


FIREWEED



A Feminist Literary & Cultural Journal

FIREWEED A Feminist Literary & Cultural Journal
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FIREWEED

Women and Language

A Feminist Literary & Cultural Journal

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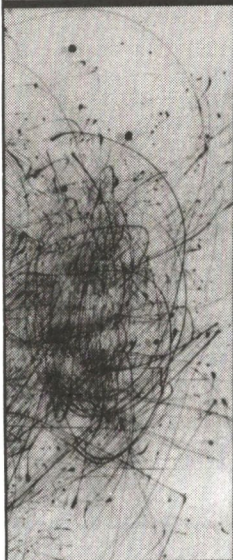
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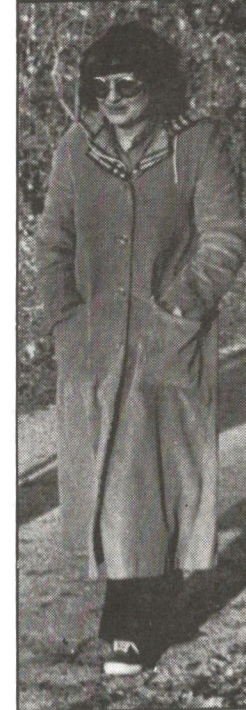
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EDITORIAL

DECLINING DECLINING NOUNS CONVENTIONS

That language is a *political* issue for feminists may not be immediately evident. The present state of the economy — and the continued resistance of the political establishment to the women's movement — virtually guarantee that the very issues defined as central at the beginning of the '70s will continue to require our strongest advocacy in the new decade: equality in education, opportunity, work, and social benefits; universal access to birth control, abortion and day care; and an end to discriminatory legislation. Because all of these demands are directly related to our economic oppression, the subject of woman and language might be regarded, at first glance, as an élitist concern.

Yet a majority of vanguard figures in the new wave of feminism have identified patriarchal language/speech as the primary instrument of our oppression. De Beauvoir, Greer, Millett, Johnston, Atkinson, Rich and Olsen have observed that words not only reflect sexist bias, but actually perpetuate it by enshrining within the dominant speech/literature values which demean and misrepresent our being and our experience. In *Beyond God the Father* Mary Daly writes: "...women have had the power of *naming* stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world, or God. Women are now realizing that the universal imposing of names by men has been false because partial." Opposed to the patriarchal language is the new language/speech of women, which is perceived as our key weapon in challenging the sexist world view:

The "method" of the evolving spiritual consciousness of women is nothing less

than this beginning to speak humanly — a reclaiming of the right to name. The liberation of language is rooted in the liberation of ourselves...

As aliens in a man's world who are now rising up to name — that is, to create — our own world, women are beginning to recognize that the value system that has been thrust upon us by the various cultural institutions of patriarchy has amounted to a kind of gang rape of minds as well as of bodies.

This rising feminist interest in the politics of language is reflected in the growing number of book-length works exclusively concerned with the topic (by, for example, Mary Ellman, Mary Ritchie Key, Robin Lakoff, Mary Daly, Casey Miller and Kate Swift). Many women linguists and sociologists have painstakingly analysed sex differentiation in language/speech; other writers, particularly poets and novelists, are engaged in the search for what is variously described as a "women's discourse," "women's style," or "common language."

In summary, New Wave Feminism has provided us with a critique of patriarchal linguistic behaviour that has pinpointed its deficiencies as a reflector of women's experience — and has swiftly moved from that work of demolition to the birthing of a revised language/speech. This development has been complemented by a new aesthetic for its implementation and interpretation. The much debated issue of whether or not social change must precede linguistic change is becoming an irrelevant one. Women are working simultaneously on both fronts to alter the socio-economic context (and consequently our definitions of ourselves) and to express the new realities in a language/speech that does not betray our knowledge and power.

Over fifty years ago in her essay "Women and Fiction" Virginia Woolf outlined the two major difficulties confronting the woman writer, what she called the "technical difficulty" — "that the very form of the (male) sentence does not fit her" because "it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman's use" — and what might be termed the 'philosophical difficulty:' "...both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values — to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. And for that, of course, she will be criticized." Now Virginia Woolf was no mean seer; the subject matter of women's writing has undergone a radical sea-change in recent years. Traditional female stereotypes have been swept aside by clear-sighted, unromantic explorations of our sexuality. Sentimental portraits of The Angel in the House have given way to women characters who often experience monogamous marriage, domesticity and motherhood as oppressive, life-denying institutions. Some seek alternatives in separation, divorce, celibacy, lesbianism, careers, abortions. *Rubyfruit Jungle*, *Bear*, *Fear of Flying*, *The Women's Room* are unmistakably contemporary novels. While fantasizing about gay sex, erotic animals, or the "zipless fuck" may not have been beyond the limits of Granny's imagination, writing it down for publication certainly was.

As the thematic focuses, perspectives and accents have changed, the need for a more appropriate 'sentence' has become evident. During the '70s Canadian

writers Joan Haggerty, Valerie Kent, Sharon Riis, Monica Holden-Lawrence, Audrey Thomas, S.S. Smith, Nicole Brossard and Marie-Claire Blais have published first-rate innovative fictions. The list is augmented in the United States by the work of Susan Sontag, Joy Williams, June Arnold, Carol Spearin McCauley, Momma Alta, Elana Nachman, and Carol Emshwiller. The attack on convention has extended to include an attack on style and form.

Here are two novelists writing on the same topic, but with one hundred and fifty years between them. The first is an elegant assertion from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: "...marriage is the only honorable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune." The second, no less elegant but striking a somewhat different tone, is from Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart*:

Conventions, like clichés, have a way of surviving their own usefulness. They are then excused or defended as the idioms of living. For everyone, foreign by birth or by nature, convention is a mark of fluency. That is why, for any woman, marriage is the idiom of life. And she does not give it up out of scorn or indifference but only when she is forced to admit that she has never been able to pronounce it properly and has committed continually its grossest grammatical errors. For such a woman marriage remains a foreign tongue...

Between these two quotations (it is interesting that the latter draws upon language and grammar as rich sources of metaphor) we swing from a reality in which a heroine's options were limited to negotiating her way into the marriage-as-a-commodity market, to one in which her choices include a loving, sexual relationship with another woman.

Perhaps what is most striking, though, is that both passages are written in the conventional language of the traditional novel form. Remarking upon this stylistic similarity seems important to me because it introduces into our discussion of women and language a necessary cautionary note: categorizing literary styles as 'male' or 'female,' 'traditional' or 'experimental,' should not imply an *a priori* value judgement. These are distinctions of considerable usefulness and their application to certain literary texts has illuminated major areas of interest and concern to feminist readers and critics. Yet we should be wary of elevating the 'radical feminist' style to a linguistic deity who issues prescriptions and proscriptions with the smug assurance of a word cop. (The French Academy did precisely this for centuries; perhaps it is not surprising that contemporary French feminists have the strongest contempt for language conventions.) It would be unfortunate if we allow our researches into linguistic and stylistic differences to eventuate in the creation of yet another female ghetto, a separatist myth of language. Any critical discourse in which we engage should, for example, propose sufficiently flexible criteria to allow for the fullest appreciation of 'traditionalists' such as Adele Wiseman and Margaret Drabble. Within the mind of a good writer an idea finds its appropriate metaphor according to its own idiosyncratic dictates; only the unfettered creative imagination — not unthinking adherence to the dictates of the marketplace, popular taste, political movements or religion — can

mediate with integrity between word and image, content and form.

The possibility that there may, indeed, be stylistic and structural correlatives for the peculiar cyclical rhythms of the female body is a challenging one (Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and Jovette Marchessault's "Night-Cows," printed in this issue, point in this direction.) And the possibility that the traditional alienation of woman's mind/body, a schizophrenic split engendered by centuries of male literature and theology and perpetuated by modern advertising, might be dissolved by rooting language in the female body carries with it truly revolutionary healing potential. Certainly Adrienne Rich's *Dream of a Common Language* conveys the full lyrical force of such an ideal — the sense of *possessing* ourselves and of achieving power over reality that naming gives us.

A child revels in the sense of identity that knowing her name gives her. Daily I hear my two year-old daughter hypnotically chant her name, her very own mantra; and daily I watch my four year-old painstakingly write down each letter of her name until the fully-achieved 'RACHEL' makes her grin with pride and recognition. My language "dream" for them is that they continue to perceive themselves as word-makers, creators of language as well as the recipients of a culturally-defined language and conception of reality. That they might share in the struggle towards the articulation of a language which captures the radically new forms into which the experience of their generation of women inevitably will fall. A language rich enough to convey women's passionate anger and love, supple enough to accommodate our ambivalences and confusions, our challenging and sometimes threatening diversity. A language of growth, process and change.

That this dream is something more tangible than a feminist chimera is abundantly evident in the current issue of *Fireweed*. Our articles range over a broad expanse of the women-and-language terrain. Jane Rule explores the subject from a novelist's viewpoint as she searches for a humane fictional idiom that accurately reflects, among other things, the experience of women loving women. Suzette A. Henke's article on rape and seduction in modern literature provides an interesting counterpoint to Jane Rule's search by directing our attention to the often explicit, sometimes implied, sexual violence in several major novels in the male tradition. Adrienne Rich's important selected essays, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* — a book rooted in the theme of language and power — is examined by Linda Rahm. Rich's passionate conviction that "In a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence," informs Barbara Godard's article on two Canadian women novelists, Elizabeth Smart and Thérèse Tardif, whose controversial works were effectively silenced for decades. From her perspective as a feminist literary critic Susan Wolfe provocatively argues for a 'woman's style,' drawing for elucidation upon the innovative work of three lesbian writers, Kate Millett, Jill Johnston and Monique Wittig. Maija Blauberg's article surveys one controversial aspect in the movement for language change — the introduction of the non-sexist term *Ms*. Pamela Fishman examines the politics of sexual dominance in mixed-sex conversations. And, on a humorous note, Mariana Valverde shows us the pitfalls of trying to speak as a politically 'correct,' verbally circumspect feminist. We also feature Anne Bolgan's interview with novelist Joan

Barfoot, whose award-winning first novel *Abra* opens with these words:

My name is Abra.

My name is Abra.

I had almost forgotten that; the naming of things lost its importance here, with no one to hear them named....

Abra. An odd name. Today I have said it over and over, making the sounds, making it disintegrate into nonsense. The harsh "A" at the beginning, sliding away into softness. Abra. That is my name; it is what other people have called me. It loses its meaning with repetition. My name. Abra.

The work of the three visual artists — Barbara Astman, Nancy Nicol, and Liliane Lijn, is interesting both in relation to their multi-media presentations (all three often combine words/texts with their images) and to their mastery of complex technologies once regarded as the exclusive preserve of male artists.

Our editorial selection of fiction and poetry for this issue was governed simply by our desire to publish the work of experimental writers, women who are pushing language and structure beyond their customary limits. The three book reviews are thematically linked through their consideration of the work of leading Québécois feminist writers, several of whom illustrate the remarkable range of linguistic experimentation currently being executed by French-speaking women.

In addition to an interview with Denise Boucher, we are delighted to present the first translation into English of an excerpt from her brilliant and controversial play, *Les fées ont soif*. Apart from its intrinsic excellence, we were interested in *Les fées* as a banned text. Boucher's vision of what happens when the Virgin Mary breaks her two thousand-year silence is a startling testimony to the potency of feminist naming. Her 'heretical' play has outraged those who are still mentally confined to their clerically-based, doctrinaire assumptions about women's 'proper' roles. Their reaction to her characters' words has shown us a new twist in the old double standard: when women appropriate 'male' swear words, they (words and women) become libellous obscenities. When a woman identifies in her womanliness with the Holy Mother, she is condemned for her sacrilege.

Michèle Jean's retrospective survey of the past two decades of Quebec feminism provides some significant insights into the social and political context of Boucher's play. Finally, the work of Quebec feminist Jovette Marchessault — writer, painter and sculptor — epitomizes the powerful work we celebrate in these pages.

Beneath this entire issue of *Fireweed* pulses a hard-won feminist conviction: words belong to us, too; language is ours, to shape as we will. The evidence is in, and it is overwhelming. The struggle for equality is not won, and while we admit that our lived realities may never equal our finest fantasies, this new awareness that we can re-create ourselves through naming our world, will surely inspire feminists in our ongoing work of social and cultural regeneration.

Elizabeth Brady

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



**NATIONAL
WOMEN'S PLAYWRITING
COMPETITION**

□ Deadline: February 1st, 1990 □
Canadian citizens and landed
immigrants □ Unpublished scripts
□ \$5.00 entry fee per script
□ Awards include publication
and professional workshop
□ Author's name, address
and telephone number along
with the title of the play must
be contained in a sealed
envelope, attached to the
manuscript. Only the title of
the play should appear on
the outside of the envelope
and the cover page of the
manuscript. □ This
playwriting competition
is sponsored by
Fireweed, a Canadian
journal of women's art
and culture □ Send all
manuscripts before the
February 1st, 1990
deadline to "...but
can she write?"
□ Fireweed,
Women's Play-
writing Competition,
P.O. Box 278
Station B, Toronto
Ontario M5T 2W2

...but can she write?

The following letters refer to the poster used by *Fireweed* to promote our National Women's Playwriting Competition: "... but can she write?" The reactions, as you may read below, are deeply felt and strongly worded; they have given rise to a great deal of thought and discussion among the members of the *Fireweed* Collective about a number of important points facing feminists today — the nature and acceptable limits of satire; the necessity of creating new images for, of and by women; conscious and unconscious conventions and standards of beauty in 1979; acceptable feminist attitudes towards female sexuality; and the forms of our reactions to the renewed and strengthened gender stereotyping by the media.

A number of readers requested an apology for the use of this image and specified that the apology should include withdrawal of the offending poster and its replacement. This, however, is impossible. While we share the concern and respect the integrity underlying these complaints, we sincerely believe that the poster is entirely free of any sexism or misogyny. On the contrary, it is a creative, vibrant and powerful reminder to us all of the continued repression of women through legal, cultural, social, economic and psychological means.

Along with a selection of these letters we are including the full text of our response (sent to all those who expressed their disapproval) in order to share with all our readers the dialogue as it has progressed thus far. This dialogue, however, continues as our thinking develops through communication with you. We welcome your participation in this ongoing exchange.

The Fireweed Collective

The Women Students' Office recently received a copy of your poster "... but can she write?" with a request to post it on our noticeboard. The picture causes us such concern that we are obliged to return it to you with a strong protest. Perhaps it is your intention to satirize the "... black and blue from the Rolling Stones and I love it" form of advertising that has been the subject of much feminist protest. There is, however, a fine line between satire and exploitation of the very images which are objectionable in the first place. The poster in question oversteps that line.

Last week Vancouver hosted a conference on pornography during which both local women and a noted feminist from the East made valiant attempts to state the feminist position that the use of violence and sexual degradation in

the media is unacceptable to women. The issue is, therefore, in the forefront of our awareness. We cannot sit back and accept material that exploits and degrades women by depicting them as sex objects and appropriate objects for violence. Whether this is your intention or not, this is how your poster appears to us; it is a piece of pornography that teaches well what our North American culture practises daily: Do violence to women. It both angers and saddens us that women themselves should propagate such an image. We cannot under any circumstance post the enclosed, nor will we encourage other women's groups on campus to do so.

*Lorette K. Woolsey, Ph.D.
Director and the Staff of the
Women Students' Office
University of British Columbia*

We have just received your poster for the National Women's Playwriting Competition.

We were shocked at the image of the woman that was presented. It appears that you meant to be satirical, but have succeeded in reinforcing many of the myths and stereotypes surrounding women.

A naked woman clutching her typewriter, backing off, and looking threatened. Is a male worker attacking her? Her legs (feet encased in stilleto heels, no less), spread, with the typewriter extending just below her crotch. Her hands are trapped inside the typewriter. This is not funny!

*You are once again portraying women in an objectified, sexual manner, and we were unpleasantly surprised to see such an image come from a women's journal such as *Fireweed*.*

We hope you find this criticism valid and helpful.

*Sincerely,
Lyn MacDonald
for the Vancouver Women In
Focus Collective*

I am writing to take strong exception to the advertising poster you have distributed for the national women's playwriting competition.

The poster is objectionable on two counts. First the picture of the woman is reminiscent of standard media advertising which aims to ridicule women. Perhaps the intent was to use satire but the effect is to add to the reams of advertisements which degrade women. There is nothing in the content of the poster to challenge this impression. In fact the very title of the competition intensifies it and this is the second count on which I find the ad objectionable. "But can she

write . . ." implies doubt as to whether there can be a positive answer to the question.

The fact that a women's periodical has distributed this ad is all the more upsetting. It does not, as you may have intended, reveal that the whole thing is tongue-in-cheek.

I sincerely hope you will stop distribution of the poster, issue a new one that offers women the equality and respect we deserve, and run an apology for the current one in your magazine at least.

*Yours,
Sandra G. Shreve
Vancouver*

Thank you for sending the announcement of the "National Women's Playwriting Competition."

We think you must be mistaken however about the nature of our courses. We do not have a playwriting program for women only — we have men and women playwrights!

Unfortunately, we couldn't post the announcement anyway as the photograph is very offensive to our artistic community.

*Yours sincerely,
Janet M. Amy
Administrative Assistant
Performing Arts Dept.
The Banff Centre for Continuing
Education, Alberta*

Everyone here thinks your poster for the playwright's competition is the pits, so don't expect any cooperation from us. We're not hanging it.

*Bill Glassco
Tarragon Theatre
Toronto*

This poster is an outrage. What is the purpose of having a writing competition for women, and using this kind of poster to advertise it? Surely organizers of the competition hope to have material submitted that is written from the perspective of women. This misogynist portrayal of women as undignified object of ridicule is part of a long tradition that I would think you would be trying to break away from.

If this is an ill-conceived attempt to lampoon stereotypical views of women, I seriously suggest to you that you use more positive images of women and not add to the plethora of negative images existing in the minds of people in this culture. There is no contradiction between humour and positive use of imagery for women. I urge you think this problem through so that you can advertise in a more responsible way in the future.

*Isobel Kiborr
Vancouver Women's Health Collective*

I am returning a poster that I consider obscene. Not only are women upset but the men in our office question "What could prompt a women's group to use such gross material?"

Women's organizations and individuals who received or saw your poster have expressed their indignation and will undoubtedly be corresponding with you. It angers me that women should stoop to use such tactics to obtain attention. I can perceive no rationale. How can we expect male society to cease denigrating women in advertising if we as women sink lower than them?

*(Mrs.) C.K. Waddell, Director
Women's Exploratory Apprenticeship
Program, B.C. Ministry of Labour*

The original of the enclosed copy of your poster was received by ASWAC (Alberta Status of Women Action Committee). Many Edmonton women have now seen it. I'll quote a few reactions (after gasps, dropped jaws and shaking of heads): "gross", "disgusting", "what the hell does Fireweed think it's doing". All of these expressions match my own sentiments.

A promotional campaign, if it is to be effective, should try to anticipate how the audience will receive the message. I suspect that the message about the competition will get drowned by feelings of outrage. Putting it mildly, I am deeply disappointed that a women's collective which publishes excellent material shows such insensitivity to its sisters.

*In Sisterhood,
Julie Anne Le Gras*

The Members of the Hamilton Status of Women Committee have instructed me, as their Chairman, to write to you stating most vehemently their disapproval of your poster.

We do approve of a playwriting competition for women, but we cannot accept the kind of vulgar and disgusting display which you seem to consider good advertising.

You will note that I have used the masculine salutation to begin this letter. I have done this believing that no thinking woman would possibly agree to the use of this appalling insult.

*(Mrs.) Pat Ford
Alderman, Ward 3
City of Hamilton*

Dear Friend,

Thank you for expressing your opinion on the poster the women on the Fireweed Collective are using to promote our National Women's Playwriting Competition. We hope you will understand our point of view on the matter, and that you'll pass this letter on to your friends as well as feel free to respond to it.

For those whose first introduction to *Fireweed* was the poster, the enclosed press release should give you the basic information about our magazine, as well as the competition and our reasons for sponsoring it.

