

## Defining Stages in Women's Lives

Since the emergence of women's studies in the late 1960s, many books, articles and edited volumes have addressed and analyzed literary depictions of women's life experiences. Studies have focused on gender and identity, women's voices, women's agency, women and work, women coming to writing, feminist histories, gendered sexualities, women and the body, women in relationships, women and the family, women and violence. A considerable body of work has been published in both English and French on women's autobiography and on the mother-daughter relationship. Beginning with the classic feminist texts of the 1970s (Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow, Nancy Friday), there has been a steady production on the themes of motherhood and mothering in many different literary contexts (e.g. Davidson, Hirsch, Norman, Gyssels, Journey, Rye, Jensen). Since the 1990s, a number of studies have also focused on other defining stages in women's lives: childhood (e.g. Norman, ed.), adolescence (e.g. Di Cecco and Gale), aging and dying (e.g. Woodward and Ladimer).

The proposed volume will take a more global and synthetic approach to these distinct and defining stages in women's lives. By looking at key moments and passages in relation to one another and within the context of a continuing life story, we will be able to begin to trace the ways in which women's identities evolve over a lifetime. We will seek to elucidate how these significant transitional moments set the stage for women's evolving definitions (and interrogations) of their identities and roles.

While there exist a few important targeted studies on some of these topics, many focus on literatures of earlier periods (Woodward, Ladimer, Gale, Jensen) and/or on a largely Anglophone corpus (Waxman, Cosslett, Bilston, Looser, Francus). Very little can be found specifically addressing the themes of mothering, adolescence or aging in the fictions of contemporary francophone women writers. Our book intends to fill this gap by limiting our focus to works published by French and Francophone women writers since 1980.

Three research areas will be considered:

1) the first one will center on narratives of coming-of-age and adolescence. Among the topics to be addressed in this passage from girlhood to womanhood are the experience of menstruation, the awakening of sexuality, the questioning and/or affirmation of gender identity, the complexities of women's socialization.

2) the second one will include essays on the literary treatment of mothering, including such themes as childbirth, adoption, "bad" mothering, surrogacy, the refusal of motherhood.

3) the third one will look at literary depictions of women aging and approaching death. The focus will be on the declining years when lives seem to shrink but perspectives expand as one begins to

confront one's own mortality. Articles in this section may focus on the particular experiences of loss that come with age—physical decline, loss of friends, mobility, energy, health, language, autonomy—and on the changing roles women adopt as they leave jobs behind, move into retirement and perhaps become increasingly dependent on others (as when mothers find themselves being mothered by their own daughters).

In our choice of essays and in our critical introduction, we will be insisting on the complexities and tensions inherent in each of these defining stages. Women's negotiations of a life's transitional moments are inevitably filled with ambivalence. There is unquestionably both continuity and rupture at each juncture since the movement from one stage to the next (coming of age; becoming (or not becoming) a mother; coming to terms with old age and mortality) necessarily means both carrying the self forward and leaving the self behind. In addition, as the volume's own life story will suggest, attention to these defining stages lets us realize the relationships not only within each generation but also across generations.

In choosing articles that treat the themes described above, we are particularly interested in soliciting essays that will analyze the work of some of the following writers: Hélène Cixous, Annie Ernaux, Gisèle Pineau, Marie-Claire Blais, Maryse Condé, Werewere Liking, Nicole Brossard, Marie-Célie Agnant, Abla Farhoud, Denise Boucher, Nina Bouraoui, Louise Dupré, Marie Darrieussecq, Leonora Miano.

Questions should be directed to Karen McPherson: [ksmcpher@uoregon.edu](mailto:ksmcpher@uoregon.edu) and/ or Florence Ramond Journey: [fjourney@gettysburg.edu](mailto:fjourney@gettysburg.edu)

Abstracts of 250 to 300 words should be send to both Karen McPherson: [ksmcpher@uoregon.edu](mailto:ksmcpher@uoregon.edu) and Florence Ramond Journey: [fjourney@gettysburg.edu](mailto:fjourney@gettysburg.edu) by **August 15, 2013**. The final articles will be expected by January 10, 2014.