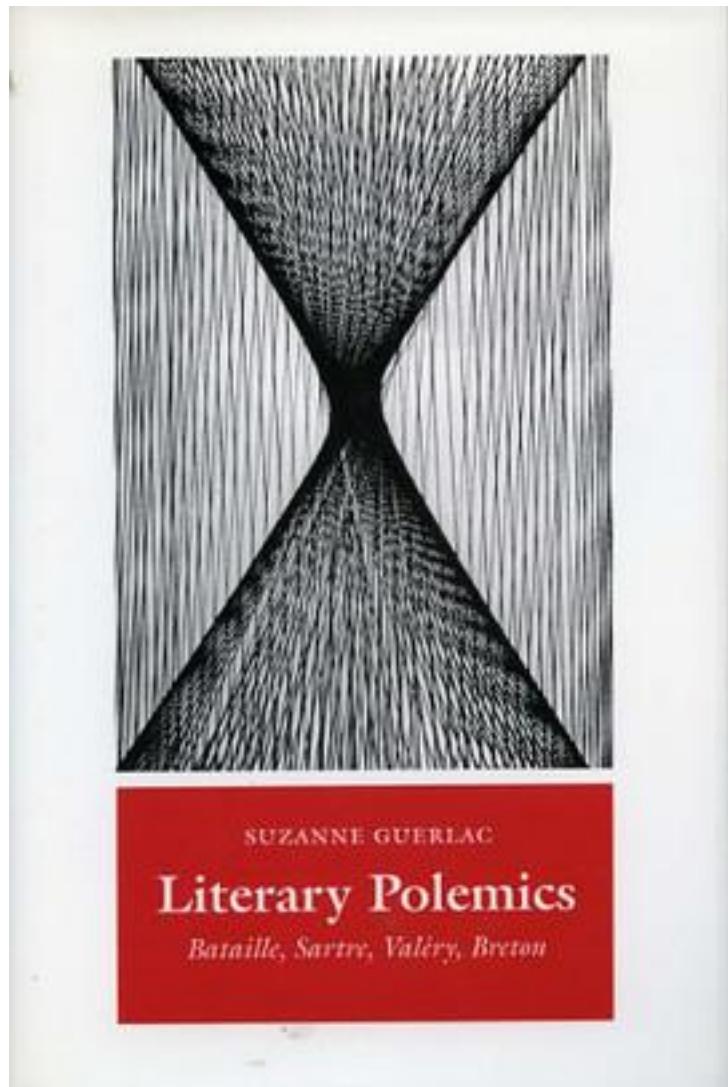


Literary Polemics



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著者:Suzanne Guerlac

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During the 1960's and 1970's, the eruption of theory was presented as an epistemic break, reorganizing the field of questioning both prospectively and retrospectively. In the forefront of this new movement was the influential journal *Tel Quel*, which both canonized a body of preferred avant-garde texts (both literary and theoretical) and nullified prominent figures from preceding generations. In a broad remapping of French modernism, this book shows how the milieu of *Tel Quel* transferred myths of the powers of literature inherited from Bataille, Sartre, Valéry, and Breton to theory, in the process erasing the traces of these myths and their common ground.

The author analyzes cultural and theoretical positions—pure art, automatism, engagement, and transgression—that structured the literary and critical field from the 1920's to the 1950's to show their strong impact on the formulation and elaboration of theoretical issues in more recent decades. Focusing on the question of relations between poetry and action, she reexamines these positions and uncovers proximities between them that significantly displace theoretical issues.

These proximities emerge when a philosophical subtext of Bergson—antiphilosopher and nondialectical thinker—is revealed to operate alongside the more obvious subtext of Hegel. The discourse of Bergson shifts the category of action central to these literary polemics and revalues the visual register, suggesting a reconsideration of Surrealism. The book concludes by examining the ideological pressures associated with the eclipse of the discourse of Bergson as well as some of the effects of this erasure on our understanding of the modern as distinct from the postmodern.

作者介绍:

Suzanne Guerlac is Professor of French at Emory University.

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