On to the poster. The image which has proven so controversial comes from a photo-cartoon series entitled, "SuperSecretary", by conceptual artist Tanya Rosenberg. (Tanya herself is the woman depicted.) The photo is intended by the artist to satirize two of the most prevalent and restricting stereotypes of women. Rosenberg is juxtaposing the "blonde bombshell" — woman as sexual object, with "Miss Efficiency" — the organizer, researcher, typist of "his" work: woman as functionary.

The thought that some of you would find this image offensive or sexist did not occur to us. Certainly the image can be interpreted as outrageous, but both Rosenberg and the Collective feel that it is only by strongly confronting the traditional images that are foisted upon women, and the context in which they are presented, that the manipulative nature of these conventional roles can be examined. In using the clown-like image of a woman, parodying the sex-kitten, Rosenberg is asking us to consider how the cosmetized, air-brushed version, seen so often in commercial advertising, is used to exploit. Unfortunately, some people perceive the image not as satire, but as the very thing it meant to debunk and ridicule.

The caption ". . . but can she write?" was intended to provoke the obvious answer: of course! This play on words on the career door slammer seemed entirely appropriate for a search for writers. The response to the competition will be numerous interesting plays, thus helping to demonstrate that women's place is in all endeavours, artistic or otherwise — and can not be confined to the traditional roles of, say, sex-kitten or typist.

These are serious times. The past several years have been a period of quiet in Canadian feminism, a time of solid work on basic issues: day care, social services, equal rights legislation. It's been a time of slogging foot work, a productive, but less than exuberant time. There are good reasons for rage in a period when so many of the achievements we have so painfully carved out are being threatened. But while we respect the anger that some of you felt when presented with this image — your feeling that its humour and parody are out of keeping with these sombre times — we must clearly perceive what is as great a threat to women in these reactionary times: a refusal to explore all aspects of our experience, to deny the ways — and the images — that are used to confine us all.

Sincerely,
The Fireweed Collective

**"Combining a career with motherhood
is my most demanding role...
and Fermodyl haircare systems fit right into my lifestyle."**

Among the most
advanced haircare
systems obtain-
able, Fermodyl
is used only in
salons by
stylists.



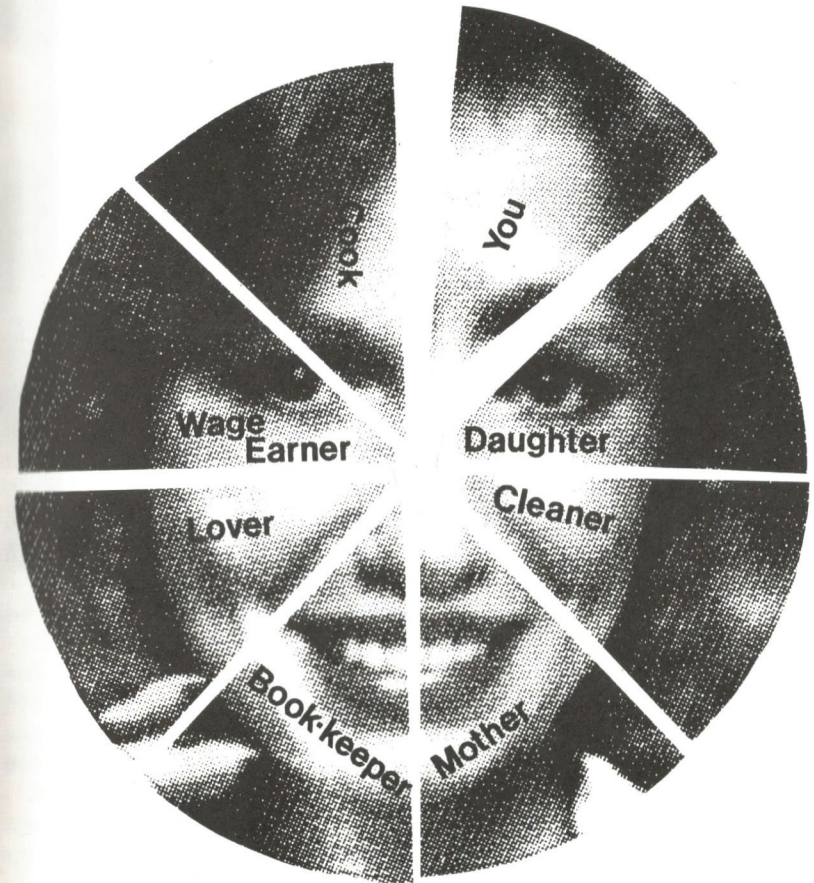
I'VE FOUND ME.
Business woman, fashion consultant, wife,
mother. Yes, they're all me. And Letter
Designer Fabrics helps bring them
all together.
As a Letter representative I show
fabrics in my home by private appointment
and I choose the part-time work
works for me... and my

The Active Woman

She can't spend that much time getting rid of wrinkles.
But she can do something about their cause!



**Cindy Roberts, 1978 Mrs. America
from Anchorage, Alaska, is 31
years old, a dynamic career
woman, wife, and mother of two—
an all-around winner!**



SUPER-MS. The Bionic Feminist



"...but can she
live past 32?"



The
danger
of
positive
thought

Rina Fraticelli

Many aspects of the controversy over the "... but can she write?" poster image have provoked me to serious thought. For example, what *exactly* is "vulgar," "obscene," "disgusting," and (the most commonly attributed adjective) "gross" about the woman, SuperSecretary, carrying the typewriter? Is it who she is? That she is? Or how she looks? The questions which have disturbed me most deeply, however, were generated by an attitude which, though never really articulated, seemed to pervade much of the criticism. The gist of it was, "How dare you, as feminists, portray us this way?" This attitude was expressed to me most forcefully and succinctly in the closing suggestion of one angry correspondent, "... I seriously suggest that you use more positive images of women and not add to the plethora of negative images existing in the minds of people in our culture."

Although the majority of the women who complained did acknowledge the satirical intent of the poster, this fact in no way abated their anger. Their letters seemed to say, "Yes, I know you are calling attention to these terrible negative stereotypes which continue to afflict us. Don't." It began to feel a little like the messenger was getting her head cut off because of the unpleasantness and the unpopularity of the message.

No one can argue with the importance of generating and reinforcing strong, positive images for women. We need these to nourish and support our continued development, and to foster improved opportunities in the minds of our children. The question, however, remains: how can one be positive *and* truthful at the same time? How does one propagate images which depict the successful, fulfilled

woman — without creating the dangerous impression that this is an accurate representation of women today? For the truth of the matter is that both the possibilities for, and the actual condition of women today are far worse than most of us would like to believe; certainly worse, in most areas, than they were ten years ago. And a significant impediment to remedying the situation now may be our very unwillingness to come to terms with the grim facts of it.

In the all-powerful media, the order of the day seems to be a proliferation of advertisements depicting an elegant, coiffed, composed and refined woman visibly enjoying her secure position of professional power. This image sells a multitude of products (most often expensive luxury items and cosmetics) and services with the argument that, "We've made it. We've arrived. We can now have this desirable product / service because we *now* deserve it."

This sort of advertising compliments our dreams, flatters our strength of conviction, and congratulates us on our successful conversion from second-class citizens to significant persons of authority. Consistently, what we are being told in these ads is that both battle and war are over: we won and we can now relax our guard and begin to enjoy the benefits of full participation in society. And we can *allow* ourselves to enjoy our femininity again because, "When you've made it, you don't have to be *afraid* to be a woman."

A closer investigation of these advertisements reveals that "success" is easily translatable as "slim, stylish and sensual." They depict the successful woman as one who *adds* a lucrative, high-pressured professional position to the full load of traditional responsibilities of wife, mother and lover. She does it all. Easily. And she loves it. Success for the emancipated woman of 1979 is also characterized through the same forms of hierarchical power we so abhorred in men just a few years ago. Collective efforts are not admired on TV.

This sort of image-making is far more offensive and dangerous, in my opinion, than the type which is obviously and directly aimed at women's insecurities as wives and mothers and sex-objects: ring-around-the-collar is a classic of this genre. The latter assumes an attitude towards women which is thoroughly abhorrent, with no redeeming value, but it does so both at its core and on its surface. Because of this both its assumptions and implications are more obvious and, therefore, less potent.

It is easy to get sucked in by the projection of women as airline pilots, busy executives on the go, and scientists making crucial discoveries. The image is made all the more seductive when it *says* to us that we can have this achievement with no attendant loss in domestic or romantic bliss. Unfortunately, it is devastatingly easy for pictures, still or moving, to lie while appearing to do just the opposite. Those are undeniably real women, and we do *see* her, in each sixty-second ad, kissing the children off to school with home-baked desserts in their lunch buckets, giving dictation in her executive suites while signing reams of important documents supplied by some underling, weaving in her *off* hours, and slipping into bed in costly lingerie to the evident approval of her handsome husband. She looks wonderful, she feels wonderful. She's not tired. And men gaze wistfully as she strides elegantly, purposefully and aromatically by.

Of course, it's all celluloid lies, but how feeble are our protests against the power of those glossy, air-brushed versions of reality we are being proffered. To some, this may sound like sour grapes — how can we not be thrilled by the depiction of women in such enviable positions?

I see Tanya Rosenberg's SuperSecretary as the child calling the Emperor naked. Rosenberg's presence is in direct and flagrant contradiction to those images which depict the role of women as different than reality imposes. And after the amount of work feminists have done over the years, it is extremely painful to admit that women average 59¢ to every dollar made by men, that we are *more*, and not less, ghettoized in low-status, low-paying jobs, and that the disparity between the salaries of men and women has *grown* rather than diminished. The marked absence of women from the fields of politics and economics further illustrates the cosmetic or "storefront" nature of the success stories postulated by the media.

This is a sensitive and double-edged situation. I am, of course, thrilled that our daughters see women depicted as pilots, engineers and architects in the magazines they read. But I fear they will need more strength, confidence and optimism than those images can inspire when they encounter the economic, legislative, social and psychological obstacles to their best efforts.



Sexuality In Literature

JANE RULE

I have been out of the academy long enough not to make a fetish of defining terms, but the word 'erotic,' in the dictionary simply "pertaining to sexual love," carries with it for a great many people pejorative meanings as well. Erotic literature is expected to be sexually arousing and therefore, at least to some, "obscene," offensive to modesty or decency. Erotic language is "dirty" language. Though there are obvious institutions to blame for our prudery and squeamishness about sexuality, even without centuries of repression by the church, there are fundamental ambiguities in our nature and condition which would never allow us the innocent and simple sexual pleasure we can think is out there beyond all the negative morality. It is not my purpose here to discuss the complexities of relationship between our sexual and mortal natures, but only to suggest that a body we know is designed to die will never be a simple plaything, nor will the language we use to express our sexuality ever be without that irony. As if that weren't problem enough, much of what is sexual has nothing to do with love or even, for both or all parties, pleasure. It is perfectly clear why erotic language so often borrows images from the hunt, why Kate Millett's title, *Sexual Politics*, has become one of our defining phrases. A language adequate to express our sexual experience must be able to describe negotiations far more complex than the entrance of penis or finger into vagina, and it will arouse pity and terror as well as pleasure in its readers if it says anything real about that experience.

For many writers the question of erotic acts and language is confined to personal taste or inhibition. In poetry, in poetic or autobiographical prose, the writer has the hard but clear job of establishing her own preferences and taboos in a language graphically or metaphorically accurate and appealing at least to her.

Adrienne Rich, therefore, in *The Dream of a Common Language*, draws very particularly on her own experience in loving another woman. In twenty-one love poems there is only one "(THE FLOATING POEM, UNNUMBERED)" which focuses on the sexual. Even in it, she avoids the names of most sexual parts of the body. There are the "half-curved frond of the fiddlehead fern" and the "rose-wet

eave" instead. Monique Wittig, on the other hand, in *Lesbian Body*, fills the pages of a book with the parts of the female body with the accuracy of a medical student and the passion of a devouring lover until every bone, muscle, nerve, gland, secretion is eroticized in a dissection which goes on and on in sexual frenzy. While Adrienne Rich is choosing to love "for once/with all my intelligence" and therefore rejects, as much as she can, the obsessive, the guilt-ridden, the fearful, or holds them at the arm's length of reason to understand and control them, Monique Wittig enters the experience and allows all the Catholic energy of disgust, the cannibal urgency as well as the tenderness and wonder, simply to be. Between these extremes are a number of autobiographical writers in the process of explaining their sexual experience as vividly as they can. Kate Millett in *Sita* can be extravagantly romantic, biblical in language rhythms, and come down hard with a political fist: "I am her cunt and against my will I tell her so, slavish, owned, devoted, open, a thing to be used."

Though all three of these writers are lesbian and writing about sexual experience between women, only Adrienne Rich makes an attempt to describe and live in terms of a relationship between two equals. For her, therefore, the problem of erotic language is severe because political connotations of sexual nouns like "cunt" are alien to that experience. Both Monique Wittig and Kate Millett are describing relationships in which there is a struggle for power not only between the lovers but in each to be at the same time slavish worshipper and devourer, as if the lover were a manifestation of what we call holy and therefore eat. They have rich sources of erotic behavior and language since so much of myth already incarnates unequal love, the transformation of lover into beast or tree, since all already sexual language carries with it the colors of domination, worship, and death. Yet, of the three, the very spareness of Adrienne Rich's language for "a whole new poetry beginning here" can arouse desire in the mind undivorced from the body, a longing for resolution which is neither union nor death.

It is probably obvious that Adrienne Rich is for me the writer who has something new and important to say, but as a writer I may learn as much from the other two. For the novelist the problem of erotic behavior and language is not one of personal taste or inhibition. Just as a novelist does not give all her characters her own features, needs, moods, so the sexual natures of characters vary, and the novelist who chooses to deal with that aspect of her characters may often be faced with offenses against her own taste and morality, or at least a very hard balance between the requirements of aesthetics and truth must be struck.

"Both Wittig and Millet are describing relationships in which there is a struggle . . . in each lover to be at the same time slavish worshipper and devourer, as if the lover were a manifestation of what we call holy and therefore eat."

There are arguments for avoiding the problem altogether from those who want sexuality denied or at least kept secret. There are arguments for partial censorship, for political as well as moral reasons. There are lesbians who see no reason to write anything about male or heterosexual experience. Increasing numbers of women are arguing for censorship of erotic materials which abuse women and children, willing to risk sacrificing freedom to prevent license.

For anyone to deal with even a limited range of sexuality, there is a lot that is exploitive and abusive both in people's fantasies and in their behavior. If we are ever going to understand ourselves as sexual creatures, at least some novelists and biographers, as well as sexologists, are going to have to learn to be accurate about sexual experience, knowing the difference between fantasy and fact, between what ought to be and what is. Knowledge is a collective enterprise. Without it understanding is impossible. Ignorance is too often a murderous vulnerability.

Having decided that what is explicitly sexual is sometimes necessary in my own work, and being the sort of novelist who needs to draw on a range of experience often beyond my own, I am particularly grateful to writers like the three I have mentioned, for they open ranges of experience and of attitude my own life might not encompass. I have to be equally grateful to the writers Kate Millett so expertly exposed in *Sexual Politics* for giving me some real insight into the abusive violence some men feel toward women; for, given the requirements of my own craft, I may have to be for a while inside such a man's head. There I must be willing to use a language and speak a view that is authentic to him, however offensive it may be to me.

I remember how surprised I was, when my first novel was about to be published and I was informed that I could be sued for anything any one of my characters said. "But I often don't agree with what they say," I protested. The lawyer was not interested in the clear distinction I make between my own voice and the voices of my characters. Neither, I have found, are many of my readers. A friend on Galiano tried to defend me to someone who was protesting the "foul" language in *The Young in One Another's Arms* with, "But Jane doesn't talk like that. It's just her characters." When I hear that it sounds like the sort of defense my brother used when he was three or four years old and always blamed what he had broken, eaten, or neglected to eat on "two bears." Anything I allow to be in my fictional world is something I have to take responsibility for.

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Censoring subject matter doesn't seem to be the answer. Pretending self-righteously violent men do not exist will not make them go away. The aggressive man and the masochistic woman are the sexual norms of our society. As clichés they affect real men and women in relationship with each other. Presented uncritically in novels, plays, films, they can re-inforce the acceptability of abusive and submissive behavior. Entirely censored, they are given a different sort of freedom to exist in secret, as so much child abuse does.

Morality for the novelist is expressed not so much in the choice of subject matter as in the plot of the narrative, which is perhaps why in our morally bewildered time novelists have often been timid about plot. Who is materially rewarded, emotionally fulfilled, allowed to live are more powerful judgments than pages of sermonizing. Real propagandists are always strong plot makers. Dickens, killing innocent children to make his readers feel guilty enough to reform, is a classic example. There can be both relief and satisfaction in witnessing a system of rewards and punishments we so miss in real life that we have invented heaven and hell as compensations. What sadistic fun Dante had putting all his personal and political enemies through a hell of his own designing, and yet he is never singled out with de Sade as a man of perverse tastes because Dante was being "moral." Even I, not Catholic, raised in a nominally Christian family in which reason took precedence over systems of rewards and punishments, was so affected by Dante's particularly designed tortures that I had to write his burning sands out of my homosexual heart before I could go on to saner perceptions. I resist strictly moral consequences in my fiction. I so little like to kill people that victims of so severe a judgment begin to build up unnatural amounts of sympathy to resist such character assassination. And so characters should if they are anything but mouthpieces for a point of view. In these morally suspect times, it is as dangerous in fiction as it is in life to make martyrs. I leave my characters so much still alive with so many options left that readers often write to me suggesting sequels in which finally justice is done. They often don't want to reward the characters I would choose or punish those I find most reprehensible.

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Resisting judgment in plot is not simply a matter of squeamishness, uncertainty, or lack of responsibility. It is, in my case, resisting mistakes and lies, particularly in the realm of erotic experience. Take a simple example of that kind of lie: men do not respect — that is marry — women who are sexually generous. Even before the pill, marriage was not the reward of the virtuous nearly as often as it was the result of pregnancy, an entrapment in which men were perceived as the victims and allowed, therefore, some measure of revenge, harsh economic control, rape inside marriage, drunken brutality. Now, as women have greater control over their own bodies and greater economic opportunities for independence, they increasingly fear the entrapment of marriage and understand, as they didn't before when they had fewer options, that they are the real victims of the institution they have been taught to work so hard to deserve. Fiction that goes on "rewarding" women with marriage serves a morality I find reprehensible. Nevertheless, some of my characters do marry hopefully, with a sense of being rewarded. One is even a virgin (probably frigid). I am trying to write about the real world in which people are often influenced by the silliest of moral teachings, for which I am more interested in understanding than judging them. Marriage does not come at the end of a book or story. There is always time left for irony. My responsibility, as I see it, is not to present the world as it ought to be but as it is. Understanding is an imperfect tool of limited effectiveness in controlling or changing anything, but it can lay before us the options of cynic or lover in terms less distorted than anything either Dickens or Dante has offered us.

Dealing with the lies about sexual experience by avoiding obvious devices of plot is easier than dealing with the problems of erotic language. The vocabulary of sexual love is male ammunition for the ancient war. Even the medical terms which are used for parts of the female body like vagina ("sheath") and clitoris (from "to shut or hide") are descriptive only of the male uses of them. Most vulgar terms like "boobs" manage not only to describe female breasts but to suggest something worthless (booby prize) and at the same time dangerous (booby trap). Women use for themselves such terms as "horny" and "jerk off" though neither is descriptive of their own physical experience. There may have been some value at first in taking male vocabulary so that it is no longer something exclusively for their use. A standard defense against all negative slang is the adopting of it by the abused group for positive identity, as has happened with "dyke" and "faggot." Recently there have also been attempts to make

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language speak for the female. I read in *Lesbian Tide* a claim that some women have "clit," the female equivalent for "balls." We may find value in words adopted and adapted, but they often seem more adequate for those sexual experiences which are as concerned with power as with pleasure, in their excitement something offensive. In the mouths of some of my characters as well as in their reveries, such words retain their ambiguity. One of my characters, a writer herself, broods on the limitations of erotic language:

The problem is that I have no language at all for my body or Roxanne's body that isn't either derisive or embarrassing. I don't like to write about fingering her ass hole, which immediately becomes personified for me as a belligerently stupid male, a surreal genie, metaphorical fart emanating from that...anus? I think of licorice, which I don't like. We make love without nouns as much as possible, speak in directions instead. "There." "Here?" "Yes, there." Adequate for the lovely circumstance of two very present and visible bodies which are wonderfully familiar in fact as well as practice, but a love letter filled with nothing but adverbs is ridiculous. Gertrude Stein tried to invent a new language for love-making, but it was more a code to be cracked than a communication. Imagine the limitation of that when scholars are still debating whether "cow" means turd or orgasm.

