

the status of women could be altered fundamentally is by the creation of a powerful female symbolic to represent the other term of sexual difference. What is at stake is the ethical, ontological, and social status of women" (22). Viewed in this light, the reading of women's writings for glimpses of Irigaray's *parler femme* continues the work of exploring the feminine unconscious for articulations of a female symbolic. Her project contributes to the greater task of establishing terms and a framework for identifying and interpreting the symbols of a feminine construct which would not be simply "the other" of the masculine imaginary but which would constitute women's own voice.

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Theorising About New Modes of Representation and Ideology in the Postmodern Age: The Practice of Margaret Atwood and Li Ang

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is by now well known as a feminist text in the English-speaking world (see book's back-cover), but Li Ang's *The Butcher's Wife* (1983) did not come to Western critical attention until it was translated from the Chinese in 1986; Alice Walker warmly acclaimed it for offering "not a single evasion or pretence about the reality and pervasiveness of sexual oppression" (cover page). For her part, Li Ang describes her work in unequivocal terms as "a piece of feminist literature" ("Author's Preface" ii). Both Li Ang and Atwood choose a single female as protagonist; the major conflict is between women and the patriarchal system or family, and its resolution involves violence on a physical and a symbolic level. Leaving aside the possibility of intentional fallacy in Li Ang's case, I intend to treat both Atwood's and Li Ang's novels as feminist; further discussion in the main text will both support and substantiate this point.

The two works can also be roughly classified as postmodern, though I hasten to clarify the theoretical underpinnings of my definition. Since the Chinese work belongs to the third world, whose literature often defies definition in Western terms, I need to go to some length in establishing my approach; it is eclectic, or rather, syncretic, combining my readings with those drawn from Linda Hutcheon, Jean-François Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson.¹ And since, coincidentally, Chinese

¹ Critics, especially Western, have vied with one another in defining what "postmodern" means. At some risk of simplification and reduction, I would suggest that Linda Hutcheon focuses largely on literary techniques and structures; Lyotard, on philosophical mode and implications; Jameson, on cultural and political ramifications. However, Jameson's periodization of postmodernism (1983, 11-6), for example, seems to work well in the Western context, but his close linking of realism, modernism and postmodernism respectively to competitive, monopoly, and consumerist capitalism would baffle scholars who attempt to define literature or culture in China under socialism, or in other countries with pre- or non-capitalist societies.

and, sometimes, Canadian literature are described as having basically "skip[ped] modernism" (Tang 1992; qtd. in Hutcheon 1988, 201), a paradigmatic comparison of key features of postmodernism and realism may facilitate our understanding:

a) In philosophical terms, postmodernism poses ontological questions about human identity or reason. It doubts the possibility of representation and totalization; realism respects and affirms human intelligence and believes that the world is representable or totalizable. Moreover, postmodernism does not assert anything in the traditional sense (unless we take the refusal to assert as a kind of assertion); realism does.

b) On the level of historical vision, while postmodernism casts doubt on historical progress and sees circularity or irregularity, rather than meaning or direction, realism depicts history as orderly, progressive, teleological and meaningful.

c) As far as social, economic structures or ideological superstructures are concerned, postmodernism sabotages, or overthrows, order and hierarchy — whether social, moral, or political. Realism claims to reflect them "as they are or were" (the Aristotelian dictum), and hence unwittingly, may perpetuate the status quo.

d) Culturally speaking, postmodernism has no faith in eternal or universal truths, nor in centres or authority; it is a combination of critique and complicity; by contrast, realism often celebrates traditional values, or at least allows them to go unquestioned.

e) Linguistically, postmodernism uses and abuses language by making it opaque, self-referential, self-reflexive, and disruptive, by breaking down syntax and etymology. Realism, being mimetic, assumes that external reality can be copied through the medium of language, as if language were transparent and did not have an effect on representation.

f) Postmodernism employs parodic devices and pastiche, leaving the reader with a sense of uncertainty, bewilderment, and loss. Realism appears to mirror a reassuringly "real" world where the reader can expect to find meaning.

