

- Spivak, Gayatri. "French Feminism in an International Frame." *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988. 134-53.
- . "Feminism and Critical Theory." *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988. 77-93.
- Tang, Xiaobing. "Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' and a Chinese Modernism." *PMLA* 107.5 (Oct., 1992): 1222-34.
- Weedon, Chris. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

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.

Since the 1980s in English Canada there has emerged a group of experimental women writers who also consciously embrace various critical theories and inscribe them in their writing. They understand that theory allows women "to continue their exploration of subjectivity, desire and representation as active agents of their discourse" (Kambourelli 23). The majority of these women write "through a divided cultural tradition" (Williamson 36); they are compelled to question the nature of their relationship to the English language. Similar to anglophone writers displaced in French Québec culture, these Anglo-Canadian women turn their condition into advantageous displacement. The margin/centre opposition exists not only between the Anglo-Québec and Anglo-Canadian writers. Canadian literature operates in a multi-ethnic society, yet ethnic writers are relegated to marginal status.

I adopt several concepts of Bakhtinian thought for the following discussion since his views help to clarify processes taking place in a multi-ethnic culture. Canada is culturally and ethnically polyphonic. The general condition of Canadian literature is that of "polyglossia" (the simultaneous presence of two or more national languages) and "heteroglossia", multivoicedness, ("a diversity of social speech types ... and a diversity of individual voices" [Bakhtin 1981, 62]) with centripetal and centrifugal forces in operation. The concept of "dialogism" helps to discard the margin/centre differentiation operating within the Canadian literary scene and, in my project, between Anglo-Canadian and Anglo-Québec women writers. Each cultural voice, for Bakhtin, exists in dialogue with other voices: "utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another" (Bakhtin, 1986, 91). The "dialogic" disrupts hierarchies by positing the other as another subject rather than object.

The concept of the "carnavalesque," as elaborated by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, is also congenial to my analysis. It refers to the general economy of transgression in history, society and literature: "Carnavalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by a grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest" (Kristeva, 1980, 65). The women writers discussed here aim at "carnivalizing" the dominant patriarchal discourses of contemporary society.

Texts produced by women tend to foreground a relation between subjectivity and language. The writers discussed here look upon the act of writing as a ground for exploring the subject. The analysis of subjectivity in feminist critical discourse has gone through many stages. Assumptions about subjectivity are influenced by discourses operating in a given society and especially by theories of language. According to Julia Kristeva, "every language theory is predicated upon a conception of the subject that it explicitly posits, implies or tries to deny" (1980, 124). The differences in the French and Anglo-American intellectual traditions have had a big impact on the formation of a feminist aesthetics in both

English and French Canada. In English Canada the impact of American empirical linguistic studies which conceptualise woman as "a negative linguistic space," of descriptive linguistics and the "expressive theory of language (writing regarded as transcription, translation of sensation)" (Godard 1985, 45) is significant. These theories promote women's identity and experience based on a conception of the "unary subject," "closely related to traditional concepts of consciousness, where the self is seen as a homogenous, consistent whole" (Kristeva 1980, 19). French feminist theory, on the other hand, originating in the tradition of language-centred philosophy, semiotics and deconstructive theories of language, has had a bigger influence on Québec and consequently Anglo-Québécois writers. The concept of the "unary subject" is opposed here to concepts of the "split subject" and "subject in process"; "(w)riting is not transcription but inscription, a means of resisting language through a foregrounding of process" (Godard 1985, 46). The subject is no longer understood in humanist terms "as a free agent, but as constructed and positioned within discourse(s) whose codes are legitimated by social institutions" (275). In the French tradition language and subjectivity are theorized within an explicit socio-political framework, in relation to power and existing ideologies. French feminists do not focus on sexist language as Anglo-American feminists do in their search for discriminatory words, phrases, grammatical and syntactical structures. Language for them is not merely an empirical object, a system of naming or communication, but "the threshold of all possible meaning and value ... a structuring device, a condition for the production of subjects" (Grosz 39).