Well, an adequate love poem has been written with adverbs. Here is one of Phyllis Webb's *Naked Poems*:

*And
here
and here and
here
and over and
over your mouth*

I am sympathetic with my character's sense of defeat, though not finally willing to participate in it. She, like Gertrude Stein, struggles for a language in which to make love; that is only one, if not the least, of my concerns. Now that our sexual experience is increasingly available to us as a subject for contemplation, we have to extend our language to express our new consciousness until we have as many words for sexuality as the Eskimo has for snow, that pervasive, beautiful and mortal climate in which we all live.

CONTRAPPOSTO.

A STORY

by ELIZABETH BRADY

1

“What is the use of a book,” thought Alice, “without pictures or conversations?”

Later in the same book, the King said, gravely, “Begin and the beginning, and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”

The King was a fool. In his youth he had been corrupted by Aristotle.

Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas. (ascribed to Aristotle)

Aristotle is dear to me, but dearer still is Alice.

A beginning, then, with pictures. No conversations: my characters do not speak. Observe their postures.

Contrapposto. A story.

2

A woman is standing in front of a painting. Where the painting is hanging does not matter. It could be on the wall of some famous gallery; as it happens, it is in a private collection.

(And, one must concede, it also could be that she, the observant woman, has agreed to sleep with the owner of the painting in exchange for the dubious/indubitable privilege of looking at the painting.)

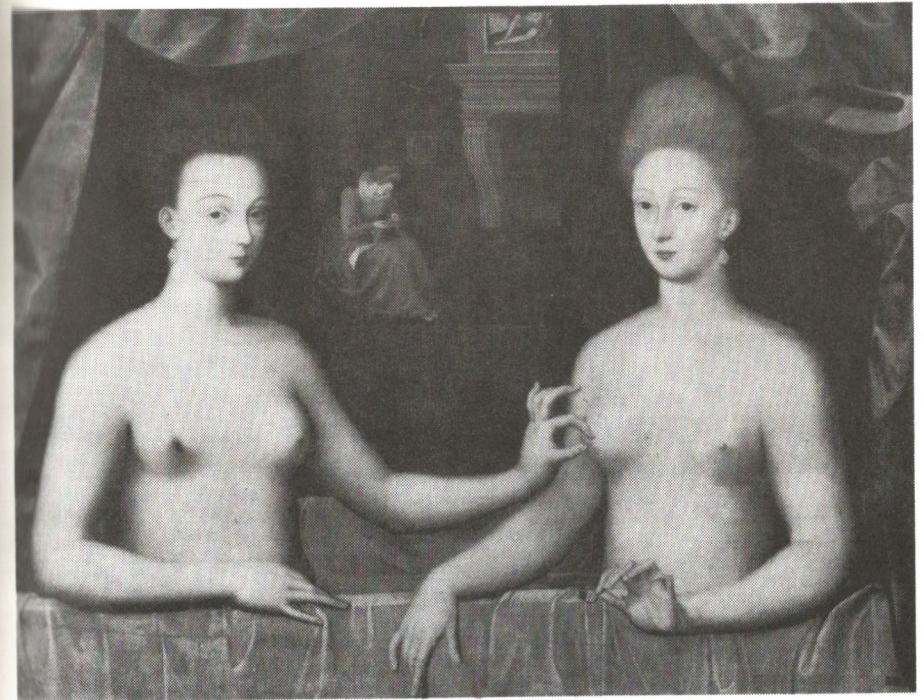
That she has agreed to so compromise herself does not matter.

In a world where bodies are objects without value unless painted or sculpted and Art is collected by rich old deviates.

Simply to be human is not enough.

The owner of the painting could be a man or a woman. That is as much a matter of speculation as the provenance of the painting. It matters.

But we do not know.



3

The subject of the painting is anyone's guess, although if one were to subject it to the scrutiny of ten people (who could be men or women: that does not matter) nine of them would agree that the painter (who is anonymous, surely not to himself, but all we know of him is that he is 'of the School of Fontainebleau') has depicted two women taking a bath together.

The front of the bath (which, with the two women inside it, occupies the foreground) is hung with a drapery. Curiously, it does not appear to be wet. Above and alongside the bathers hang two sharp-edged draperies. Making the whole scene look like part of a Punch and Judy show.

(Could they be marionettes? Might the tableau be animated from above by unseen strings?) Certainly their drawn-out arms have about them an air of cheerless lassitude, as though setting the two figures in motion could be brought about only through the meddling intervention of a *deus ex machina*.

So devoid of expression are the women's faces they might as well be masked. Perhaps they are. They are looking directly out into the world of their observance.

There is in the background

(which is obscure: it could be a sylvan landscape or a drawing-room) the seated figure of a woman, clothed and bent over, intent upon her needlepoint or catching a flea, perhaps. Like the suspended draperies around the bath, her dress falls into rigid folds.

No need to dwell on her, though, for she occupies the periphery of one's interest, as do the two bathers hers.



4

The woman who is presently looking at the painting is older than the two women in the bath. (Does this matter? We must wait and see.)

She is also colour-blind.

Her monochromatic attention has been rivetted by the following detail in the painting:

One of the figures (the one on the left as the observer sees it) is tweaking the other's right (*her* right: this seems important, as some pain may be involved) nipple with her left hand.



The recipient of the tweak does not appear to be displeased by what some might regard as a most disconcerting gesture. She is holding a small mystery object between the thumb and forefinger of her left hand.

The artist has given his work a title —

Gabrielle d'Estrées and Her Sister in the Bath

This tells us something, although precisely what is not clear. It does set one to wondering. Doesn't it?

Had he called it simply 'Two Women in the Bath' our range of legitimate interpretations would be greater.

But we have no choice but to get on with what is given.

We can in any case and for the moment dismiss the painter from our reckoning. He. is. dead. Gone the way of all flesh and his prior knowledge of that one incontrovertible fact probably made him a painter in the first place.

Before leaving him though I can tell you that, apart from being a good painter — you would agree if you could see his painting — he was a smart ass. He has left us an enigma:

What did he mean to convey through this arresting (to viewer and tweekee alike) gesture? What does it tell us about the bathers' relationship?

Something about his perception of things.

(Because he is an accomplished painter we cannot leap into that convenient foxhole labelled 'unintentional ambiguity.' No.)

We must snatch at whatever crumbs of freedom fall our way.

It occurs to me at this point that I have needlessly given up a pronominal freedom: I said earlier that the painter was anonymous.

Anon. could be a woman. However

She. is. dead.

The woman who is looking at the painting shows no sign of moving on.

Is she forestalling the advance of the fat, hungry fingers of the rich old deviate over her flesh?

(We must allow the alternative, slight as it may be and distasteful to the morally fastidious reader, that she is looking forward to being laid, or whatever.)

in a world where bodies are objects

Or is she presently engaged in that most fruitless of all human endeavours

trying to figure it out?

The two women in the painting, they too show no sign of moving on.
Nor have they ever, for four hundred years.

They are not real women, you say, they are representations of real women and thus not vulnerable to the myriad phenomena that set real women in motion. They have been sentenced for the life of the canvas to sit immobilized, trapped in a bath tub, one tweaking the other's nipple.

If we are humanists we can only hope that the activity is mutually agreeable and that the water does not get too cold.

We will not, however, be troubled by this or any other thought about the relative quantities of pain-pleasure these bathers are forced to endure-indulge if we happen to be Platonists, because we know that, at three removes from reality, they are immune from everything

— save the disapproval of the Philosopher King

(and why bother to reintroduce the male pronoun at this juncture in time, in herstory?)

To return to our woman. We have just caught her in an ecstatic moment. She thinks that she has *figured it out* (fool that she is).

She began by speculating that the two sisters were, possibly, lesbians;

she regressed from there by way of (she would call it 'feminine') intuition to an assurance that this matter of their deviate (for so she regards it) sexuality was indeed, and in deed, a probability;

at this very moment she believes that she has discovered the means of verifying her hypothesis:

(forgive her, she knows not what she does: in her youth she was corrupted by the logical positivists: anything that she can not prove she shuffles to the periphery of her interest. Thus is she sadly restricted to the world of her own observance.)

. . . "anyway," interrupts the King, gravely, "will you go on?"

She reaches into her alligator (perhaps *she* is kinky) handbag and extracts a small but elegant magnifying glass. Just as she is focussing it on the nipple-tweaking finger detail she is distracted by the unheady odour of cigar fumes.

She turns

Behind her, beckoning forebodingly, is a very old, exceedingly obese rich deviate in a black quilted smoking jacket. It is a man. Before following him (damn it) into his boudoir for god-knows-what decadent sensual delights / horrors, she glances quickly back at the painting.

Then it occurs to her that her about-to-be lover / torturer (sometimes they are one) may be a woman.

After all.

For a few seconds she will not know conclusively one way or the other: by then it (probably) will not matter.

Shriek. Shriek.

At the sound of the shrieks (remember, they could be from an excess of horror or delight, or some seductive mingling of the two) emanating from the boudoir, the two women in the painting stir.

THE TWO WOMEN IN THE PAINTING STIR.

Their movement, however brief and inconsequential to them, perhaps would not have been made so casually did they realize that it has just set revolving in their graves generations of grey aestheticians.

One (the one on the left) gently releases the other's nipple. They grin wickedly — how else? — at one another, then together shift their weight.

Thereby releasing from beneath their pearly buttocks a beautiful young man (as beautiful as the Botticelli Venus, he, but with different parts, of course.)

He is still breathing but, alas, his penis is limp. This is to be expected.

Water wilts.

Meanwhile back at the boudoir,

a single blood red rose in an ormolu vase
sheds a single petal
it falls soundlessly onto the carpet

four drops of blood
splash onto the petal
also soundlessly

THE TWO WOMEN IN THE PAINTING STIR.

How can this happen, you ask me?

Do I really expect you to believe that Gabrielle and her sister who are, after all these four hundred years, mere brush stokes on canvas and nothing more, do I really expect you to believe me when I say,

reader, they moved?

I do. This story is not a fiction (remember: because it lacks conversations, it is perhaps also wanting in usefulness).

Nor is it 'a tense and engrossing study of relative phenomena'

'a dazzling *tour-de-force*'

or 'a fable about parallel worlds'

This story is not an exercise in perspective — although I should have noted earlier that the postures of the bathers' bodies *is* weird, as though the artist had twisted their upper torsos on the same axis as their legs (which we can't see, but there are no grounds for inferring that they are amputees) but in a different plane.

No. I tell it like I see it.

There is no one present to authenticate what I have narrated (this the inevitable price one pays for atheism and indulging in first-person narrations).

The woman who was here at the beginning of the story is still in the boudoir.

Shriek. Shriek.

Shedding blood on a fallen rose petal
and soundlessly the shrieks fall.

The painting *Gabrielle d'Estrées and Her Sister in the Bath* still is swaying on the wall.

So you must accept what I say.

An ending is not in sight.

This is not a trick: no mirrors are required.

Where is your attention, percipient reader, now focussed?

If you could, would you peek unobserved into the boudoir (to have your suspicion laid, to rest)?

Or will you remain here, in front of the painting (to reconfirm your faith in known stabilities, that nothing moves if you don't)?

Contrapposto. A story.



Stop.

TUMBLING AND WITH TANGLED MANE

Marge Piercy

1
I wade in milk.
Only beige sand exists as the floor
of a slender nave before me.
Mewing fishhook cries of gulls
pierce the white from what must be up.
The fog slides over me like a trained
snake leaving salt on my lips. Somewhere
I can hear the ocean breathing.
The world is a benign jellyfish.
I float inhaling water that tastes
of iodine and thin bright blood.

2
We squat on a sandbar digging as the tide
turns and runs to bury the crosshatched scales,
the ribs of the bottom as if the ebbing
of waters exposed that the world is really
a giant flounder. As we wade landward
the intruding tide is so cold
my ankles ring like glass bells.
We lie belly up baking as the ocean
ambles toward us nibbling the sand.
Out to sea a fog bank stands like world's
end, the sharp place where boats fall off.

3
When a storm halts, people get into their
cars. They don't start picking up yet, the bough
that crashed on the terrace, the window
shattered. No, they rush with foot hard down
on the accelerator over the wet winding black
topped roads where the pine and oak start out
normal size and get smaller till they are
forests for mice. Cars line up on the bluff
facing waves standing tall as King Kong,
skyscrapers smashed before a giant wrecking ball.
Mad water avalanches. You can't hear.

Your hair fills with wet sand. Your windshield
is being sandblasted and will blind you as the sun
burns a hole in the mist like a cigarette
through a tablecloth and sets fire to the air.

4

A dream, two hundred times the same. The shore
can be red rocks, black or grey, sand dunes
or barrier reef. The sun blazes. The sky
roars a hard blue, blue as policemen.
The water is kicking. The waves leap
at the shore like flames out of control.
The sea gnashes snow capped mountains
that hurl themselves end over end, blocking
the sky. A tidal wave eats the land. Rearing
and galloping, tumbling and with tangled
mane the horses of the surf with mad eyes,
with snorting nostrils and rattling hooves
stampede at the land. I am in danger
yet I do not run. I am rooted watching
knowing that what I watch
is also me.

Making makes guilt. Cold fierce mother
who gouges deep into this pamet, who
rests her dragon's belly on the first rocks,
older than land, older than memory,
older than life, my power is so little
it makes me laugh how in my dreaming
lemur's mind making poems or tales or re-
volution is this storm on a clear day.

Of course danger and power mingle in all
birthing. We die by what we live by.
Again and again that dream comes when I set
off journeying to the back of my mind,
the bottom of the library, a joust with
what is: the sun a fiery spider high
overhead, the colors bright and clear as June,
the sea raging at the coast, always about
to overrun it, as in the eye of a hurricane
when the waves roll cascading in undiminished
but for a moment and in that place the air
is still, the moment of clarity out
of time at the center of an act.

O!

Marge Piercy

Oh, the golden bauble of your rising
wet from the waves rippling,
radiating like orgasm, round
as a singing mouth at full stretch,
rounds as the vagina when it takes,
round as a full belly, round
as a baby's head, you come to us
riding over the white manes
of the waves, walking on their backs
like a circus rider. Hoop
of cool fire, goose egg,
silver mirror in which we see
ourselves dimly but truly reflected,
our blood is salty water
you tug at, drawing us.
Red onion, I peel you layer
by layer and weep. The nights
carve you and then you swell
again, lady of the wild animals
whose homes are paved and poisoned,
lady of the furry mammals at teat
and the shimmering fish whose sides
echo you, of those who hunt for roots
and berries, hunt for the island
in the sea where love rules and women
are free to wax and wane and wander
in the sweet strict seasons
of our desires and needs.

*These two poems are from The Lunar Cycle, the central sequence of Ms. Piercy's
new volume of poetry, The Moon Is Always Female, forthcoming from Knopf.
"Tumbling and with tangled mane" is a midsummer poem to the lunar month
COLL, and "O" is the epigraph to the entire sequence.)*

BARBARA ASTMAN

“I WAS THINKING ABOUT YOU”

The newest SX-70 murals speak of memory, and how the memory becomes the truth of the situation regardless of what really occurred at that time. They also speak of the notion of influences, and how I feel as though I'm made up of bits and pieces of the people I've spent time with, books I've read, places travelled, and experiences from a variety of situations. I chose to address individuals who have affected my life over the years, and then selected specifics from particular experiences with each to write about. This written information is not directly about how I was influenced by each person, rather it is a specific which my memory has recorded about the person.

I have chosen to appear in each image to maintain the human element. My name is never mentioned, but the person written to is identified; the viewer can recognize the female form and reflect on the person I am addressing.

The objects — pencil, cigarette, lightbulb — are all about me, and do not reflect upon the person referred to. They are common objects found in my studio and used for common purposes.

There are many formal elements at work in each print. The colours, and colour combinations were chosen as carefully as a painter would choose paint. They may be dealt with as colour field, but should also be acknowledged for their emotional impact.

I have also chosen to deal with singular images as opposed to series of 6, 9, or 30's as I have in past works. The show, an installation of singular images, may then be seen as the sequencing of images and events. I wanted to appear life size in each image so as to deal with human scale.

The words, typed directly on the emulsion during development, become more than words when blown up into human scale. They become graphic symbols, and obviously create a texture that is quite unique to SX-70's. The mural, in these dimensions, then becomes less of a precious object than the original SX-70 was.

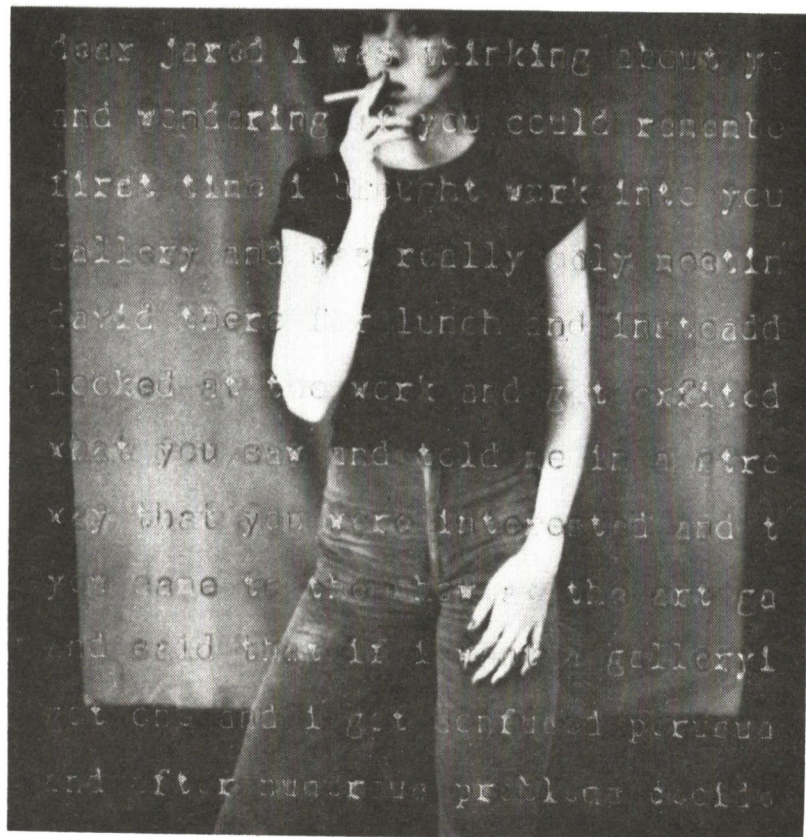
I chose six different articles of clothing in order to control the variety of uniforms for posing. They work to establish another colour field, identifying a form and holding a constant.

I have cropped my face at a variety of levels. I did not wish to identify myself any further than to establish the human form as female. I purposely avoided using a flash so that my features would blur slightly when the print was enlarged: the colour backgrounds remain relatively in focus, however. That the blur adds to the mystery of the woman's identity is important to me as the ideas I am dealing with are not particular to me.