While the above sketch is simplified and generalized, it is intended to provide a reference point for the following discussion. According to the categories I have just outlined, Li Ang's novel appears postmodern on the linguistic level. However, the author dispenses with word play and maintains a simple style of rendering reality transparent: the traditionally realistic mode. Though the novel is not postmodern in its historically backward-looking (retrospective, or rather, primitivist) and linear narrative line, it is certainly postmodern on the cultural, philosophical, historical, and literary planes.

Atwood's novel, on the other hand, develops towards a full-fledged postmodernism: not until page 37 do we begin to savour the narrator's self-reflexive, self-conscious acts of narration. Indeed, one of the novel's salient artistic features lies in this subtle transition from the realistic mode to the

postmodern² on several levels; the philosophical (questioning the identity of the Handmaids); the historical (projecting the past or even the primordial into the futuristic dystopian society); the sociological (disturbing the Gileadian totalitarian state); and the literary (employing parodic devices and self-reflexivity).

It is my contention that both Atwood and Li Ang blend a feminist critical faculty with postmodern awareness and techniques in the following respects. First, they exploit multiple voices to achieve postmodern irony with a feminist cutting edge. Second, they challenge and break down traditional symbolic or semiotic systems and establish new systems beneficial to women's total liberation. And finally, they unmask and subvert patriarchal ideologies that have been responsible for women's oppression and subjugation in their respective cultures.

Though from different literary traditions, Atwood and Li Ang both employ parodic devices and multiple voices to bring out the irony and difficulty involved in creating a genuine female voice. Irony as defined by earlier critics such as Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* and Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Irony* needs redefining in the postmodern era. Frye, for instance, has a grand vision of all literary language as ironic and elevated; that is, since literature always says one thing while meaning something else, it is more sophisticated than daily discourse (Frye 41). This conception of the ironic nature of literature eliminates the striking differences between male and female writing in general, and postmodern feminist employment of ironies in particular. In much the same manner, while recognizing the doubleness of irony articulated in Frye, Booth contends that the meaning of irony is "intended" (Booth 1974, 5), "covert," but "stable or fixed," and "finite" (6). In other words, for Booth, the active play of different levels of ironic meaning have to rest or be arrested at some point, although he does not specify where.

In the feminist texts under consideration, the so-called dualities of irony are fragmented by multiple and conflicting voices with a specific gender-related agenda. Linda Hutcheon, in her *Splitting Images*, describes such a deployment of irony as "hermeneutic" (emphasis mine) and as having a "political" (24) function.

Li Ang's main text is doubly framed by some short reports and an appendix, though the translator omits the latter. The problematic nature of English translation from the Chinese in general has been dealt with elsewhere.³ But this

2 Atwood's short story, "The Scarlet Ibis," best exemplifies this technique.

3 For various problems in general, see Duke 214-15. In our case, the omission of the appendix, the initial document that inspired Li Ang eight years before she commenced the project of writing the book, has been unfortunate. The translators apparently did not grant as much importance to it as the author. In addition, I have chosen not to dwell on my two texts' differences on the linguistic level, since such an undertaking will necessarily entail a far more

omission of an appendix results in an unfortunate misrepresentation of Li Ang's use of postmodern irony through contesting voices. For the appendix contains three of these voices. The first of these is the original historical document which records a sensational event in Shanghai where an unusually abusive husband is brutally murdered by his wife. This report contains what Li Ang will develop into the second and third voices: a denunciation of the alcoholic, sadistic, and whoring husband; and an assertion that the victimized wife must be absolved of the crime.

The translator does not state the reasons for the omission of this part of the text. However, if we are to believe Bakhtin when he suggests that the many voices of the polyphonic novel necessarily counterpoint one another, rendering the novel richer and more dynamic (1984a, 21-22, 32-36), the omitted appendix must be restored. Only in this way can we fully understand the interplay of the novel's ironizing voices within a postmodern framework.