In their crudest form these two feminist aesthetics signify a division between (French) theory and (Anglo-American) practice (Smith 135). The two versions correspond with the two forms of feminism, as demonstrated by Linda Alcoff in "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism:" the cultural essentialist feminism of Daly, Rich, Griffin, and the poststructuralist feminism of Kristeva, Derrida or Foucault (415). Smith stresses the need to look "for a notion of subjectivity which will satisfy both the demands of theory and the exigencies of practice" (xxxii).

The theory and practice of feminism have to be reconciled in order for feminism to be an effective movement changing women's lives in contemporary society. Bakhtin's thought provides a theoretical background for the merging of empirical and textual feminism. All of the key Bakhtinian categories — dialogism, heteroglossia, polyphony and carnival — embrace simultaneously the textual, the empirical and the contextual. Bakhtin never dissociates textual practices from social and historical processes. It has been stressed that Bakhtin anticipated major features of post-structuralism, "the denial of univocal meaning, the infinite spiral of interpretation, the negation of originary presence in speech, the unstable identity of the sign, the positioning of the subject by discourse, the untenable nature of inside/outside oppositions, and the pervasive presence of intertextuality" (Stam 2).

Academic and cultural circles in Québec have been marked by French theoretical discourse and poststructuralist theory. Anglo-Québécois writers were exposed relatively early to this influence. It is important to note, however, that a significant number of English, American, and Canadian critics and writers have chosen to work with French poststructuralist theory. Consequently, there is a need to rethink the terms "French" and "American" feminist theory which, as Rita Felski stresses, "must be taken to refer to a grounding in a particular intellectual tradition, rather than simply to a nationality of the individual critic" (20).

In English Canada both the American and French forms of feminist aesthetics have had an impact on cultural life, although historically, American feminism had an earlier influence on Canadian society. Anglo-Canadian and Anglo-Québécois writers do not write in isolation. During the past decade they have entered into a dialogue through participation in conferences, editorial (journal) collectives (e.g., *Tessera*), and personal friendships. The result of this cooperation is writing that stands at the crossroads between the American and French approaches to language.

Preoccupation with language and subjectivity is pronounced in both groups of writers. Benveniste has shown that "language provides the very definition of man" (224) and that "the basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language" (226); subjectivity is then linguistically and discursively produced. Nevertheless, feminist linguists, critics and writers have shown that women do not have the same place of enunciation as men. In contemporary patriarchal culture, the feminine is the spoken subject and not the subject of enunciation. The subject position is denied to women. This obviously creates difficulties for a woman writer. The question is: "How to inscribe the feminine subject in discourse and the dominant ideology without being inscribed in its norms" (Masse 75). Women writers variously respond to the need to inscribe a feminine subject in language; they take a variety of subject positions. They experiment with language, they deconstruct it, and reconstruct it, autographing it with female signatures. They perform carnivalesque acts with language by breaking its laws and consequently by transgressing structures of thought imposed by patriarchal tradition.

Betsy Warland's texts reveal her obsession with codes of language. She is determined to subvert codes in order to show how male power and authority are inscribed in them. Her language creates a positive semantic space for women whose actual lives, sexuality and anatomy have been cast into the sphere of the non-verbal. Warland follows the tradition of American empirical studies. In her work there is nostalgia for a fully coherent humanist subject. She expands the concept of "subject" in her notion of the erotic, which she understands in Audre Lorde's sense of "a source of power and information within our lives ... as an assertion of the life-force of women" (Lorde 55). Like Mary Daly, Warland uses etymology and word play as one of the routes to reclaim women's memory and

words. Each word carries its memory trace, its own evolution. The etymological plays with words remind one of Cixous' "étymologiquage" (word created from etymology and orgy), and of Kristeva's female "jouissance." Warland is also determined to deconstruct dead language forms and their ideological underpinnings and all the clichés which bar women from their erotic and sensual lives. Her writing reincarnates the spirit of carnival. It valorizes the body and the erotic and, on the linguistic level, it liberates language from strict patriarchal norms.

