

**FRENCH 478-01**  
**Modern French-Canadian Literature: Women's Wor(l)ds in the Québec Novel**  
**Instructor: Miléna Santoro**  
**French Department**

**Spring 2001**

**Prereq: Culture and Writing or Literature and Writing II.**

**Course Objectives**

This course is designed as an upper-level seminar of variable content, under the broad rubric of "Modern French-Canadian Literature" (so titled to allow for inclusion of authors from Manitoba, Acadia and Ontario in addition to those from Québec). The objective in this course is to offer students an opportunity to read and study the astonishing wealth of outstanding literature published in Québec and French-speaking Canada since World War II. Representative texts will be selected based on thematic, generic and/or theoretical considerations. Depending on the orientation chosen for the semester, discussions will focus on questions of cultural and linguistic specificity, of form, and, where appropriate, of gender as it relates to these other questions. Attention will be paid to developing close reading as well as analytical skills, through classroom and online discussions, and essay assignments. Theoretical readings will be used to assist students in securing a critical context for their readings, as well as a broader historical understanding of the various important moments and movements in modern Canadian literature in French.

**Course Content**

For the Spring of 2001, I am proposing course content based on the extraordinary tradition of women's fiction in Québec, beginning with Gabrielle Roy at the end of the war, and spanning the latter half of the century up to and including texts participating in feminism and postmodernism. The fiction chosen will document the changes in Québécois women's lives during the period, even as it reflects women's evolving political, personal and creative aspirations and possibilities.

**Structure and Methodology**

This course will be a discussion-driven seminar, where students will be encouraged to explore the themes, symbols, language and forms of the texts they encounter, through interaction with their peers. Small group discussions as well as plenaries will be prepared and pursued, if possible using an online discussion board to which students will contribute on a weekly basis. The topics discussed online and in class may provide the basis for student papers, of which there will be three. The final paper will be a comparative exercise for which students will be required to draw together at least two of the texts read over the course of the semester. One oral presentation will be made by each student, based on the theoretical readings selected to enhance and extend students' understanding of the issues raised by the fiction they read. Particular attention will be paid to the impact of feminist thought on the form and content of women's writing in Québec since 1970, based in part on the student exposés of theoretical essays written by authors and feminist thinkers of the time.

**Required texts/materials**

Gabrielle Roy, excerpts from Bonheur d'occasion (1945, Prix Fémina in 1947) or other short texts.

Lea Pool, Gabrielle Roy (film, 1998, 77 mins).

Anne Hébert, Les Chambres de bois (1970).

Louky Bersianik, Pique-nique sur l'Acropole (1979).

Dorothy Todd Hénault, Les Terribles vivantes (film, 1986, 90 mins).

Nicole Brossard, Le Désert mauve (1987).

Marie-Claire Blais, L'Ange de la solitude (1989).

Madeleine Gagnon, Les Cathédrales sauvages (1994).

Elisabeth Vonarburg, Chroniques du pays des mères (1992).

### **Selected Bibliography**

Louky Bersianik, La Main tranchante du symbole (1990).

Nicole Brossard, La Lettre aérienne (1985).

Brossard et al., La Théorie, un dimanche (1988).

Roseanna Dufault, ed., Women by Women: The Treatment of Female Characters by Women Writers of Fiction in Québec since 1980 (1997).

Madeleine Gagnon, Autographie II: Toute écriture est amour (1989).

Gagnon, "Mon corps dans l'écriture," in La Venue à l'écriture (Cixous et al, 1977).

Paula Gilbert, Traditionalism, Nationalism and Feminism: Women Writers of Québec (1985).

Karen Gould, Writing in the Feminine: Feminism and Experimental Writing in Québec (1990).

Lori Saint-Martin, Le Nom de la mère: Mères, filles et écriture dans la littérature québécoise au féminin (1999).

Patricia Smart, Écrire dans la maison du père: L'émergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec (1988).

### **Evaluation**

Participation 35%, Papers 45%, Oral presentation 10% and Online discussions 10%