

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 238

TOPICS VOLUME

Volume 238

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Commentary on Various Topics
in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary
and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and
Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys
of National Literatures**

Lawrence J. Trudeau

Project Editor



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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)* has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” *TCLC* “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism, (CLC)* which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*.

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A *TCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*, edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*. Ed. Reginald M. Nischik. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. 163-74. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 227-32

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Canadian Women Writers

The following entry provides a critical overview of prominent twentieth-century Canadian women writers.

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian literary canon contains a large number of works by prominent women writers, and this cohort has expanded greatly since the so-called Canadian Renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s. During this period Canadian women writers embraced postmodern narrative forms, particularly after European feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous—both part of what is known as the French feminist movement—published works that explored links between language, psychoanalysis, and sexuality and developed a *écriture féminine*, a specifically gendered form of composing narrative that eschews conventional linear progression in favor of nonlinear, circular forms of expression. This type of writing focuses heavily on experience rather than language, deliberately attempting to circumvent masculine discourse. Many critics who discuss Canadian women authors postulate that these poststructuralist thinkers helped clear a path for the exploration of ethnic and gender identity in a traditionally white, male, colonized nation, opening creative space for these writers to give voice to the multiplicity of experiences within the borders of their large and diverse country.

Reflecting Canada's many cultural and geographic regions, its French- and English-speaking communities, immigrant groups, First Nations tribes, and feminist affiliations, the country's women writers are themselves divided into subcategories that mark their primary concerns as women writers. As early as the 1920s Canadian women began experimenting with modernist narrative, brought into vogue in the United Kingdom by such literary luminaries as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, and by e. e. cummings and T. S. Eliot in the United States. In Canada Katherine Hale and Louise Morey Bowman published works of poetry that expressed the anxieties of living in the post-World War I era, abandoning formal versification in favor of modernist free verse. Later generations of Canadian women were far more overt in the way they explored both the large-scale political landscape and the individual women whose lives were shaped by the culture and politics of the country. Margaret Atwood has addressed the ongoing problem of Canadian identity in her fiction and nonfiction, with the female body frequently standing in

for the country as the site of colonization and its effects on the individual and the larger population, as well as the effects of patriarchal ownership and the imposition of "otherness" on women.

More radical in their approach are writers such as Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard, who have written separately and in collaboration. Both lesbian feminists, Marlatt—who resides in Vancouver, British Columbia—and Brossard—who is from Quebec and writes in Quebecois—represent the attempt not just to circumvent male-centered discourse and history but to actively destroy and replace it with an "alternative genealogy" of women, according to critic Peter Dickinson, who notes: "Waging war against the regulatory structures of language, grammar, and syntax . . . may not ultimately lead to the defeat of patriarchy and its affects/effects, including the nation-state; but a mobilization of this sort will necessarily contribute to their *transformation*, their *translation*."

Likewise, Native Canadian women have been doubly marginalized by their womanhood and their First Nations status, which has left them adrift in a predominantly white country founded by powerful imperialist nations. Lee Maracle, Rita Joe, Jeannette Armstrong, Beatrice Culleton, and Beth Cuthand, among others, have drawn upon their personal histories and the larger experiences of Native peoples—particularly the "official" attempts by the Canadian government to force them into integration and acculturation throughout the twentieth century—of living in the shadow of a dominant culture. This experience has also affected immigrants and women of ethnic minorities in Canada. Women writers who are members of the African diaspora and immigrant groups from Asia, the Caribbean, and the Indian subcontinent living in Canada have similarly written of their experiences of otherness and dislocation—notably such writers as Himani Bannerji, Dionne Brand, Joy Kogawa, and Marlene Nourbese Philip. Finally, Acadians—a group of seventeenth-century French colonists who were expelled from their settlements in the Maritime Provinces along the Atlantic Ocean by the British during the Seven Years' War and resettled in Louisiana, where their descendents are known as Cajuns—are represented in the fiction of such authors as the modern-day Acadian writer Antonine Maillet, who has examined the tragedy of the literal loss of homeland at the hands of a conquering power and the subsequent attempt to regain both the land and the use of native language that were forcefully stripped from them.