The second and third voices are in direct conflict with the fourth voice, embodied in two newspaper accounts apparently written by men. These reports condemn the wife, Lin Sih, as both unfeminine and evil:

Report #1

We urge the authorities to launch a thorough investigation to determine the identity and precise role of the secret lover in this case.... But the killing of a man by his wife is a moral issue that affects all of society. The authorities must treat this case with the utmost severity in order to stem the public outcry and restore healthy social tendencies. (Li Ang 1986, 3)

Report #2

Even without proof of her infidelity, the public exhibition of an adulteress-murderess can serve as a warning against immorality, and in the final analysis, the parading of Chen Lin Shi was a necessity. Surely all the women who saw her will take heed and refrain from imitating foreign women, who are always clamouring for equality and the right to attend Western schools. Such demands are actually little more than excuses for a woman to leave house and home and make a public spectacle of herself. They comprise a mockery of the code of womanly conduct and destroy our age-old concepts of womanhood. (4)⁴

lengthy paper. Interested readers may examine specifically the imagistic nature of the Chinese language as well as Li Ang's exposure to Western drama and its effect on her dialogue and creation of gripping scenes. On the other hand, Atwood's language swings between the fragmented and the complete, the prosaic and the poetic, a result perhaps of her career as a novelist and a poet.

4 The "Preface" in this English version differs from that in the Chinese: in the former, the omission of a few pages of Li Ang's reference to and discussion of the original document (the appendix, as I call it) seems to be mind-boggling at first, but explicable at this point since the translators deleted the appendix altogether. I believe that the translators have, regrettably, violated the integrity of the original Chinese text. As to other works by Li Ang, I have

The injustice of these passages is obvious; the reader cannot fail to notice that the unsubstantiated labelling and parading of Chen Lin Shi as an adulteress is discriminatory. But Li Ang goes further to parody both the sanctimonious tone and the formal, dry style of the male moralists. Though the two reports establish "official" male voices, the easily detectable irony implied in the contradictory, self-justifying, and thus unconvincing claims (note the rhetorical and self-defeating indicators "but ...," "Even though, ..." and the frequent but futile uses of the imperative mood) completely undermine the authoritative voice of the patriarchal society represented by the press.

Although the 140-page body of the novel outweighs the two-page prefacing reports, reinsertion of the missing appendix, which absolves the wife from any guilt, would complete the dialogue in the moral world of Li Ang's novel. Together, the body and appendix challenge the truth of the reports with scene after scene of increasingly violent male sexual abuse. The narration is reliable and graphic, leaving out no significant aspect of nuptial life or of female-male relationships outside marriage. The concrete details of household work also authenticate the female protagonist's painful experiences. Furthermore, the non-existence of Lin Shi's lover throughout the novella provides an ironic contrast to the presence of the husband's mistress (87-90). It also confirms the wife's fidelity and innocence, as well as accentuates the blindness of the public, and often male, sanctions.

Using structural irony, Li Ang first leads her readers to take the position of the two male voices; she then profoundly shocks her readers with an accumulative and detailed account that forces them to reconsider their initial stance; finally, she provides an appendix which rightly exonerates Lin Shi. This use of irony destroys the credibility of the male voice in the reports and certainly exemplifies the feminist, or "political," use of the device, as described by Hutcheon. But Li Ang's appendix fragments this monophonic replacement of the male. The appendix itself is a historical record. Who wrote it and why? When was it written: is it contemporary with the two reports? How official is it? Its presence in the original text demonstrates the effect of polyphony in a feminist and postmodern novel on the supposed duality of irony.

While Li Ang first introduces the male voices and then subverts them, Atwood (1985) impresses her readers throughout her novel with a relatively "full" picture of Offred's life before a male authoritative voice is appended "to censure but [not] understand" it (284). In the text proper, Offred openly invites us to believe in her in the same manner that she believes in us:

I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilized. I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia. I wish it had more shape.... By telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you. I believe you're there, I believe you into being. (251)

In this oral account, Offred furnishes as much information (including information about trivial matters) as she can, under the forbidding circumstances of the Republic of Gilead, to authenticate her experience and obtain credibility from her future audience.

