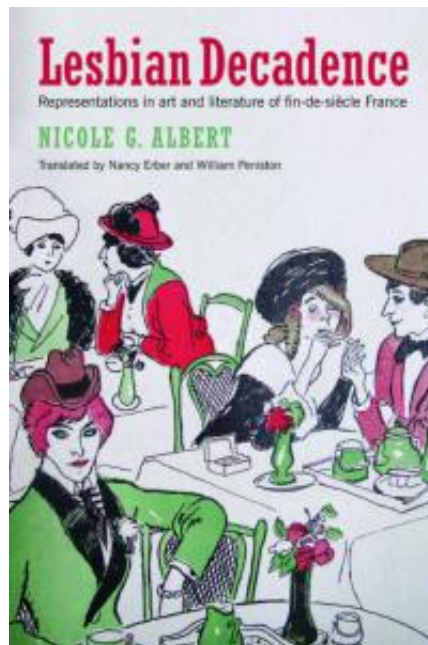


Reviews by Amos Lassen

Books, Movies and Judaica and Random Thoughts About Whatever

"Lesbian Decadence: Representations in Art and Literature of Fin-de-Siècle France" by Nicole G. Albert— The Lesbian Mystique in Art and Literature



**Albert, Nicole G. "Lesbian Decadence: Representations in Art and Literature of Fin-de-Siècle France",
Translated by Nancy Erber and William A. Peniston, Harrington Park Press, LLC, 2016.**

The Lesbian Mystique in Art and Literature

Amos Lassen

At the end of the twentieth century, lesbians in Paris dared to flaunt themselves. It was a period of time that became known as the Belle Époque. Nicole G. Albert in "Lesbian Decadence" (available in Eng-

lish for the first time) gives us a new analysis/synthesis of lesbianism as a social phenomenon and a symptom of social malaise. It should also be seen as a fantasy. in that most vibrant place and period in history. We read of historical representations of the lesbian mystique in art and literature in contrast to the condemnations of moralists of the time who referred to it as the "lesbian vice." We also get a look at the psychiatric establishment's medical ire and their obsession on cataloging and classifying symptoms of "inversion" or "perversion" in order to cure these "unbalanced creatures of love."

Writer Albert brings together literary, artistic, and historical analysis of the sources from the mainstream to the rare and from scholarly studies to popular culture. This is also a core reference/text for those interested in the Decadent movement in literary, French and social history. I see this as an excellent textbook for gender studies, , women's studies, LGBT history, and lesbianism in literature, history, and art. It is not the kind of book you read for pleasure before bed. It is a scholarly and

authoritative study that shows how lesbians were associated with the first expressions of a feminism that unbalanced the popular imagination and brought about some incredible fantasies. Albert returns to us some of the forgotten heroes such as Natalie Clifford, Barney the Amazon, Renée Vivien and Lucie Delarue-Mardrus as well as other literary figures and she has done so with grace and elegance. We become acquainted here with both the shy and the flamboyant lesbian and a sense of eroticism is on almost every page. We see that by the end of the century, lesbian decadence was visible all over Paris and the rest of Europe.

Albert gives us the history of lesbian representation and shows the influence lesbian writers had on their readers. She goes a step past the traditional canon and includes "hundreds of sources from scholarly philology to popular caricatures." This is a portrait of the lesbian as she was represented in arts and letters at the end of the previous century. The fantasies about these women were connected to the real pleasure that they provided and many will be amazed at how many books, articles, and illustrations that the author shares with us.

For years, "Lesbian Decadence" was the standard but because it was only available in French, many did not have the opportunity to study it. Now it has been translated and updated making it indeed a landmark study. Albert's research is stunning and her prose is gorgeous. She shares how lesbianism was imagined and re-imagined by observers, and how the Belle Époque vogue for lesbianism created "a spectral figure both 'demonized and poeticized.'"

By far the most authoritative book on how lesbianism is depicted in the decadent discourse of the French end of the century, the book is filled with insights and history. The many illustrations included make it a reading pleasure and should inspire others to have a closer look at the culture of France.

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