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Jeannette Armstrong

Slash (novel) 1985

Margaret Atwood

The Edible Woman (novel) 1969

Surfacing (novel) 1972

Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (novel) 1972

Lady Oracle (novel) 1976

Bodily Harm (novel) 1981

The Handmaid's Tale (novel) 1986

Cat's Eye (novel) 1988

The Robber Bride (novel) 1993

Himani Bannerji

doing time (poetry) 1986

Sandra Birdsell

Night Travellers (short stories) 1982

Ladies of the House (short stories) 1984

The Missing Child: A Novel (novel) 1989

Agassiz: A Novel in Stories (short fiction) 1990

Louise Morey Bowman

Moonlight and Common Day (poetry) 1922

Dream Tapestries (poetry) 1924

Dionne Brand

Chronicles of the Hostile Sun (poetry) 1984

Nicole Brossard

Picture Theory (poetry) 1982

La Lettre aérienne [*The Aerial Letter*] (poetry) 1985

Le desert mauve [*The Mauve Desert*] (poetry) 1987

Baroque d'aube [*Baroque at Dawn*] (poetry) 1995

Maria Campbell

Halfbreed (autobiography) 1973

Beatrice Culleton

In Search of April Raintree (novel) 1983

Beth Cuthand

Horse Dance to Emerald Mountain (poetry) 1987

Voices in the Waterfall (poetry) 1989

Barbara Godard (editor)

Gynocritics/La Gynocritique (fiction) 1987

Katherine Hale

Morning in the West (poetry) 1923

The Island, and Other Poems (poetry) 1934

Rita Joe

Poems of Rita Joe (poetry) 1978

Joy Kogawa

A Choice of Dreams (poetry) 1974

Obasan (novel) 1982

Itsuka (novel) 1991

Margaret Laurence

The Prophet's Camel Bell (nonfiction) 1963

The Stone Angel (novel) 1968

The Fire-Dwellers (short stories) 1969

A Bird in the House (short stories) 1971

Antonine Maillet

La Sagouine (dramatic monologues) 1974

Evangéline Deusse (novel) 1975

Pélagie-La-Charrette (novel) 1979

Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois (novel) 1992

Lee Maracle

I Am Woman (fiction) 1988

Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel (novel) 1990

Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories (short stories) 1990

Ravensong. A Novel (novel) 1993

Daphne Marlatt

How to Hug a Stone (poetry) 1983

Touch to My Tongue (poetry) 1984

Ana Historic: A Novel (novel) 1988

Salvage (poetry) 1991

Patricia Monture-Angus

Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks (essays) 1995

Marlene Nourbese Philip

Thorns (poetry) 1980

Salmon Courage (poetry) 1983

Harriet's Daughter (novel) 1988

Eden Robinson

Traplines (short stories) 1996

Carol Shields

A Fairly Conventional Woman (novel) 1982

Various Miracles (short stories) 1989

Departures and Arrivals (play) 1990

Audrey Thomas

Intertidal Life: A Novel (novel) 1984

OVERVIEWS

Marie Carrière (essay date 2002)

SOURCE: Carrière, Marie. Introduction to *Writing in the Feminine in French and English Canada: A Question of Ethics*, pp. 11-30. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

[In the following excerpt, Carrière contrasts the critical and academic reception of French- and English-language Canadian women's writing and examines its evolution since the so-called Canadian renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s.]

