

Pauvert, interviewed in *Writer of O*, was used to such attention, having already published the complete works of Sade and Jean Genet. With an impish grin, however, he states of Genet, "But homosexuality always had a lot of prestige"—unlike female masochism. After *Story of O* was rejected by Gallimard, Pauvert immediately saw the value of what he calls "a very decent book . . . without the slightest excess. . . . I knew it would be a revolution." The book has never been out of print.

The re-creations of scenes from *Story of O* interspersed throughout the documentary are pretty and promising if dissatisfying. Pénélope Puymirat is lovely to look at as O, appropriately French, not porn shorn, and, as a student of "philosophy and psychology," she is, one assumes, in the right frame of mind. Mostly, we see O languishing, naked, in becoming poses, constrained by leather cuffs, ensconced in red satin: static s/m, a contradiction in terms. The implication of a slow pan across a large case of brown dildos of ever-increasing size (party time for O!) is, ironically, emblematic of the softness of Rapaport's approach. Why must sex always be sentimentalized for public consumption? "To love is to live on the precipice," said Aury, reporting live from the ledge. Sentimentality removes the danger. "Profane love and sacred love are the same love, or should be," she wrote—a combination virtually impossible to film, requiring the unlikely partnership of Carl Dreyer and Bernardo Bertolucci, Joan of Arc meets Marlon Brando and butter in Paris.

All this aside, the interviews make *Writer of O* well worth seeing: Pauvert, hardly aged, amused by the ruckus; Henry Miller speaking French with a hilariously defiant American accent; and a glimpse of the petite Réage-wannabe Anaïs Nin. The still-glamorous woman of letters Régine Deforges casually mentions that Aury at one time liked to walk the streets of Les Halles dressed as a prostitute. Oh. The literary whore. Asked by Deforges how she would have felt if offered money by a lover, Aury responds quixotically, "I imagine I would have been quite pleased."

Story of O ends with an astonishing apotheosis, where O is displayed at a party in a Renaissance "cloister." She is naked but for a leash attached to the rings piercing her labia. The towering mask of an owl conceals her face, Athena personified. The crowd disperses as she enters; she is a living altar as much in her beautiful nakedness as in the pride that cloaks her. At dawn, she is laid on her back, unleashed, and, in her final triumph, "possessed" by the fortunate few. She is now beyond possession.

Aury, not knowing "how to end it," offers a second ending to O's story. Sir Stephen is going to leave her. Unable to bear the loss, she asks his permission to die. He consents. Declos-Aury-Réage was a woman who sinned with the best of them but with courage more than most. O is something rarely, if ever, seen: a woman's erotic core.

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