how it resides at the very heart of both the family and the heterosexual couple's relationship while underscoring the more or less conscious female decision to acquiesce to the patriarchy. In chapter three, Schaal defends *Viande* against critical condemnation and focuses on Legendre's political reflections on women, i.e. gendered identity and the globalized contemporary society. According to Schaal, Legendre offers a dark and pessimistic vision of young women in the '90s and demonstrates how without a drastic eradication of the gendered hierarchy, women who try to reconcile plural and contradictory identities are destined to perpetuate the same brutality of which they are victims. In the last chapter, Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué* complicates the intersectionality of differences by juxtaposing the plural identities of the protagonist with her refusal to choose between them. The female character, who inhabits a space in between two national identities, two ethnicities, and two sexual orientations, chooses to become male, thus claiming an identity that fluctuates between the pluralities that constitute her being.

After a thorough and compelling analysis, Schall concludes her book with an overview of additional literary works and feminist political organizations characterizing the following decade (2000-2010) in France. In considering both similarities and differences with the third wave, Schaal puts the common tenets in perspective on an international level and, ultimately, contemplates the potential for a fourth-wave feminism in France.

Schaal's book is an essential resource and a valuable tool for specialists in the fields of Gender Studies, Francophone Literatures and Postcolonial Studies, and Theory and Cultural Studies, as well as for those with general interests in literature, women studies, and feminism.

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