Writing in the feminine has made its presence known, albeit in different stages and with differing impact, in both French- and English-speaking literary Canadian milieus. Conferences, collaborations, and collectives have been extremely important in establishing contact among women writing in French and English (more precisely, between Québécois and English-speaking feminists), and also among English-speaking women themselves writing from various geographical regions of Canada. The Dialogue Conference held at York University in 1981, transcribed and published in 1987 as *Gynocritics/La Gynocritique*, constitutes one of the most successful literary and theoretical dialogues between the two cultures. Bringing together articles by Canadian and Québécois writers and critics, the book, according to editor Barbara Godard, sets out 'to rethink the act of reading with respect to the work of women writers in this country' (Introduction i), as well as deal with 'the charting of sexual differences within literary institutions' (Introduction i). The notion of sexual difference operates as the unifying thread of the book. The essays address and seek to redress the domination of androcentric, exclusionary discourse, and its resulting hierarchical conceptions of difference within the fields of knowledge, writing, and criticism. Yet the challenge of this volume rests not only in its critique of a traditional formulation of difference, that is, of the female other as a negative reflection of the self-same subject. It also proposes alternative models of female alterity.

The title of the book derives from Elaine Showalter's term for a current of feminist criticism that looks at literary history's encodings of gender. Yet the Canadian book's form of gynocriticism extends to female creativity itself, to women as producers, and not just interpreters, of textual meaning. It therefore includes women who often do both. *Gynocritics* encourages the involvement of critics in the forging of a feminist aesthetics and emphasizes the influence of feminist creative writers on the directions of the criticism itself. As such, *Gynocritics* stands as an example of what much contempo-

rary, postmodern criticism has presented in the past twenty years: the critic as theorist, extending in some cases to the theorist as creative writer. What *Gynocritics* reveals is that boundaries, both generic and cultural, are beginning to blur in some of the feminist criticism and poetics of this period. These blurred boundaries also correlate with the bilingual format of the conference, which worked to make mutually familiar the literary and academic milieus of Québec and English Canada. As Godard argues, the conference even represented the allegorical bilingualism of women living in two worlds, one defined for and one defined by them.

Gynocritics also takes on the outdated notion that anglophone feminism necessarily gives primacy to social action and American-influenced empirical thought, as opposed to Québécois feminism's bent towards Continental philosophy. It signals new directions in English Canada, where, in the early eighties, writers took special interest in language theory and formal experimentation. On this front, another important point of contact between Québécois and English-speaking women writers occurred at the multicultural, feminist forum *Women and Words / Les Femmes et les mots*, held in Vancouver in 1983. The conference brought together women across Canada to discuss issues of writing; its proceedings were published as *In the Feminine: Women and Words*. The event has been described as a turning point by a number of women writing in English, especially in terms of their exposure to the language theory of Québécois feminists.¹

Conversely, in recent criticism on writing in the feminine, other types of contrasts are sometimes drawn. This time, these are not in terms of anglophone feminism's being limited to a socially pragmatic agenda as opposed to the more language-oriented francophone movement, but in terms of the political impact of its acquired theoretical focus—of language-oriented writing in general. For instance, Christl Verduyn considers the anglophone writing in the feminine of the eighties less politically provocative than its French counterpart of the seventies as well as women's literature concerned with race ('Relative(ly)' 211). Or, in her work on Québécois women's writing of the seventies and eighties, Bénédicte Mauguère opposes critical considerations of difference (which she categorizes as the search for a 'métaphysique du désir' [*Traversée* 3]) to the sociological approach that she favours in her study. Mauguère expresses her weariness about the 'au féminin' of these writings, unconvinced of the relation between French language-focused concerns (à la Kristeva or Cixous) and social change (*Traversée* 3). To be sure, this is not a new criticism, especially when directed at 'French Feminism,' but evidently it is a persistent one.² Yet what Mauguère fails to take into account is that the authors she is treating avowedly reject, in their work, the very demarcation she is making. Rather, they argue

for a politics, and more specifically as I shall treat here, an ethics, of difference.

