Lee has much to say, yet refrains from definitive judgments. All agree that Leonard played a caretaking, controlling role toward Virginia, monitoring and limiting her activities, though the question of whether—or to what extent—this was beneficial or harmful remains open. Lee forestalls the reader's impulse to view Leonard too critically by including of the story of T. S. Eliot's unstable wife, Vivien, who sought—in vain—a possible ally in Woolf, "before she disappeared into life-long incarceration—the very fate which Leonard had protected Virginia from in 1913." On the much mentioned matter of their sex life, Bell's early presentation of Leonard's incontestably "passionate nature" and Virginia's sexual "congenital inhibition" has by now undergone significant challenges—for example, from Claire Tomalin, who writes instead of "Leonard's failure to arouse her sexual nature, followed by his complete denial of it, and his refusal to let her have children," pointing to Leonard's "personal anxieties and repugnances" toward women as revealed in his letters to Lytton Strachey. Lee also calls attention to the "violent expressions of sexual disgust" in Leonard's early fiction. Yet at the same time, and despite Lee's recognition of "Virginia Woolf's sexual squeamishness," her intense feelings for other women, and what appears in conventional terms as the non-sexual nature of the Woolf marriage, Lee repeatedly emphasizes her subject's "powerful, intense sensuality ... erotic susceptibility to people and landscape, language and atmosphere ... [her] highly charged physical life;" and Lee argues convincingly for "evidence of an erotic secret life" between Virginia and Leonard, carried on with "pet names ... animal games ... cuddling and nuzzling and kisses."

The Virginia Woolf who emerges from these pages is complex and contradictory, courageous, timid, sensuous, snobbish, iconoclastic, susceptible to the prejudices of her class and culture, cruel, kind, and humane. Lee has painted a fascinating, variegated canvas, bringing us somewhat closer to the remarkable woman who wrote those wonderful books. And her copious citations from Woolf's own writings will encourage the reader to return to these in the light of new insights and connections.

ECLATS DE SEL

Sylvie Germain. Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

by Siobhan McIlvanney

Sylvie Germain's latest novel, *Eclats de sel,* presents as its main theme the requisite role of the past—whether in its fantastical embodiment of myth and legend, or more personal form of an individual's history—in constructing the present. Indeed, Germain's narrative perceives the past as always present, in that it is both ubiquitous and constitutes part of our present existence: "Chaque instant du passé demeure dans la chair du présent, obscur et fécond sédiment, infime caisson de lumière indéfiniment refondu et luisant en secret tout au fond de l'oubli." *Eclats de sel* represents the significance of this symbiosis between past and present in the return of the male protagonist, Ludvík M., to his hometown of Prague, after eleven years abroad and a failed love affair. The death of a close friend and mentor during that return leads Ludvík to further ruminations on the relationship between his past and present selves. Germain's novel thus inverts the traditional narrative of the *Bildungsroman* in that the protagonist's development hinges on a return to the historically familiar, to his geographical and psychological origins—"il s'ensuivit un exil à rebours"—and not a voyage of discovery into the unknown. As the narrative progresses, the learning process of the protagonist stems from his recognition that myth and legend, rather than existing in an hermetically sealed magical past, are the stuff of everyday life and continue to inform and influence us.

This imbrication of myth and reality pervades the work. Numerous "détails concrets" enhance the geographical accuracy of Germain's portrayal of Prague, a city in which she spent seven years, and which provides the backdrop for her two previous novels. Within this realist setting, however, several "unreal" exchanges occur, and are thus "normalized." Beneath the grey facade of Prague—"l'heure ne suintait que laideur et tristesse et ne portait aucune promesse d'éclaircie"—mythical encounters take place. Ludvík engages in meaningful exchanges with a number of strangers whose most striking feature is their sheer ordinariness: their professions range from bank clerk to cleaning-woman. These strangers are spectres of his past, segments of his conscience, who, by relating experiences and emotions identical to his own, gradually induce a volte-face in Ludvík's attitude towards that past. (The work is divided into three sections: *Preface,* in which Ludvík refuses to face up to his past, *Face à faces,* in which he confronts his previous self, and the resolution of the narrative, *Volte-face,* in which he fully accepts and integrates his past existence into his present). These exchanges also provide the work with its title in that each comprises a reference to the different functions of salt, whether corrosive or purifying. Like salt, these mythical conversations penetrate Ludvík's protective shell and force him to confront reality, signalling, in a manner reminiscent of Breton, the false dichotomization of the two "consciousnesses" of myth and reality: "Il ne tentait pas de dépister la source de ce flux d'irréalité qui se mêlait au cours pourtant si banal de sa vie; d'ailleurs il n'aurait su dire s'il agissait d'une crue d'irréalité, ou bien de surréalité, ou encore de para-réalité ou même d'infraréalité."

