

Marie-Claire Blais 1939 - 2021



Your most compelling purpose
must be to free the human in you.
Then you will understand
that others really exist.

Votre but le plus impérieux
doit être de libérer en vous
l'humain.
Ensuite vous comprendrez
que les autres existent
vraiment.

MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS

Marie-Claire Blais' New York Times Obituary December 7, 2021

Private

www.nytimes.com/2021/12/07/books/marie-claire-blais-dead.html?searchResult

BOOKS

The New York Times

PLAY THE CROSSWORD

Account

Marie-Claire Blais, Acclaimed French Canadian Novelist, Dies at 82

Though largely unknown outside Canada, she was often ranked alongside Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro as one of the country's greatest living writers.

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A photograph of Marie-Claire Blais, a French Canadian novelist, sitting at a desk. She is wearing a blue denim jacket over a red and white striped shirt. She has curly brown hair and is looking towards the camera. She is holding a pen and writing on a piece of paper. There are books and papers on the desk in front of her. The background is a plain wall.

EXCERPTS FROM THE NY TIMES OBITUARY

The New York Times

BOOKS | Marie-Claire Blais, Acclaimed French Canadian Novelist, Dies at 82

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By Clay Risen

Dec. 7, 2021

5 MIN READ

Marie-Claire Blais, a novelist whose long, elliptical sentences and incisive explorations of human consciousness won her comparisons with Virginia Woolf and a place alongside Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood as one of Canada's greatest contemporary writers, died on Nov. 30 at her home in Key West, Fla. She was 82.

The New York Times

BOOKS | Marie-Claire Blais, Acclaimed French Canadian Novelist, Dies at 82

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Ms. Blais was encouraged along her ascent by the American critic Edmund Wilson, who called her a “genius” in his 1965 book “Oh Canada: An American’s Notes on Canadian Culture,” and later helped her win two grants from the Guggenheim Foundation.

The New York Times

BOOKS | Marie-Claire Blais, Acclaimed French Canadian Novelist, Dies at 82

 Give this article

Her most famous work, “Une Saison Dans la Vie d’Emmanuel” (“A Season in the Life of Emmanuel”), centers on a family whose members suffer poverty, child abuse, reform school and untimely death. The book was a smash, winning the Prix Médicis, a French award given to rising literary talent, in 1966, the year it was published in French. (It was translated to English a year later.)

EXCERPTS FROM THE NY TIMES OBITUARY

The couple later separated, and Ms. Blais moved to Key West, Fla., in the mid-1980s, eventually becoming an American citizen. But she continued to write in French, for a Quebecois audience, and while her books achieved renown in the Francophone world, they were less read in the rest of Canada, and she was largely unknown in the United States.

Her last 10 novels, the focus of his article, composed a cycle that Ms. Blais called “Soifs,” which she translated as “thirst for everything.” They were set in unnamed but obviously American locations, including a stand-in for Key West, and they explored how intimate turmoil could lead to grand-scale consequences: nuclear annihilation, racism, climate change.

“Will American Readers Ever Catch On to Marie-Claire Blais?” read the headline to a 2019 article in *The New Yorker* by the Canadian writer Pasha Malla. His answer on whether they would was equivocal, but on whether they should, he left no doubt.

The reason she wrote, she explained in her 1968 novel “Manuscrits de Pauline Archange,” published in English as “The Manuscripts,” was “to go down into that depth of mud and dried leaves to take a last look at all the living and the degenerate dead from whom, more than my birth, more than my life, I had to extract my resurrection.”

Some 50 books followed over the next six decades, including 29 novels, nine plays and three volumes of poetry. She won practically every prize available to Canadian writers, including four Governor General’s Academic Medals, one of the country’s highest literary honors.

UNDER REVIEW

WILL AMERICAN READERS EVER CATCH ON TO MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS?

The French-Canadian novelist—who has lived in Florida for decades—has been writing brilliant, original fiction for more than half a century.