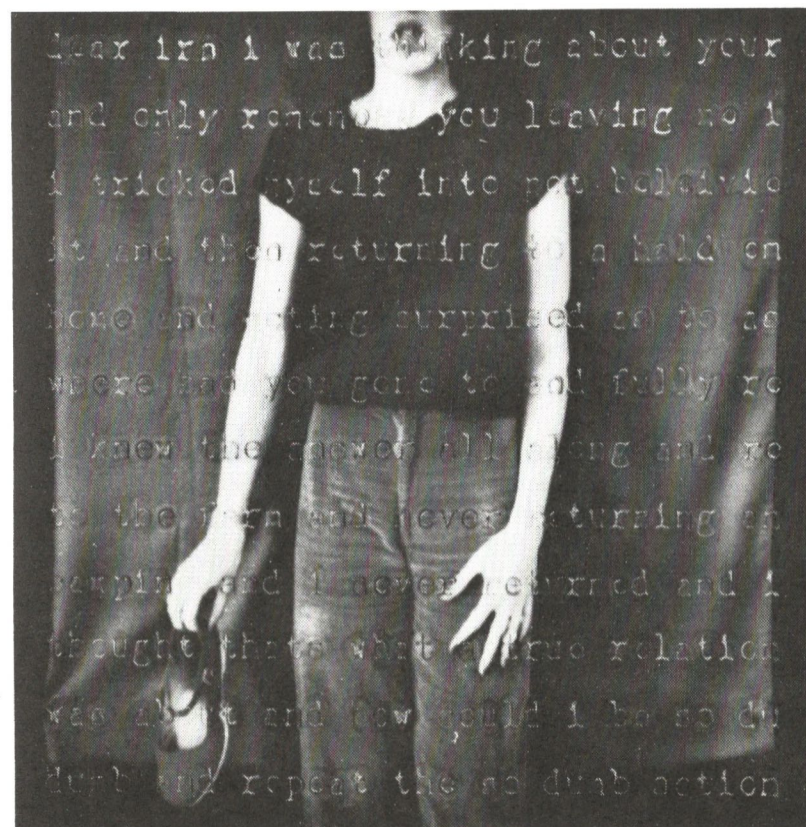
An exhibition of Barbara Astman's recent works, 4 x 5 ft. Polaroid SX-70 Autofocus murals collectively titled, "I was thinking about you," was on exhibit at the Sable Castelli Gallery, Toronto from January 5.



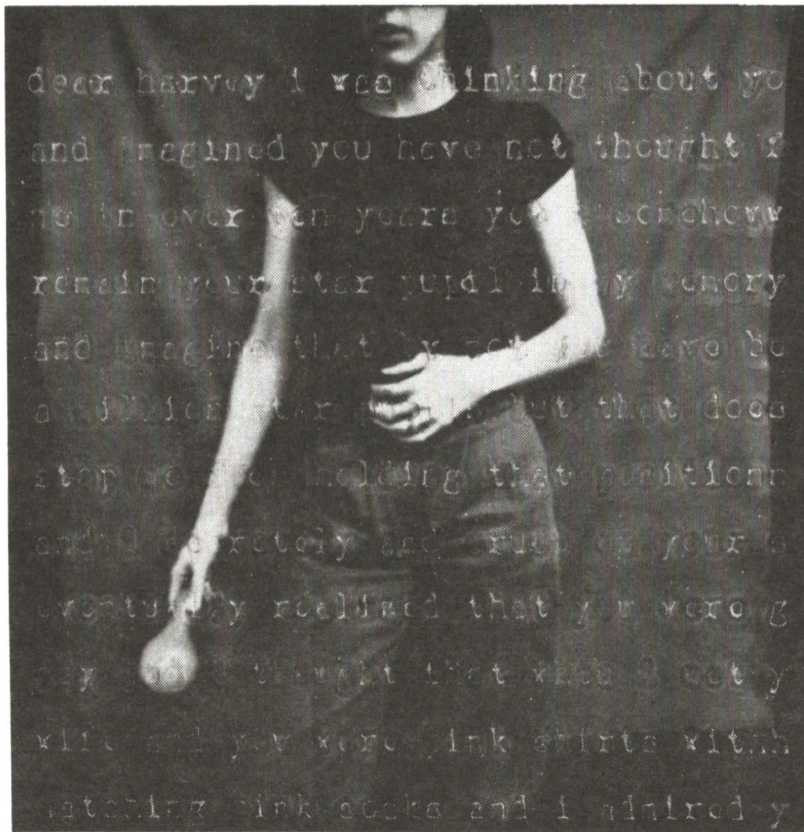
*"Untitled, I was thinking about you."
Original 4' x 5' in full colour.*



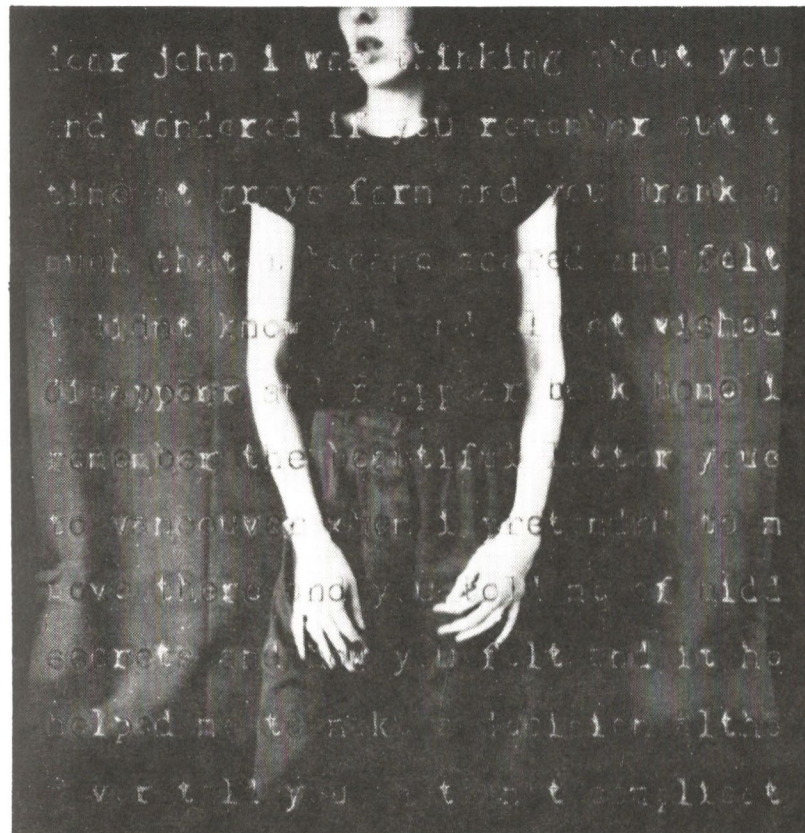
*"Untitled, I was thinking about you."
Original 4' x 5' in full colour.*



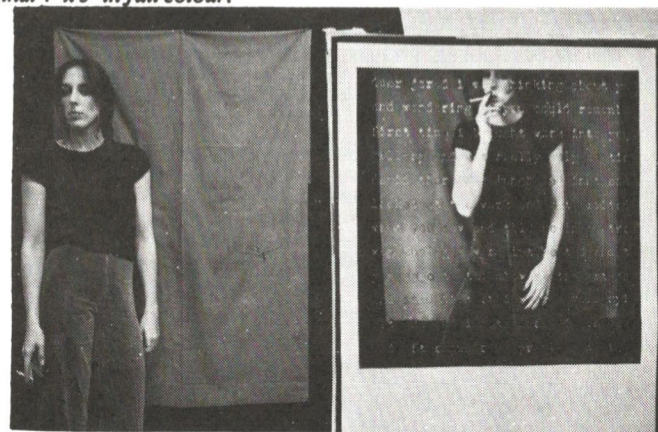
*"Untitled, I was thinking about you."
Original 4' x 5' in full colour.*



*"Untitled, I was thinking about you."
Original 4' by 5' in full colour.*



*"Untitled, I was thinking about you."
Original 4' x 5' in full colour.*



PENNY KEMP:

3 poems

OPEN HOUSE

list
list ten
listen to
listen to the
listen to the hum
listen to the hum of
listen to the hum of the
listen to the hum of the bee
listen to the hum of the bee love
listen to the hum of the bee love ed
listen to the hum of the bee loved win
listen to the hum of the beloved wing
listen to the hum of the beloved winging
listen to the hum of the beloved winging a
listen to the hum of the beloved winging a cross
listen to the hum of the beloved winging a cross a
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crow
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowd
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded room
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded room or
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded room or herd

listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded rumour heard own
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded rumour heard own lea
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded rumour heard only buy
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded rumour heard only by spear
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded rumour heard only by spear it
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded rumour heard only by spirit tear
listen to the hum of the beloved winging across a crowded rumour heard only by spirit ears.

imp/low/shun

imp
low
shun

of

ex
cess

data
dada
data

be done

*

rain
over
us

Go-od save the
bits

*

this version
disperses
aversion

*

reel
thought
from the on
slaught

*

a plum for the cadual
aplomb

WAIT LATE

*I gaunt go a gape guck gong or glove
I haunt hay a heap hutch hunger hove
I can't kay a cake cook conger cove
I don't day a drake dutch danger dove
I stance stay a stake such stung or stove
I slant say a sake such song or sieve
I fount fay a fake fuck fang or fluve
I pant pay a peak pluck ponder puff
I won't weight a wake watch won or wove
I taunt tea a take touch tongue or t'other
I might may a make much mongrel muff
I shan't shaw a shake such shaun or shove
I launch lay a lake luck longer love
I chant chafe a cheek chuck chung or chuff
I launch lay a lake luck longer love
I jaunt jay a jake yuck younger jove
I can't stay a wake much longer love*

ENDS

S.E. Carlisle

My end, you imagine, will be violent.
I'll walk toward light that is not light
or through a window I believe is air,
never believing my peculiar blindness,
seeing the man with the knife as a sudden
tree. You'd like to let
my bones return to fire, but know
I'd rather lie beneath a stone.
You ask me, would I want to die
without my mother being certain
that I loved you, another woman?

You want a sudden end but I don't think
you'll swim off quickly even if
you plan it and begin beneath the water.
If I arrange your funeral I will give you
a wilder fire than we have ever made
in winter. I'll take your bone dust
to the Cape, walk miles north
on Nauset, give you to crabshells,
dunes, the sloop I cannot see
on the greyest waves, the one
you say is always turning, there.

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS IN CONVERSATION: SOME SPECULATIONS

Pamela M. Fishman



A version of this paper was originally presented in New York at the September, 1979 Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association.

I am interested in the politics of everyday talk between men and women. Through our conversations, especially those which occur between intimates, we are constantly constructing and maintaining definitions of reality. Our conversation turns our private thoughts and personal understandings into interpersonal and, thus, public realities. The things we talk about take on shape and subtlety, they can be referred back to, and they form an integral part of the social world we share with others. Though much of our daily conversation may seem trivial, we are, in fact, defining what is important, what is worthwhile, what is real.

In this regard, we may conceive of power as the ability to define reality,¹ to make one's version of the world hold in a situation where conflicting definitions of that situation may exist. It is obvious that certain people have more power to enforce their definitions because of the prevailing economic and political definitions of reality. Male-female power relations in our society, for example, are the outcome of the social organization of activity in the home and in the economy. But power is not simply an abstract force operating on people: it is also an accomplishment — something people do in concrete interactions. Larger social relations are not only reflected in our daily lives, but must be enacted and maintained. Therefore the aim of my analysis of conversation is to uncover the ways male-female power relations are enacted through talk.

The data which I have used is derived from 52 hours of taped natural conversation, 12 1/2 hours of which have been transcribed. Three couples agreed to have tape recorders placed in their apartments for periods ranging from 4 to 14 days. Because the couples operated the recorders manually, uninterrupted recordings ran from 1 to 4 hours in length. The apartments were small, one-bedroom units,

and the recorders picked up all kitchen and living room conversation as well as louder talk from the bedroom and bath. The six participants were between the ages of 25 and 35, white and professionally-oriented. One woman was a social worker. The other two women and all three of the men were graduate students. Two of the women were feminists. The other woman and all of the men were sympathetic to the goals of the women's movement. The participants could erase anything they wished before giving me the tapes, but this was done in only three instances.

I have used an interactive rather than a personality perspective to analyze these conversations. That is, having discovered differences between men's and women's conversational style, my first question was *not*, "What is there about women's or men's personality or socialization which would make them speak that way?," but "What work does any given utterance do? What interactional problem does it solve?"

I have taken each utterance as an *attempt* at conversation which only becomes a part of actual conversation when it was oriented and responded to. A statement can be "thinking aloud." It becomes a piece of conversation only when it is followed by a response. Any given remark is thus a co-production of both the conversants. My concern is with analyzing the work women and men are doing to begin, maintain or end conversations.

An obvious place to begin the study of the enactment of power relations in conversation is with topics. Whose proposed topics become actual topics in conversation? In the 12 hours of transcribed transcript, I found that there were 76 topics raised. The women initiated 47 of them, the men 29. That is, the women raised between 1 1/2 and 2 times more topics than the men did.

However, raising a topic does not insure that it is discussed. The introduction of a topic is an attempt to get a conversation going, not a guarantee that it will occur. In order for the topic to turn into an actual conversation, both participants must work to make it happen, to orient to the topic and to one another. Not only must one person raise the topic, the other person must respond, and at least some of those responses must contribute to the topic's elaboration. At minimum, the two people need to take turns speaking, thus displaying their mutual orientation to each other and to the topic at hand.

So, let us look at what happens to the topics raised by women and men, at whether they succeed or fail in becoming actual conversations. Of the 47 topics initiated by the women, 17 succeeded; 28 of the 29 topics raised by the men succeeded. Thus while women made 62% of all attempts to introduce topics, they only raised 38% of the actual topics of conversation.

The women clearly had more trouble getting conversations going than did the men. The women's failures cannot be explained on the basis of the content of the topics, since what the women and men wanted to talk about was quite similar — an article in the paper, something that happened during the day, friends, dinner, work. Topics introduced by the women failed because the men did not respond with the attention necessary to keep the conversation going. The men either did not take turns speaking over long periods of the women's talk, or they responded

minimally. While a minimal response fills a turn at talk, it does nothing to elaborate on the conversation and little to display interest in it.

In contrast, the men's topics succeeded, not because they were inherently more interesting, but because the women upheld their part of the conversations. The women responded regularly and in non-minimal ways; they displayed orientation by taking conversational turns. Topics men initiated succeeded because both parties worked to turn the initial attempt into an actual conversation. Thus, in these conversations, the men controlled the couple's definition of what is real, what is important or unimportant, and what topics are worth discussing.

In this context of women's efforts to be heard, to have their remarks attended to, we may explore the different sorts of strategies women used in trying to increase their chances for success.³ The women asked 2 1/2 times as many questions as the men did (263 to 107 in my transcripts); women also asked 3 times as many tag questions ("Isn't it?" "shouldn't we?"), or questions that could have been declaratives ("Should we do a grocery shopping?," "Isn't it a nice day?"). This type of question has been interpreted by some researchers as indicative of women's insecure or hesitant personalities.⁴ When we look at these



Illustrations by Gail Geltner

questions interactively, at the work they do conversationally, we see that they are a result of the insecurity of the conversations women are trying to have.

In 1972, Harvey Sacks was the first to point out that questions are interactionally powerful devices. They begin a two-part sequence, to which answers are the second part. Questions demand answers in a way that simple statements do not demand responses. A question puts one's partner on notice that they are to speak next, to provide a response oriented toward the question. Statements assume responses, while questions work to get them. Evidence for the interactive power of the question is found in the success and failure of topic initiations. Women introduced topics with questions 18 times, 13 of which succeeded. This success rate of 72% is double the women's overall success rate of 36%. Men used questions 6 times, all of which succeeded. Questions not only have the power to insure an immediate response, they also seem to increase the chances more generally of the conversation continuing.

A similar device, which extends the question-answer sequence, was used twice as often by women: "D'ya know what?" This question not only insures an answer, but the answer, "What?", is another question which invites the first speaker to continue. This device was noted by Sacks while he was analyzing children's conversations with adults.⁵ He pointed out that children use "d'ya know what?" because of their restricted rights to speak. This question is both an acknowledgement of these restricted rights and a strategic solution to them.

Another device used nearly twice as often by the women to get the necessary attention for conversation was introductory remarks, such as "This is really interesting." Conversation hinges on the assumption that each speaker's remarks are of some interest. Ideally, interest need never be made explicit, since it is established by both participants orienting to a remark. But in practice women cannot assume the men's participation and orientation and thus often attempt singlehandedly to establish the interest of what they say.

Women used the phrase "you know" at least five times as often as the men. Their uses of the phrase were not randomly scattered throughout conversation, which one would expect if "you know" were an indication of women's tendency to hesitate and hedge of remarks.⁶ 35% of the usages occur in three segments of talk covering not quite 2% of the transcripts. All three segments represented failed conversational attempts by the women in which the men responded minimally or not at all. Furthermore, within these failed attempts most of the "you know's" were clustered around pauses internal to the women's speech or around minimal responses from the man. The internal pauses are places where a change in speakers might have occurred, that is, where openings were left for a remark from the other person. The man offered no remark and the woman continued, trying to keep the conversation alive. "You know" works both as an invitation to the man to participate and displays his position as co-participant when he has not displayed it himself. Similarly, the use of "you know" immediately after a minimal response is addressed to a speaker change problem. It recognizes that technically the man took a turn at speaking but that more is required to keep the conversation alive.

The women did more conversational work than the men. They worked at making successes of the topics raised by men, and demonstrated full participation in the conversation. Women also worked to try to make their own conversational attempts succeed, using strategies to try to get their partner's attention and response. Because of the visibility of this work, the women appeared to need attention more than the men. It appeared this way because the women had to work for the attention necessary for conversation to occur at all, whereas the men did not have to actively work for that attention. The men controlled conversation as much by veto as by positive effort.

Why, one may ask, did the women not exercise the same refusal to participate on the men's topics that the men did on the women's? Why did the women not insist on their right to be heard? I would suggest that this conversational work is strongly required of women, and may well be tied up with female gender identity. That is, one of the ways of showing that one is female is by doing conversational work with men without having control over what reality is thus interactively produced. Women who refused to do this work or who insist on being heard get in trouble of various kinds. Women who consistently attempt to control conversation may be called bitchy or domineering; doubt is cast on their female status. Refusing to do conversational work, even temporarily, often leads people to ask, "What's wrong with you?" Arguments may start when a man does not pick up a topic and the woman refuses to drop it, insisting that it be paid attention to. More seriously, the refusal to participate or the insistence on one's point of view may even lead to physical violence against the woman.

When we speak of gender, we are speaking of hierarchy. This is true when we look at women's situation economically and politically, and it is true in the conversations through which we live and define our everyday lives.

NOTES

¹See Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967).

²See Pamela M. Fishman, "What do couples talk about when they're alone?," in *Women's Language and Style*, ed. D. Butturff and E. Epstein (Akron: L & S Books, 1979).

³These strategies are more prevalent in, but not exclusive to, women's speech. Men use them also the few times they are having trouble keeping conversation going. For an elaboration of this material, see Pamela M. Fishman, "Interaction: the work women do," in *Social Problems*, 25, 4 (June 1978), 397-406.

⁴See Robin Lakoff, "Women's Language," in *Women's Language and Style*, ed. D. Butturff and E. Epstein (Akron: L & S Books, 1979).

⁵See Harvey Sacks, "On the analyzability of stories by children," in *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, ed. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

⁶Lakoff, op. cit. (above, note 4).

Mallardville Monologues

ANNE MCLEAN

I "Cyril Montgomery"

Well sir. Once on possum time there clove a certain tree surgeon named Sifting Bill or Hootowl Charles (his right name he forgot). Now he took care of the trees but he was a man of God besides, and was much looked up to due to his strange gifts, including the gift of tongues.

All day long while the sun beat down he would squat and ponder, thinking of difficult questions and jotting them down in a little black book. He would refer to these, his notes, whenever his instincts took him out into the world of real people, where sin abounded unchecked and Satan swooped down the corridor of every soul. These notes were his greatest spiritual weapon, and he was a terrific source of bombast at such times. In fact people were wont to accuse him of trying to wipe out their minds by posing so many unanswerables.

"Who are you anyway, mister?" newcomers could cry out when they come to their senses following one of these onslaughts (for he always brought to bear the full amplitude of his personal forays into the realms of darkness as revealed to him by his parishioners).

But in regards to his own identity, Sifting Bill or Hootowl Charles would have to admit that it was a clearcut case of Either/Or.

So he alternated for several years while his fame spread, till the strain was too much and he expired. But not before altering the religious life of this community beyond recognition or remedy.

We were constantly having funerals in those days, much like it is today, but few people can forget all the dancing and shrieking that used to accompany them while Bill or Charles was among us. For as I say, before he passed out of life he was a very burly and unruly husk of manliness, and could drink the rest of us under any size of table you care to name. That can't be denied. And he could sing and shout as loud as the best man.