But the "Historical Notes" by the male history professor, placed in a peripheral position as an unpaginated epilogue, criticizes the female text for its lack of order, reason, and recording of important historical events. Here ironic meanings abound. First, he contradicts his own words that "our job is not to censure but to understand" (284). In addition, reading Offred's passage quoted above against the title of the Professor's article, "Problems of Authentication in Reference to The Handmaid's Tale" (282), we find biting situational irony involved in his criticism of Offred's personal account. While Offred believes in her future audience, her first audience, a male one, does not believe in her. This epilogue sounds a warning that the whole book has been transcribed from "approximately thirty tape cassettes" (283), and very probably altered, by the authoritarian male figure of Professor Pieixoto, a historian. The title of *history* professor (emphasis mine), as well as his editing role, also intimate that he may have turned Offred's tale into his story. Thus, the palimpsest effect of the written text indicates Atwood's acute sense of the dubious nature of such a female narrative. Finally, like Li Ang's male editor/journalist, the male historian's scholarly, pedantic, "well-reasoned" observations couched in hypotactic sentences in the "Historical Notes" are juxtaposed ironically with the rich, concrete, and sensuous experiences narrated in the predominantly paratactic style of the female narrator (e.g., "But a chair, sunlight, flowers: these are not to be dismissed. I am alive, I live, I breathe, I put my hand out, unfolded, into the sunlight" [8]). This is the vivid concretizing of female experience so important to feminist critics like Edwards and Diamond (1977), Showalter (11), Hooks (77), Spivak (xvii-xviii), and male theorists such as Althusser (1971) and Eagleton (1990, 98-99) alike. And it is precisely this aspect of Offred's oral tale that the history professor has not managed to erase, in spite of his reasoning, ordering, and editing.

From these two instances, we may argue that the conflicting voices or incongruous parts of a novel (in Li Ang, two male and one female, that of the third-person narrator; and in Atwood, one female, two male, if we consider the recurring biblical intertext to be a patriarchal voice, as many feminists have contended) vigorously vie with one another. However, it is also evident that in both novels, doubts are eventually cast on the validity of male sanctions and justifications. Linda Hutcheon sums up this kind of irony unequivocally: "the reader has not missed the feminist lesson, even if the male professional historian

[or journalist] has" (1991, 24). Hutcheon, on another occasion, encapsulates the problem of irony — who is ironized, who can afford irony, etc. — in two words: "the context."⁵ In other words, the narrative voices and the historical documents eventually nudge us towards a certain interpretation: in Atwood's text, the feminist critical thrust overrides postmodern ironic playfulness. Offred, we may remember, makes a similar point: "Context is all" (Atwood 1985, 136). In sum, though both Li Ang and Atwood share the postmodern awareness of the shaky grounds of the ultimate truth in the oral or the written narrative, and in male or female discourse, the general impression we get after reading the two works is that male-dominated society is inescapably at fault. An overwhelming richness of concrete details, an authenticity of sensuous feelings, and hence an authority of personal(ized) female experience, prevails over the self-righteous, self-validating, but hollow and impotent male discourse.

It is not accidental that Li Ang exploits the conflictual functions of multiple voices, often with the "official" male ones italicized, boldfaced, underlined, or otherwise set apart from the main text. In her title story in *This Human World* (1977), "An Experiment in Life: Love," in "Misunderstanding" in *Experiments in Love* (1982); and in "A Love Letter never Sent," (1986) certain parts of the text are typographically accentuated to indicate a contrast or opposition of divergent voices. Similarly, Atwood is given to placing epigraphs, quotations (as in *The Edible Woman* and *Life Before Man*) or other self-reflexive appendices (as in "The Scarlet Ibis") to counteract or unbalance the incipient order of the narrative. Some of these quotations may play a minor role in the text, appearing only once in the novel. But in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the first biblical citation is repeated enough times to suggest that it is an ever-present "voice" from the patriarchal master text, one which interpenetrates Offred's female text. Both Li Ang and Atwood are feminist moralists who, even in this postmodern age, consciously and ruthlessly debunk the public and political authoritative voices of the patriarchies in their respective social milieus. Atwood's essays, "The Writer's Responsibility," and "The Curse of Eve," and Li Ang's "Foreword" to the second, and "Preface" to the first, edition of the Chinese version of *The Butcher's Wife*, all bear witness to this moral impulse.