Warland develops the "étymologiquage" technique in *open is broken*, written in collaboration with Daphne Marlatt. Here, through the use of word play and etymology, Warland reclaims a sexual vocabulary of tenderness and affection. It is a variation of body texts: "*tonguetext ... scentext ... telatext ... webstext ... vortex ... tissuetext ... exotext ... etymotext ... erotext...*" (1984, 13-15):

you calm me with your tongue
speak my skin's syntax
know my desire's etymology, *idiom*. (15)

It is the type of writing advocated by Cixous; writing close to a woman's body, writing which breaks open the patriarchal syntax. The musical and rhythmic quality of Warland's texts, sound associations, pulsations of language, are also reminiscent of Kristeva's "semiotic chora." Warland is breaking the taboos of patriarchal society by inscribing a lesbian self in her texts. The very fact of foregrounding the female body as a centre of identity, a body which encompasses a mind, is a strategic form of resistance to a culture privileging rationality and spirit.

In *serpent (w)rite* Warland continues to carnivalize patriarchal language, but she also develops her concept of Eve's language; language close to woman's body and simultaneously permeated with thought. The text reveals the history of women's suppression and it focuses on discourses relating to the position of women in history, psychology, philosophy, feminist theory and literature. *Serpent (w)rite* is subtitled (*a reader's gloss*). The main body of the text is a collection of citations from a great variety of texts. Warland also appropriates advertising slogans, newspaper headlines and media clichés; this structure makes it impossible to form a coherent lyrical voice, a transcendental ego. The fragmentary nature of the text underscores the writing subject's difficulty in reconstructing the history of a female voice drowned in patriarchal discourses and language. The structure of the text also reflects Bakhtin's view of writing as always dialogical, citational and intertextual; it ties in with his questioning of our presence in our own utterances when we appropriate other voices.

Warland breaks one of the most rigid frames of patriarchal writing. She manages to dissolve the "unary subject," the "I." She theorizes and renders in her texts a new, relational subjectivity; a plural feminine subject, a collective subject

in the feminine. In *Double Negative*, another text written in collaboration with Daphne Marlatt, the two women posit themselves as two equal selves, not the self and the other. They prove that "woman's identity is the relation of a subject to another subject" (81). Warland's texts inscribe "the relational subject, always already engaged in intersubjectivity" (81). Her work embraces Bakhtin's theory of self, which stresses the role of the other in our psychic life, the other as another subject, not as an object of consciousness: "I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance)" (Bakhtin 1984, 287). The collaborative process defies the patriarchal notion of authorship as an individual "property." One cannot recognize the individual voices: they permeate each other. The first person plural pronoun, normative and prescriptive, once the property of male discourse, is being appropriated by a female collaborative subject. It gives women autonomy and validates the position of a woman as subject of enunciation. Here again we are reminded of Bakhtin's denial of a "single authorial consciousness," in a polyphonic text there is a mingling of voices which do not belong to anyone, a "*plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*" (1984, 6; Bakhtin's emphasis).

Warland's writing is both reflective and theoretical; it combines the power of emotions with the power of intellect. Like Gail Scott in *Spaces like Stairs*, Warland in *Proper Deafinitions* engages in theoretical writing. Her explorations of feminist thought reveal her leaning towards the cultural essentialist feminist agenda. Like Adrienne Rich, Warland advocates feminine experience and the search for identity and, like Kate Millet, she reveals how patriarchal sexual politics excludes these from theoretical discourse. Warland simply transcribes her own experience in the text (incest memories or her lesbian relation with Marlatt). Even when she engages in the deconstructive games of language her texts feature nostalgia for "presence before the Word ... desire for origin" (Tostevin 1986, 389).

Tostevin is a writer and literary critic for whom the question of language and its contexts is of primary importance. In "breaking the hold on the story: the feminine economy of language," she acknowledges her interest in the language-oriented texts of women from France, Belgium, and Québec. Language for her has the "power to express the most fundamental dimension of both personal and universal realities" and also "the power to transpose, transform" (391). She stresses that "poetic language cannot be reduced to phenomenological perspectives; it exceeds these perspectives and strives towards a space or language where social codes, laws and traditional concepts of the subject are exploded so that they can be revised, renewed" (1985b, 52).