But when he got to going all that come out was foul blasphemy and swarwords and speeches about unnatural and ugly deeds, and exhortations to us to cut our tongues and become scorpions. And as I couldn't understand much of it, I would slip out of the hall and make for home as fast as my bony legs would carry me across the glen, which was where my home lay.

How he died, either, I'll never know. Never, no. Shreds and flecks of the story have reached my ears, but no credence can I give to them. They're saying that he tried to stuff himself through a knothole in his kitchen floor and died of fracture and strangulation. Bill or/ Charles was always a seeker. Yet I disbelieve this tale.

And rightly so. Everybody else is always disbelieving me! They're always saying

behind my back that I'm an old woman. But I am an old man! So far nothing irrefutable has yet been uncovered, but my doctor says he expects the breakthrough to come any minute.

Myself, I seem to find it satisfactory just to sit and stroke my chin, sweep the ants out of the kitchen whenever the piles get too high, and wait for the next event, which informed sources next to God himself say is not far off.

II "An Old Farmer and His Wife"

(A conversation with Edwin and Edna Dewdney, on their farm four miles east of Mallardville)

Well, my wife here beside me, she's as plain as day in her cotton dress she hasn't taken off since I married her, and her head all wrapped up in a dishtowel, which makes me ask myself sometimes, "Now, has she got a hair on her head left?" But how am I to know, and besides, I wouldn't call it a mystery, because I don't want to know anymore one way or the other. So it's sure as Hell's not a mystery, not to me anyways, by Jesus not by a long sight.

What is there to say about her after all? Can't get two words out of her most days, unless it's "Let the cat out Ed." That's the open and shut of it. So you see what it's been like living in the same room with that closed mouth for nineteen years. She doesn't move from the window in the summer, and in the winter she falls asleep next to the stove every night.

Well, I take care of things around here, though I don't farm anymore. Never much liked farming to begin with except that in my family we've always been farmers and it's been that way for generations.

Strange events? No, there've been no strange events hereabouts since the night during hunting season when me and the boys were all camped in the bush, bedded down in a little cabin and up jumps Jack Barr, whose bottle of rye we had just tidied off, and says "By the holy Moses, boys, I hear a bear outside."

"No come off it Jack" we all says to him, "there's nothin out there, it was young Brady scratchin the wall with the sole of his boot to give yez a little scare."

But Brady says he never and that did it for old Jack. He was up with his 12-gauge shotgun, the one with the handcarved deer's head along the stock of it, and out he went into the woods and that there was the last we ever saw of Jack Barr, although the Mounted Police and the O.P.P. made a thorough scouring of that whole stretch of bush and went so far as to drag the river two or three times over.

Now that was a very strange thing and that was I guess it was fifteen years ago. But as I say, aside from that not much strange has occurred in this part of the country in all this time.

.....

For years I've sat here, just as you see me, my hands in my lap and eyes staring straight out at you just like a dead woman's eyes. As the years seem to pass I get more bent over and gnarled, and my husband here says I'm constantly emitting

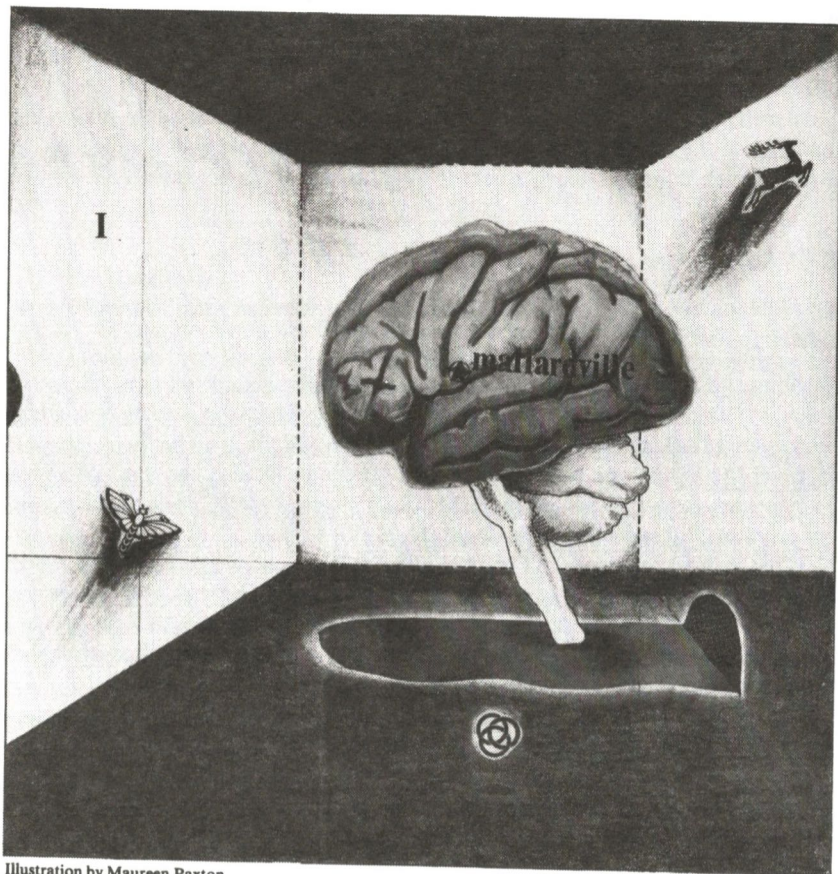


Illustration by Maureen Paxton

a low kind of a buzzing noise. He says it's either emphysema or indigestion. But I know it for what it is, a variety of mean, twisted-up rage.

They say it's the place of some people to listen and of others to talk. Well, for the last seven years I've had a dream which keeps coming back. In it I am standing in a crowd in the midst of some big event, and people are gathered all tightly packed and eager. Suddenly I have a kind of seizure and collapse on the ground with a pain in my head, just like I'd been struck on the back of the skull. After they revive me I stand up and find I have a tongue growing out of the roof of my mouth, and when I speak I'm speaking in a language that nobody's heard before. And I think to myself, "Now the whole country will know; and even he can't shut me up—the animal."

Well then, if you want to hear about my life, I'll tell you. At the beginning there was my marriage to my first husband, a farmer out on the Sixth Concession line a few miles from here, and the birth of my first two children, twins, a boy and girl. My husband was a big man, named Alexander, and his people come from down in Treetoad Marsh, where nobody knows the first thing about farming.

Needless to say, Alexander did a pitiful job of running the farm. I was standing on the garden fence hanging out the wash one afternoon, and I looked over and saw him just as he was falling into the baler. When they pulled him out there was nothing left — just a few scraps of his checkered shirt and the tongue of one of his boots.

I mourned him for a long while, for he'd treated me well despite his inadequacies. And then after a year another husband came along. He was a tremendously strong and energetic man. My family back home was all a bit worried. They've always been a slow-moving bunch. They said, "Edna, you know you're not getting any younger. A man like that is apt to wear you out and then have a heart attack and leave you flat sitting there penniless and destitute." So I had him take out an insurance policy. Then came the birth of my second son, and a week later the ladies of Mallardville held a shower for us in the Church. It went on into the night and Albert had a little too much to drink. On the way home we had a terrible accident — myself and the baby were flung from the old car into a ditch where we were found by the provincial police several hours later — unharmed. But Albert was unrecognizably crushed, between the windshield and the steering wheel when the car collapsed, and I was widowed again for the second time.

Edward, my third husband, came and went in less atrocious circumstances. He was up in a lumber camp at hunting season and someone mistook him for a moose walking through the bush. I wasn't nearly so unhappy about it due to the fact that he had so rarely been home: there was no time to get used to him. But by then I had five children, ranging from seven years to six months.

My second to last husband died by drowning in the river and was carried away, while I was left for the fourth time, standing like a cactus on the riverbank, arms hopelessly outstretched.

Shortly thereafter I went suddenly mad and ran into the woods and my children had to be sent to live with relatives. When I came out I would not speak to anyone. Not a single word would I utter, and this condition lasted for a couple of years. But in spite of my ordeal I had somehow kept my looks, and with the passing of time another one asked to marry me. I'm talking about HIM, who did you think? And he's been the worst of the lot. But I've kept what I know to myself, and am a sober and rare-spoken wife to him.

He is an old-fashioned man with a set way of talking and set opinions, like most of the yahoos you get coming off the farms in this district. But by a long stretch he's a better husband than the younger ones you find nowadays. They're getting ideas from those movies that they show up in the Penguinton at the drive-in: filthy, bad movies for the young people to see. Well in my day love was something different than what it is now.

But that's nothing compared to what goes on here in this town. He don't know nothing about it — he never listens to gossip — but I keep abreast of events, and I know there'll be a lot more chaos before the end comes. You'll see, mind my words. There'll be monsters born around here with four legs and eyes in the backs of their heads. It says so in the Bible, and I can show you chapter and verse.

LANGUAGE AND POWER

An essay on Adrienne Rich's ON LIES, SECRETS, AND SILENCE

Linda Rahm

The poem "Hunger," addressed by Adrienne Rich to feminist poet Audre Lorde (and, beyond Lorde, to all women), concludes with the sentence, "Until we find each other, we are alone."

That women have traditionally been "hidden" from each other by orientation toward individual men, the private life, and their own families is a commonplace of feminist thought. That they may continue to be hidden from each other by such fundamental identifications as those with class, race or sexual preference is a point which has become increasingly and often painfully clear in the evolution of the feminist movement itself. Must a black feminist ultimately choose between black rights and women's rights? Can the same movement adequately represent both "straight" women and lesbians? And finally, how significant, after all, are women's issues, compared with the immediate horrors of war, famine and political atrocities perpetrated by both the Right and the Left in the world at large?

Adrienne Rich's response to the challenge implicit in these questions is developed through the more than twenty essays in her recent collection, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979; \$18.95). The various articles, lectures, informal talks, reviews and introductions which comprise the book share an on-going concern with "asking women's questions" (Foreword, p. 17) and draw on Rich's experience as a poet, a teacher and a lesbian/feminist. Retrospective commentary and critique are provided in the general foreword and in the brief prefaces which accompany many of the entries; however, the twelve-year span indicated by the subtitle is somewhat misleading. Only one essay actually dates from the sixties, and over half are from the period 1975-78, a fact which may reflect Rich's acute awareness of what might be called (borrowing a phrase from her 1978 talk on motherhood) "the contemporary emergency" — the latter-day realities of division, backlash and slackening zeal which beset the feminist movement. If the book represents, as Rich describes it, "the journey of my own thought" (p. 17), it is clear that this journey has been no leisurely evolution, but a struggle waged with a growing sense of commitment and urgency.

Since Adrienne Rich happens to be one of the foremost literary figures in America today, the account of her intellectual journey is bound to have, at the very least, the intrinsic interest of any such work which provides insight into the mind of an artist. And in the case of Rich, of course, the connection between the feminist and the poet is particularly intimate. Readers with a special interest in

"Rich never allows her readers to take language for granted or to leave unexamined their own lies, secrets and self-imposed silences."

women's creativity will welcome the personal analysis of her own poetic development in the 1971 article "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision."

On Lies, Secrets, and Silence is not, however, a book about Adrienne Rich. Rather, it is a book which decries the notion of the unique, "exceptional" woman, again and again articulating the ideal of a community among all women and Rich's belief that "the connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the most potentially transforming force on the planet" ("Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism and Gynephobia," p. 279). Above all, it is a book dedicated to the idea of "finding," of breaking down the forms of concealment represented by the lies, secrets and silence of the title — finding each other; finding ourselves; finding, identifying and loving ourselves (as women) in each other.

This process of finding or discovery is sustained through the book by two major, and overlapping, themes which are at once metaphors for revelation and literal concerns of the feminist movement. One of these themes, as the title of the collection hints, has to do with language or speech. Language is crucial for Rich, not simply because she herself is a writer, but because she recognizes its importance as a weapon and tool for critical thinking and because "In a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence" ("Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women," p. 204).

Whether it is in a discussion of poetry, or an exhortation to teachers of women to combat lax standards of literacy which are "symptoms of female self-deprecation" ("Taking Women Students Seriously," p. 244), or an analysis of linguistic biases toward a specious male superiority and objectivity, Rich never allows her readers to take language for granted or to leave unexamined their own lies, secrets and self-imposed silences. (See, for instance, the short essay entitled "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying"). Rich's own prose is exemplary; like her mature poetry, it is lucid, strong, unaffected and charged with the cadences of the speaking voice.

The second major "discovery" motif of the book concerns visibility, or the idea which Rich expresses in "Conditions for Work" as "the long process of making visible the experience of women" (p. 204). As mentioned previously, the two themes of language and visibility naturally overlap, since language is one of our chief means of "uncovering the hidden" (p. 245), bearing witness, communicating. If feminism is to be a truly potent force for effective change, women need to

understand their past and to “see” the common terms of their struggles in the present. Once again, Rich’s book stands as both exhortation and illustration: exhortation in its demands for changes in a male-oriented education which buries or ignores the experience of women, and in its repeated insistence that feminism must broaden its own vision: illustration in the generous attention it gives to the work of women in the past (Anne Bradstreet, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Dickinson, for instance) and the present (Audre Lorde, Mary Daly, Anna Demeter, Alice Rossi, Eleanor Ross Taylor, and many more).

Rich’s major criterion in choosing the pieces to be included in the collection is usability, which she defines in her Foreword as “part of the effort to define a female consciousness which is political, aesthetic, and erotic, and which refuses to be included or contained in the culture of passivity” (p. 18). Inevitably, in a compilation of essays written by a single hand and bearing on a single main topic, there is a degree of repetition and overlap, and in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* this can sometimes blunt points which are otherwise highly provocative. Rich herself sees the repetitions, as well as the internal disagreements, qualifications and contradictions, as endemic to the book’s character as a “journey” which has been neither smooth nor linear, and certainly the reader does find ample evidence of continuing re-assessment. For example, the earlier (1971) account of how she slowly and painfully wrested her creative identity from the influences of her father and a predominantly male literary tradition is more stringently summed up in her comment of 1976: “It is the lesbian in us who is creative, for the dutiful daughter of the fathers in us is only a hack” (p. 201).

Broadly speaking, Rich’s journey entails an increasingly radical exploration of her dissatisfactions with theories of feminism which ignore or obscure the fundamental conflict between the sexes, having recourse to vaguely-defined concepts such as “human liberation” or “androgyny” and aiming toward nothing more than a spurious sexual “equality.” Although Rich does not, understandably enough, present a detailed program for revolutionary change in a book of essays, her position is clear regarding the futility of seeking to achieve meaningful liberation through compromise with an idea of “civilization” which has been defined by males. According to Rich, masculine culture is not just institutionally anti-feminist, but gynophobic, and the deep-seated fear and hatred of women are inextricably related to the various forms patriarchal violence and oppression take — from rape and wife-beating to war, racism and economic exploitation. “I am a feminist,” she states in one of the earlier essays, “because I feel endangered, psychically and physically, by this society, and because I believe that the women’s movement is saying that we have come to an edge of history when men — insofar as they are embodiments of the patriarchal idea — have become dangerous to children and other living things, themselves included” (pp. 83-84). And, in the book’s final essay, significantly entitled “Disloyal to Civilization,” she explores the complex history of interactions between racism, feminism and gynophobia in the United States, and the dangers inherent in a feminism which disregards the issue of racism and limits its objectives to inclusion within the white male society.

Closely bound up with the development of Rich’s theory of feminism is the

development of her views on sexuality. Fundamental principles here are complete acceptance for lesbianism as an erotic option for women and the need to scrutinize “the institution of heterosexuality as a major buttress of male power” (p. 17). Although Rich’s lesbian perspective does inform many passages in the book, it should be emphasized that the lesbian/feminism which she advocates does not mean feminism for lesbians alone. Rich herself has resisted a narrow lesbian “separatism” (see “The Meaning of Our Love for Women Is What We Have Constantly to Expand”), just as she has resisted identifying herself with a white, middle-class version of feminism or with a small élite of “exceptional” women. In part, the prominence of the terms “lesbian” and “lesbian/feminism” is one more aspect of Rich’s language theme — the theme of naming, breaking the silence, speaking the hitherto “unspeakable.” However, she also uses the terms in a larger sense, to express the idea of self-affirmation through identification with other women, a kind of antidote to the self-deprecation and self-hatred which women, taking their views of themselves from men, have so long experienced. Lesbian/feminism, in this broader sense, involves “a non-exploitative, non-possessive eroticism, which can cross barriers of age and condition, the sensing our way into another’s skin, if only in a moment’s apprehension, against the censure, the denial, the lies and laws of civilization” (p. 307).

No one who has been at all attentive to the developments of the past few decades and the accumulating evidence of achievement in the past, can seriously doubt that women are fully capable of entering and functioning successfully in “a man’s world,” that they are equal to the tasks and roles traditionally reserved for men. And, indeed, much feminist effort has been directed toward establishing precisely this “equality.” The question which now presents itself, prompted by Rich’s book, is not whether women — given the same freedom and access to power as men — can be *like* men, but whether in the same conditions they can be sufficiently *different* from men to bring about a society, a form of civilization, radically different from any we have known, including those created by supposedly “revolutionary” (male-dominated) groups.

One wants to believe it, not simply because one is a woman, but because the

“The question prompted by Rich’s book is not whether women can be *like* men, but whether they can be sufficiently *different* from men to bring about a society radically different from any we have known.”

need for change is so insistently present. As I write this article (late November, 1979), attention is, for the moment, turned toward Cambodia. In newspapers, on television, on magazine covers, the age-old image for victimization — a starving mother and child — yet again reiterates itself. It is the same image evoked in Rich's 1974-75 poem "Hunger" and in a number of her prose writings. Her alternative image — of society founded on values other than aggression, dominance, control — appears as a series of provocative questions near the end of the essay on motherhood:

What would it mean to mother in a society where women were deeply valued and respected, in a culture which was woman-affirming? What would it mean to bear and raise children in the fullness of our power to care for them, provide for them, in dignity and pride? What would it mean to mother in a society which had truly addressed the issues of racism and hunger? What would it mean to mother in a society which was making full use of the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physical gifts of women, in all our difference and diversity? What would it mean to mother in a society which laid no stigma upon lesbians, so that women grew up with real emotional and erotic options in the choice of life companions and lovers? What would it mean to live and die in a culture which affirmed both life and death, in which both the living world and the bodies of women were released at least from centuries of violation and control? This is the quantum leap of the radical feminist vision. (pp. 272-73)

As the foregoing passage suggests, there is more than a touch of the visionary in Rich. This is not to deny that she is also a realist. Further on in the same essay, she reminds us that "radical imagination" must combine with a determination to cope "with the here and now, our feet on this ground where we now live" (p. 273), and in the essay "Towards a Woman-Centered University" she offers a very practical set of proposals (some deriving from earlier work by Alice Rossi) regarding child care and changes in the university. Insofar as it is a visionary work, however, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* leaves us with questions and possibly some doubts.

Rich feels, and probably rightly, that it is time for feminism to affirm the uniqueness of women as women and not as imitation men, but we cannot underestimate the complexity of the task of ascertaining which values and qualities are inherently unique to women and which are culturally defined. Nor can we underestimate the difficulty of extracting the attributes Rich's feminist vision implies — such as compassion, tolerance, generosity, non-violence — from the traditional "culture of passivity" (p. 18) and, further, reconciling them with the anger and power necessary to accomplish revolutionary social change within a gynophobic, patriarchal context. Patterns based on researches into primitive matriarchal cultures are inconclusive at best, and contemporary evidence from the women's movement is mixed — showing striking examples of love and co-operation in some cases, power struggles and subtle forms of exploitation in others.

Adrienne Rich is certainly not a simplistic thinker, and yet there is a type of simplifying common in polemical writing which she does not always avoid.

Without denying the sins of patriarchal society, one does nevertheless feel at times in the book that "patriarchy" becomes a kind of catch-all abstraction of a villain, like the "establishment" of the New Left rhetoric of the sixties, that a moral dichotomy is created between patriarchy and feminism which bears an important visionary truth but which sometimes begs the question of moral failings in feminism by invoking patriarchal influence. And finally, of course, there is the dilemma of how feminism can avoid compromise with masculine thinking on the one hand and a stalemate of polarization on the other hand, to bring about changes which must affect both men and women.