Besides exploiting the presence of multiple ironic voices, these Canadian and Chinese writers challenge a male symbolic system which constructs the female body as merely a reproductive or aesthetic object. A central focus of this

⁵ Linda Hutcheon's talk (1992) emphasized the complexity of irony by using the problems besetting the ROM Exhibition on African culture as an example of the role of the "reader" in ironic situations. As readers/viewers we must exercise our judgement vigorously, something postmodern writing demands as a matter of course. Hutcheon's most recent work, *Splitting Images* (1991), focuses on postmodern irony in the last chapter. Of equal interest is the final section of *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), where she rejects an incorporation of feminism into postmodernism chiefly on political grounds.

challenge is their attempt to re-represent the female body and to define its many-faceted functions anew. The colour red figures large (e.g., in women's clothing, make-up, menstrual blood), signifying femininity, submissiveness, beauty, and productivity. Atwood's Moira has only to shed her red robe and put on the brown robe of the Aunts (women who are higher in social rank and who are allowed to move freely) to escape the Red Center (a place so named from its red brick walls and which has been exclusively designed for the Handmaids, the fertile women all clad in red [123-26]). It is true that the name Offred can be read as "Of Fred," an intended meaning imposed by the Gilead Republic (a fictional futuristic country in what is now the State of Maine, US). But it can also be interpreted as "Off red," as the narrator takes off her red dress to pass for a Wife in order to gain admittance to Jezebel's (a nightclub reserved for high-ranking male officials). Indeed, this act of discarding the handmaid identity in an exchange of attire provides the sole means for handmaids to escape; it also constitutes a powerful symbolic rupture of the rigid, colour-coded, patriarchy of Gilead.

In Li Ang's work, blood also turns images of victimization and oppression into those of rebellion and revenge. Both the husband and wife have witnessed numerous bloody scenes throughout their lives. On the one hand, the husband is a butcher and must slaughter pigs daily; for almost thirty years, he has bled to death so many pigs that his name has become inextricably linked with the pigs: "Pig-Butcher Chen" (Li Ang 1986, 14). Both the colour red and the image of blood here signify violence, cruelty, and death. On the other hand, the wife has by chance seen her mother copulating with a soldier in exchange for a few mouthfuls of rice; she vividly remembers the red wedding dress lying under her mother's body (9). Red and blood are here associated with sexual exploitation and submissiveness. Additionally, the pillar, originally a physical support for the Lin Clan Ancestral Hall, the locus of the rape of Lin Shi's mother, is turned into a Freudian phallic symbol.⁶ This pillar appears from time to time in Lin Shi's dreams; blood seeps from cracks in its surface, prefiguring its eventual crumbling when Lin Shi kills her rapist husband. Lin Shi's alarm at her initial menstruation, the draining of life in the absence of motherly care, turns her into a laughing-stock. Finally, her husband's careless and brutal sex even during her periods adds to the high frequency of the appearances of blood. In short, the multitude of the images of blood is invariably bound up with her humiliation, victimization and subjugation.

6 Li Ang does read Freud; see "Preface" in Li Ang 1983. Although Li Ang does not go into a detailed analysis of psychology, in her early writing (5) she feels dissatisfied with it, as well as with existentialism, and decides to write a feminist novel after serving as a columnist for the *Chinese Times* on women's issues (7-9).

However, Li Ang eventually subverts the negative connotations of blood. The husband's last two senseless and gory killings — of Lin Shi's adored ducklings, the only creatures she loves, and of the pigs right in front of her — shock Lin Shi into a trance-like state. Traumatized by these two cruel acts, she can be exonerated from any moral responsibility for her subsequent actions. That same night she takes up the butcher's knife and literally slices the male chauvinist pig to pieces.⁷ Lin Shi's murder of her husband signals a change in the symbolic meaning of blood: the meek and submissive wife has become a fighter, a rebel, and a slayer of the brutal male authoritarian figure. Killing, a traditionally masculine act, has become meaningful as part of the female's maturation.⁸

It may be said that both Li Ang and Atwood begin by using images of blood normally associated with women. However, as both stories develop, the connotations migrate to the other gender. They now suggest violence, subversion, and destruction. This reversal of the connotations of colour imagery parallels the undermining of the authoritative male voice seen elsewhere in these novels. It also represents a distinct aberration from postmodern writings that incorporate ambiguity or uncertainty at all levels of representation. In this aspect of their work, Atwood and Li Ang make it their task to undermine conventional masculine signifying discourse in a straightforward and certain manner.⁹

Finally, both Atwood and Li Ang set out to dismantle the male-oriented ideology historically prevalent in their respective cultures. In their treatment of family life, sexuality, and reproduction, Atwood and Li Ang trace the history of women's oppression back to a time well before capitalism. The prime ideological

7 The epithet is not simply a borrowing from the English expression. Li Ang deliberately blurs the distinction between the man/husband and the pig in more than one way: his appellation is none other than "Butcher Chen"; his appearance bears striking resemblance to a pig; his whole life has been inextricably connected to pig-slaying; and his death by a knife of his own is rumoured to be a retribution from all the pigs slaughtered. Bai Xianying, one of the best modern Chinese writers, has commented briefly on this method of raising the novel from the merely realistic to the symbolic and universal level ("Preface" to the Chinese version of *The Butcher's Wife*). In postmodern phraseology, the ontological status of man/pig is thrown into doubt.