Tostevin has studied the language theories of Kristeva, Cixous, Derrida and others. Her writing is an ongoing dialogue with the essential points in their

theories in an attempt to find the most adequate way of dealing with the problems of female identity and language. There are several stages in her writing. In *Gyno Text* she inscribes Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and the symbolic. At this phase Kristeva just rehabilitates and reclaims the feminine or maternal as the pre-symbolic, which was rejected by Lacan, for whom the only possible meaning is located in phallic presence. For Kristeva language is double, both rhythm and structure. The subject in language exists in a permanent state of division between the semiotic and the symbolic.¹ Kristeva calls the descriptive and traditional language of communication, the "phenotext," and the generative language of poetry, "the genotext."

The title of Tostevin's book is a play on Kristeva's term. The book itself celebrates the feminine by focusing on the part of language which inscribes it. The semiotic processes can be detected "in phonematic devices (such as the accumulation and repetition of phonemes or rhyme) and melodic devices ... (intonation or rhythm)" (Kristeva 1984, 86):

fluttering	hymen	&
flinch	hyphens	belly
inch	gender	bell
by		in
inch		abdominal
into		dome
invisible		

(Tostevin 1984, no pag.)

In "genotext" the subject is not yet in a split state. It is important to note that the maternal semiotic is just a re-discovered underside of male logic, the opposite of rationality; as such, it continues to be a language of the oppressed, a language with no authority (Nye 211). Irigaray and Cixous move beyond Kristeva's theories. They abandon the patriarchal logic of absence/presence and clear a way for a new kind of feminist thinking. Feminine sexuality as a positive presence provides a new model for a feminist thought and writing; Cixous stresses the revolutionary power of "l'écriture féminine," which is for her a springboard for the transformation of social structures. She continues the work of Derrida. In place of the paternal authority displaced by Derrida she introduces the possibility of a maternal authority. She argues that female texts exemplify the correspondences between language and body, dramatizing multiplicity and process rather than resolution. The meaning is never fixed but constantly deferred and multiplied through the process of différance.

¹ The semiotic and the symbolic are for Kristeva two components of the signifying process. The semiotic/symbolic dialectic refers to "drives and impulses on the one hand, the family and society structures on the other ... envisaged ... by means of, and through language" (1984, 4).

In *Double Standards* Tostevin inscribes Cixous' theory of language and subjectivity. She reconstructs her autobiography, which should rather be called "autography," as the writing subject is located entirely in writing. The poetic text does not transcribe experience but enunciates it in and through language. The subject of enunciation is language itself. Tostevin seems to appropriate the words of Lacan: "I am not a poet but a poem. A poem that is being written, even if it looks like a subject" (Lacan viii). However, it is not a simple appropriation of his words; it is a displacement of patriarchal discourse in poetry, and a replacement of it with a writing in the feminine, with a woman as a subject of enunciation and utterance: "do not be deceived by appearances / I am not a woman I am a poem.... I am words / on the prow!" (no pag.).

Tostevin performs deconstructive wordplays like the one on her name in "*les trois ailes de mon nom*": "et je dis oui au lexique de *l'eau là ... ou je le mire*" (no pag.); here "the self is suspended and the primacy of language is emphasized" (Williamson 33). She celebrates language that inscribes tension between the symbolic and the semiotic. In many lines words and sounds interplay so that the barrier between the signified and the signifier dissolves as the musical sound is heard: "where the sign/takes time to sigh" (no pag.). The spelling itself often inscribes a difference which disappears when the words are pronounced; the barrier separating the signified and the signifier is actually deconstructed, liberating the musical self of the word beyond its meaning: "the langour/langue d'or," "rant/rent" (no pag.). This privileging of hearing over sight in Tostevin's writing corresponds to the Bakhtinian predilection for aural and musical metaphors — voices, intonation, polyphony, orchestration; moreover, as Ahmed-Hajdukowski correctly points out, "Bakhtin's dialogical universe, be it that of the text, the novel, carnival or everyday language, is first of all nurturing and maternal" (157). Bakhtin's writing shows features of *l'écriture féminine*: "traces of orality and gestation ... it unfurls in a spirited, never ending conversation" (157).

