

and that it was not a particularly liberating period. For those familiar with Pierson's earlier work this will not come as a surprise but for those who are not, they will be unable to see WWII in quite the same optimistic light again. What has to be kept in mind, however, is that women themselves were primary supporters of traditional careers for women. As Pierson points out, "middle to upper-class women's organizations, recognized by government as the representatives of

women's interests, placed their influence behind the prevailing inclination of public policy to preserve sex-typed occupations, the sexual division of labour, and the class-based occupational structure." (p.63)

"*They're Still Women After All*" is now the major source for those interested in Canadian women in the 1940s. It is elegantly written and interspersed with excellent photographs and cartoons. The research is prodigious, and as a result

Professor Pierson has uncovered a wealth of information for historians to feed on and has provided new and exciting leads for future research. WWII may not have been a lasting experience for women, but it did teach one lesson which we should not forget – where there is political will the government and society can change and do change. It would be comforting if we could rediscover that political will without having it coincide with another World War.

TRADITIONALISM, NATIONALISM, AND FEMINISM: WOMEN WRITERS OF QUEBEC

Edited by Paula Gilbert Lewis. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985.

Jeannette Urbas

This book is a collection of seventeen essays on women writers of Quebec considered, as the title indicates, within the framework of three categories: traditionalism, nationalism and feminism. It combines a historical perspective with contemporary analysis ranging from the end of the nineteenth century with a discussion of Laure Conan's *Angéline de Montbrun* to the creative production of the early 1980s.

In her introduction Paula Gilbert Lewis stresses the unique situation of Quebec, at the crossroads of both American and French thought. The essays fall into three time periods, each corresponding with a particular outlook, from the pre-1960s when traditionalism is most evident, to the 1960s when nationalism is central, to the 1970s and 1980s when feminism comes to the fore. Inevitably, there is an over-

lapping of categories in the study of individual authors. In addition, the close link between nationalism and feminism in Quebec has never been abandoned.

Some women writers have been omitted because of a lack of current research on their writing but those who are included offer a good representation, as well as considerable variety. The only writer who is not specifically Québécoise is the Acadian, Antonine Maillet, whose work, however, fits into the overall context and the themes of the book. All but three of the authors are still living.

As the essays move into the more recent period, issues particularly pertinent to feminist writing are explored, e.g. the emphasis on the power of language, the search for expression in a specific female discourse, the use of myth and a newly discovered female mythology. The relationship between lesbian feminism as a way of life and as a revolutionary force in literature is also examined. Approaches to change vary from the belief that the liberation of each individual must come from within and the fundamental struggle for women must be against a patriarchal society (Nicole Brossard) to concern with the social conscience of Quebec and skeptic-

ism of any discourse urging women to wage war indiscriminately on their male compatriots (Madeleine Gagnon). The final essay is an update on women's theatre in Quebec and its attempt to replace unacceptable female stereotypes on the stage.

The essay on Louky Bersianik points to a paradox faced by feminist authors in their desire to communicate: "the more she speaks the phallic language, the better understood she makes herself *L'Eugéline*; the more she speaks in the female (fluidity, polysemy, etymologies, babble), that is, the more she subverts the normative code (especially in *Maternité*), the more restricted becomes the group to whom she addresses herself and who understands her."

This collection is designed to appeal to both specialists familiar with the authors discussed and non-specialists who seek an introduction to a fascinating new area of knowledge. Specialists, like myself, will disagree with individual researchers about some points, such as the interpretation of the ending of Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska*, but the book as a whole is thought-provoking and informative.

WATER AND LIGHT: GHAZALS AND ANTI GHAZALS

Phyllis Webb. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1984.

Heather Murray

The title of *Water and Light: Ghazals and Anti Ghazals* lures the reader with the seductions of the exotic and the obliquely oppositional. (If we wonder what is a ghazal, still less can we imagine its anti-part). The mirrored pairings of water and light, ghazal and anti ghazal, suggest multiple inter- and cross-relationships,

counterings and encounterings. The cover photo by Gordon Robertson for this handsome volume, of water lilies and pond grasses, inmixes indistinguishably the reflected and reflecting, as will the verse itself. And "Webb" on the cover completes the reader's ensnarement – for her production is as spare as the poems themselves, and a new book by her is an event.

The table of contents shows a five-section division to the book: "Sunday Water: Thirteen Anti Ghazals," "The Birds," "I Daniel," "Frivolities," "Middle Distance." These too, intrigue, for their relationship is not easily ascertained. An

accompanying series of cryptic dublets ("No one denied you your memory of wings: / those clouds, although faces, are not your own.") adds complexity to perplexity. On the facing page, an acknowledgement to *Ghazals of Ghalib: Versions from the Urdu*, edited by Aijaz Ahmad, with translations by W.S. Merwin, William Hunt and, most intriguingly, Adrienne Rich, encourages the reader to learn more about Webb's poetic project here.

The ghazal, writes Ahmad, provides the basic poetic form in Urdu from the beginning of the language until the middle of this century. It is composed of at