8 We need only to view the film versions of both novels (*The Woman of Wrath*, based on Li Ang's *The Butcher's Wife*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*) to realize the bloodcurdling, violent, and sanguine scenes at the end. These startling images are complemented by a reversal of the symbolic meaning of the dark and the feminine: both Atwood's and Li Ang's works are replete with nighs; their central female characters either escape under the camouflage of night or revolt violently at night, triumphantly turning it into a corridor to daylight — their salvation — and transforming the meek and feminine into the strong and "masculine."

9 See Jameson (1983, 125) on two categories of postmodern writings, especially the "resist[ing]" (politically committed or engaged) one; see Booth (1988) and, via him, Jameson (1981), on the ethical dimension of postmodernism; see also Kristeva's "Talking about Polylogue" about ethics and *jouissance* (1987, 115-17).

target for Atwood's feminist assault can be identified from the outset: the quotations from the Old Testament on the verso of the title page allude to a root cause for women's subjugation: "And When Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.... And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her" (Genesis 30:1-3). Here, women's sole role is revealed as being reproductive for the patriarchy. The importance of a woman's existence is thus determined by her ability to (re)produce children. Atwood thus suggests that "surrogate motherhood" (287) has its biblical precedents and that Christianity has had an unavoidable share in the marginalization and othering of women in the patriarchal ideology. Furthermore, the idea that a woman must redeem her original sin through childbearing (207) stems also from the Bible, echoing precisely the same point Atwood poignantly made in her essay, "The Curse of Eve." Atwood perceives two extreme patriarchal Christian views of women: as angels or as prostitutes. In the context of *The Handmaid's Tale*, handmaids like Offred are defined in reductive terms of their fertility alone; they are seen as "walking wombs." If they can give birth, they will be well treated, put on a pedestal with the baby for others' admiration; if not, they will be sent to the Colonies (places where they have to sweep floors and clean nuclear wastes) or to Jezebel's to sell their flesh. Either way, they are robbed of their own identity: even their own names are lost and patronyms such as "Ofglen" stand in their stead (287). The so-called name of the father thus metamorphoses into that of the ersatz husband/mate, with the assured result that male genealogy and control are renewed, monumentalized and perpetuated; Christian ideology and its concomitant social praxis have condemned women and their names to limbo.

In contrast to the women subjected to the control of extremist Christian patriarchal ideology in Atwood's novel, Li Ang's female protagonist comes under the pervasive sway of a Confucian ideology as old as its Western counterpart.¹⁰ "In the Confucian classics very little is said about women," one Chinese critic writes, "although they are described as inferior to men and not qualified to engage in social activities" (Deng Wei 50). Confucius once remarked, "Women are those who follow the instructions of men; thus do they

become capable." A woman should be respected only for her familial roles: taking care of the house and her husband or his parents, worshipping his ancestors and continuing the family line. Another Confucian admonition has it that "only men and women are hard to live with," which consigns all womanhood to the position of depraved and base men. In other words, men are the center and master, while women live at the periphery as slaves/servants. Julia Kristeva, for one, has decried the paramount emphasis on men in Confucian teachings, describing him as "an eater of women" (1977, 66). Though Gayatri Spivak has critiqued Kristeva's methods of research and her Orientalist attitude, Kristeva's epithet for Confucius could not be more poignant and accurate. In Li Ang's novella, we find no lack of parallels to the tenets of Confucian patriarchal ideology. The husband invariably demands that the young wife obey every whim of his in drinking and gambling; a slight demur on her part will bring about brutal beatings or sexual abuse. What is worse, he receives sadistic pleasure from her groans of pain during sexual intercourse. For the butcher, Lin Shi's reason for being is to provide a ready sexual outlet. In fact, the scenes of sexual cruelty are so frequent that they become routine; such repeated cruelty ironically dulls the wife's sensitivity and deprives the husband of his chance of being even sadistically satisfied.