In her writing, Tostevin combines the two dominant versions of feminism, the theoretical and the empirical. She subscribes to the theories of Cixous but her work is also influenced by Bakhtin and the poststructuralist thought of Foucault, with their emphasis on the social, historical and cultural conditioning of subjectivity and its plurality. She is interested in the multiplicity of selves or, as she states in an interview, in the "polyphonic presence of the self, where we have many versions of the 'I,' many stories to tell" (Williamson 34). Here, Tostevin adopts Bakhtin's concept of polyphony which, similar to "dialogism" and "heteroglossia," calls attention to the coexistence of the plurality of voices that "do not fuse onto a single consciousness but exist on different registers, generating dialogical dynamism among themselves" (Stam 229). Her awareness of social problems and violence against women is evident in a text entitled "Not a Poem," which was written after the brutal rape of her own young daughter. In

a text with "no metaphors, or similes, or poetic functions" (Williamson 36) she attempts to render the emotional devastation caused by such a tragedy.

Apart from her interest in issues essential to empirical feminism Tostevin also engages in feminist theoretical debates. Her concern with major contemporary theoretical issues manifests itself in *sophie*. In this text she combines poetry and theory when she addresses the absence of woman in philosophical discourse. She wants to reverse the absence. "Philo-" has been dropped from "philosophy," the traditional realm of men, and replaced with the apostrophe which allows Tostevin to focus on the woman's name and subjectivity. The apostrophe in the title signifies the absence, but the apostrophe itself turns the absence into presence; the empty space, "the pregnant pause," functions as woman's "conceptual space" (1987, 74). Tostevin emphasizes a promise of such a space for women because it opens many possibilities for a woman as a subject of enunciation.

Although Tostevin writes primarily in the French poststructuralist tradition she does not accept it blindly. In *sophie* she reveals how Derrida, who claims to be sympathetic to feminism, in fact trivializes it, and she recounts his marginalisation of a woman at a philosophical debate. Tostevin is sarcastic about his misogyny and questions his authority. She gives an ironic account of his seminars in the two week course, "The Political Theology of Language," which she herself attended. She reveals Derrida's lack of interest in questions from women, which he avoided simply by suppressing the questions themselves. Conversant with Derridean strategies, Tostevin uses them to deconstruct Derrida himself: "A gift can only be a gift if it's not a gift. He is delighted with his play of words and logic and we are delighted that he is delighted.... The sacred power of a master's word"(46). For Derrida, the existence of women and their problems is fictional and irrelevant: "Between nothing, between woman spoken, and a woman speaking in her name, there can only be the metaphor of the I, which like any other metaphor cancels.... She is nothing but a name" (47).

Although both Warland's and Tostevin's texts explicitly engage in a dialogue with several current French critical theories, they are also close to the American literary tradition. They can be placed at the crossroads between the American and French literary practices. They lack, however, an explicit socio-political and ideological framework. The texts of many Anglo-Québécois writers, on the other hand, reveal a strong influence of French and Québec poststructural, ideologically oriented discourses. Both Scott and Diamond self-consciously and enthusiastically immerse themselves in French Québec literary traditions.

In "Finding Her Voice" Scott discusses the problem of the fragmented female personality in terms similar to Kristeva's theories. Scott focuses on women's split relationship to language, their knowledge of mother tongue and "fathertongue" (39) as the seat "of the fractured female identity, the difficulty of centering self, of knowing self" (39). Scott follows the advice of Québec French-speaking feminists to "write herself," to write texts which would reflect the rhythms of her

body and mind, "more circular, more holistic" (40) than men's. Scott allows language to take her "where it would in order to get to the core of that shattered identity" (40). She draws here on the poststructuralist insights into the primacy of language over subjectivity and on Bakhtin's view of subjectivity as mediated by language and by the other.

