



Pastre, Geneviève (b. 1924)

by Tina Gianoulis

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Geneviève Pastre, one of France's leading lesbian theorists and political activists, was a respected French poet and academic in her fifties when she came out as a lesbian and made radical lesbian feminism the root of her political and literary work. A proficient student and teacher of the Greek and Latin classics, she became one of the first theorists to deconstruct the myths and archetypes of classical cultures from a feminist perspective.

While her political writing has been ignored or denigrated by mainstream critics, Pastre has become a major influence within the French lesbian and gay movement. She became an advocate of lesbian autonomy and gay rights in her own work, and created her own publishing house to ensure that radical queer voices could be heard. In addition, she has worked to place gay and lesbian concerns on the French national agenda by helping to found the *Parti des Mauves* (Lavender Party).

Geneviève Pastre was born on November 20, 1924, in Mainz, Germany. Growing up in the much-contested Franco-German province of Lorraine, she had a happy, if sheltered, childhood. As a child she planned to become a dancer, but gave in to parental pressure to give up her devotion to dance and concentrate on her studies of classical literature. She completed her higher education in Paris at the Sorbonne.

After earning the highest qualification to teach in France, the *agrégation*, Pastre became a high school literature instructor, spent eight years in a loveless marriage, and had two daughters. She wrote and published poetry, earning critical respect and literary prestige. She retained her love of dance and theater, studied mime with Marcel Marceau and Jacques Lecoq, and, from 1960 to 1978, directed a theater troupe that eventually took her name, becoming the Geneviève Pastre Company.

During the 1970s, Pastre became involved with radical lesbians and began the process of coming out as a political lesbian feminist. The "official" public announcement of her lesbianism was the publication in 1980 of the essay, "De l'Amour lesbien" ("About Lesbian Love").

In 1987 she published *Athènes et le Péril Saphique: Homosexualité Féminine en Grèce Antique* (*Athens and the Sapphic Peril: Homosexuality in Ancient Greece*) and *L'Homosexualité dans le Monde Antique* (*Homosexuality in the Ancient World*). These pioneering works analyze modern mythologizing of the Athenian democracy and other classical institutions from a uniquely feminist and gay perspective. She conceived them in part as a response to Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, which she believes is flawed by Foucault's misunderstanding of ancient languages and of lesbianism. However, Pastre's works were pointedly ignored by the French press and the literary establishment.

Unfazed, Pastre continued to write about emerging lesbian political identity. She also founded her own publishing house to ensure that voices outside the French mainstream would be heard. Editions G. Pastre publishes Pastre's own work as well as that of other queer iconoclasts, such as Catherine Hubert, Odette Mentau, and Michel Aurouze.

Pastre has said of herself, "Je ne suis pas une activiste. Je suis poète et danseuse" ("I am not an activist. I am a poet and dancer"). While such a statement is disingenuous, it is true that she has not limited herself to a single form of activism.

In 1979, she co-founded the political organization, *Comité d'Urgence Anti-Repression Homosexuelle* (CUARH). During the early 1980s, she began to work in radio, and, in 1982, she was elected president of the national gay radio station, *Fréquence Gaie*. Though she left *Fréquence Gaie* in 1984, due to political differences with other officers, she continued to host a weekly show on *Radio Libertaire* for several years.

In the 1980s, she also helped form the *Association des Octaviennes*, a society of lesbian writers, and the publishing house Les Octaviennes. In 1990, she organized a festival of European glbtq writers.

In 1995, Pastre began to work toward a nationally influential gay political movement by helping to found a gay political party, the *Parti des Mauves*. The *Mauves* have worked on such internationally important gay issues as the removal of homosexuality from the World Health Organization's list of mental illnesses and persuading Amnesty International to recognize the right of queers to political asylum.

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About the Author

Tina Gianoulis is an essayist and free-lance writer who has contributed to a number of encyclopedias and anthologies, as well as to journals such as *Sinister Wisdom*.