



## Hahn, Pierre (1936-1981)

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Pierre Hahn was one of the earliest gay militants in contemporary France and an amateur historian who received the first doctorate given in France for work in the history of homosexuality.

Pierre Hahn, who was born on April 5, 1936, was nineteen when he contacted André Baudry (b. 1922), the conservative former seminarian who had just begun publishing *Arcadie*, a monthly "homophile" review and would soon found an association with the same name. Invited to participate in the review, Hahn wrote numerous articles (under the pseudonym André Clair) on a wide variety of subjects of interest to the homosexual readership, while simultaneously embarking on a career in journalism.

Under pressure from his father, however, Hahn briefly entered a psychiatric hospital at the age of twenty in a vain attempt to "cure" his homosexuality. The experience left him with a life-long distrust of the medical profession because of the way it had been treating homosexuals since the nineteenth century.

By the mid-1960s Hahn was evolving beyond Baudry's position that homosexuals should show themselves "respectable" and "dignified" in order to win the tolerance of society and the approval of the authorities. Hahn later explained that he had begun a serious relationship with another man and "like all people who are in love, I wanted to shout it from the rooftops; I also wanted to rehabilitate something [homosexuality] that was held in contempt or treated with condescension." In a public talk at *Arcadie*, he compared the discrimination against homosexuals to racial discrimination, a point of view that shocked some of his more conservative listeners.

Hahn also got in touch with several left-wing groups in Paris, who still considered homosexuality to be a bourgeois vice: "I was trying to get these puritanical leftists to understand that homosexuals were oppressed and that there was a struggle to be undertaken here."

Guy Hocquenghem (a leading gay militant of the 1970s, but at the time a 21-year-old Trotskyite who carefully hid his own homosexuality from his homophobic "comrades" on the political left) later recalled Hahn's appearance at one meeting in 1967: "He came into the damp cellar and for an hour spoke to us about homosexual liberation. It was the first time I had ever seen a homosexual militant. And for a good reason, because at the time he was the only one in Paris."

In late 1970, some of the lesbians belonging to *Arcadie* started holding meetings together with a number of sympathetic men, including Hahn. Out of this caucus there emerged a small radical group that undertook a number of commando actions, most notably the disruption of an anti-abortion meeting in Paris on March 5, 1971, in which Hahn participated.

Five days later, on March 10, more or less the same group sabotaged a live radio broadcast on the theme "Homosexuality, This Painful Problem." Half an hour into the broadcast, they stormed the stage and overturned tables, chairs, and microphones. Hahn, who was taking part in the program as an invited journalist and (presumably heterosexual) "expert" on homosexuality, had arranged to have the group seated

in the front row of the auditorium.

That evening the jubilant radicals founded the Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action (Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire, or FHAR). Radical gay liberation had come to France and Hahn, breaking definitively with the conservatism of Arcadie, threw himself whole-heartedly into the movement. He was the author of many of FHAR's most fiery manifestoes.

After FHAR's collapse in early 1974, Hahn remained active in the gay movement and wrote articles for the expanding gay press. He had also begun research into the gay past. One former gay militant, Alain Huet, remembers Hahn as "a living homosexual encyclopedia" and "an inexhaustible talker" on the subject.

In 1970 Hahn edited a small anthology of quotations about homosexuality from ancient times to the present. In 1979 he published *Nos Ancêtres les Pervers (Our Ancestors The Perverts)*, in which he tried to demonstrate how, by repressing same-sex activity in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Paris, policemen and doctors had produced the modern homosexual as a distinct category of man (he did not deal with lesbians).

In late 1980, a board of examiners at the University of Paris-VIII (Vincennes) awarded Hahn a doctorate in philosophy for his work on "the birth of homosexuality." He submitted no formal doctoral dissertation, earning the degree on the basis of the work that he had already published in the form of books and articles. Hahn's was a "doctorat d'université," which was less prestigious than other kinds of doctorate and did not confer any right to teach.

By then Hahn's professional life and personal life were both in disarray and he had taken to drinking heavily. Without a steady job, he found it difficult to make a living and was deeply in debt. He was also infatuated with a young Moroccan, who took Hahn's money and gave little in return.

Hahn committed suicide on February 19, 1981. Gay militants had to take up a collection to pay for the burial. The card on one of the two wreaths at the funeral was an implicit acknowledgment of his historical role in launching gay liberation in France: "To Pierre Hahn, from his friends in the French and foreign homosexual movements."

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**Michael D. Sibal** is Associate Professor of History at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. He specializes in the history of modern France and has published articles and essays on the Napoleonic police state (1799-1815), the nineteenth-century French labor movement, and French homosexuality. He has co-edited, with Jeffrey Merrick, *Homosexuality in French History and Culture* (2002) and is currently writing a history of the gay male community of Paris since 1700.