In the collection of essays *Spaces like Stairs*, Scott discusses the problematic nature of the constitution of subjectivity in writing. Her desire is "to create a new female subject-in-process through the act of writing — which act was also a process of deconstructing traditional fictions about women" (62). Scott's views on the positioning of the subject by discourse correspond with poststructuralist concepts and Bakhtinian views on the topic. The notion of a self-conscious identity is problematic to Scott as she is aware of the positioning of the subject in linguistic, cultural and religious contexts which multiply the parameters of the self. She comments on the difficult position of a Protestant anglophone writer in a Catholic francophone society. Her difference is linguistic and cultural but she absorbs French critical discourses and chooses to learn from them.

Scott's subjects are multiple in their linguistic and discursive construction. The issues of race, class and religion are of primary importance to her. Her texts seem to inscribe the poststructuralist notion of subjectivity as defined by Teresa De Lauretis: subjectivity, "constituted in gender ... though not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations; a subject en-gendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual relations; a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted" (2). Scott admits the strong influence of Québécois culture and politics on her writing. She feels "constantly stimulated by the spectacle — from the volatile politics to the festivals of dance, jazz, etc." Montréal is for her "a place where there's a tremendous political and social tension that challenges everything you do that has to do with expressing yourself in art" (Leith 24). It is imperative to mention here Bakhtinian views regarding the influence of cultural polyphony on an individual voice and the capacity on the part of an individual voice to adopt and internalize the other's discourse. A detailed discussion of the problem, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

In *Heroine* Scott shows how various Québécois discourses of the 1970s and 1980s, such as nationalism, leftist politics, feminism and lesbianism, influence the formation of individual identity. The self-reflexivity of this novel foregrounds the problem of subjectivity. The narrator is a woman writing a novel about a female protagonist living in Montréal in the 1970s and 1980s. Scott thematizes here the construction of the female self in fiction. She enacts in the text various cultural and literary ideas about female subjectivity, and shows their effect on the writing self struggling to create a heroine in her novel. Scott shows how difficult it is for a writer to create a female tragic hero, when she faces a literary tradition full of trivialized women's tragedies. Her heroine speaks in many voices which

reflect her various selves, various identities, all of them conditioned by discourses operating in the society of the time. Scott's interest in feminist theory is evident here. She enacts in the text the dialogue between the empirical and theoretical feminisms; the British feminist Anne reveals the tragic reality of abused women, and the French woman Marie engages in theoretical feminist discussions.

The novel deals with issues of the self but cannot be classified strictly as autobiography, biography or fiction. Raine proposes a concept of "life writing" for these types of texts; they are a "fusion between the creative act of writing and the act of living creatively, between the textual and the biological" (87). The narrator's name in *Heroine* is Gail and her initials are G.S., the same as those of Gail Scott. The narrator writes a novel about a female character who also writes. The boundary between these two subjects is blurred, and so is the boundary between the author and the narrator. "Life writing" emphasizes the fluidity of the self and corresponds to Bakhtin's theories of writer and hero, the dialogization between the writer and her/his autobiographical subject-character, the dialogic conception of intersubjectivity, the transgression of the boundaries between self and the other, between the inner self and outer self.

The structure of the novel, which reminds the reader of poetic montage, reveals Scott's surrealist imagination. The narrator of *Heroine* writes the novel from a bathtub, the events of the novel follow the logic of dreams; repeated images, unrelated ideas, events and characters (for instance, a black tourist watching Montréal from a telescope on Mount Royal) are inserted between bits and pieces of frequently unrelated plots and discussions; the collage-like structure is another technique that underscores the impossibility of creating a unified subjectivity; consequently, there is no fixed identification for the reader. Scott's insistence on merging art and life also points to her links with avant-garde art and surrealism.