Published in 1986, the collection of essays *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing* confirms the growing interest in Canadian feminist writing in English, that is to say, in writing of a certain style. (This is therefore not to discount the substantial attention also received both earlier and later by P. K. Page, Dorothy Livesay, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, or Mavis Gallant.) As another collaborative effort between English and French writers, the book includes essays by both critical and creative writers (although, unlike *Gynocritics*, the essays are all presented in English or their English translation). As editors Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli indicate, the collection 'documents a conversation, sometimes of long standing, sometimes tentative and beginning, among women writers from a variety of linguistic, social and national backgrounds, among poets, novelists, dramatists, non-fiction writers, critics, theorists' (Preface ix). Another compilation of essays written in both French and English is *Women's Writing and the Literary Institution*, proceedings of a conference held at the University of Alberta in 1989. The title itself emphasizes a prevailing concern among feminist critics in the nineties: writing in the feminine and the writer's relations to the literary institution, including issues of production, legitimation, and reception (Potvin, 'Préface' i). As did earlier the founders of *Spirale* (Gail Scott and France Théoret), Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard also confirm the ties between writing in the feminine in English and French with their collaboration in *Mauve* (1985) and, more recently, in a text jointly delivered at the University of Leeds and published in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. So too does the journal *Tessera*, writings from which are compiled in the 1994 volume *Collaborations in the Feminine*. These publications and dialogues highlight women's writing and criticism, as well as differences and commonalities among women. They also encompass the plurality that inescapably marks any notion of Canadian literary feminism as a whole.

To delineate some of the common features of writings in the feminine is not to efface differences between the distinct contexts out of which each writer, critic, or theorist evolves. But it may begin to efface the all too limiting and factitious binary oppositions (two or many solitudes, anglophone centre versus francophone margin, or vice-versa). Such dichotomies have had and continue to have more to do with the power of a particular political rhetoric than with literary production itself—at least in terms of writing in the feminine. Literary historical research reveals some of the incompatibilities of francophone and anglophone Canadas. Yet, we cannot be completely bound by such oppositions. In short, established models of irreconcilable differences have not signified as much for some femi-

nist writers in Canada. Neuman and Kamboureli point to a similar dissemination of the margin/centre cultural paradigm in their preface to *A Mazing Space* (x). Godard observes as much in her consideration of the impact of theory on creative feminist production in English Canada (Godard et al., 'Theorizing' 11). In her 1989 *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec*, Caroline Bayard even argues that 'such feminist concerns [as women's tongue and women's bodies] are what best connect Quebec's literature of the last fifteen years with that of Canada's' (159). Notably, recent critical interest in writers such as Brossard and Marlatt (by Knutson, Dickinson, Davy, and Simon, for instance) continues to put into question the resilience of cultural barriers between Québec and English Canada, and particularly singular conceptions of the country. With the growing presence and development of feminism through experimental writing in both English and French, we can therefore conclude that there has been less of a gap between the two cultures (which in themselves are already plural anyway), if not in terms of an entire literary past, at least in terms of certain literary moments.

Yet, a few points of difference must be acknowledged. Writing in the feminine in Québec has received a considerable amount of institutional attention, notably in contrast to such works produced in English. Undoubtedly, Brossard and Madeleine Gagnon are known more widely in Québec, in and outside academe, than experimental writers like Marlatt, Tostevin, Brandt, and Mouré. Lynette Hunter's 1996 work, *Outsider Notes*, offers an important critique of the lack of serious 'assessment' of 'language-focused writing' by Canadian men and women; according to Hunter, the dismissal of such works for their political ineffectiveness is still far too common (121).³ According to some critics, radical subversion and literary experimentation are 'almost a kind of norm' (*Canadian* ix) in Québec, as Linda Hutcheon contends in her study of postmodern English-Canadian fiction. In English Canada, it is safe to say that such subversive and experimental styles of literary practice (feminist and non-feminist) remained somewhat peripheral in the early seventies. When some did provoke media and public responses, these ranged 'from absolute silence to a political scrutiny bordering upon libel,' as Bayard notes in turn (112). Hutcheon also indicates that English Canada's 'more conservative cultural history as a colony' (*Canadian* 3) has distinguished it from the more overt tendencies towards the revolutionary and the radical markings of the Québécois sociopolitical and cultural spheres.