The foregoing comments should not be taken as implying a criticism of Rich's book for not supplying "answers" to questions which are at this point probably unanswerable. The essay, in its original sense, is a form designed to evoke questions, to stimulate thought, and it is a measure of Rich's success and her stature as a courageous and probing thinker that she does just that. It must be said, as well, that the later entries show a movement toward ever more searching and rigorous analysis. The passion matures, becoming no less passionate, but more willing to examine problems in their full, and often disturbing, complexity.

Adrienne Rich presents a challenge to every woman who would call herself a feminist. At a time when economic pressures, a general drift toward conservatism, and uncertainty within the women's movement itself may make it tempting to work within the confines of what has already been achieved and pursue our own individual goals, Rich compels us, if not, perhaps, to repeat precisely the journey her thought has taken, at least to explore the difficult terrain she has covered and question anew our own motives and commitment. The book's major contribution lies, not so much in its documentation of what has been done to women by a patriarchal society (an important theme but hardly a new one), as in its emphasis on what women can and must do for each other. A feminism which itself manifests patterns of discrimination against *some* women cannot overcome universal discrimination against *all* women. Until we find each other, we are alone.

"Adrienne Rich presents a challenge to every woman who would call herself a feminist . . . She compels us to explore the difficult terrain she has covered and question anew our own motives and commitment. The book's major contribution lies . . . in its emphasis on what women can and must do for each other."

MOTHER WAS A LOVELY BEAST

Lorna Uher

mother was a lovely beast
she gave to me a lovely feast
three teats hanging from her chest
I found the third one quite the best

a coarse black beard grew from her chin
she worried it was due to sin
but she was good and she was kind
and father didn't seem to mind

*with three teats you can suckle three
and still leave room enough for me
besides, you're quiet as a flower
a wife's tongue makes a marriage sour*

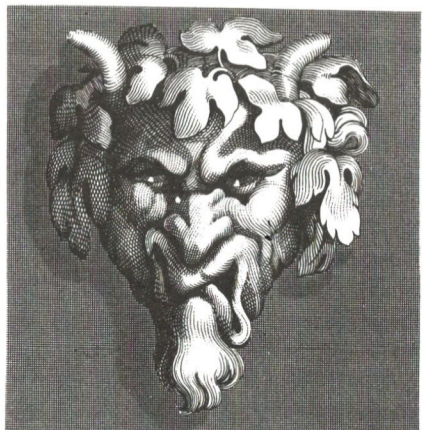
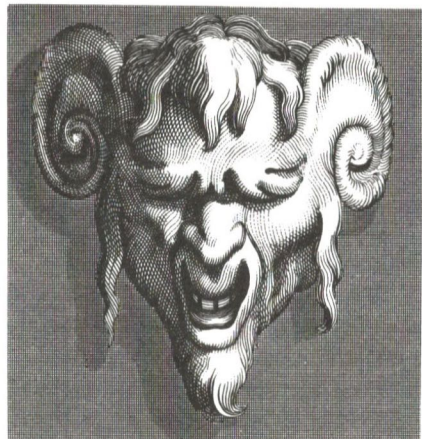
he stroked her beard as she stroked his
they lived a life of total bliss
till people came from field and town
to see my mother's chest and down

so father built a stage for her
to bare her breasts and show her fur
he tried to teach her how to scowl
to walk on fours, to moan and growl

she sat on stage head-bowed, alone
while father bought a megaphone
The Bearded Venus he would say
A Woman — and he'd make them pay

still mother uttered not a sound
but when my father went uptown
she raised her skirts to show her hair
and let men mount her like a mare

mother was a lovely beast
she gave to me a lovely feast
three teats hanging from her chest
I found the third one quite the best



ANDY AND GEORGE, FRIENDS

(for David Arnason)

Lorna Uher

Last night they came to visit,
talked of women who dance
with balding men, wiggle
their asses to attract
those who sit
backs to the wall.
*These new women
want to be blessed
with blood. They want men
who put their balls in glass
cases on display.*

The other talked of rape,
men who turn
icons to the wall,
hold boiling water
above the woman's face
until she opens. *A fantasy
for a film about the prairie.*

This morning my lover and I
walk to the river to see the eclipse,
the last of this century, the last
before we die. We hold hands, watch
the joining of sun and moon,
whisper *This is holy*,
as a bat, thinking it is night,
stumbles into the sky.

THE TAMING OF THE UNICORN

Lorna Uher

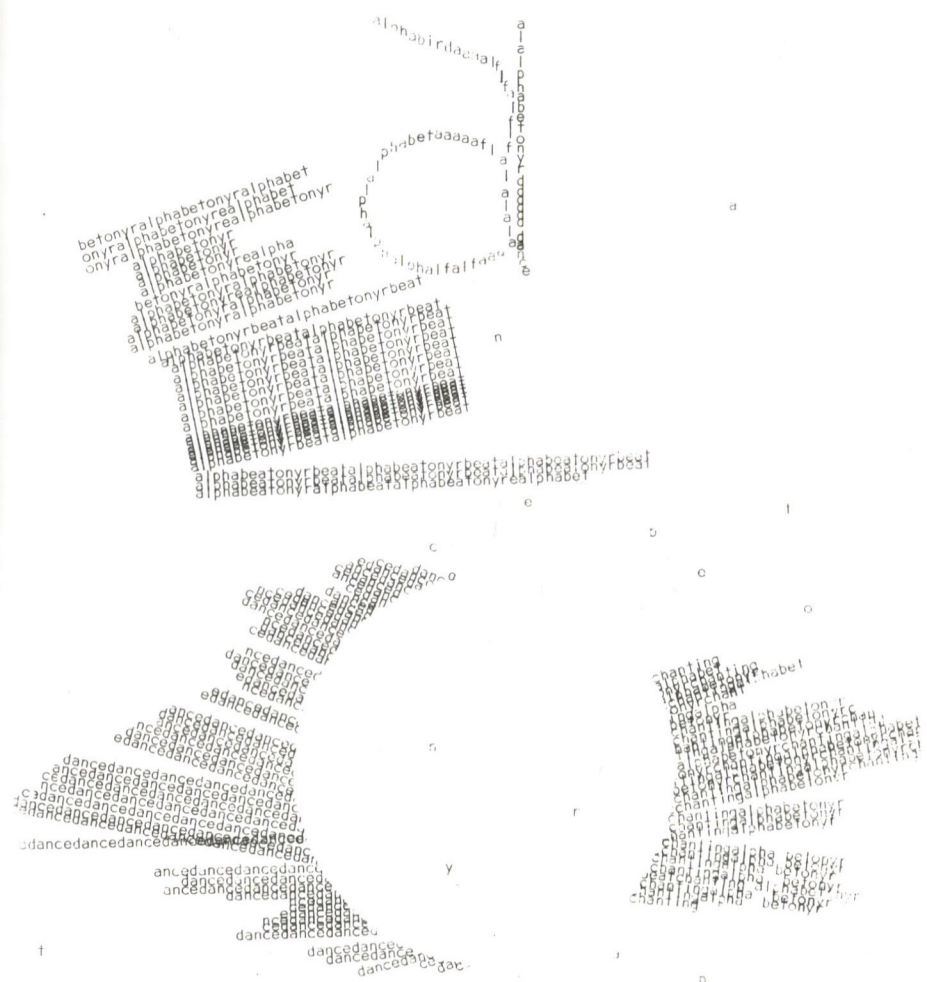
Three mornings and nothing has happened.
But today she hears a tongue lap water
and hooves sink into sand.
In her mirror she sees
where they squat behind her
silent as the tall grasses. Their faces
frozen in glass: the betrothed, the father
and lover, the sun encircling
his head like a noose.

A nose sniffs the hem of her skirt
nuzzles her still, white hand.
She wants to move, to frighten
the animal back into shadow
but the warmth on her skin
recalls the breath of her lover
and the moist darkness of earth
that will hold him
if she fails.

She hums the Woman's song
learned in the hours of waiting,
the hours of the hunt. She sings
softly so the men won't hear, the song
more subtle than the serpent's kiss.
The unicorn lays his head across her lap.
The white beard brushes her arm.
His eyes, liquid as sun, become
the centre of her twisting world.

She touches the horn once
with the tips of her fingers follows
the skein of light as it spirals
before the men pin his legs and her father
with one swift stroke lops off the head
holds it triumphant
above him (her face
caught in the large dead eyes).

ELLEN QUIGLEY: Four Poems



the string unravels

b raking grass

the string makers used to
b eat their flax & hemp with a toothed
brake until particle fibred into
f rags
meant for recollision

re: collusion of p art
reclusive beat on the brake drum
k partial to
stop you dead in you tracks
no breaks here i'm riding out
tide mark
b i t
e or
water mouth weathering song
in the ear ear you
sound time

dark blue red feathers
green ferns
reeds &
frayed cuffs
up there the
moon is feathering light

f s 1 movement

whether to feath or
partickle it all out right
b
u-turn it out of here
saint o p p s are
st opps on patrol
pulling up the road
lurking around the corner
b p g q k &
d or of
order

f jumps over the t quick &
rides on into the field

quarter p rising
katch if katch can
white light wind water
the sound of weathering continues
to wear away the surface the
circle is broken open

f #ffffs
h k b d q g p

p ranks
ters & other terns
freeze in the mind as
light freezes image moving through
the lens

p
age
de v^el^ops

d is
solution to the image
p art of detail

g one movement

get off your horses & circles &
ride off across the horizon

gone g as p
galloping in the hinterland
h internal ling
lang m a p
a

p
as open myth
winding & unwinding fast
image changes flash

k 1 movement

f
l 4
i n
e i
s i

o direction
u
t
s

still precis*

mice piping and mice plain
jolt both perhaps piping in mice future
and mice future fountained in mice piping.
if all mice graze incautiously piping
all mice are satisfactory.
what might have quelled is an oidium
moldering an immoveable immunology
what might have grown and what has grown
hook to nine loads, which are always piping.
outlets rustle in the rudiment
down the remedy which we did not pinch
toward the map we never hounded
into the face-event. my chords rustle
thus, in your fire.

but to what package
fingering the ear on an ant of note-pitch
i do not quest.

other rustles
mutiny the outrage. shall we seduce?
queer, net the moth, jump them, jump them.
oil the Norman. know the loath loaf
into our loath land, shall we indwell
the kerosene of the mill into our loath note?
there they reel, frivolous, heterodox,
needing without output, over the plaid scotch
in the feat head, through the tacky claim
and the crux

loaded.

* (Author's Note: still precis is a syntactical rhythmical homolinguistic translation of the first 26 lines in T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, "Burnt Norton". syntactical rhythmical, meaning that a word is randomly selected from the dictionary for each word of the original poem, the only criterion being that the word must be of the same syntactical category as the original word, and that it must have the same number of beats. the point of such translation is that the poem that is derived in this manner should, somehow, comment on the original poem. still precis does, i believe, comment on both Eliot's original poem and on the manner in which the poem itself was written.)



(Photo: Charles Meunier)

AN INTERVIEW WITH DENISE BOUCHER

Susan H. Poteet

Interested in the feminist ideas in Les fées ont soif, I went with a friend to interview Denise Boucher. The interview took place at Denise Boucher's favourite coffee spot, a little hole-in-the-wall on Montreal's Main. The conversation was a mélange of French and English, with Lyse Ponton and me furiously scribbling notes. My thanks to Lyse for her assistance in this effort. She and I will be reporting on other Québécois cultural events in future issues of Fireweed.

If one followed the Quebec cultural scene last winter, *Les fées ont soif* by Denise Boucher could not have escaped attention. Throughout December and January the papers were full of the news of the banning of this feminist play, and later the repeal of the decision. What was all the furor about?

After the lifting of the ban, we were able to see the play in a reprise at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in June. An English translation by Alan Brown,

played Ottawa in November and is tentatively scheduled for Toronto later in the winter.

The play includes three women, the central character being the Virgin Mary, played by Louise Dussault. The Sainte Vierge is portrayed as a gutsy earthy woman locked inside a silly plaster statue. As statue, she describes herself as a desert which counts itself grain by grain; the aid of imbeciles; the tool of the powerless; a rotten symbol of abnegation; and finally, Woman deprived of eroticism, indeed of her very body. As the play progresses, the Virgin Mary breaks her bonds, expressing the anger of a real woman of today.

The two other characters, Marie and Madeleine are the spiritual daughters of the Sainte Vierge. Marie is a housewife, played by Michèle Magny. Enconced in a little niche decorated with the paraphernalia of the home and family — pots and pans, feather dusters, broken dolls — Marie laments her fate, wherein a shopping trip is all one has to look forward to. Madeleine is a prostitute, played by Sophie Clément, who from her niche littered with the artifacts of her trade (especially her beloved collection of boots), complains of life as an object designed for men's pleasure. Marie and Madeleine, the two acceptable female archetypes, describe themselves as "demi-vivantes" who go through the dreary motions of their roles, drugged by Librium and alcohol.

The movement of the play involves an analysis of their situation, communication between the characters and, finally, an angry breaking out of the roles, symbolized by the niches and the statue on the stage. At the end, the housewife, the whore and most important, the Madonna, are three living, breathing, beautiful friends, ready to control their own destinies.

Les fées ont soif is clearly an attack on the Catholic Church, in fact on all religions created by men, as the principal mystifier and hence oppressor of women.

The authorities responded with counter attacks. Even before it was staged, the play was denied support from the Montreal Council of the Arts for its colloquial and blasphemous language. As soon as the production opened, Catholic groups pressed for action and the printed text was banned. The press was filled with cries of outrage at the blaspheming of the Sainte Vierge. Mary, the most holy Virgin Mother of Christ, is portrayed as a very real woman, who laughs, swears, and even feels physical desire. Feminist groups rallied to Mme. Boucher's side and the court battle was won. But when Denise Boucher won this case, her opponents were so troubled that they appealed. In court on October 10, 1979, the banning of the play, both as a text and in stage production, was considered.

It all began when Denise Boucher was asked to write a feminist play about the Greek Goddesses. She found she had no feeling for them. In thinking about her mother, she realized that she had "wanted to be a lady, not knowing she could be a woman." Why not write about Our Lady, in an effort to begin to understand our mothers?

In the process of writing the play, Mme. Boucher thought about the spirit of "les fées." "Les fées" are fairies who, in Quebec legend, refused to stop singing and dancing when Christ arrived on earth — women who would not submit to the

church. The origin of these legendary characters can be found in Brittany at the dawn of Christianity. The women of Brittany would not submit to the church because they got the impression (perhaps not, after all, incorrect) that the priests of this new religion stole babies. The women felt they were demons who must be exorcised. The eventual success of Christianity tells us these women failed, but "les fées" have become our "belle mères."

The three characters in *Les fées ont soif* have the spirit of "les fées" within them, although it is only during the course of the play that they actually rebel, becoming "les fées" who refuse to stop singing and dancing, to accept Christianity's definition of them.

Certainly the spirit of "les fées" is alive and well in the person of Denise Boucher. She is a self-pronounced iconoclast who sees her writing as a weapon in the battle against POWER, the authorities, those who try to rob us of joy, then tell us that joy is impossible to attain. She has a strong conviction about the necessity of overthrowing the oppressive power structures of our society. Boucher feels that the character of the Sainte Vierge and indeed the play itself came from deep within her, as a passionate expression of her convictions. She was not trying to be clever, but was writing instead with "beaucoup d'abandon," finding herself using the techniques of "automatisme" and the surrealists.

Many critics have called the play Brechtian, since its political message is direct, the direction stylized, and its songs powerful and angry comments on the action; but the author says she was not thinking of Brecht when she wrote the play. She's not trying to create action on stage, but is concerned with the action between stage and audience. In fact, for Denise Boucher, the task of the artist is to show reality, perhaps hidden from us by the authorities. Theatre should make people act and react.

Power does not like reality. She mentioned authority's response to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. When asked what reality concerned her in *Les fées ont soif*, she responded: "*Love is Forbidden*. This reality is hidden behind the lie that *love is impossible*. Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, Abelard and Heloise. Culture makes men and women very different, then tells us that love is impossible."

We as women must find out our true selves, possess our bodies, know what it is really to be a woman. This has been a main theme of all Denise Boucher's work. Her first book, *Retailles*, written with Madeleine Gagnon, and published by Etincelle, is the account of two of the women in her consciousness-raising group and their journey towards a feminist awareness. Her second work, *Cyprine*, published by Aurore, is a mix of poems and letters. It explores the difficulty of breaking with the culture and finding out, "What is a woman?" The title of the book is a word banned from the dictionary for 200 years, describing the woman's white secretion during love-making. Not only the word, derived from Venus, the goddess of love, but the concept is forbidden — that a woman actively and naturally enjoys sex. According to Denise Boucher, men too must find themselves, be iconoclasts. Only then can men and women truly love each other. This is not a hope. Rimbaud said: "J'ai commencé à vivre quand j'ai perdu

l'espoir. Il faut perdre la foi, l'espérance, et la charité." Hope is an illusion, like the Virgin, designed to keep us from changing.

The response to Mme. Boucher's Saint Vierge has been great. A Middle Eastern Jew who saw the play thought that the character was Theodora, with her symbols of the bird and the serpent. A woman from Ottawa wrote that, inspired by the play, she had gone to the National Museum of Man to discover that all its fertility goddesses were *virgins*.

All mothers of Gods were virgins, Mme. Boucher says, with ironic delight. Buddha's mother was impregnated by an angel. One of the Aztec mother goddesses swallowed a Jade Pearl and became pregnant. All religions were created by men who envy women's child-bearing capacity. This "phantasme" of the virgin mother is a male "phantasme." She particularly relishes an Inca legend. Here we have an unusual mother goddess. She has 400 children, 399 boys and 1 girl. One day she picks up a cotton ball and puts it between her breasts. When her sons discover she is pregnant, the decapitate their sister, and are preparing to kill their mother for her sin, when she gives birth to a son. He kills his 399 brothers. He has killed the past and returned his mother to virgin status. Why? If his mother is a virgin, the man is not obliged to kill his father. So womankind has been caught in a false version of purity simply as a by-product of man's Oedipal complex, the real interaction of being between father and son. In this instance, the man creates himself fatherless to reduce his culpability, to allow himself the perfection of no father. How? By making his mother a virgin.

Denise Boucher does not find men or the structure of society solely responsible for making selfhood and love between men and women impossible. She finds that radical feminists also forbid love and build structures which are disturbingly similar to those that already enslave us. She recalls the consciousness-raising group of five women she was a part of. The subject of sex was very divisive. There was the temptation to believe that they could "return to the convent, live as nuns, go back to being perfect virgins." This is the fantasy of the radical feminists, Mme. Boucher says. Before Feminism, there was a hierarchy of women, with the Virgin at the top, married women, then mothers as the lowest, servants of their children. Radical Feminism suggests the same kind of hierarchy with the lesbian, the woman who does not love men, at the top, wives and mothers lower because of their association with men. Again, love is forbidden.

As an artist, Denise Boucher concerns herself foremost with the forbidden truths. She trusts laughter. Works like *Les fées ont soif* make the audience laugh with recognition. The laughter signals thought to Denise Boucher.

She has a great deal of confidence that we *are* going to change the world. The authorities are right to be afraid of Denise Boucher. She will show us the truths that will make their society crumble. She mentions Margaret Mead, who reminds us that society is based on roles. Virgins, Mothers, Whores — they make the world go round. But they can and, at the end of the play, do refuse to go on playing the roles. If we won't play the roles, "society will be on its ass." Denise Boucher says she sits at her typewriter rather than learning Kung Fu. In her case, the word seems mightier than the sword.

FIRST ENGLISH
TRANSLATION

les éditions
INTERMEDE

les fées ont soif

Denise Boucher



LES FEES ONT SOIF

AN EXCERPT FROM THE PLAY
By Denise Boucher

Translated by Alan Brown.

This excerpt is from the French version of the play published by Les Éditions Intermède (Montréal, 1979), and is reprinted here with the permission of Christopher J. Reed. The English translation of *Les Fées ont soif* is forthcoming

THE STATUE: Once upon a time there was a day. And that's today, and I'm about to unsing the whole Angelus.

