

Social Sciences. One hopes that the publication of volumes of essays such as *Homosexuality in French History and Culture* will act as a catalyst to increased interest in queer French Studies, both in Canada and elsewhere.

Erica Fischer. *Aimée & Jaguar: A Love Story, Berlin 1943*. Translated from the German by Edna McCown. Los Angeles and New York: Alyson Books, 1998. 274 pp. Ill. US\$12.95. ISBN 1-55583-450-7.

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On one level, *Aimée & Jaguar* recounts the “Love Story” of two women in a troubled time. Lilly Wust (Aimée), a German mother of four boys and the wife of a Nazi, and Felice Schragenheim (Jaguar), a young German-Jewish woman trying to hide her identity from the Nazis, fall in love in Germany in 1943. But readers looking for straightforward lesbian romance will be surprised. Journalist-author Fischer adds another dimension to the story by incorporating many of the protagonists’ documents, letters, poetry, and diaries and the recollections of friends and family. Fischer’s work thus crosses the boundaries between biography, history, and fiction and frames the lovers’ perspective between multiple voices. It is the resulting ambiguities that question the nature of sexuality, oral history, the truth of memory, and the lovers’ story itself that make *Aimée & Jaguar* so interesting.

Pivotal to the story is Jaguar’s arrest, incarceration, and forced labor in a series of Nazi prisons and concentration camps, and Aimée’s impassioned efforts to help her. Their correspondence, often smuggled through the prisons by various people won over by Jaguar’s warm personality, is extremely moving. It conveys the women’s love and commitment to each other as well as the desperation and torment suffered by prisoners and their loved ones on the ‘outside.’ When Jaguar is captured and sent to Theresienstadt the author conveys a love that seems to transcend the limitations of physical separation. In this way, *Aimée & Jaguar* resembles a universal love story. In

fact, sexual orientation is secondary to the theme of love and devotion and it is only the malicious comments made by disapproving relatives and acquaintances, as well as Nazi interrogators, that convey to the reader that Aimée and Jaguar's was hardly a 'normal' relationship for the place and time.

Fischer never reveals how she, or the people in the book, conceptualize lesbian sexuality. Aimée's apparently eager participation in heterosexual relationships, including extramarital affairs with men, and her delayed sexual interest in women, begs the question of whether or not she would have been regarded as, or regarded herself as, a 'true' lesbian, a bisexual, or a 'naturalized' lesbian. This is central to whether or not their relationship can even be termed 'lesbian.'

Clearly, Fischer was limited by her subject's reluctance to provide explanations for many of the gaps in her story, and the author expressed frustration in trying to understand Lilly's postwar distance from lesbianism: "Why did she have to reject Helene [a suitor] and marry the horrible Willi Beimling? Why didn't she dare to step back into life in the seventies, when the lesbian scene in Berlin was in full swing?" (270). These suggest that sexuality is not a discrete entity but rather that it exists within a context complicated by, and intertwined with, other factors — personal, social, economic and historical — that limit and complicate choices and, as a result, confound simplified categorizations. Ironically, Fischer's decontextualization of lesbianism suggests the importance of considering contexts.

Yet, Fischer offers a limited insight to the social and historical conditions of same-sex relationships between women under National Socialism. By comparison, the oral histories and biographies about German lesbians by Ilse Kokula and Claudia Schoppmann are much more deliberate in capturing what life was like for lesbian couples during the Nazi era.

Fischer's casual treatment of sexuality leads to confusion about the book's objective. Since lesbianism is secondary to other themes, it is unclear whether the book is intended to make a claim for homosexual rights, as one would assume from the plot, or to condemn the persecution of Jews instead. Jaguar's persecution was not a result of her lesbianism (the Nazis did not expressly persecute homosexual women in quite the way they did homosexual men), but rather her

Jewishness and alleged resistance activities. Whereas Fischer's epilogue carries a passionate message about individual responsibility against human injustice, her discussion is about the Holocaust and "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia, with no mention of, and hence no call to action against, other human rights violations such as those based on sexual orientation.

Historians will also be frustrated by the fictionalization of sources that results from Fischer's adoption of an omniscient narrative voice. Although the author reproduces substantial excerpts from interviews, she also makes claims about individuals' thoughts and feelings that are more akin to conjecture. For example, Fischer states that "Günther Wust was thunderstruck ... Perhaps it was his fault, perhaps she [Lilly] simply needed a firmer hand" (38). This cannot have been Günther's recollection since he did not survive the war to tell his story, but Fischer's embellishments are presented in an authoritative fashion, blurring the distinction between history and fiction.

Yet this tension between fact and fiction is one of the things that makes *Aimée & Jaguar* so interesting. Fischer allows discrepancies in testimony to stand in contradiction to one another — for instance, the question of whether or not Aimée had a picture or bronze relief of Hitler in her living room. This becomes particularly important when Fischer presents Aimée's overzealous embrace of Judaism after the war. Was Aimée anti-Semitic before falling in love with Jaguar? Did guilt and shame over possible Nazi sympathies prompt Lilly's conspicuous silence about the years prior to her love affair? These inconsistencies remind the reader of the constructed, and perhaps even deliberately manipulated, nature of memory and history.

On the other hand, it is these inconsistencies and manipulations that ultimately call the love story itself into question. For instance, Fischer creates suspicion around Aimée's motives for her zealous pursuit of linens, a Persian lamb coat, and other items, bequeathed to her by Jaguar, although it is up to the reader to decide if Aimée was driven to this out of greed, grief, or grim necessity. Less subtly, Fischer contradicts the impression that Aimée and Jaguar had an everlasting love when she baldly states: "I don't believe that Jaguar would have stayed with Aimée" (271). In the epilogue, Fischer reasonably concludes that "Aimée's story is full of holes" (270).

Thus, although *Aimée & Jaguar* is neither a traditionally narrated love story, nor a conventional academic history, the book draws its strength from the questions generated by the mixing of these genres. For those willing to overlook or even relish the book's ambiguities and its lack of historical methodological rigor, Erica Fischer's work is a thought-provoking exploration of a complex *human* relationship that raises questions about the subjective nature of memory and the construction of the past.