However, as Hutcheon adds later on, the anglophone world has indeed shared (obviously in a different manner, in the face of a different history) nationalist politics and the emergence of the women's movement in the sixties and seventies (both of which are portrayed in the early novels of Margaret Atwood). Anglophone Canada

too has seen 'the "inscription" into history of those previously silenced excentrics: those defined by differences in class, gender, race, ethnic group, and sexual preference' (Hutcheon, *Canadian* 11). With more dialogue between the two linguistic groups, a growing availability of translations, and even, as Neuman and Kamboureli suggest, an increase in bilingualism, the interest in theory (French and feminist Québécois) has worked its way into certain texts written in English by Canadian women. *Writing in the Feminine: Feminist and Experimental Writing in Québec*, a book published in 1990 by American critic Karen Gould (whose textual quotations appear in her own English translations), has also had a considerable impact on anglophone critics, and possibly writers, interested in this movement. Nevertheless, women producing theory or language-oriented works in English have faced a highly polarized reception that can range from acclaim, national recognition, and celebration to the dismissal that Hunter treats.

Thankfully, though, there are recent critical contributions to the field of Canadian literature, and notably Canadian comparative literature, which focus entirely or partly on writing in the feminine. Susan Knutson's *Narrative in the Feminine* presents a feminist narratological reading of Nicole Brossard's *Picture Theory* and Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*. In its study of writings from Québec as well as First Nations and English Canada, part of Peter Dickinson's *Here Is Queer* deals with the translation poetics of Brossard and Marlatt. Winfried Siermerling's *Discoveries of the Other* contemplates alterity in contemporary writings from Québec and English Canada, including Brossard's fiction theory. Christl Verduyn has in turn contributed comparative pieces on experimental as well as immigrant women's writing in French and English Canada.⁴ For her part, Marie Vautier looks at the postmodern and postcolonial historiography of Canadian fictions in French and English, including a novel by Jovette Marchessault. Preceding these recent comparative efforts is *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec*, Bayard's aforementioned study of the formal experiments of a number of Québécois and English-speaking poets, including such women writers as Tostevin, Marlatt, Théoret, and Brossard. One noticeable feature of these comparative volumes as well as many single-author articles is the recurrence of studies on Marlatt and Brossard since the nineties.⁵ This is not to say that there are no important article- and chapter-length studies of such authors as Mouré, Brandt, and especially Tostevin.⁶ Yet recent scholarship shows that the actual scope of the movement of writing in the feminine, especially in its anglophone context and from a comparative perspective, is still not accounted for, and indeed demands further attention. With a distance of several years from the first collaborative surges of this movement, and with a

new focus on a relational ethics as well as the internal contradictions that figure in these texts, that serious consideration is what the present book aims to offer.

In her 1988 article 'Au noir de l'écriture,' Dupré notes a decline in the critical reception and study of writing in the feminine in Québec. Lori Saint-Martin makes a similar observation in her introduction to the 1994 collection *L'autre lecture* (Introduction 11). According to Dupré, the heart of 'écritures au féminin' needs a pace-maker, especially in comparison to the twelve preceding years of feminist production ('Au noir' 66). Writings in the feminine are inevitably dependent on literary institutions (academic and non- alike) that ultimately negotiate and at times regulate bursaries, subsidies, sales, and, to a large extent, critical reception. As Dupré asserts elsewhere, 'L'écriture peut difficilement fonctionner à vide: elle a besoin d'être nourrie, de prendre une certaine place dans la vie littéraire' ('La critique' 71). This turns out to be a difficult goal to pursue (in both cultural contexts) since the works themselves often insist on generic blurring just when the culture advocates a return to a 'generic purity.' According to Dupré, such purity is the preference of the Québécois literary institution as a whole ('La critique' 71-2). Moreover, the continuing presence of certain misogynist attitudes in the reception of works is detected by Dupré, and also by Smart in her introduction to the special edition of *Voix et images* on Théoret.