Both Atwood and Li Ang take pains to search for an ideology specific to and responsible for the reduced status of women in modern society as well as in pre-modern societies. Though their respective findings — the Christian and the Confucian ideologies — are different, the treatment of women as the "second sex" in Occidental or Oriental cultures remains more or less the same. By identifying a particular patriarchal ideology operative in the sphere of male-female relationships, both authors reject the long-standing version of ideology in male discourse. Though neither Atwood nor Li Ang suggests any new ideological project conducive to women's emancipation in particular, exposing and deconstructing an old one is a crucial step toward such a goal.

What I have done here constitutes only a tentative excursion into the work of two postmodern feminist writers. Though from two widely-divergent cultures, Margaret Atwood and Li Ang make essentially the same point about the historical oppression and repression of women. In addition, the two writers forcibly demonstrate that a feminist dismantling of devices and practices formerly held to be fixed or immutable — whether the calcified male signifying system and male-sanctified ideology, or "sophisticated" uses of irony — is at once possible and imperative. Their distinctively female/feminine¹¹ use of irony and

10 Although Li Ang traces female oppression to pre-Marxist, Confucian ideology, China's continued use of Marxism as a central theoretical guide (or ideology in its neutral sense), becomes an important factor in literary analysis. Attempts to examine the postmodern and to account for the status of nearly a billion women under socialism must of necessity take Marxism into account. On the connection of Marxism with feminism in the postmodern age see Heitlinger; Sacks and Diamond *Toward an Anthropology of Women*; Newton and Rosenfeld *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*; Humm; Guettel *Marxism and Feminism*; Weedon; bell hooks; Smith; Hamilton and Barrett; Sobie; Ballan; Kristeva 1977, 1986.

11 My discursive position may sound essentialist, but I agree to an appreciable extent with Hélène Cixous' and Julia Kristeva's views that men can also achieve or approximate feminine writing. See Cixous' definitive comment in "An Exchange with Hélène Cixous" in Conley 1984, 129; and Kristeva's concepts of the feminine (the feminine not as biological

their subversion of the symbolic and ideological systems specific to women's issues and bodies, and the relationship of this writing to the postmodern, certainly bears further study.

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EUGENIA SOJKA

Language and Subjectivity in the Postmodern Texts of Anglo-Canadian and Anglo-Québécois Writers

Literature reveals the complex and problematic nature of culture and its "competing versions of reality" (Simon 179). The Canadian literary scene seems to be a perfect example of this complexity. Here, two literatures, Anglo-Canadian and Franco-Canadian, rival for space and recognition. The struggle for a dominant position on the literary scene in Canada is not limited to the two language groups. In Anglo-Canadian literature there is no univocal tradition. Women writers themselves write in many voices. Those who write in English, both in Canada and Québec, prove that the diversity of their voices depends not only on the kinds of discourse operating in given cultural areas, but also on their personal choices.

This paper aims at discussing the texts of four Canadian women writers, two Anglo-Canadians (Lola Lemire Tostevin and Betsy Warland), and two Anglo-Québécoises (Anne Diamond and Gail Scott). My focus is on texts written from a self-conscious feminist perspective, texts which deal explicitly with feminist issues and which show the impact of the writer's oppositional stance on her texts, on language and the formation of female subjectivity. These writers are engaged in a feminist postmodernist discourse, understood here in a very broad sense as a radical rereading, as well as rewriting, of the dominant forms of Western culture.

The influence of French literary and critical discourse has affected the writing of many Canadian women writing in English, especially those who live in Québec. The position of Anglo-Québécoise women writers is unique and distinctive. In their specific cultural context, both in Québec and English Canada, the Anglo-Québécoise feminist writers are marginalized. They are "speaking from a very complex place in cultural terms" (Leith 24). They have acquired French language and internalised Québécois culture but they are not native to it. In English Canada their voice is considered different because it is theoretically oriented and it is saturated with Québécois rhythms and attitudes. This position of displacement is for many of them, however, a stimulus in their writing process.