



Pol Pelletier, theatre artist and a founding member of Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes. She performed the powerful theatre piece Les Vaches de Nuit by Jorette Marchessault.

une longue préface dans laquelle on retrouve les noms de Sappho, de Gertrude Stein, de Djuna Barnes, d'Adrienne Rich, de Mary Daly, de Monique Wittig, etc. De plus cette préface contient un certain nombre d'annotations biographiques qui racontent la culpabilité, l'humiliation, le mépris, le désespoir, la joie, le courage, la révolte et l'érotisme des lesbiennes de tout temps. Le livre est blanc, la préface fait rêver.

Je sais que les lesbiennes ne regardent pas au plafond quand elles font l'amour, mais un jour, j'ai regardé et m'est apparue la plus belle fresque qu'il m'ait été donné de voir, de mémoire de femme, parole d'honneur de lesbienne, c'était une fresque absolument réelle au bas de laquelle était écrit: une lesbienne qui ne réinvente pas le monde est une lesbienne en voie de disparition."

Nicole Brossard (Outremont, QC) poète expérimental et romancière.

L'ECRITURE DES FEMMES

Je me propulse dans un territoire autre avec une écriture que j'entame. Il s'agit d'enrayer la machinerie. Dériver le sens

des mots appris de l'univoque-mâle... Ne plus être le gibier de leur discours. Il s'agit de s'installer dans l'ordre socio-symbolique en sujet à part entière, comme le propre objet de ce qu'elle écrit. En vérité et en son nom... Désarticuler les modèles, la linéarité, la loi par des enchevêtrements, des distortions sémantiques, des espacements... Se prendre au sérieux, se penser, s'inventer pour donner du corps au féminin et me savoir par coeur... Devenir les enclencheuses d'une rupture historique par l'avènement de nos paroles traversières.

Déviations. La parole des femmes sème aujourd'hui la déroute des codes... Quelqu'un dit que je mens, j'affirme que j'invente. Pour que le réel ne soit plus une fiction. Sortir du désastre langagier... Les mots appellent 400 ans d'Histoire. Nous écrivons autrement ce qui, n'a jamais été dit. Voilà le problème que nous posons à l'ensemble du corps social contemporain."

Louise Cotnoir (Thetford Mines, QC.) professeure, écrivaine et rédactrice de la *Nouvelle Barre du Jour*.

A new writing of body by Adena Franz

effective woman

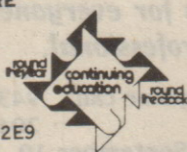
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"the beginning: language, a living body we enter at birth, sustains and contains us. it does not stand in place of anything else, it does not replace the bodies around us. placental, our flat land, our sea, it is both place (where we are situated) and body (that contains us), that body of language we speak, our mothertongue, it bears us as we are born in it, into cognition."

— Daphne Marlatt

Language is power. For too long women have allowed their language to be defined for them, usurping their natural right to be counted as 52% of the population. Karen Gould feels that "what the modern dominant male discourse has successfully avoided naming is a complex nucleus of (unarticulated) feminine perceptions, aspirations, desires, emotions, and fantasies that form the core of a vision and state of being which many feminists in Quebec and elsewhere believe is qualitatively different." (Karen Gould, *Signs*)

French-speaking women in Quebec have, however, been consciously redefining their language for more than a decade. Writers such as Madeleine Gagnon, France Theoret, Nicole Brossard, Louky Bersianik, Denise Boucher and Pol Pelletier have upset the traditional male-oriented vocabularies, structuring their specifically feminine experiences to speak for themselves as women, as humans with hitherto untold consciousness. Through their efforts, a new theory of language evolves, embedding reality with imagination. What follows is the birth of the



Rina Fraticelli, writer and dramaturge. Published the 1982 report on the Status of Women in the Canadian Theatre.

writing of the body's thought, another scenario, a new generation of exposing the silent edge of language. It is reality as experienced by women.

For present-day feminists, this means viewing their physicality as a creative resource rather than a hindrance. It means un-learning, un-speaking, un-writing, exploring those topics and images of social taboo which often necessitate a thorough understanding of a personal and collective history. This *écriture* frequently returns to the haunting memories and emotional turmoil of intense personal traumas still unresolved. These texts, often misunderstood and ignored by male critics, expose a process of connecting images, meanings,

senses—there is no final certainty, just as there is no one female language.

"If we don't invent a language—if we don't find our body's language, its gestures will be too few to accompany our story. When we become tired of the same ones, we'll keep our desires secret, unrealized. Asleep again, dissatisfied, we will be turned over to the words of men—who have claimed to 'know' for a long time. But not our body. Thus seduced, allured, fascinated, ecstatic over our becoming, we will be paralyzed. Deprived of our movements. Frozen, although we are made for endless change . . . Continue, don't run out of breath."

