

Eribon, Didier (1999). *Reflexions sur la question gay*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard.
(2001). *Reflexiones sobre la cuestión gay*. Barcelona: Anagrama
(2004). *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*. Durham/London: Duke University.

Highly recommended but difficult to summarize or review is this work by French philosopher and historian Didier Eribon, France's leading authority on Michel Foucault and author of numerous books and articles on intellectual history related to homosexuality/gay and queer studies. The title in English, with its focus on "insults" and "the making of the gay self" captures two major areas Eribon treats, but the reflections represent a rather encyclopedic perspective on homosexuality/gay/queer interests and controversies in the 19th-20 centuries. Part I treats "The World of Insult" into which the gay person is born and from which he ever strives to liberate him/herself. Part II, titled "Specters of Wilde," delves into the dramatic changes brought about in relation to the career, trials and death of Oscar Wilde in the late 19th and early 20th century. Part III, "Michael Foucault's Heterotopias" brings us down to contemporary times, but in all sections the great influence of classical Greco-Roman literature and the Renaissance is fundamental. An Addendum, "Hannah Arendt and the 'Defamed Groups'" explores the contributions and misinterpretations of this German, Jewish philosopher on anti-semitism and homophobia.

Eribon's knowledge at every point seems not only virtually encyclopedic but balanced and fair to those with whom he disagrees. The encyclopedic character of the author's knowledge may reflect his editorship of a major French work, *Dictionnaire des cultures gays et lesbiennes* (Paris: Larousse, 2003). The documentation is thorough, with some 70 pages of footnote and a bibliography of 18 pages reflecting works especially in English and French. If we listen to the debates common in contemporary secular or religious gay/queer groups, after reading *Insults* we will probably conclude with Qoheleth that "There is nothing new under the sun" (or at least not much), since our perspectives and arguments are shown to have lengthy genealogies and leading thinkers such as Foucault and Eribon often changed their minds or emphases in response to changing historical contexts.

Although a philosopher, Eribon writes with admirable simplicity and clarity, but with a philosopher's breadth of perspective is able to show the interrelations between science (especially the developing psychology beginning in the 19th century), literature, sociology (police records, histories of institutions) and the common misinterpretations of mass media majority propaganda. Since "constructionists" still commonly refer to Foucault's hypothesis that the homosexual *person* was an invention by late 19th century psychiatry (contrasted with the supposed exclusive focus on sexual *acts* of sodomy before), it is important to have not only Eribon's refutation from history, literature and police records, but also his demonstration that Foucault himself later recognized the error of his hypothesis (411, note 5).

For individual gay/queer Christians, as well as for their groups and organizations, the relevance of the wisdom Eribon offers is considerable. Especially in the face of homophobic insults ("God hates fags"—Fred Phelps and his family/church), Eribon's analysis and reflections on the world of insults into which we and other oppressed groups are born (women, the poor, Jews, foreigners, etc.) is of fundamental importance. And the making/fashioning of the gay self (or gay group/church) as a *work of art* brings to the task a perspective that can motivate, encourage and guide all our efforts to liberate ourselves from the interiorized homophobia instilled by the insults: "The idea that from one's own life one can make a work of art is an idea that was undoubtedly foreign to the Middle Ages, and reappears at the moment of the Renaissance" (Foucault, cited p. 415, note 11). Of course, from a Christian perspective, our aim is not to become secularized/post-Christian "self-made men/women" but rather to see ourselves as "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10). The experience of the Syro-Phoenician woman and her example of how to queer an insult (Mark 7:24-30 // Matthew 15:21-28) can open the door to a whole new investigation of insults in the Bible (see "Racca" in Mat 5:22) and how to use the tongue to edify rather than destroy (James 3:9-11). Feminist studies have made a good start in the area of insults in the Bible reflecting patriarchal prejudices against women, but the whole area of insults directed at sexual minorities (many of them also women) remains to be explored.

Mark 7:24-30 // Matthew 15:21-28 The Syrophenician Woman: How to Queer an Insult.

Mark 7:24 And from there [Jesus] arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house, and would not have any one know it; yet he could not be hid. **25** But immediately a woman, whose little daughter was possessed by an **unclean** spirit, heard of him, and came and fell down at his feet. **26** Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. **27** And he said to her, 'Let the children first be fed, for it is not good/fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' **28** But she answered him, 'Yes sir, yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. **29** And he said to her, 'For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.' **30** And she went home, and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

Matthew 15:21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. **22** And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon.' **23** But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying 'Send her away, for she is crying after us.' **24** He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' **25** But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' **26** And he answered, 'It is not fair/good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' **27** She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' **28** Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

For decades this text has been a favorite of feminists, who like to emphasize that the only argument Jesus lost in the Gospels was to this pagan woman, who encouraged him to expand his vision and sense of mission to include "unclean" Gentiles (see Mark's placement after the controversy over un/cleanness, 7:1-23 and the declaring of all foods "clean," which would have opened the door for table fellowship with Gentiles). What commonly has been overlooked is that this Gentile woman also was representative of sexual minorities (see now Hisako Kinukawa 1994:51-65). Modern interpreters who have delusions of "family values" sprouting all over the New Testament like dandelions undoubtedly expect readers to suppose that the sick daughter's father stayed home to take care of her. However, as Mark has just reminded us in the account of the raising of Jairus's daughter, in ancient patriarchal cultures, the father would be the one expected to leave home and take any initiative in approaching the Jewish exorcist with a request for healing (6:21-24, 35-43). Recognizing this, pre-modern interpreters commonly suggested that the woman was a widow. However the Hebrew Bible (→ Exodus 22:22-24; → Deut), the Gospels (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 7:11-17), Acts (Acts 6; 9:32-43), and Paul (1 Cor 7:8-9; 1 Tim 5) all take special interest in cases involving widows, so Mark would not likely fail to mention the widow status of the woman in this case (Bonnie Thurston → 1 Timothy 5). We are thus compelled to face the probability that the story not only involves a clever woman, an "unclean" Gentile (idolater), but also a "single mom", perhaps divorced/abandoned or even a prostitute (male prostitutes are designated "dogs" in Deut 23:18 and Rev 22:15).

Especially in the Marcan version, the text is notable for its emphasis on the utter humanity of Jesus.

- 1 He wants to remain hidden, closeted, but is outed by the noisy pagan woman with a sick child.
- 2 He wants to limit his mission to his fellow-Jews but is convinced by her argument to extend his mission immediately to pagan idolaters like herself.
- 3 Throughout the Four Gospels, Jesus wins the arguments against the best brains the Jerusalem elite could send against him, but here, for the only time, he loses a theological argument to an idolatrous woman.
- 4 Jesus begins with a finite, ethnocentric belief in Jewish superiority (or at least their priority in God's liberation project), employing the common derogatory "dogs" to refer to non-Jews, but ends up commending the pagan woman for her superior faith.
- 5 He begins with the presupposition that children are so superior to dogs, that the latter can be left hungry, but ends up modifying his "speciism" to the point of allowing the puppies under the table their sustenance.
- 6 Throughout the episode, as elsewhere in the Synoptic Gospels, he shares the common superstition of the era in attributing illness to demons (in John's Gospel, Jesus refers only to the Devil, not to demons or exorcisms).
- 7 Using the humanly constructed language of his day, Jesus employs the derogatory term "dogs" to maintain the inferiority of non-Jews, but thus proves open to the woman's clever deconstruction of his prejudice.

Eribon, Didier (2004). *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*. Durham/London: Duke University.

Kinukawa, Hisako (1994). *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective*. Maryknoll: Orbis.