

VAN, MARINA DE. *Passer la nuit*. Paris: Allia, 2011. ISBN 978-2-84485-400-1. Pp. 142. 9 €.

After graduating in 1996 from FEMIS, the French school for cinematic studies, Marina de Van began her career as an actress in, and scriptwriter for, films by François Ozon. She wrote and directed *Dans ma peau* (2002), in which she also starred, and *Ne te retourne pas* (2009), starring Monica Bellucci and Sophie Marceau. *Passer la nuit*, Van's first novel, continues to investigate the difficult themes she so ingeniously explored in her films, such as the location of identity, the experiences of depression, mourning, and loss of memory, and in general, women's place in the world. Van decidedly eschews the psychoanalytical approach in her films and continues to do so in her novel. Rather, she concentrates on what it actually means, feels, and looks like to experience an identity lost, or perhaps more likely, never achieved. One has the sense of following a person who is suffering from acute amnesia (or worse, the inability to formulate memories at all), but who nonetheless manages to function in a way that suggests she has no problem with recalling and performing the mechanics of her daily routine. She even establishes relationships and careers, but what she cannot do is ascribe meaning to them or, in fact, to any aspect of her life. Still she is not sociopathic—she is poignantly aware of her condition and knows there is something wrong with her. What Van's films and now her novel explore is this condition of being out-of-sync with one's body and the world; not its potential causes or treatment, just what it means to live the condition, which has apparently always been with her.

*Passer la nuit* is written almost as a journal recounting the life of the narrator over the course of a few days, which, we learn, could well describe her entire life: "La seule chose passée que je ressente avec certitude est celle que j'expérimente aujourd'hui, des années plus tard, à travers l'enfermement solitaire et la paralysie" (141). When she awakens in the morning, she immediately starts to wonder how she will pass the time of her day until it is time to go to bed again. Even a steady regimen of coffee, alcohol, cigarettes, anxiety medication, and sleeping pills does not alter her mechanical functioning: she wakes up in the morning, time passes,

she goes to sleep at night. During her waking moments, she keeps appointments, she imagines beautiful yet haunting fictions, but unopened mail overwhelms her to the point of paralysis, and her depression evokes in her anger, not indifference. She is acutely aware of bodily sensations: a neck ache, the discomfort of sitting in one position for too long, a growling stomach, the itch of a dry patch on her skin. Her existence is both ghostly and too real: "Mon corps se rappelle à moi, constamment," and yet "[m]es journées sont si abstraites et vides que je me sens l'existence d'un fantôme" (93). Van's work is one of the best I have read on the great puzzle that is depression, exploding the myths and clichés that treat it as a nature-versus-nurture problem, and that the best medicine, be it physically or psychologically oriented, may never be able to solve.

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