Like Gail Scott, Anne Diamond is also concerned with subjectivity as constituted by social, cultural, and religious contexts. She demonstrates the influence of the dominant Catholic metanarrative of Québec society on women, many of whom were expected to live lives of self-abnegation in convents. In *A Nun's Diary* Diamond presents a macabre vision of a woman's victimization by the Christian Church. The central metaphor of God/Man/Monster organizes the whole text and debunks the myth of God's love and spirituality. In Diamond's carnivalesque approach, the male deity is posited as incompetent, promiscuous and perverse, "with the woman left abject, something that crawls along the ground and begs to be taken up" (48). Diamond shows how woman's self can be lost through a total subjection to certain discourses. She creates, however, a strong female protagonist, a nun, who although experiencing problems with self definition, manages to cope with her abusive husband/God. The dream-like, fragmentary structure of the text and its grotesque scenes and images point to the

influence of avant-garde techniques on Diamond's writing. She also revives the carnival sense of the world with its "peculiar logic of the 'inside out' ... (*a l'envers*), of the 'turnabout,' of continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, ... of numerous parodies and travesties" (Bakhtin 1968, 11), a universe which "combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low" (Bakhtin 1984, 123).

Diamond's *Mona's Dance*, like Scott's *Heroine*, may be read as a thematization and enactment of the problem of subjectivity. The question is foregrounded through the employment of a self-reflexive narrator in the process of writing a novel. This is again "life writing" in which the boundaries between "authorial and written selves are fluid" (Raine 89). There are two Annes, Anne Miller and Anna Morgenstern, who are posited as writing subjects in the novel. The names could be a facade for the author's name Ann Diamond (or her maiden name Ann McLean, whose initials are A.M.). Anne Miller writes a book on *Mona*, a stripper. The characters of the novel are allowed to read and comment on the book while it is being written. The identity of the writing subject merges with the identity of the written selves; the border between reality and text is obscured. Ann Miller immerses herself in the identity of her characters who begin to control her life. She gradually loses her identity but gains it back again through writing. Diamond seems to enact here Derridean theories on the displacement of the subject, on the impossibility of defining it, as it is always deferred in language.

Diamond addresses the problem of woman as a discursive historical construct. Her women have multiple selves. They are constructed in and by language, and social and cultural contexts. The action takes place in the 80s when women were making the transition from being "revolutionaries to being artists" (11). Radical statements on Québécois separatist ideology reveal the problems of the contemporary political situation of Québec: "Québec must separate.... The English must be made to assimilate, through force if necessary, because historically they have no culture" (55). Diamond enacts in the text a variety of discourses: Québécois politics (discussions on nationalism), feminism (talks on the Women's Movement), literature (problems in creating fictional reality), psychoanalysis (the case of Anna Morgenstern), and mass media (*Mona* as a TV Evangelist). She exposes their impact on the constitution of individual subjectivity. The surrealist section of the narrative proves that language offers many possibilities for feminist writers and that utopian visions can fulfil an essential function in their political and empirical agenda.

The approach to the question of subjectivity and language in the two groups of writers discussed here is conditioned by the impact of various discourses operating in English Canada and Québec. Warland writes in the American essentialist, cultural mode of feminism but her texts also expose the social construction of subjectivity. Tostevin tries to combine cultural and

poststructuralist feminism in a more intense fashion. The Québécois writers, on the other hand, are deeply entrenched in the French poststructural tradition. They show an intense political awareness and interest in ideological issues and their texts exhibit the influence of avant-garde culture. These writers are not in a position of subjection to dominant discourses. Their texts show their passionate engagement in theoretical debates. They interweave theory and other forms of writing: fiction (with its different forms: novel, life writing, essay) and poetry. They fit Brossard's definition of "fiction théorique," "the text as both fiction and theory — a theory working its way through syntax, language and even narrative of a female as subject, a fiction in which theory is woven into the texture of the creation, eliminating or trying to, distinctions between genres, between prose, essay, poetry, between fiction and theory" (Godard 1986, 7-8). Nevertheless, the texts of Anglo-Canadian writers which foreground theoretical awareness often meet with harsh criticism and the writers are accused of being too cerebral (Williamson 36). Consequently, the difference between writing in the feminine in Québec and in English Canada is, in Scott's words, in the "existence of the permission for an ongoing troubled and challenging relationship to discourse in the text" (1989, 7). The concept of "theoretical fiction" is about 15 years old in Québec and it has permeated much of Québec and Anglo-Québécois writing. Theory is so intricately interwoven in the text that it is hardly "entendu;" it functions naturally in existing discourses; it is not only permitted but in fact expected in feminist texts.

