



Love, Desire and Transcendence in French Literature: Deciphering Eros

Paul Gifford

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European literature and theory of the twentieth century have been intensely preoccupied with questions of 'Desire', whereas 'love' has increasingly represented a fractured and strange, if not actually suspect, proposal: this is a prime symptom of an age of deep cultural mutation and uncertainty. Paul Gifford's book allows this considerable contemporary phenomenon to be observed steadily and whole, with strategic understanding of its origins, nature and meaning. Gifford paints a clear and coherent picture of the evolution of erotic ideas and their imaginary and formal expressions in modern French writing. He first retraces the formative matrix of French tradition by engaging with five classic sources: Plato's Symposium, the Song of Songs, the myth of Genesis, the tension between Greek Eros and Christian Agape and the repercussions of Nietzsche's declaration of the 'death of God'. Modern variations on these perennial problematics are then pursued in ten chapters devoted to Proust, Valéry, Claudel, Breton, Bataille, Duras, Barthes, Irigaray, Emmanuel, Kristeva. Literary and theoretical perspectives are perfectly blended in his study of these attempts at 'deciphering Eros'. The book will appeal not only to students of French literature, but to all those interested in the cultural upheavals of the twentieth century.

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