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Palimpseste by Valérie Rinaldo (review)

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essential element. Her first celebrated exhibit in the early 60s, *Tirs*, was not only a means for healing the wounds of her childhood but it was also an attack against patriarchy in all its forms as well as a protest of societal norms that restricted and even destroyed women and their creativity and independence. By 1965, her style seemed more playful and colorful even though the bright figures known as *Nanas* were meant to make male critics who dominated the art world uncomfortable; the sculptures represented the modern, curvy woman and all her “imperfections” and mocked the unrealistic expectations that men have of women and their bodies. Saint Phalle’s final years focused on the making of public art and she created several indoor and outdoor sculpture gardens—*Hon* at the Moderna Museet in Sweden and later, *Le jardin des tarots* in Italy, and *Queen Califia’s Magic Circle* in California. With the loss of Tinguely in 1991 and her own illness which brought her back to the United States for good, Saint Phalle’s later years were also rife with pain. The book ends with her reflections on 9-11, an event that affected her deeply, and the words: “What’s for sure, is that, if I hadn’t created, I would have destroyed. Yes, I’d have made a rather fearsome terrorist!” (179).

The book is divided into twenty-chapters, each announced by an original illustration of Saint Phalle on a tarot card. These chapter markers emphasize turning points in the artist’s life while paying tribute to one of her most famous works, *Le jardin des tarots*. The graphic novel is followed by an extremely useful and well written chronology of Saint Phalle’s life in addition to a list of suggestions for further reading.

The graphic novel’s writer, Dominique Osuch, holds an advanced degree in literature and was schooled in art at the École Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Strasbourg. Illustrator Sandrine Martin was trained in art at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Osuch’s polished writing style and Martin’s powerful images fuse perfectly, resulting in an unforgettable work that is useful and meaningful not only for a variety of readers but also for instructors, researchers, and students alike who are studying 20th century French culture and the arts or interdisciplinary subjects involving Women’s and Gender Studies. The original French text, *Niki de Saint Phalle: Le jardin des secrets*, was published by Casterman in Belgium in 2014 and translated into English by Joe Johnson who has done a remarkable job capturing Osuch’s writing style. With both the original French version and the English translation in print, there is the potential here to reach many readers who wish to explore the events leading up to the production of this versatile artist’s highly acclaimed works. Not only does this book cover the essentials about the life of Niki de Saint Phalle but readers also have the impression of being let in to Saint Phalle’s private world, all while learning more about the origins of her works.

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Rinaldo, Valérie. *Palimpseste. Illustrations de Ginette Adamson. Éditions Terre de Ciel, 2018. Pp 76; ISBN: 978-2-9553849-3-0. 18€.*

In these times of political turmoil, with constant media reports, escape into beauty is a wondrous gift. And this book is truly “a thing of beauty,” to quote John Keats: beauty in the words, their musical qualities, their placement on the page;

beauty in the images, their vibrant colors, their evocative shapes; beauty in the book itself as artifact. Both artists have Haitian roots; both reside in France. The poet, Valérie Rinaldo, teaches literature in the Tarn-et-Garonne, where she recently founded the Éditions Terre de Ciel to share her “passion de beaux livres” (www.editions-terredeciel.com). The painter, Ginette Adamson, now living in Strasbourg, is known to many WIF members, especially as the organizer for many years of the Continental, Latin-American and Francophone Women Writers conferences at Wichita State University.

As its title, “Palimpseste,” suggests, the book joins a long tradition, but it seems to ask, “Do we need another account of the wrongs of slavery?” This one, however, covers less studied ground. It represents a voyage of self-discovery as, first and foremost, a woman. The moment of full understanding comes toward the end of the text: “Croyant partager avec les chantres de la Négritude / La violence de l’insurrection / Penses-tu qu’il est permis de tutoyer les grands Bâtisseurs / Ta quête est d’une autre nature / Boire enfin Ta Vérité à pleine bouche » (54) and leads to the realization of the function of the poet: « Réinventer le futur pour donner du sens au passé » (55). The voyage passes through the individual acts of love and pleasure, motherhood, and also, more broadly, looks at women’s suffering during the time of slavery, with “les enfants de la honte,” when a woman was forced to bear “l’enfant du maître” (49).

There is much here about Haiti, especially in a section titled “À la rencontre d’Haïti”—the physical beauty of the land (“Haïti la très belle” [65]), its suffering (“Port-au-Prince entrouvre ses plaies béantes” [57]), details of its history as “l’Insoumise” and “la Rebelle” (50), its myths (Erzulie and other aspects of the loas of vaudou), its dances, its colors, its sounds, and even lines from a song in creole. Rinaldi also emphasizes the multiple connections to Africa, such as the creation myth, Fon in origin, of Mawu and Lissa.

The ten paintings, although created independently of the text, correspond to cues where, sometimes, specific colors are named (corail, saffran, mauve, magenta, or, pourpre, grège, indigo, rousse, bleuté) or, at other times, only suggested, in for instance, the many details concerning the sea: “le mugissement suave de la vague océane / Vibre à fleur d’écume” (28). Adamson has chosen strong reds to accompany passages that speak of the physical pleasures of love. Blues dominate in the pages where the sea is described. African masks and vague human shapes appear in other images.

I recommend the volume, with its echoes of Césaire and Rimbaud, in particular, to those WIF members who teach poetry, Caribbean Studies, or Africa and its diaspora, but also—more broadly—to anyone who desires to flee today’s often hideous world into “Toute la beauté du monde” (63), the sheer wonder of colors, forms, and words.

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Zouari, Fawzia. *I Die by This Country*. Trans. Skylar Artes. Afterword by Susan Ireland. U of Virginia P, 2018. Pp 164. ISBN: 978-0-8139-4022-9. \$59.50 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0-8139-4023-6. \$24.50 (paper). ISBN: 978-0-8139-4024-3. \$59.50 (eBook).