By Pasha Malla
September 16, 2019

During the next half century, Blais would publish more than forty works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and writing for the stage, and earn many of Francophone literature's highest international honors. She has been lauded as an heir to Virginia Woolf, nominated as a candidate for the Nobel Prize, and, in French-language literary circles, has become indisputably canonical. Yet she has never attracted a wide readership among her home country's English-speaking population, and her work is practically unknown in the United States. This is a common problem for French-Canadian writers, who are, as the translator Peter McCambridge once put it to me, "at once too different and too familiar" to interest many English-language readers in North America. But Blais should, by all rights, cross that divide. For one thing, her magnum opus—a cycle of ten short novels, the eighth of which was recently translated into English—is set in Florida, where she has lived for decades. More pertinently, she is, as Wilson was right to proclaim, and as the rest of her career has demonstrated, one of the most distinctive and original living writers of fiction.

PROPOSED TEXT FOR SIDEWALK INSTALLATION

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Ensuite vous comprendrez
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vraiment.

MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS

PROPOSED INSTALLATION SITE
717 WINDSOR LANE, KEY WEST



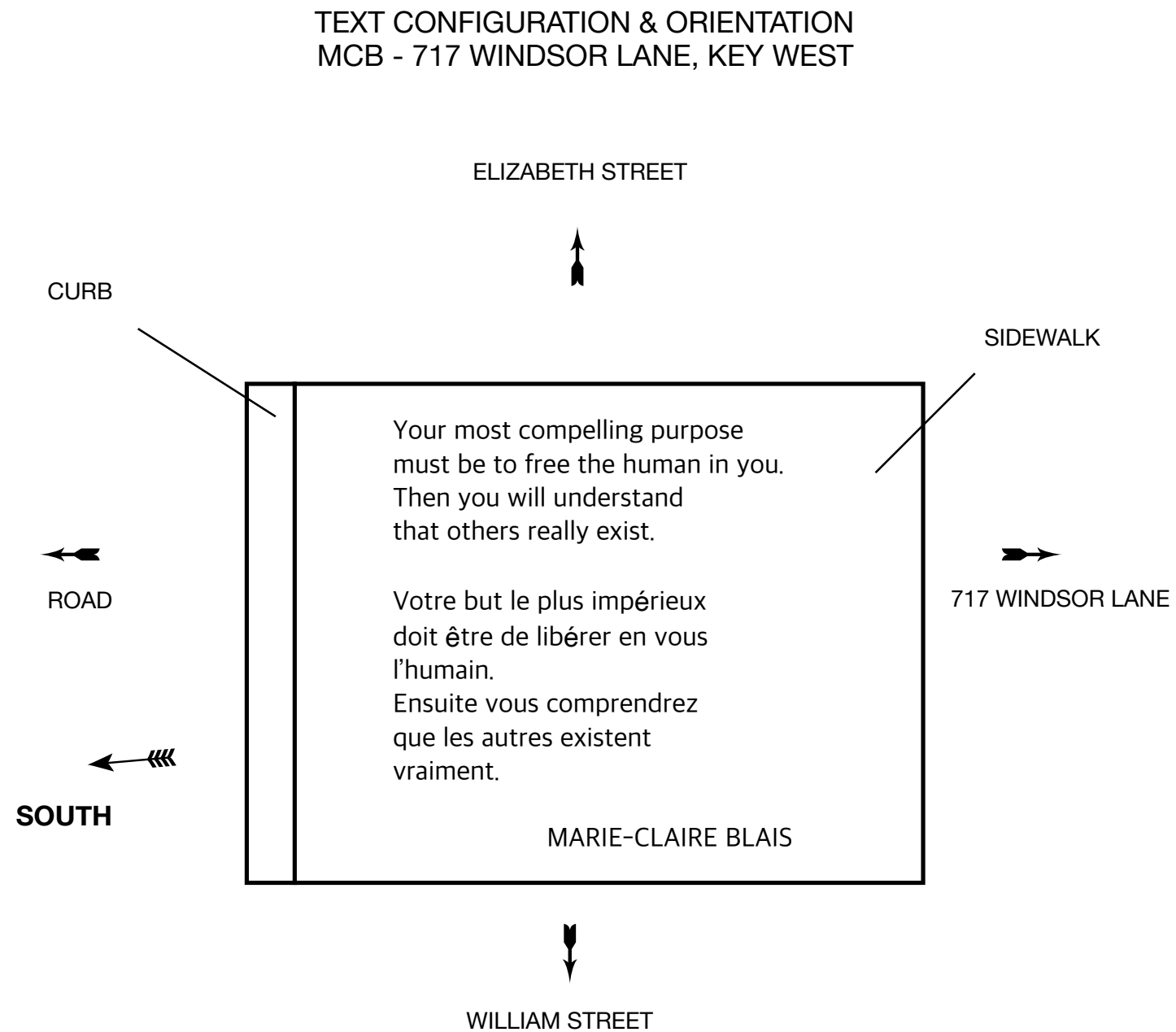
View of the Writer's Compound looking
West toward Elizabeth Street



