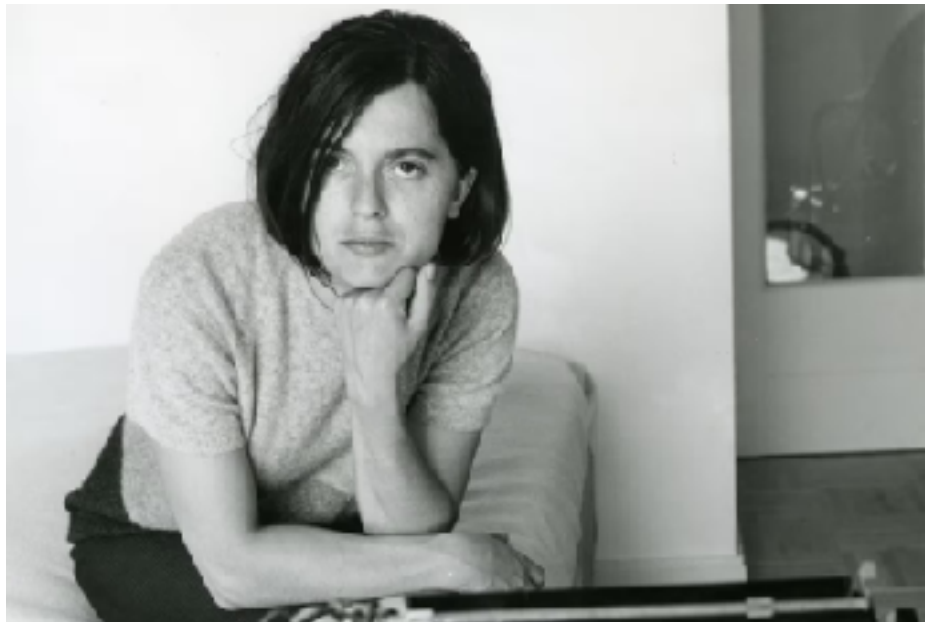


“In The Enemy Arena”: a collection of texts by Monique Wittig, the guérillère



Monique Wittig. DOUBLE/MINUIT

Critique In the wake of the #MeToo movement, we've recently rediscovered the precursory power of Wittig, who died just over twenty years ago, in 2003.

By Elisabeth Philippe

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Like Ulysses, Monique Wittig entered hostile territory by cunning. For her, the place to reconquer was not a besieged city, but the literary field, too long the preserve of men. As a Trojan horse, she wrote a book with an enigmatic title:

“The Opoponax”. This first novel, published in 1964, won her the Prix Médicis. Critics hailed this beautiful picture of childhood, but no one saw in the unusual use of the pronoun “on” and in the love affair between the two little girls a seditious act or even a declaration of war against the established heterosexual order and its mortifying use of language. This is how Monique Wittig, lesbian and materialist feminist, entered the “enemy arena”, the expression under which the texts and interviews in this new volume are grouped.

In the wake of the #MeToo movement, we have recently rediscovered the precursory power of Wittig, who died just over twenty years ago, in 2003. This collection sheds further light, if any were needed, on her extraordinary advance on themes now at the heart of intellectual debate: feminist radicalism (read her account of the stormy beginnings of the MLF and her rivalry with Antoinette Fouque) or questions of gender - “Everything I try to break down in my books has to do with categories of sex”, said the author of “The Straight Mind”, in 1982. Convinced that “any work of new form functions as a war machine”, Wittig turns the weapon of language against those who have monopolized it.

In various interviews, she explains how the use of pronouns in her work plays a political role. She claims, for example, the systematic use of “elles” in “Les Guérillères” “as an attempt to make the feminine plural ‘elles’ universal, to make it equal and capable of opposing the masculine ‘ils’”. The texts on literature - on

“Bouvard et Pécuchet” or on Nathalie Sarraute, whom she admired - are perhaps among the most beautiful. This is Wittig's true place, conquered through hard struggle, her own island.



“Dans l'arène ennemie. Textes et entretiens 1966-1999”, by Monique Wittig, edited by Sara Garbagnoli and Théo Mantion, Minuit, 368 p., 22 euros. Also in paperback, Virgile, non, Double/Minuit, 144 p., 9 euros.

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