Yet it is also the lack of male criticism that Dupré and Lamy point out: their concern is with the danger of 'ghetto-izing' writings that are self-avowedly 'au féminin' (Saint-Martin, Introduction 19). The predominance of female reception and criticism indeed adds to this danger, as does feminist critics' tendency to offer a 'critique de la complicité' rather than a 'critique de la distance' (Dupré, 'Au noir' 68). Dupré, Smart, and the late Lamy publicly call on their male colleagues to partake in the reading and interpretation of feminist literature. These critics are inviting men to keep in mind what women have learned through their own acquired right to read and interpret the great Western literary masterpieces. Hence, the validity of Dupré's deceptively simple observation that 'les livres de femmes n'appartiennent pas qu'aux femmes . . .' ('La critique' 73). Lamy is certainly correct in her assertion that this simple understanding needs to be ingrained in both men and women: 'c'est beaucoup—des hommes et des femmes à ébranler et à convaincre' (23). Again, thankfully, recent criticism in both cultural contexts seems to indicate the beginnings of a rectification to this problem.

Both Québécois and English-Canadian writings in the feminine abide by theories on female specificity and difference. These discourses raise issues pertaining to the political acquisition of equality/sameness and recog-

dition in the (literary and social) culture, as this acquisition also depends on assertions and proper configurations of sexual difference. Such configurations involve the treatment of and conduct towards the female or/and male other—the other's body, the other's alterity, the other's subjectivity. It is this treatment that presents the possibility of a relational ethics applicable both to lesbian and heterosexual relationships. Certainly, the difficulties associated with the political ramifications and issues surrounding reception, readership, and publication are not easily surmounted. Yet, writing in the feminine's ethical models of difference, which depend on processes of recognition, can begin to answer this need for open dialogue, this need to hear and listen to the other.

ÉCRIRE AU FÉMININ⁷

The sustained impact of language-oriented poetics on Québécois literature is not all that surprising. As a cultural minority sharing a predominantly English-speaking continent, and for well over two hundred years, Québec has displayed its sensitivity to linguistic issues and cultural survival; these concerns have been at the heart of its political, religious, social, and legislative policies, institutions, and cultural directions. From its days of clergy-dominated politics, though the conservatism of the Duplessis government, the 'Révolution tranquille' of the sixties, the language laws, and the nationalist resurgence in the politics of the past decade, language has been the prevailing point of contention in Québécois society. This concern with the spoken, lived, and transformed language has never found its artistic vehicle as completely or as vehemently as in the nationalist poetry of the fifties and early sixties. For a period of approximately ten years, poetry actually dominated the literary production of Québec. However, for many of its critics, Québécois nationalism was already seen as having its foundations in decades of arguments advocating the dependence of national survival on women's familial roles as mothers and only as mothers, while the father's power role was said to descend hierarchically from God. Yet the liberal politics of 1969 Québec did entail the creation of the leftist feminist FLF (Front de libération des femmes), followed by the Centre des femmes and its journal, *Québécoises debout*, as nationalist poetry's proliferation (organized around the Hexagone) of a decolonizing discourse provided feminist literature with useful terms of reference.

