IN MEMORIAM

Gilbert Tordjman. End of the road for the French-speaking world?☆

“To be dead is to be a prey for the living”
Jean-Paul Sartre
Being and Nothingness (1943)

Who owns the memory of someone after their death? Apart from a few exceptions, death is the starting point of the unavoidable slide into anonymity that condemns us all to ultimate oblivion. What memories should the living choose to define someone’s history? The choice of memories is particularly complicated when the individual in question has had such a long and busy life, anchored in a constant power struggle between his private life and the media spotlight. Gilbert Tordjman leaves behind enough intellectual material for us to have no need to resort to either tears or controversy in telling his life-story.

Gilbert Tordjman was born in 1927 in Oran, Algeria. He left Algeria after the war, completed his medical studies in Montpellier and settled in Paris in 1955. His Mediterranean Jewish roots have always been apparent; expressed throughout his life in two ways: firstly his appetite for multidisciplinary knowledge in the field of women’s health and medicine for couples, secondly in his taste for the mass media. His vocation as a sexologist developed progressively starting with his involvement in the beginnings of the French family planning movement, and the humanist activism of the 1970’s. In 1974, he was one of the “famous four” founders of the French society for clinical sexology (along with C. Gellman, G. Vallès and J. Waynberg); he published or collaborated on 24 books, was editor of the Journal of clinical sexology between January 1975 and December 2001 and was constantly in the media spotlight until 2000.

From then on, although the epilogue of his professional life was arduous, his overall heritage spilled over into a huge geopolitical space: along with others, but always in a much more noticeable way, he made a major contribution to the short-lived domination of Francophile culture before the steamroller of irredeemably English-speaking globalization razed everything in its path. In 1978, in Rome, he took part in the creation of the World Association for Sexology (WAS), that he chaired from 1981 to 1985. This was the peak of his commitment for “amalgamated” sexology, able to mix languages and beliefs; in this respect, Gilbert Tordjman has no successors.

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