Germain's novel is written in the evocative, lyrical style for which she is famous, yet, in what can be considered a further combination of myth and reality, it also incorporates amusing passages of a more informal na-

ture: "Ludvík, par précaution, monta dans le wagon de queue car s'il appréciait la fantaisie des doux dingues, il ne goûtait guère en revanche les cinglés grandiloquents." Only in very rare instances is Germain's lyricism overblown—"Ce jeune homme a des larmes d'oiseau de mer dont il parsème les ongles noirs des convives"—or her authorial presence unnecessarily intrusive: "En fait Ludvík était bien plus affecté qu'il ne voulait le reconnaître par tous ces événements et la déficience de sa vue offrait un dérivatif à son inquiétude." Such minor criticisms apart, *Eclats de sel is* a beautifully composed work, intricately linking apparently superfluous details to form an integrated narrative whole. Numerous thematic parallels run throughout the narrative, demanding the reader's active participation in their decipherment. The work's first reference to salt is in a description of Judas in da Vinci's *La Cène* (Biblical resonances are once again ubiquitous in *Eclats de sel);* in a similar vein, Ludvík considers his behaviour towards his former mentor to be an act of betrayal. His mentor is significantly named Brum, and with his death, Ludvík's misty vision of the past disperses and he is able to see more clearly; the destruction of his glasses also acquires symbolic value in that he can now face the past unaided. Shortly before his death, Brum sends Ludvík a card whose design he gradually deciphers, further highlighting his improved perception: "Il lui semblait parfois voir affleurer un vague motif dans cette image peinte ton sur ton,—des esquisses de silhouettes discrètement ivoirées se suivant à la queue leu leu dans une brume laiteuse."

A final example of the textual parallels which enrich the reader's understanding of the narrative frames *Eclats de sel.* The novel begins and ends with the protagonist on a train, travelling back from T. to Prague, the first trip after visiting the ailing Brum, the second after Brum's funeral. The psychological distance travelled between the two journeys is underlined in Ludvík's ability to confront his past, embodied in a second self. On his first trip, he falls asleep, in a subconscious move to avoid contact with the strangely familar man in his train compartment, yet on the second journey he enters into dialogue with his "sosie" and thus reintegrates his past with his present: "Il se rendait à lui-même, à l'inévidence du monde, au miracle de la réalité, à la foncière réalité du rêve." Brum's death helps him "à retrouver le goût de vivre," and like salt, gives him a new thirst for life. The numerous references to salt accumulate throughout the work and, in a manner analogous to Stendhal's description of the salt-covered branch in *De l'amour,* "cristallise" in Ludvík's sanguineness about his future.

While the combination of the fantastic and the everyday in *Eclats de sel* may produce a feeling of "dépaysement" in some readers, it is worth heeding the advice given to Ludvík by one of his many interlocuters. In what could be a direct exhortation to the reader, the stranger urges: "Rebroussez un peu chemin dans vos pensées par-delà le cercle étroit de vos idées toutes faites, surfaites et mal faites de surcroît, risquez-vous donc du côté de l'impensé...." It is a risk richly rewarded.

GENDER, GENRE AND RELIGION: FEMINIST REFLECTIONS

Morny Joy and Eva Neumaier-Dargyay, eds. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995.

by Judith Poxon

This volume, comprising 16 essays with a brief introduction, was compiled by a research network of women scholars organized to take stock of the current status of feminist scholarship in religious studies in Canada. The collective wager of those who participated in this project is that Canadian feminism, because of its double anglophone and francophone heritage, stands in a privileged relation to both Anglo-American and French feminisms, and that, within the field of religious studies in particular, there exist many opportunities for finding ways beyond some of the impasses that trouble contemporary feminist theory. Toward this end, according to the introductory essay (co-authored by editors Morny Joy and Eva Neumaier-Dargyay), the essays in this collection both call into question and strategically affirm the categories of "gender" and "genre," and in the process the category of "religion" itself undergoes significant interrogation from both gendered and generic perspectives.

These themes are more fully elaborated in Mary Gerhart's opening contribution. Asserting the importance of the hermeneutical turn away from the desire for certain knowledge and toward an appreciation of the process of knowing, Gerhart suggests that religious studies, with the multiplicity of genres evident among the sacred texts and oral religious traditions of the world, provides a rich venue within which feminists may raise questions about the status of identities, gendered and otherwise. She takes note of the challenge to the epistemological coherence of feminist theory that has arisen within feminism in response to confrontations with race- and class-based critiques of white, middle-class, feminism, and acknowledges the need to interrogate the category of "woman" even as she also asserts the inevitability of reaffirming that category as the basis for political action. What is especially significant about this move for feminist scholars of religion, Gerhart notes, is its suggestion of an analogous approach to the category of "religion" itself, an approach which entails bringing both "gender" and "genres" perspectives to bear on the texts and traditions that make up the material of religious studies, so as to trouble both notions of identity and the traditional (patriarchal) insistence on canonical interpretations of those texts and traditions.

The fifteen essays that comprise the balance of this volume, then, are