Yet, the later practitioners (including feminist writers) of a 'modernité' or 'poésie formaliste,' 'infra' or 'nouvelle,' in Québec would seek not only to transgress but reject, as a false and limiting convention, the transparency of language assumed by some militant poetry and cultural 'prise de parole.' These new poets would reject what they perceived as a nostalgic appeal to history. They would also reject the rhetoric of a political

and artistic current which had become the representative of a conservative 'male political establishment' (Gould, *Writing* 15). By the mid-sixties, the dissemination of nationalist ideas through poetic writing was dissipating. In 1965 Nicole Brossard helped found the pivotal journal *La barre du jour*, a forum for the articulation and development of Québec's new poetics. Brossard's appropriation of Rimbaud's slogan 'il faut être absolument moderne' (changed to 'résolument moderne' [*Lettre* 45]) harked back to the modern poets of nineteenth-century France, namely, to their impulse to break radically from convention and tradition.

Against the prevailing referentiality of the Hexagone players, a number of poets turned to the linguistic sign itself to unveil its ontology, exploring the theories of French structuralism. The 'formalisme' pursued for a time by Brossard and Théoret was thus prevalent (and bound to be redefined by writing in the feminine). Québécois 'modernité' purposely recalled the French theories channelled through *Tel Quel* by Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva, and Sollers. Yet distinguishing itself from a French 'modernité' that consisted mostly of (structuralist, and later poststructuralist) theorizing, Québécois 'modernité' was first and foremost a literary practice. In fact, the poetry's distinct feature was its blurring of theoretical and creative practice, to produce what Brossard would later term 'fiction théorique.' As Jean Yves Collette observes: 'La modernité québécoise a inventé, sans même y penser, le concept de "TEXTE" comme genre littéraire . . . Le "TEXTE" c'est la conscience expérimentale du langage dans un système de production . . . Tout ce qui n'est pas "TEXTE" n'est pas moderne et continue de renforcer les genres de la tradition' (quoted in Royer 89).

As Brossard's early collections display, the poet was considered a technician, poetry a science, as the text blurred the boundaries between theory and poetry. If the poetry was its own theory, then the writing was its own reading, staging its own self-encounters, its own hermeneutics, drawing attention to its gestures of rupture, of dissemination, and its influences. The text of 'modernité' was a 'lecture-écriture, la relecture du texte au moment où le texte s'écrit' (Brossard, 'Ce que' 79). In the sixties, the insertion of literary theory into the creative text certainly shook a number of academic traditions: the gap between critic and writer, the topological, historical idea of the creative oeuvre (Dion 252), as well as conventional modes of reading. A considerable shift from Brossard's own 'texte' of so-called semantic neutrality is evident in her 1974 'Cortext exhubérant.' Published in *La barre du jour*, this text inserts a sexually distinct 'I' and introduces the feminist orientation which has remained part of Brossard's experimental style. Brossard's new feminist voice resulted in the fiction theory of *L'amèr*, fuelling the feminist movement ready to explode on the Québécois poetic scene. *La barre du jour's*

1975 issue, 'Femme et langage,' and the journal's new title, *La nouvelle barre du jour*, acquired two years later, asserted feminism's insurgence upon the theories and textual productions of Québécois modernity.

If formalist poetics had set out to break the rules, it had created new ones; Québécois literature was again under self-scrutiny. Many of the formalist poets and theorists (Beaudet, Charron, Beausoleil, Gagnon) were sounding the death knell of modernity's arid rejection of ideology and its referents. And the feminist voices of Carole Massé, Louky Bersianik, Gagnon, Brossard, and Théoret were insisting that discourse was not only always already ideological, but also gendered. Certainly worth mentioning here is that the development of 'modernité' poetics profoundly marked francophone Canadian literature outside Québec as well.⁸ Moreover, the language and feminist poetics of writing in the feminine have made their way into a number of texts by francophone women outside Québec, including France Daigle, Évelyne Voldeng, Cécile Cloutier, Marguerite Lapalme, Catherine Ahearn (Firestone), Louise Friset, Janick Belleau, and, of course, Lola Lemire Tostevin.