View of 717 Windsor Lane
looking North

- The site has a full southern exposure, with no curb parking and relatively little tree droppings.
- The proposed section of concrete sidewalk measures 71" wide and 61" high.
- Existing sidewalk poetry has been created with a Common Gothic Font at lettering of 2" in height, with 3" text spacing.
- There are two 6" break spacings in the proposed quote.
- The text is justified left and the artist's name at the end is justified right.
- The proposed quote will require 58" in height
- There is more than sufficient width at the site (71").

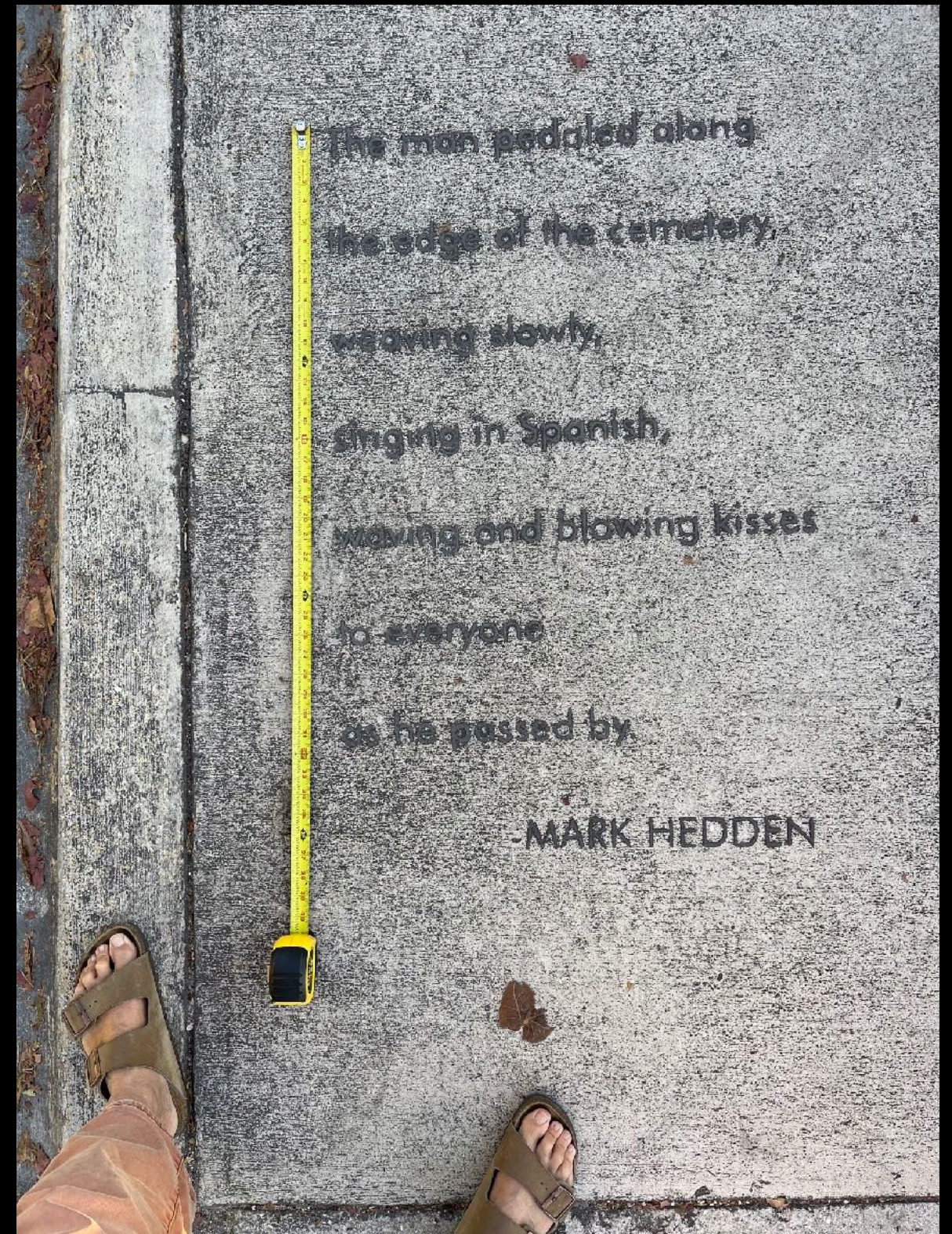
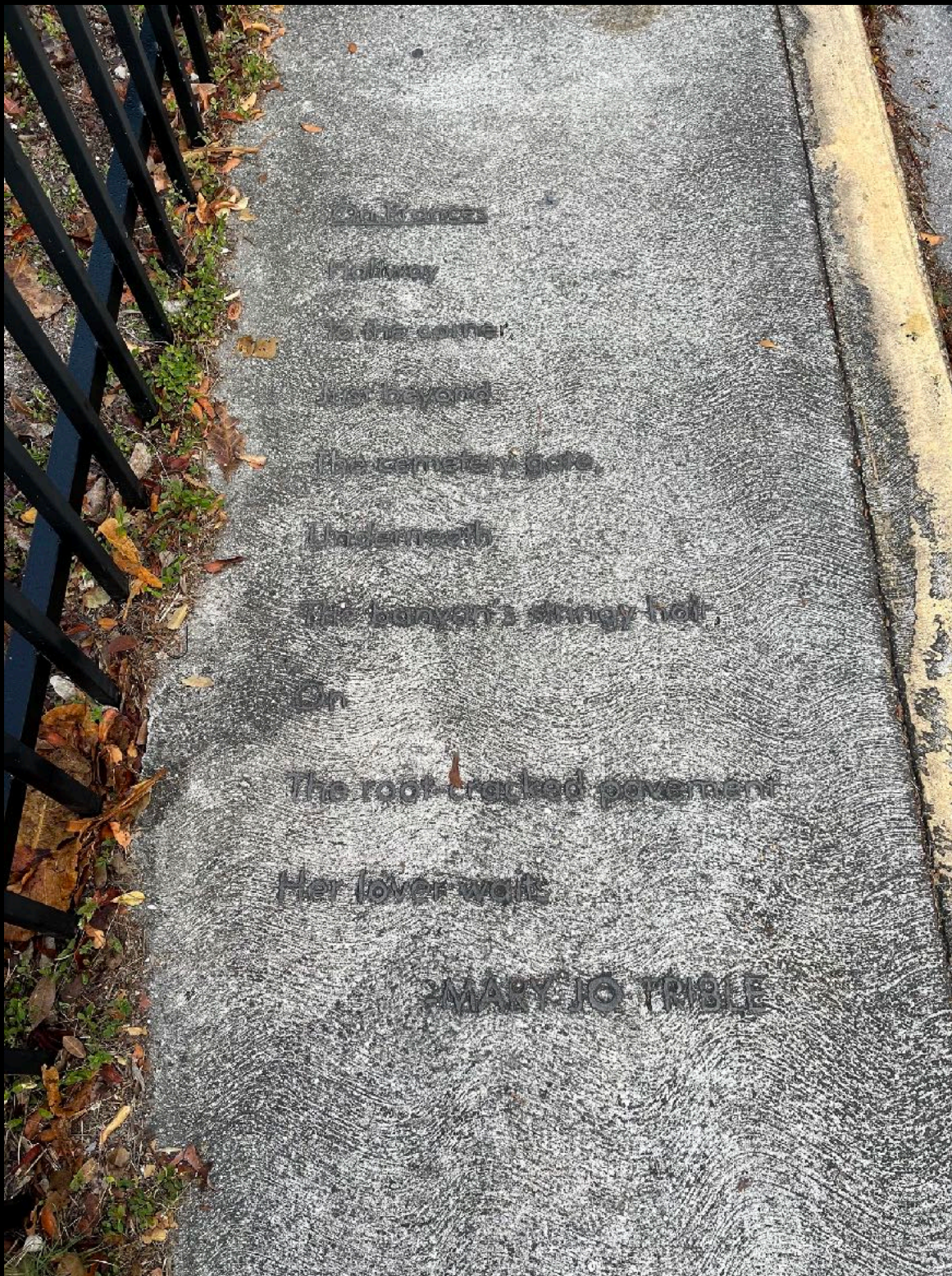
TEXT CONFIGURATION / ORIENTATION ON THE SIDEWALK



