

Monique Wittig, feminist and lesbian icon

The approach of the twentieth anniversary of her death, in 2023, reminds us of the growing relevance of the feminist activist and writer. A biography by Emilie Notéris precedes the events and reprints



Monique Wittig (center, hat), with, among others, Nicole Lise Bernheim (left), during the tribute to the women of the Commune, in Issy-les-Moulineaux (Hauts-de-Seine), in 1971. "

CATHERINE DEUDON/MARGUERITE DURAND LIBRARY/ROGER-VIOLETT

The hashtag #Wittig2023 is already launched. Twenty years after her death, fifty years after her book *Le Corps lesbien* (Minuit, 1973), followers of the French author intend to make 2023 a real "Wittig year". The program

includes readings, exhibitions, workshops, and an international conference in Berkeley (California) and Geneva (Switzerland). Not to mention the reissue of *Le Corps lesbien* in paperback, published by Minuit, in early January.

The transformation of Monique Wittig (1935-2003) into a feminist and lesbian icon has already been underway for several years. Not a week goes by without her being brandished as a reference by the actresses Adèle Haenel and Angèle Metzger, the journalist Lauren Bastide or the writer Virginie Despentes, who praises her "relevance", even stronger according to her than twenty years ago. "Wittig is for me the perfect illustration that creativity can be exercised as well in activism as in literature," adds the ecologist Alice Coffin, interviewed by "Le Monde des livres". In April, Gallimard has reissued *The Endless Journey*, a lesbian rewriting of *Don Quixote*. The play, which was notably performed by Adèle Haenel, was applauded in June at the *Maison de la poésie*, in Paris. Her 1969 novel *Les Guérillères* (Minuit, reissued in paperback in 2019) inspired the *Compagnie Marinette Dozeville* to create a dance show that tours France and Belgium. In Brittany, it is a traveling bookstore also called *Les Guérillères* that will open in December, in the *Monts d'Arrée*. And this month, in the collection "Icônes" of the publishing house *Les Pérégrines*, a first biography, signed by Emilie Notéris, is published. This is the "Wittig moment".

After her exile in the United States, which began in 1976, the writer - she held to the masculine form - had been somewhat forgotten in France, relegated to the list of dated figures in the history of literature and feminism. The book by the American philosopher Judith Butler *Trouble in the genre* (1990; *La Découverte*, 2005) has allowed her to be rediscovered. For a new generation of feminists and lesbians, Monique Wittig has become a model of a committed, enraged woman who has moved the lines with her pen. A point of junction between the feminism of Marxist inspiration and the current "queer thought". "She was a keystone, without which the cultural and political building lesbian-feminist would not hold", judges the writer Wendy Delorme in a message quoted by Emilie Notéris. Demonstration in four times.

Pronouns

Half a century before the polemics about inclusive language and the appearance of formulas such as "iel", Wittig attempts to dynamite the boundaries of gender in her first published novel, *L'Opoponax* (Minuit, 1964). This book, hailed by the writers of the *New Novel* and awarded the *Prix Médicis*, tells of a love between two little girls, even if this aspect was then "completely ignored" by the critics, as the author would later note. Wittig gives priority to the "on" in order to temporarily "cancel" the "social division of the sexes". In her next work, *Les Guérillères*, the epic of a troop of women fighters who want to free themselves from oppression, the "they" predominates. Then a troubling "I", a torn "I", takes the floor in *Le Corps lesbien*. "The personal and impersonal pronouns are the subject, the matter of all my books", she will write a posteriori.