(Luce Irigaray, *Signs*)

To an extent, comparisons of this revolution in French writing with Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* or the poetry of Adrienne Rich can be made, but for the most part, English women writers have yet to discover their own particular vocabulary for themselves. Gladys Downes, in exploring this difference between French and English Canadian women authors, said that the history and geography of Quebec is easily traced whereas English Canadians have a cultural background too divergent to be characterized into a single entity. English writers need time to discover their shrouded pasts, their widely divergent psychic spaces, before they can establish the controlled and understandable sense of history which Quebec writers have used to redefine their psychological, symbolic and socioeconomic systems.

Barbara Godard of York University suggested these Quebec writers have become

forerunners of the "female image breakers" because they have inherited a different intellectual history than their English counterparts. A significant impact on women's consciousness in Quebec came from the increasing strength of Quebec nationalism, a decline in church influence and improved educational opportunities for women. English women have been influenced by the advent of feminism in the United States and struggle to come to terms with the shedding of colonial dependence on Britain. Although a large number of women in both groups have been celebrated in Canada, their common goal for finding a new language to replace the traditional white male vocabulary has led English authors to retreat into silence, to explore the gap between language and experience. This silence is found in prehistorical gesture and then translated into language. This is a physiological experience translated into a "foreign" language.

In Quebec, Godard said, women writers talk about inscription instead of transcription. Language is a double—a recognition, a repetition of experience rather than a retreat from it. Their attempt to translate this sensation results in rhythms. Language is a process:

"You will be adjectives," Pedalists are told in their cribs. And the Legislators are told: 'You will be verbs.'

Adjectives are interchangeable, they are trinkets, one moves them about at will, one does what one likes with them, one takes them out and puts them back in, it makes no difference. But the verbs never let them-

selves be caught.

If adjectives want to become verbs, one takes some of them, shakes them, puts them back in their places and crushes them with the end of a pen as one crushes ants with the tip of the toe. The first are forbidden to transform themselves into verbs under pain of seeing themselves crushed in their turn. (Louky Bersianik, *The Euguelionne*)

Whereas French authors approach language theoretically and intellectually, English authors' attitudes reflect pragmatically the uses of language.

"language thus speaking (i.e., inhabited) relates us, 'takes us back to where we are, as it relates us to the world in a living body of verbal relations, articulation: seeing the connections (and the thighbone, and the hipbone, etc.), putting the living body of language together means putting the world together, the world we live in: an act of composition, an act of birthing, us, uttered and outered there in it." (Daphne Marlatt, paper presented at *Women and Words*.)

Women's literature is visionary. Alternative structures must replace outmoded traditions of writing if women are to be heard and understood. Textual experimentation with new grammatical constructions, personal punctuation and open-ended structures are valorizations of an utopian feminist literature which will see women through and beyond a feminist revolution. The spirit of the feminist literacy activity in Quebec must be picked up and explored by English women writers in the rest of Canada, not as a matter of course, but as a matter of survival.▼

Giving Birth to Creativity by Debbie Halmberg-Schwartz

Novelists Marian Engel, Joan Haggerty and poet Libby Scheier facilitated the workshop, "Creativity and Child-Bearing, Child-Raising" at the recently held *Women and Words* conference.

All three women were a delight to listen to, spicing the discussion with personal anecdotes from their lives as writers and mothers.

Marian Engel joked about teaching her children to sleep until noon so that she would have the opportunity to write in the mornings. She says "working only when my children slept has given them the firm opinion I do nothing." More seriously Ms. Engel talked about the difficulty of supporting children on a writer's wage.

We responded with laughter when Libby Scheier discussed the groundless "creative juice theory" whereby women writers run the risk of depleting their creative juice reservoir by having children. Ms. Scheier quoted from Tillie Olson and Adrienne Rich to further emphasize her point: women are forced to operate within

restrictive culturally-imposed structures; thus they experience undue stress as writers and mothers.

All three writers felt that having children had expanded their emotional awareness and provided them with a wealth of material and experience from which to write. Libby Scheier agreed that although having one child broadened her creativity, having five might just finish her off.

Marian Engel quickly made note of the presence of Carol Shields in the workshop, author of two novels and mother of five children, an impressive role model.

Joan Haggerty saw writing and child rearing as an "elaborate system of juggling."

An important point was made when a lesbian mother spoke of her painful experience of losing custody of her child and the effects of the emotional fallout on her writing.

One was reminded of how often the additional problems lesbian mothers face are excluded from literature and discussions



Typical Women and Words Conference attendees (also some ex-Winnipeggers). In receding order are Heather Wood and Honna Boschmann.

on motherhood.

In general the workshop provided encouragement, insight and an almost tangible energy for women and their words.