VIEW : LOOKING DOWN

TEXT : JUSTIFIED LEFT
ARTIST NAME : JUSTIFIED RIGHT
FONT : COMMON GOTHIC
2" LETTER HEIGHT TYPICAL
3" TEXT SPACING TYPICAL
6" BREAK SPACING 2 PLACES
58" FULL INSTALLATION HEIGHT
61" SIDEWALK PANEL HEIGHT
71" SIDEWALK PANEL WIDTH (NO CURB)
NOT TO SCALE

SAMPLE SIDEWALK INSTALLATIONS



PROJECT COST ESTIMATE

ITEM	COST
INSTALLATION	2800.00
CITY PERMITS	200.00
FLORIDA SALES TAX 6%	168.00
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>3168.00</u>

- \$2800 INSTALLATION (INCLUDES MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT TRANSPORTATION)
- (POSSIBLE 10%-15% INCREASE DUE TO DELAY \$3080-\$3220)
- CITY PERMITS (OPENING AND CLOSING)- \$200 (POSSIBLE EXEMPTION?)
- FLORIDA SALES TAXES AND FEES (6%) = \$226.00 (POSSIBLE EXEMPTION?)
- TIME WINDOW FOR INSTALLATION EXECUTION SEPTEMBER -DECEMBER 2023

LETTER OF SUPPORT - ARLO HASKELL DIRECTOR LITERARY SEMINAR KEY WEST

Sent: Wednesday, January 25, 2023 at 10:07:57 AM EST

Subject: Re: Marie Claire Blais tribute

Hi Michelle,

More important than Marie's involvement in the local literary community is the fact that she was a major international literary figure, widely recognized as one of Canada's greatest novelists. In my opinion, she easily ranks among the likes of the American authors John Hersey, Richard Wilbur, John Ciardi, and Ralph Ellison, who are all already recognized by a plaque at the compound. I'm not aware of any other residents of the compound who could claim the same kind of impact on the world of letters. [Her obituary in the New York Times](#) gives a good sense of her stature and importance.