No doubt a 'neutre-masculin' was the guise under which Brossard's own 'formaliste' text had unfolded. Brossard indicates that part of her early project was to forget 'que j'étais une femme, c'est-à-dire que j'appartenais à la catégorie des non-pensantes'; feminism would, as she puts it, work to 'de-neutralize' her (Brossard, Saint-Pierre et al. 80). It is precisely through women writers' renegotiations of the formalist current in Québec that questions of gender and the inscription of feminine difference quickly began to take centre stage. Despite the conjuncture of formalism's and feminism's 'manifestations explosives de l'incrédulité' (Koski et al., 'Naissances' 4) towards Western humanist thought, the differences between the two movements would actually constitute some of the defining features of writing in the feminine. With the development and emancipation of a feminist consciousness, the political and aesthetic features of 'modernité' were not only to be expanded, but some of them rejected, notably 'le texte fétiche, devenu trop réducteur' (Brossard, *Lettre* 48). Women began to perceive and treat language not only as 'an intrinsic part of social constructs' but also 'of sexual constraints, of the physical as well as political texture of the writer's and her readers' existence' (Bayard 94).

In its quest for a gender-specific inscription in language, writing in the feminine recognized the necessity to reinscribe the female body (maternal, sexual—heterosexual or lesbian—and intellectual) in a symbolic order that had always been interpreted on masculine grounds. Retaining the poetics of deconstruction and transgression pursued by the 'formalistes,' some feminists wanted to integrate modernity's experiments while transcending its limitations and its 'aseptic' language (Théoret,

'Writing' 362). As Théoret recounts, formalism had inscribed the speaking subject as 'a textual presence abstracted from its history' ('Writing' 362). Now, the importance of historical, social, and cultural conditioning could no longer be ignored. The concrete economic and socio-cultural context of oppression and the work towards social change, explored within formal experimentations seeking a female-specific inscription in language, became the fundamental and motivating concerns for writings in the feminine. 'Il faut être résolument moderne' transformed into 'Il faut absolument être rebelle' (Brossard, 'Ludique' 110).

In the seventies, feminist poets, novelists, theorists, essayists, and dramatists established dialogues, friendships, and a sense of collectivity in their works not only among themselves, but also with such French thinkers and writers as Irigaray, Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Annie Leclerc, Claire Lejeune, and Monique Wittig. The American women's movement also left its imprints on those Québécois experimental texts seeking a more 'woman-centred' approach in their attack on the patriarchal family, social policies, institutions, and cultural myths—especially concerning the misogyny and male supremacy within Québec's traditional religious and cultural discourses. Even more indispensable than the praxis-oriented facet of American feminists at this time was the poetry of Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, as well as the philosophy of Mary Daly, for whom the physical, the sensual, the feminine, and the historical were always already culturally scripted, and seen to mesh with, rather than oppose, poetic and theoretical language.

In view of the historical pervasiveness of the Catholic Church in all aspects of Québécois life, of both its repression and implicit condemnation of the sexualized female body, new articulations were certainly welcomed. The focus shifted from the victimized body to its affirmation in discourse. As Gould indicates, the feminist reorientation of the forms of 'modernité' posed in particular the question of whether 'the mother, the maternal, *la maternité* [could] actually be "modern"' (*Writing* 27). Dissension over the reconfiguration of 'woman' and class solidarity, over the concept of 'sisterhood' and the politics of sexual preference, have broken up some collaborative efforts as well as directed new ones. It is, in fact, this multiplicity of approaches, ideologies, and influences that shows how no single organizing manifesto or cohesive philosophy inscribing the feminine can be pinned down in these texts (Gould, *Writing* 30). Nonetheless, the feminist project of 'écriture au féminin' contemplates female alterity in what Gould calls 'all [its] conceivable forms of expression—philosophical, psychological, intellectual, biological, sociological, political, and aesthetic' (*Writing* 40).

Just as writing in the feminine may have retained from the literature of the Quiet Revolution the thematic of