MARIE: My house is clean, clean, clean. My name is Marie. I do my errands. You've met me at the shopping centre.

MADELEINE: I chuck spermatozoa out the window. *(Pause)*
I'm sorry, your three minutes are up. *(Pause)*
In my full-moon blood your children drip away.
Poor fatherland!

THE STATUE: As I said to Fatima: Poor Canada!

MADELEINE: Sorry, your three minutes are up!

MARIE: In the shopping centres they sell cute bathing suits. Scanty bikinis. I could never stand being alone beside the sea. I'm far too scared. The waves roll toward me. They want to talk to me. I'd never want to be alone beside the sea. I'm far too scared. The waves could take me in their folds and carry me where I'd never want to go. I am a woman of suffering.

THE STATUE: Whose suffering?



(Sophie Clement, Louisette Dussault and Michele Magny)

LA STATUE: Il était une fois, un jour. C'est aujourd'hui et je commence à déchanter tout l'Angélus.

MARIE: Ma maison est propre propre propre. Je m'appelle Marie. Je fais des commissions. Tu m'as rencontrée dans les centres d'achat.

MADELEINE: Je jette les spermatozoïdes par les fenê tres. *(Silence)*
Je regrette, vos trois minutes sont écoulées. *(Silence)*
Dans mon sang de pleine lune dégoutte
tout le temps chacun de vos enfants.
Pauvre patrie.

LA STATUE: Comme je disais à Fatima: Pauvre Canada!

MADELEINE: Je regrette vos trois minutes sont écoulées.

MARIE: Dans les centres d'achat, ils vendent des beaux costumes de bain. Des petits bikinis. Je ne pourrai jamais être seule au bord de la mer. J'ai trop peur. Les vagues roulent vers moi. Elles veulent me parler. Je ne voudrais jamais être seule au bord de la mer. J'ai trop peur. Les vagues pour raient me ramasser dans leurs plis et m'amener là où je ne voudrais jamais aller. Je suis une femme de peine.

LA STATUE: La peine de qui?

MARIE: I listen to my transistor. In winter I go to Florida with my husband. He plays golf.

THE STATUE: *(sings)*
Some day my prince will come . . .

MADELEINE: At reform school they told me, Madeleine, make a woman out of yourself.
I never knew what that meant. *(Pause)*
I am the menstrual floodway of the thundering, breaking ice.
Dried coffee settled in a cup that's never washed.
I am a hole. I am a big hole. A big hole where they stuff their money in.
A big hole in a closed hoop in a circle that shrinks round my skull.
My eyes don't fit their sockets. There are days I'd like to believe in love.
Before they turned me loose in the world from the reform school, they decided to have me treated.
The sick-guyatrist, he wanted to screw me. Some going, for a voyeur!
But I told him. I said, for my ring-dang-doe it'll cost you. One thousand bucks.
Per shot.
He found I was a heavy number. Couldn't be helped, he told me.
Then he wouldn't see me any more.
That's how I came to be a lady of joy.

THE STATUE: Whose joy?

MADELEINE: There are days when something in me tries to believe in love.

THE STATUE: *(sings)*
Some day my prince will come . . .

MARIE: When I was twelve what did I want? Adolescence is a sickness. Better not to remember it. The fewer desires I had the sooner I'd be grown-up. No problem. Now, I think, I have NO DESIRE AT ALL. Except those you give me. The new discoveries I like are the new soaps that get your clothes whiter than white. Soap for the dishes that keeps your hands ever so smooth. Just as if you never touched those dishes. What more could I ask from life?
And as far as husbands go, there are worse ones than mine. But what good are husbands anyway?

MARIE: J'écoute mon transistor. Je vais en Floride l'hiver avec mon mari. Il joue au golf.

LA STATUE: *(elle chante).*
Un jour mon prince viendra...

MADELEINE: À l'école de redressement, elles m'avaient dit: Madeleine, fais une femme de toi.
Je n'ai jamais su ce que ça voulait dire. *(Silence)*
Je suis le fleuve brun des grandes débâcles.
Du café séché au fond d'une tasse que personne n'a jamais lavée.
Je suis un trou. Je suis un grand trou. Un grand trou où ils engouffrent leurs argents.
Un grand trou enfermé dans un rond enfermé dans un cercle qui me serre la tête.
Je n'ai pas les yeux en face du trou. Il y a des jours où je voudrais croire à l'amour.
Avant de me laisser partir dans le monde, à l'école de redressement, ils ont décidé de me faire soigner.
Le p'tit chiâtre *(prononcer: chi)*, il voulait coucher avec moi.
J'trouvais ça drôle pour un voyeur, d'ailleurs.
Ben, j'lui ai dit: pour toi mon tarla, ça s'ra mille piasses.
D'la shot.
Y a trouvé que j'étais grave. Y m'a dit que j'étais irrécupérable.
Pis, y a plus voulu me voir.
C'est ainsi que je suis devenue une fille de joie.

LA STATUE: La joie de qui?

MADELEINE: Il y a des jours où il ya a quelque chose en moi qui voudrait croire à l'amour.

LA STATUE: *(Elle chante).*
Un jour mon prince viendra.

MARIE: À douze ans, qu'est-ce que je voulais? L'adolescence est un maladie. Mieux vaut ne pas s'en souvenir. Moins j'aurai de désirs, plus je serai une adulte. Ne craignez rien. Je crois que je n'ai plus AUCUN DÉsir. Que ceux que vous me donnez. Dans les découvertes, ce qui m'intéresse, ce sont les nouveaux savons qui rendent le linge encore plus blanc, plus propre. Du savon à vaisselle qui garde les mains douces. Comme si vous ne la faisiez pas. Qu'est-ce que je demanderais de plus à la vie? Et des maris, il y en a des pires que le mien.
Et à quoi ça sert un mari?

MARIE: *Marie sings the following song, to the tune of the old Newfoundland ditty, "I's the B'y That Builds The Boat."*

1. I's the gal that mops the floor
And keeps us clean and tidy
He's the b'y that lays in the bed
And takes a bath on Friday.

*Diddle-ee-um dee eye-dee-oh
Diddle-ee-um dee eye-dee
Diddle-ee-um de eye-dee-oh
He takes his bath on Friday.*

2. I's the gal that bakes the cake
And everythin' else he wishes
He's the b'y that drinks the beer
And never does the dishes.

3. I's the gal that scrubs the wash
And irons every Monday
He's the b'y that makes the dirt
And kicks my ass on Sunday.

Marie stays in the neutral place.

THE STATUE: *(In place of a rosary she has a thick chain between her fingers.)*

As for me, I am an image. I am a portrait.
My two feet are stuck fast in a plaster cast.
I am the queen of nothingness. I am the door to the abyss.
I am the priests' white dreams.
I am the white sheep, the white ewe unshorn.
I am the star of the bitter sea.
I am the dream of Mr. Clean.
I am the daughter of Javel-water.
I am the mirror of injustice. I am the seat of slavery. I am the sacred vessel strayed and still unbound.
I am the darkness of ignorance.
I am the whites, the leucorrhoea, loss without profit of all women.
I am the refuge of imbeciles, the succour of the ineffectual.
I am the tool of impotence.
I am the rotting symbol of rotten abnegation.
I am a silence heavier and more oppressive than any words.
I am the yoke of those jealous of the flesh.
I am the image imagined. I am she who has no body.
I am she who never bleeds.

MARIE: *(Elle chante. Dans le lieu neutre).*

Mon père m'a donné un mari
Boum badiboum boum barbarie
Il me l'a donné si petit
Spiritum sanctum eliminum boum ba
Zim boum barbarie
Que dans mon lit je le perdis
Boum badiboum boum barbarie
Oh chat oh chat
C'est mon mari
Spiritum sanctum eliminum boum ba
Zim boum barbarie

LA STATUE: *(Au lieu d'un chapelet, elle a une grosse chaîne entre les doigts).*

Moi, je suis une image. Je suis un portrait.
J'ai les deux pieds dans le plâtre.
Je suis la reine du néant. Je suis la porte sur le vide.
Je suis le mariage blanc des prêtres.
Je suis la moutonne blanche jamais tondue.
Je suis l'étoile des amers.
Je suis la rêve de l'eau de Javel.
Je suis le miroir de l'injustice. Je suis le siège de l'esclavage.
Je suis le vase sacré introuvable.
Je suis l'obscurité de l'ignorance.
Je suis la perte blanche et sans profit de toutes les femmes.
Je suis le secours des imbéciles. Je suis le refuge des inutiles.
Je suis l'outil des impuissances.
Je suis le symbole pourri de l'abnégation pourrie.
Je suis un silence plus opprimant et plus oppressant que toutes les paroles.
Je suis le carcan des jaloux de la chair.
Je suis l'image imaginée. Je suis celle qui n'a pas de corps.
Je suis celle qui ne saigne jamais.

MARIE: (*Sings "du Pont de l'île" by Felix Leclerc.*)
He touched my lips he touched my eyes
Just like the wind the wind that lies.
Marie returns to her place.

THE STATUE: They gave me a bird to be my groom.
Century after century they stole away my son.
They gave him a bachelor father, jealous and eternal.
They carved me in marble and had me bear down with my
weight on the serpent.
I am the ultimate alibi of failed desire.
They gave me a bird as my groom.
They carved me in marble and had me bear down with my
weight on the serpent. (*Pause.*)
No one ever breaks my image.
They start and re-start me without respite.
Who will stare down my image?
Have I no daughter anywhere to liberate me, de-virginate me?
*The Statue lets slip her rosary, which falls with a tremendous
sound, out of proportion to its reality.*

MADELEINE: A dumb woman can't talk. But I just heard something.

THE STATUE: In the name of the father and the son and the holy prick.
Brrr! That air is raw. It's damp inside my statue.
I am in the tree. With the nests.
I see myself seeing myself having been Eve.
I see myself seeing him having been Adam.
I see myself seeing what never existed.
I see myself seeing his Adam's apple bobbing faster up and
down as he hears what I have to say.

MARIE: In my throat I have a song.
In my throat, as well, a cat that eats my song.
In my head I have an idea.
And in my head as well, a kind of order that eats my idea.

MADELEINE: (*going toward the neutral place.*)
Heavy on my heart is a turd that will not let me yodel, yodle-ay-
ee-hoo.
My feet are stuck in shit and can not jig away my freeeeeedom.
Beee-cause.

MARIE: (*Elle chante du Pont de l'île de Félix Leclerc.*)
Il a juste effleuré ma bouche
Comme fait le vent le vent qui ment.
Marie retourne dans son lieu.

LA STATUE: On m'a donné un oiseau comme mari,
On m'a dérobé mon fils de siècle en siècle.
On lui a donné père célibataire jaloux
et éternel.
On m'a taillée dans le marbre et fait peser.
de tout mon poids sur le serpent.
Je suis le grand alibi des manques de désirs.
On m'a donné une oiseau comme mari.
On m'a taillée dans le marbre et fait peser
de tout mon poids sur le serpent. (*Silence*)
Personne ne brise mon image.
On me recommence sans cesse.
Qui dévisagera mon image?

Personne ne brise mon image.
On me recommence sans cesse.
Qui dévisagera mon image?
N'ai-je point quelque part une fille aui me
délivrera? Qui me déviergera?
*La statue échappe son chapelet qui fait un bruit énorme,
disproportionné par rapport à la réalité.*

MADELEINE: Une muette, ça ne parle pas. Et pour-
tant, j'entends du bruit.

LA STATUE: Au nom de la queue et du père et du fils.
Brr. Le fond de l'air est crû. C'est humide dans ma statue.
Je suis dans l'arbre. Avec les nids.
Je me regarde me regarder avoir été Ève.
Je me regarde le regarder avoir été Adam.
Je me regarde regarder ce qui n'a jamais existé.
Je me regarde regarder sa pomme
d'Adam qui monte et qui descend de plus
en plus vite à mesure qu'il m'entend.

MARIE: J'ai dans la tête une idée.
J'ai dans la tête, un ordre qui mange mon idée.

MADELEINE: (*En allant vers le lieu neutre.*)
J'ai sur le bord du coeur une crotte qui
m'empêche de turluter.
J'ai les pieds englués dans une merde qui
m'empêche de giguer ma liiiiiiiiiiiiberté.
Parce que.

MARIACHI SUITE Mazatlan

Lorraine Vernon

1

3 days now a hurricane warning
in this resort city where black
clouds move ominously over beach
front hotel & windows are marked
with adhesive crosses to prevent
shattering Somewhere at sea
a high wind blows, half-
promise of disaster on the post-
card scene spines of waves split
into ground thunder On the promenade
in wet heat men women children
sweat silently brown skins losing
Salt to sea Each moves somnambulant
:taut, any moment the sea will rise
trees will fly like birds already
winging inward On the sands Mexican
musicians play raucous mariachi music
higher higher louder *higher* than the sea
& brown children compete with violence
running barefoot on the high sea wall

2

in the night
death passed
through the Sea
of Cortes, finding the small
town of La Paz, settled down

on roofs, brown
bodies soft
mud sand
held
death = wind
as it struck /
stilled:

Hurricane kills
630 in La Paz
14,000 hurt
40,000 more
left homeless
Reports *The Los Angeles Times*
Saturday October 2, 1976
(from Mazatlan newstands)

3

Throughout the Mazatlan marketplace
fruit has cooled, crosses are removed
from store-windows Doves & gulls
rest with Mexicans streets roofs
benches breathe as air cools the thick
sweat on skins; inside
the cathedral in the square
a black-frocked priest prays
thanks with his flock of black-
clothed matrons & the virgin
breathes deep in her stone
cloak : flowers nod a delicate
relief around the white wrought
iron bandstand & from under the old
frame, now converted into rock & coke
American style, young Mexicans converge
to dance, laugh joyful at the passing
of the storm

4

at the hotel the desk clerk recounts
the wind of the year before with
Mexican excitement he tells
about the big blast & how
it moved desks, chairs
wind people caught
high off ground
with heroic candor
he tells his own
role saving cloistered guests
who hid in the restaurant
doors shut until wind blew
out, how his eyes sparkled
with the memory of that
valor what tall
tales he tells us
as we listen now
wide-eyed looking
at the exact spot
where the potted
palm flew winging
over the empty lobby
of the *Hacienda*, the year the
wind blew over La Paz

The heart, the sea

Marianne Bluger

A black cord snakes from the waves
to the phone at your knee
pale girl inclined on the beach
Reach and hear in the whorl of ear
the din of an open line to Spain

'Consign's heart was a breaker
'That crashed on a rocky cliff
'Withhold's heart is weaker
'But intact laps the reef

The fluted waves all laced with foam
roll in and smash — some
just short of her splayed feet
The splinters fan where she shall pass

. . . great hearts are greatly broken
small hearts grow great
hearts are greatly broken
small hearts grow
great hearts are . . .

All tears slip into the ocean
So much for the evidence

But the taste of it
like the taste of tears
is good:
It's salt
And sea itself
is evidence

Gowned waves glide in without feet
like women with jars
Oopla and
their legs are in the air
So. There were after all legs

)Jéanne is flushed now from the sun(
'Break break break
'From thy old grey tones oh sea
'Speak out of your mercy
'A curse on this ennui

There's only one death: it
is surely not from blisters
Death is to drown
in the boiling vats
with visions of heroes
brine-drenched mariners
flooding your eyes
And they likewise downed
as they clung to the mast
and realized at last
the voyage itself
a corrupt enterprise

)It was a blue pad . . . a blue pen . . .
an oceanic afternoon . . .(

White shells dead but not fossils
age in the sand and waves
aping hills in wanting the moon
crash down their frustration like fists
The wavelets feign indifference
but they are the waters of consequence
dangerously swiping
little nibbles of coast —
They are undermining continents

In the hollow between neck and shoulder
is cradled the receiver
And one pair of tracks
leads where she is.



Mariana Valverde

Solid walls, square windows, sharp corners: language does sometimes appear to be a venerable old building far older than its occupants, organizing our lives into compartments and perpetuating the myth that outside the house of the fathers it's dark and none too safe. So we stay indoors and adjust our clothes and our emotions to fit the décor.

But sometimes the language of the fathers is more like a crumbling old castle whose continued existence is assured only by the joint effort of whole armies of soldiers, bureaucrats, and court magicians. They keep mending holes, plastering over cracks in the wall, and shooing the curious away from attics and cellars — nobody is allowed to see how run-down the apparently magnificent castle really is. Intruders occasionally slip in past the doorkeepers: bearded radicals carrying paper bags containing poisonous words like “imperialism” or “bourgeoisie”; old hags concealing magical spells under their pointed hats; sexual perverses sporting “Gay Pride” buttons on the lapels of their business suits; lesbian singers disguised as black cats and cleaning women...

There must be a special police force designed to hunt down these subversives, I think: an army of grey-uniformed gnomes, short and fat and bald, clicking their heels and licking their pencil-thin mustaches wherever they find any evidence of criminal activity. These gnomes don't simply murder the innovators; such crude

methods are too obvious to be effective. If they decreed, for instance, that Marge Piercy's “per” (meaning “her/his”) was to be hung by the neck until dead, crowds would gather around the gallows and the new word would attain the heights of fame even as it was being executed. No, they are rather more clever. They hunt down the offending term, put it in a cage, feed it until it's stuffed, and tame it by repeating it over and over in blander and blander contexts. They turn it into a domesticated, powerless pet: a cliché.

The word “hippy” was once a cry of revolt, but the gnomes got hold of it and flooded the airwaves and the pages of the nation with it, until we got so sick of it that we chose to give up the thought rather than have to hear THAT WORD once more. At one time, children were rebellious, and this was called “the generation gap.” But after the language gnomes were through with it, the “g.g.” became such a boring cliché that we all yelled, “Have mercy! Stop!” And now, the “g.g.” does not exist any more. Students are all conservative and competitive, keen on acquiring a wife and a mortgage. I want to complain: I am well under 30 but I do not want to study law or business administration. But I'm at a loss for words. Who wants to be a “youthful rebel”? Or a “women's libber”? And who can help puking at the mere mention of the “counter-culture”? Yech! So I don't say much.

Last week I was bicycling down a busy street and a bus pulled up beside me; on its side, at eye-level, it had a large advertisement for the *Toronto Sun*, consisting of some man's face (their “financial analyst,” I think) and the word CAPITALIST in two-foot letters. Well, at first I thought that the *Sun* had been taken over by terrorists and that they were denouncing someone as counter-revolutionary and capitalist-roader. But after a moment's reflection I decided that if that were the case the terrorists in question would not have the bucks to buy up so much space on a public-transit bus. So I pedalled on and soon came to another conclusion: this was a device of the language gnomes especially designed to make left-wing bicyclists stop using the word “capitalist.” It worked. I cannot now open my Karl Marx without smelling the fumes. A few more experiences like that, and I'll be forced to sell my bike — although I wonder if they have also invaded the inside of the buses.

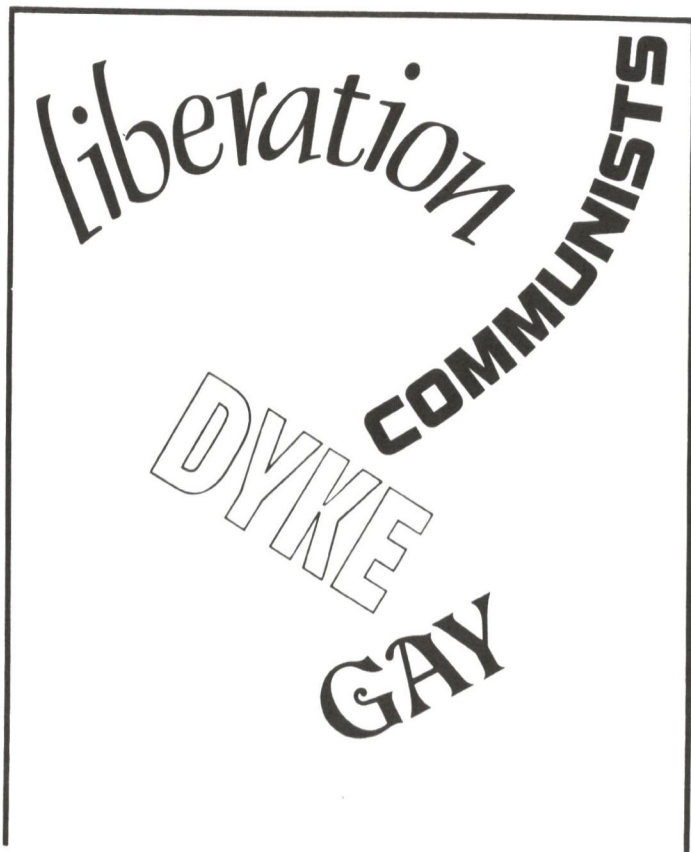
COUNTER-CULTURE

Per

GENERATION | GAP

Hippy

Women's Libber



So we cannot call others "capitalists" and expect them to hang their heads in shame. And we cannot call ourselves "communists," even if that's what we are, because someone might have a heart attack and we'd be sued. We cannot call ourselves gay without newspaper editors blowing their fuses all the way to the Supreme Court; and I'm still waiting to use the word "dyke" on the CBC, to watch them bleep it out.