As I indicated to Anne, most of Key West's literary plaques have been formally designated by United for Libraries, and I think it's important that a plaque for Marie Claire go through the same process. I understand they are in some kind of transition at the moment, but I think it's worth waiting this process out. Their "seal of approval," so to speak, helps to separate writers of mere local import from those who have had a national or international influence.

I'd need some additional details and I would have to run it by my board to be sure, but I feel fairly confident that we would be willing to provide you with a formal letter of support when you apply for the United for Libraries designation, which you could then in turn use as you see fit with the condo association. Please keep me posted about that process. And thank you for your work to recognize Marie Claire.

All the best,

Arlo

LETTER OF SUPPORT - MICHELLE CLAUSON AND SOPHIE PAINCHAUD

EXECUTORS OF MCB ESTATE (sheet 1 of 2)

To the Board of Art in Public Places

Key West FL 33040

Feb 28, 2023

As co-executors of the Estate of Marie Claire Blais, we are soliciting your support to honor her in the Art in Public Places program here in Key West. From the early 70s, Ms. Blais lived on-and-off in Key West until the 90s when she took up permanent residency. She was throughout her time here an integral part of the prominent local writers' community. In 2008, she purchased John Hersey's writing studio (they were close friends) located in the well-known Windsor Village writers' compound. This became her final home and writing haven and hence we would like her to be honored there on Windsor Lane by your sidewalk poetry program.

Originally from Quebec, Canada, Marie-Claire became a US citizen in 2011. Not only was she widely recognized in contemporary French-Canadian literature, but also as a writer of significant international importance. It was early on in her career, while she was still very young, that renowned literary critic Edmund Wilson noticed her prodigious writing and gave his strong support to her application for her first Guggenheim Fellowship. From there, she became the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships including:

- French Prix Medicis (France)
- 4 Canadian Governor General's Literary Awards (Canada's highest literary honor)
- Prix Anais Ségalas of the Académie Française
- Prix Prince de Monaco
- Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal
- Knight of the *Ordre national du Mérite de France* and of the *Ordre des Arts et Lettres de France*
- Member of the *Académie Royale de littérature française de Belgique*.
- 2 Guggenheim Fellowships.

These are only a few of the many honors she has received. She was also a long-standing jury member for several international literary prizes including the Prix Prince-Pierre de-Monaco and was the recipient of 6 Honorary Doctorates.

Though Marie-Claire wrote in her native French, she was translated well into 15 languages and her work was distributed worldwide. She was a prolific writer and published 40 novels, as well as plays, poetry, radio texts, screenplays, and completed an opera libretto just a few days before her passing.

LETTER OF SUPPORT - MICHELLE CLAUSON AND SOPHIE PAINCHAUD

EXECUTORS OF MCB ESTATE (sheet 2 of 2)

We have selected the following quote from her book *Tête Blanche* written when she was only 21 years old. It became, among other novels, required reading in the Quebec school system. We find this quote most representative of her lifelong advocacy for human rights and equality.

Your most compelling purpose must be to free the human in you. Then you will understand that others really exist.

—

Votre but le plus impérieux doit être de libérer en vous l'humain. Ensuite vous comprendrez que les autres existent vraiment.

We think the French translation should also be presented on the sidewalk, hoping that this is brief enough to include in both French and English.

Respectfully,

Michelle Clauson and Sophie Painchaud

Estate of Marie-Claire Blais

LETTER OF SUPPORT - ANN HAMILTON - FRIEND AND NEIGHBOUR

To the Arts In Public Places Committee,

I would like to thank the committee for their time and consideration of this project. I would especially like to thank Craig Berube-Gray and Liz Young for their expertise and guidance in the preparation of this presentation.

Marie-Claire Blais was profoundly kind and insightful, I feel very fortunate to have known her. I hope, together we can see this project through to fruition, so as to have a monument to her, which will echo beyond her passing and those who knew and loved her.

Kind Regards,

Ann Hamilton
1-651 William Street
Key West
514-499-1637