

Part IV, "Questions of Genealogy and Textuality," contains articles which focus much more sharply on a single text or a smaller group of texts in the process of examining the matter of genealogy and questions of the literary character of specific texts. In part V, "Art History and Comparative Literary History," two articles examine first a broad problem associated with literature and other arts in the context of the Rococo, and then the question of Picasso as illustrator and reader of literary texts.

The final section, "Anna Balakian, Comparatist," contains a biographical sketch, a bibliography of her publications, and a short article by Professor Balakian herself, in which she offers what she considers a workable schema for the historical organization of literature. While her approach contains some interesting and subtle modifications to the standard approach to periodization, this reviewer does not feel it resolves all the outstanding questions. Still, her proposal does improve on many of the confused and frequently more taxonomic attempts to organize not only comparative, but all literary histories.

While there is no overriding theoretical rationale to this collection nor any unifying principle—nor need there be—still there seem to be two dominant motifs. The first is an emphasis on intertextuality, and the second is an appeal for a status of a sort of meta-discipline for comparative literary history. The arguments for both are fruitful, if not totally convincing, and support the contention that collections such as this should inform the investigations of all students of literature, not only those directly engaged in comparative studies.

Finally, given its outrageous price, purchasers should expect this book to be totally free of technical and typographical deficiencies, but there are still a considerable number of each. Its exorbitant price aside, the editors have put together a worthy tribute to Professor Balakian.

Salwa Bakr

*The Wives of Men and Other Stories*

Translated from the Arabic by Denys Johnson-Davies

Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993. Pp. xxii + 178. \$9.00

Reviewed by Ramzi M. Salti

At first glance, Salwa Bakr may be considered as the latest newcomer in a series of Arab feminist writers who have burst onto the literary scene in recent years, following in the footsteps of such notable authors as Nawal al-Sa'dāwi and Alifa Rif'at—both of whom have received much attention in the Arab world and in the West for their feminist works of fiction. Many of the resulting similarities between Bakr, Rif'at, and al-Sa'dāwi are notable, even striking. Like al-Sa'dāwi, Bakr was imprisoned for a short time for her political views and consequently utilized her incarceration as a basis for much of her writing. Not unlike Rif'at, her short stories carry an uneasy air of serenity which, ironically, serves to heighten the anger and courage which often accompany an (Egyptian) woman's struggle for liberation. Yet despite these similarities, Bakr has managed to success-

fully (re)create a distinctive style of writing and an innovative mode of narration that set her apart from any of her predecessors and/or contemporaries.

One of the major points that sets *The Wiles of Men and Other Stories* apart from any previous Arab feminist's fictional works is Bakr's insistence upon tying women's liberation to a macrocosmic political reality. As Barbara Harlow mentions in her introduction to the book, Bakr's writings emphasize "the status of women's rights as human rights within a collective political struggle (xiii). As a result, many of the short stories, such as "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees," attempt to explore links and boundaries vis-à-vis various notions of nationalism, patriotism, and the liberation of women.

Perhaps one of Bakr's most unique contributions to Arab feminist discourse, and Arabic literature as a whole, is her revival of a genre which so characterized early Arabic literature, namely that of animal fables. In fact, various elements in such stories as "A Small White Mouse," "The Monkey Trainer," "What Happened to Pussy," and "The Bird and His Cage" (all of which feature animals in conflict with each other or being exploited and abused by humans) are reminiscent of the famous collection of fables *Kalilah wa Dimnah*, although, of course, any attempt at a simplistic sense of morality has been elevated to new heights and intertwined with the subjugation of women by a patriarchal society.

