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## Preface

Ever since the publication of her first novel, *A Piece of the Night*, in 1978, Michèle Roberts has retained a significant presence on the literary scene in Britain. She has published fifteen novels, three collections of short stories and several books of poetry. She is also the author of two plays, a book of essays and two memoirs. She is Emeritus Professor of Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Her fiction has been compared to such major writers as Toni Morrison (Luckhurst), Jean Rhys (Goyal), Angela Carter (White, Goyal), Jeanette Winterson (Stowers, White) and Margaret Atwood (Bertrand). She has also received prestigious literary awards and nominations for her novels. In particular, *Daughters of the House* (1992) won the W.H. Smith Literary Award and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, and *Ignorance* (2012) was longlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction.

Despite the awards, the prominence, and, most of all, the range, depth and intensity of her writing, Roberts's literary status has never been properly recognised, as if in corroboration of her own suspicion that "we only allow a space for one [great female writer] at a time, one per generation" (Roberts 11). As early as 1996, Roger Luckhurst referred to Roberts as "an important, but resolutely marginalized presence" and complained that her substantial *oeuvre* tended to be "shunted off into the area of programmatic feminist texts" (243). The view was reiterated over a decade later when Susanne Gruss described the author as "almost completely ignored by academia" (2). Today, after another ten years, the words could well be repeated. Indeed, Roberts's writing has come under critical scrutiny only in two extensive studies: Sarah Falcus's *Michèle Roberts: Myths, Mothers and Memories* (2007) and Susanne Gruss's *The Pleasure of the Feminist Text: Reading Michèle Roberts and Angela Carter* (2009). Though both books offer sensitive, in-depth readings of the author's work, they were published over a decade ago and, as such, they could not (and do not) include Roberts's notable recent work. What is more, they approach the author through the lens of feminist theory and focus almost exclusively on novels, with only occasional references to poetry and short fiction. Bearing all this in mind, there is clearly a need to engage anew in the academic debate on Roberts's literary achievement.

Given the size of this slight volume, it would be presumptuous to assume that the texts included here will mark a breakthrough in how Roberts is read. Still, they offer much needed new perspectives, filling in some of the gaps in existing criticism and deepening ongoing discussions. The two articles that open the issue focus, respectively, on Roberts's poetry and short fiction, the



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two aspects of her work that have so far been seriously neglected. Venturing into these largely unexplored territories, they have the potential to expand our understanding of Roberts's writing and to reveal more of its richness and complexity. The three articles that follow are devoted to individual novels—*Flesh and Blood* (1994), *Impossible Saints* (1997) and *Ignorance*—either revisiting previously acclaimed fiction or looking at narratives that have not yet been analysed by critics. All of them, I hope, offer welcome contributions to scholarship, rekindling and broadening the discussion of Roberts's writing.

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