

KIM, ANNABEL L. *Unbecoming Language: Anti-Identitarian French Feminist Fictions*. Ohio State UP, 2018. ISBN 978-0-8142-1384-1. Pp. viii + 263.

Nathalie Sarraute, Monique Wittig, and Anne Garréta, despite critical acclaim, have received relatively limited scholarly attention from the North American academic community. Annabel Kim aims to rectify the situation by challenging what has come to be an accepted equation of French feminist thought with a politics and aesthetics of difference as articulated in the writings of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous. Kim explores the critical and fictional writings of Sarraute, Wittig, and Garréta in an effort to explicate and valorize their contributions to modern thought and literature. In a departure from the feminist discourse on *écriture féminine*, Kim's strength is her ability to craft a careful argument that slowly builds a convincing case regarding the importance of challenging both literature and politics grounded in identities. Enacting a complex dialogue between the three authors, Kim demonstrates not only the connections between the authors, but also the resonances between their texts, which all strive to shake off the deadening confines of both traditional literature, defined in terms of characters and narrative arc, and collective identity (gender, race, class, and so on) as such, inasmuch as it stifles our individual freedom to exist as individuals. Of particular use are the metaphors that Kim develops in order to explain the complex literary maneuvers of these writers. For example, she describes Sarraute's work with tropisms as placing "the reader inside the snow globe, inside the movement of the snow, where a total vision and apprehension of the scene are sacrificed in order to enable sensation and experience in its stead" (52). Images like this will be of use to faculty as they help students find an intellectual toe-hold in texts that seem to resist the average reader's expectations at every turn. If Kim's argument has a weakness, it might be that, in an effort to proclaim the benefits of the texts she studies, she seems to have overlooked the elitism implicit in such writing. While Sarraute, Wittig, and Garréta saw language and literature as belonging to all, their texts remain out of reach for the less-educated among us. Typical university undergraduates are likely to find the texts difficult to penetrate, and even literary scholars might reject the notion that such authors are the only ones pursuing "living language." In privileging these authors, who are certainly deserving of our attention, Kim risks creating a hierarchy among literary works that recreates the identitarian politics that she, and the authors she rightly admires, are working against. This conundrum in no way detracts from an otherwise superb study but is worth exploring for those who read the book.

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