In the 1990s English Canada can boast women writers who consciously engage in theoretical discourse which allows them to deconstruct or carnivalize the frames of traditional patriarchal discourses. It is encouraging to see that a feminist agenda has brought these writers together. The boundary between marginal Anglo-Québécois writing and mainstream Anglo-Canadian writing is successfully blurred and transgressed. Various women's literary voices interweave and enter into a dialogic relationship. They fulfil the promise of Bakhtinian dialogism which both recognizes and defuses differences. The dialogic encounter between English-Canadian and French-Québécois cultures has a positive effect on the development of the Canadian literary scene.

St. John's

Works Cited

- Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism." *Signs* 13.3 (1988): 405-436; and *Inquiry* 10 (September 1983): 37-60.
- Bakhtin, M.M. *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968.
- . *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- . *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*. Ed. & Trans. Caryl Emerson. Introduction by Wayne C. Booth. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.
- . *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern McGee. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986.
- Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek. Miami: U of Miami P, 1971.
- Causse, Michèle. "L'Interloquée." *Trivia* 13 (Fall 1982): 79-90.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.
- Diamond, Ann. *A Nun's Diary*. Montréal: Vehicule, 1985. [Rev. ed. 1989].
- . *Mona's Dance*. Toronto: Quarry, 1988.
- Felski, Rita. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Godard, Barbara. "The Language of Difference." *Canadian Forum* (June-July 1985): 44-46.
- , Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei and Gail Scott. "Theorizing Fiction Theory." *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 57 (Sept 1986): 6-12.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989.
- Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Maroussia. "Bakhtin and Feminism: Two Solitudes?" *Critical Studies* 2.1/2 (1990): 153-63.
- Kamboureli, Smaro. "Theory: Beauty or Beast? Resistance to Theory in the Feminine." *Open Letter* 7.8 (Summer 1990): 5-27.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardin, and Leon S. Roudiez. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.
- . *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Ed. Jacques-Allain Miller. New York: Norton, 1977.
- Leith, Linda. Interview with Gail Scott. "Face to Face." *Matrix* (Spring 1989): 23-24.
- Loche, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, New York: Crossing Press, 1984.
- Masse, Carole. "L'enjeu du sujet." *Tessera* 9 (1990): 75-77.
- Raine. "Return to Sender." *Tessera* 9 (1990): 87-91.
- Scott, Gail. *Spare Parts*. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1981.
- . *Heroine*. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1987.
- . *Spaces Like Stairs: Essays*. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1989.

- . "Finding her voice." *Canadian Forum* 65.44 (June-July 1985): 39-41.
- Simon, Sherry. "Culture and its Values: Critical Revisionism in Quebec in the 1980s." Ed. Lecker, Robert. *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991. 167-79.
- Smith, Paul. *Discerning the Subject*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.
- Stam, Robert. *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.
- Tostevin, Lola Lemire. *Gyno-text*. Toronto: Underwhich Editions, 1984.
- . "Not a poem." *Canadian Literature* 100 (Spring 1984): 321-22.
- . *Le Double Standards*. Edmonton: Longspoon, 1985.
- . Rev. of "the collected poems of Miriam Mandel." *Contemporary Verse* 9.2 (Fall 1985): 51-53.
- . "breaking the hold on the story' the feminine economy of language." *A/mazing Space*. Ed. Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli. Edmonton: Longspoon, 1986. 385-91.
- . "The Pregnant Pause as Conceptual Space (or gimme a break)." *Open Letter* 6.7 (Spring 1987): 74-76.
- . *sophie*. Toronto: Coach House, 1988.
- Warland, Betsy. *open is broken*. Edmonton: Longspoon, 1984.
- . *serpent (w)rite (a reader's gloss)*. Toronto: Coach House, 1987.
- . *Proper Definitions*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1990.
- , and Daphne Marlatt. *Double Negative*. Charlottetown, PEI: Gynergy Books, 1988.
- Williamson, Janice. "Sounding the Difference. An Interview with Smaro Kamboureli and Lola Tostevin." *Canadian Forum* 66.765 (Jan. 1987): 33-38.