Bakr's female characters may also be unified by a general trait. They are, in most cases, individuals who are equipped with intelligence and talent, two tools that could have ultimately been used to better their situation and/or free them from enslavement. Yet, due to unfortunate, cruel, and often absurd circumstances, their courage and talents go unrewarded and ignored by a society that seeks to silence, distance, and ostracize any woman who dares to cry out for freedom. Thus Sayyida, who in "That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice" notes that her voice "has become extremely beautiful" (59), is not only dismissed and patronized by others, but is actually dragged to a psychiatrist for evaluation; the protagonist in "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" attempts to cut off her own tongue, having experienced the results of voicing her opinions; and "Dotty Noona," a young servant with a keen thirst for knowledge and education, is regarded as crazy when she musters up the courage to run away rather than take part in her arranged marriage.

Yet it is perhaps within the pessimism that seems to reign over many of Bakr's stories that much optimism and hope may be found. After all, despite the way society ends up viewing Noona, she does manage to gain some agency by breaking free from certain oppressive traditions: Maatouq, the only monkey to rebel against his sadistic master in "The Monkey Trainer," is sent back to the rock garden but is still in a better position than his peers who end up dead, or sold into slavery; and, in "The Bird and His Cage," the bird which is initially scared of the outside world upon its sudden release from its cage, eventually comes to understand and appreciate freedom.

Arab feminist writers have contributed much to the current postcolonial feminist discourse which, in spite of many obstacles, shows no signs of abating. With the advent of Salwa Bakr onto the literary scene, the place for Arab feminists within that discourse seems assured as new tactics, styles, and genres continue to

be employed and (re)invented in the struggle by Third-World women for liberation and independence.

Gabriel García Márquez  
*Del amor y otros demonios*  
Bogotá: Norma, 1994. Pp. 198.  
Reviewed by Harley D. Oberhelman

Published simultaneously in five countries (Colombia, Cuba, Argentina, Mexico, and Spain), *Del amor y otros demonios* is García Márquez's latest novel to stir the expectations of his international reading public. This masterpiece is reminiscent of his earlier novellas and short stories such as *La hojarasca* (1955), *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* (1962), and *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (1961). *Del amor* returns to a more simple style with short, crisp sentences and a linear story line. Gone is the absolute and all-embracing world vision of *Cien años de soledad* (1967) and *El otoño del patriarca* (1975), but at the same time *Del amor* elevates reality to a mythical level.

Set in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, in the eighteenth century, it tells the tale of a beautiful young girl, Sierva María de Todos los Angeles, who is bitten by a rabid dog. Although her family believes she has contracted rabies, rumors are spread that she is bewitched. Her father, the Marqués de Casalduero, has her interned in the Convent of Santa Clara where she is subjected to an intense exorcism procedure. Her exorcist, a priest three times her age, falls hopelessly in love with his young charge, hence the *amor/demonios* dichotomy of the title. The novel is a veritable panoply of Cartagena in the 1700s where the slave trade flourished and heresy was severely punished by the Office of the Inquisition. The Spanish Main, the fabled commercial route from the New World to Spain, began at Cartagena's seaport, thereby making it one of the great commercial centers of the continent during the colonial period.

García Márquez asserts that *Del amor* caused him more uncertainly than any of his previous novels. In an effort to avoid anachronisms or errors, he wrote eleven different versions of the novel and corrected six complete sets of proof before accepting a definitive version. The prologue relates that the genesis of the novel dates back to October 26, 1949, when he was a young journalist with *El Universal* in Cartagena. On a slow news day he was asked to report on the destruction of the Convent of Santa Clara to make way for a five-star hotel. The process required the removal of the bodies buried there, among them that of Sierva María de Todos los Angeles. To the amazement of all when her tomb was opened, her blonde hair had grown to a length of more than twenty-two meters. This phenomenon coincided with a tale García Márquez's grandmother had told him when he was a child under her care. Now he had his column for the day.

There is a strange twist to this prologue. A check of *El Universal* for that day reveals that his column was an analysis of Edgar Allen Poe's obsession with death that had absolutely nothing to do with the convent's destruction. When asked about this discrepancy, García Márquez made the startling statement that