Even when we talk among ourselves, it's hard to hear ourselves think. When I say "liberation," no matter how softly, people either giggle and point their fingers, or they start snoring. I think of a clever way to phrase something, and it turns out to be a quote from a vaginal deodorant commercial.

So my mind is full of jingles and quotes and badly-rhymed verses; I try to find a beautiful poem I once memorized, and all I can dig up is the latest disco tune. Maybe that's one definition of brainwashing: washing one's brain in buckets of ads and headlines and lies and lies, until it comes out pure and lily-white. (I wonder if *that* was a shampoo commercial I just wrote).

But I must stop: I've just found a gnome in my typewriter, and it's looking up at me from the '7&' key with this wicked, menacing look...

HELP!

CCSIN
 S a parable
 S
 S
 S

Marilyn Julian

PRIDE : loneliness
 ENVY : suspicion
 ANGER : friendlessness
 SLOTH : emptiness
 AVARICE : emptiness
 GLUTTONY : emptiness
 LUST : emptiness
 Fe:Ar

More of the Same

Let us say Once upon a time in 1979 there lived in Canada a fearful woman built like a tube. She had ordinary eyes, ordinary hair, ordinary features and an ordinary body like a Campbell's ten ounce soup can.

She hoarded cans of Campbell's soup, Libby's beans, Clark's soup, No-Brand soup in her larder. She had eyes with an Oriental cast or a Russian tinge or a North American hue. Her name was ordinary: Mary Jones Marika Joncas Maria Josephus Marie Jung. M.J. The same initials purely coincidental the teller of this story has. Variety has always meant ultimately *more of the same*.

Brutality

She wasn't fancy, Mary Jones wasn't. She was pushing a shopping cart down the tin can alley of the supermarket. It was three o'clock. Her list was short. Butter, eggs, bananas, milk and something. The something was a blank. It didn't come in a can or a freezer bag. It was something. Something different. Would she find it?

Not soap, cake mix or dog food.

Oops. The eggs.

On metal racks in metal crates stacked around this end: Small, Medium, Large, Extra Large. Medium eggs would do for a medium ordinary person of ordinary height like Mary Jones. She reached. They cost far too much. She had to put her whole tubular head into the metal crate to reach.

Crack!

Ooh that was a nasty whack. Not the crate. She didn't hit her head on the metal crate. The brown coated arm of another woman, tubular too but taller, brushed over Mary's head.

Am I invisible? Mary Jones wondered. Tears sprang to her throat. Her head smarted where the other woman whacked her.

The other tubular woman taller in brown with ordinary frowzy yellow hair was wheeling away.

Not sorry. Not sorry. Didn't say 'Excuse me.' Got her eggs by whacking Mary Jones in the head then wheeling away.

Oo-oo!

Mary Jones. Mary Jones, that's brutality. That's something. Not something different. It's a blank all right. No values. There are no values left.

Am I invisible? Mary Jones wondered. Crying. I'm afraid. So.

Angry.

God's Garbage

The sky was blue white blue gray and foggy where the sun blazed down. On the supermarket pavement Mary Jones ordinary and tubular in brown set her white petrochemical bag of groceries into her car. Butter, milk, eggs, bananas and . The blank. The gap. She had to fill it. She was angry. She was so hungry. She reached for a ripe yellow banana and peeled it deliberately and ate, ate, gobbled it down to the little black stub while standing on the parking lot smacking her tongue and lips. She tossed the banana peel deliberately out into the traffic route of the pavement. A little compact brown and beige station wagon darted out and slipped to a stop. The woman driving, brown and tubular with ordinary frowzy yellow hair, opened her mouth as wide as a window and yelled at Mary Jones, "What if everyone did that! And you an adult!"

Mary Jones blinked. She recognized that woman. It was the woman who whacked Mary Jones over the egg crate and wasn't sorry.

Mary Jones shouted, "God's Garbage! A banana peel is God's Garbage!"

She felt like crying again.

The woman didn't listen. She shut her mouth with her window and wheeled away.

"Barbarian," Mary Jones muttered. A ball of rage the size of an orange grew into her throat.

"I'm not invisible," she muttered.

No, you were not invisible Mary Jones. This was ordinary. There are no values. You were looking for something different. Perhaps an orange. Look, there's an orange in your throat as big as a ball of rage. Can you dig it out? Can it be outrage? Can you play with it, cook it, toss it through a window?

And the Devil

Ah Mary Jones Mary Jones. "Don't I know you?" the man asked.

"I'm angry!" Mary Jones answered. "Don't talk to me. I'm outraged." Mary Jones in fact was too angry to slip behind the wheel of her car. If she drove off she would steer directly into the supermarket window like a ball of steel going through it and she would kill the cashiers and the manager and the cans of soup and tomato juice would explode everywhere bloody over the cake mix and the dog food.

"I don't blame you," the man said. "It's these teen-agers these days, no values,



they'd rape anybody, slit your throat if you weren't looking. They rob houses at noon just like vampires sucking eggs to draw the yolk out, smoking marijuana and swallowing goldfish. Some of them shave their heads. I don't trust teen-agers who grow their hair long or shave their heads."

How many heads do teen-agers have — one each, or two a piece? Mary Jones wondered. Is a teen-ager tubular in shape or round like an orange? Is a teen-ager Ordinary or Outraged?

Mary Jones narrowed her ordinary Oriental or Russian tinted or North American hued eyes. The man who spoke to her was sitting in the car next to hers. His window was open and he was laughing at her. He looked like a triangle, like an ordinary devil: Oriental or Russian or North American rubicund and black. His head was shaped like an ordinary triangle: broad across the forehead, narrowing at the boney cheeks and pointed at the chin. His hair was black, slicked back, and his chin was dimpled like the chin of the actor Kirk Douglas. His eyes shone or were cloudy and were blue or black or purple. Could they be green? Mary Jones wondered.

"Why don't you forget those teen-agers," the man said. "Come and have a drink with me, Susie."

Mary Jones stared at the man's mouth. His mouth was full-fleshed and playful. His mouth was ordinary. Then Mary Jones looked toward the windows of the supermarket, at the trio of teen-agers lounging there thin as poles, bent angular

like broken toothpicks kicked out of school or unable to find work. She stared back down at the man in the car beside her. His shoulders were broad. He was wearing an ordinary black cloth coat. He might be thirty or forty or fifty. His hips and legs might be slender. Thin. He might be easy to draw. Draw in.

"My name's Marika," said Mary Joncas. Was she going to get in?

"I'm Bruno," he said. (His name was Ted Bruin.) "Are you coming with me, Marika?"

Why Not?

(I'm not afraid of him.)

She locked her car door and walked around the front of Bruno's (Ted Bruin's) black car and slid in beside him.

Mary Mary. He was the devil. A devil of a guy. But ordinary. Ordinary. Like Mary or you or I.

This begins to look like an ordinary pickup in a supermarket parking lot on an ordinary day. Was it *more of the same* or *something different*? Were there no values?

"The bananas were cheap," Marika said. "Nothing else is."

Bruno's car was ordinary inside: a steering wheel, a dash, a radio, a glove compartment, fuel gauge, seats and a sawed off shotgun stuck in a brown paper bag.

"Is that your lunch or a bottle of Blue Nun?" Marika asked, settling her tubular brown boots atop the sawed off shotgun in the brown paper bag.

"It's garbage," said Bruno (Ted Bruin) cruising out of the parking lot. "I'm looking for somewhere to throw it out."

"Off the bridge," Marika (Mary Jones) suggested. "Then we can go to a bar for a think."

A drink.

The New Jerusalem

In the disco bar called The New Jerusalem (Salem, to be brief) it was twenty-five minutes past three o'clock. That was fast. For an ordinary pickup that was very quick. Discos don't open that early.

"Do you believe in sin?" Bruno (Ted Bruin) asked Marika (Mary Joncas).

All the dancers were wearing tight gold pants, long swirling skirts, boots and guns. They were shadows on the walls, in the music, in Mary Jones' glass of gin. They were all young.

"Suck a lemon," Marika said. "It's bitter. I'm too old for Sin. Besides I'm married to him."

"Where is your husband?" asked Bruno (Ted Bruin) looking now as if here was *something different* or *more of the same* he could sink his ordinary incisor teeth into.

"Dead," said Marika grinning, tubular, ordinary.

"Since when?"

"Tomorrow," said Mary. "That's when life begins. Something different."

"Or more of the same," Bruno (Ted) jested. "Be realistic, Marika. I'm the devil."

"My name's Mary," Marika admitted to him. "I don't want to be alone again. It's the worst that could happen. There are no values. It's so empty."

The devil smiled.

He grinned.

Emptiness

Mary Jones, ordinary Mary again, tubular and fleshy, shook her ordinary head and blinked and cleared her throat and felt a groan roll out the size of an orange. "I hate," she said. "I want to love. There are no values." She sobbed. Snick. She sniffed and wiped her tubular nose. She had an impression of reality. What was it? Mary, dear Mary. She had a lump on her head like the shape of an egg or a balloon rising from the head of a character two dimensional in a cartoon. She was not in a disco. She was in a tavern or a dimly lighted restaurant at three-thirty in the afternoon. There was no one with her. She was alone. She must go home. She remembered. Somewhere an hour or two or three from now there was an ordinary woman tubular and brown but taller sitting down with husband and family or some second or third person serving dinner made from EXTRA Large eggs and self-righteously telling the story about the adult grown woman. "Peeling a banana in the supermarket parking lot then tossing the peel onto the pavement!" Saying, "I told her off, boy, did I ever let her know what I thought of such behaviour in public. An adult, what kind of example is she setting! The nerve of some people! I mean, the nerve! There oughta be a law! A law against people! I mean, what if everyone acted like that, the world would multiply with garbage!"

Fruitful, her son or her daughter or the second or third person is asking, "Did you buy any bananas this week, Mom, woman?"

"Don't interrupt. They were too expensive."

The City of Revelation

One moral of this story, if morals there must be some — especially if there are Value Days but no values — is: one ordinary person's banana is another ordinary person's EXTRA Large egg. Or seriously: Mary Joneses must be very watchful in supermarkets near the eggs. Or: wearing a hat with an electronic buzzer might prove useful against getting whacked. Or: Mary Joneses might avoid supermarkets altogether, taking the consequence of starvation as matter of fact.

Another moral of this story, if morals there must be two (*two-for-the-price-of-one* on Value Days of no value) is this.

Ordinary people, but taller, must be very watchful of banana peelers in parking lots. This will give them a feeling of *power* at dinner. But not much satisfaction.

A third moral is unnecessary but might be relevant. It is this: never judge a tube as merely another tube, for it might be a concealed weapon. There is no sure-fire protection against it, and many tubes look alike, and some cause explosions. (Toothpicks, broken. Soupcans, hoarded. Dynamite, stolen. Sawed off shotguns.)

This is how FEAR begins.

BEYOND THE IMAGE

LILIAN LIJN

JOAN MURRAY

Joan Murray and Liliane Lijn.
(Photo: Stephen Weiss)



Lijn's quoted statements are from an interview with her by the author, 23 September 1978, on file in the archives of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario.

Liliane Lijn sees herself as a “transformer,” the induction coil which raises or lowers the strength of an electric current. She makes art which deals with transformation, both genuine (as in the refraction of light through prisms) or virtual. Through the metaphors of light and movement her art celebrates life and death, the essential transformation processes. She sees her work as a way of changing the state of mind of the viewer.

Unlike the work of Dan Flavin, an American artist who uses light as a way to demarcate and create space, Lijn dematerializes matter with light. Hers is a spiritual quest: her work is transcendental, contemplative and meditative, and actively disengages the mind from its normal patterns of thought with hypnotic, hallucinatory effects. She sees her work in terms of Buddhist philosophy and has adopted the concept of D.T. Suzuki who said, “Buddhists have conceived an object as an event and not as a thing or substance.” He work is concerned with flow — not with the “image of us but with what we are.” She has taken form beyond three-dimensional sculpture into the 21st century and allows us to see it as a luminous code. Her “columns” are a condensed, codified image of “form in space-time.”

As an artist totally immersed in her time, she is involved in relativity theory, and Riemannian¹ space. Lijn has also been involved in the study of theoretical physics, which she feels parallels Eastern philosophy. As she points out,

¹A Riemannian manifold or subset of a Euclidean space where tensors can be defined to allow a general study of distance, angle and curvature.

“modern physics is looking at Buddhist and Indian philosophy for an understanding of what it sees in the scattering experiments of experimental physics.”

One of her artistic problems is based on the principle of uncertainty: Can we really perceive anything objectively? Says Lijn, “one of the things I’ve tried to do is visualize a four-dimensional space-time continuum which physicists visualize mathematically but claim is quite impossible to see. I’m interested in seeing it.” Her art, therefore, is metaphysical in the broadest sense because it touches areas that both modern physicists and ancient philosophers have explored. She has written an unpublished manuscript, “The Crossing Map,” a philosophical and ambitious work, which grew out of her habit of keeping a personal diary for twenty years. In 1961, she adopted the name “Lijn” (the Dutch word for ‘line’). In the same year she began to read *Scientific American* — as poetry.

Today Lijn lives in London, England. After growing up in New York City and attending boarding school in New Hope, Pennsylvania, and a State school in Switzerland, where she first took an interest in the visual arts, Lijn studied History of Art at the Sorbonne and the École du Louvre. She arrived in Paris at the tail end of the Surrealist movement, finding it “sadly deflated.” But still she was excited by it and attended meetings where she met Breton, Péret, Meret Oppenheim and others, as well as studying and reading all the Surrealist and Dadaist writings she could. She was impressed with “unconscious” writing and dream painting, especially because she had unwittingly been doing something similar before she came to Paris, and

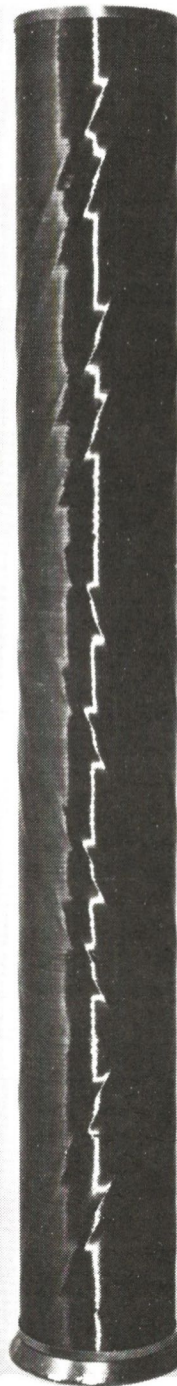
so felt confirmed in what she was doing when she met artists who had “invented” this way of working. In Paris, she was impressed by Ancient Egyptian, Archaic Greek, Indian and Chinese art, as well as by Brancusi and Giacometti. She was particularly fascinated with the extraordinary universe of Bosch with “those strange plastic-looking bubbles as if Bosch saw into the future.” As a person, she felt very lost because she was “very young, didn’t go to an art school and immediately on arrival in Paris met a great many well-known professional artists.” She taught herself to paint and draw but, because she did not feel at home with these traditional media, she gradually became more interested in exploring and inventing new forms.

From the beginning her art was involved with a “desperate need to find out who I was and what I was . . . to realize myself,” and provided a means of imposing order on her life. Paris was confusing; art was a way of sorting out her thoughts, clearing her mind of what she felt was the rubbish of her education. Most of all, she wanted to empty her mind, to be involved in “the making.” She recalls the multitude of influences: “When I went to Paris my mind was filled with an absolute miasma of facts, thoughts, impressions, stimuli, other artists, other art, the Louvre, all the museums, all the exhibitions, surrealist books on surrealism, poetry, music, people . . . it was endless.” It was during this period that she immersed herself in the study of Buddhism. Her orientation was always the same — a quest for self with her art a part of the quest.

It was also at this time that she met Erro, Hundertwasser, Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, and particularly Takis, with

whom she had a long and close relationship, as well as the poet Gregory Corso, and many musicians (among them, Ornette Coleman). Kinetic art had not yet been discredited by its technical difficulties; it was still involved in research into optical perspective and was demanding a new kind of perception on the part of the viewer. In this art form, the invisible was seen as a network: spatial relationships, motion and time were all factors to be concerned with in directing the laws of physics to art’s intuitive ends. Takis had begun to use vibratory movement in 1955, the year in which the first of his *Signals* was completed. In 1959, the year after Lijn met him, he had begun his first magnetic work. Born in 1925 in Athens and self-taught, Panayotis Takis Vassilakis struck Lijn as an “unassuming, warm and friendly human being.” As she recalls, “he didn’t care about intellectuality. He didn’t care to name things; he cared to understand them. That was what drew me to him, his understanding of materials — he taught me how to relate to matter.”

Takis, in particular, encouraged her explorations, less as a teacher than as a fellow traveller. Lijn makes the distinction clear: “When I met him, I was exploring and he encouraged my explorations . . . I wasn’t a copier. I was interested in making what he was making. I was interested in finding out who I was;” and “His help to me was to aid me in finding out who I was, in the sense that he always encouraged me. He never blocked any of my efforts. He would say, ‘yes, do it.’ He’d find tools I could use, and bring them to me as gifts. This was a fantastic help. It’s the greatest help you



Linear Light Column, 1969,
copper wound perforated metal cylinder in rotation at 3 rpm,
6' x 9"
Courtesy: collection of the artist
(Photo: Stephen Weiss)

can have . . . somebody who encourages you in whatever direction you happen to be going.”

As a way of orienting herself to her puzzling outward circumstances, Lijn worked on a puzzle painting. She took a large jigsaw puzzle to pieces, painted each piece separately, and then tried to put it together . . . which took her about three weeks because, as she says, she “didn’t have a clue anymore as to how to put it together. *The image was gone.*” Takis was excited about her work, suggested that she do it with sculpture, and taught her to cast bronze.

During the same period, 1958-59, she also became involved with making a very particular type of drawing using wax, gouache and ink. These large, scroll-like and extremely luminous works were “mind-emptying” for Lijn. When she made them, she experienced hallucinations, mental trips, fantasies. She stopped making the works at a point where “my mind didn’t hallucinate anymore. My mind became empty. My drawings became absolutely perfect. They were so good, you would have thought they were old etchings, not made at that moment. I felt they were dead. I couldn’t go any further with them.”

The problems of light’s reflection, refraction and eventual re-emission have interested her from that time. Through her explorations, Lijn found a totally new world of vibrating lines, webs of light and colour. She moved into working with light and, inevitably, into working with movement — slowly, like a “sure-footed sleepwalker.” Although her work and Takis’ have been quite divergent, the research impulse is parallel. Her detailed and

profound investigations of light are related to her own intuitive feelings about light in her own life. For her, the word "light" itself stands for "life." Growing up on the fourth floor of an apartment building on West End Avenue and 94th Street in New York, with the building opposite seventeen stories high, she remembers that it was only "once in a while that I got a ray of sunlight into the room." For her, family outings, happy events, were always associated with sunshine. Her father "never had a closed car in his life . . . always a convertible." She tends to relate her predilection for light with a vision she had when she was eighteen or nineteen, while waiting for her father to arrive one night in the Geneva airport. Looking in one of the glass windows at the airfield she saw her reflection in the glass, "studded with glittering lights from far away villages, and slow moving clouds, and the coloured signals of the airfield." "I knew then that I was not solid." The ambiguity of what we take to be solid form is an important part of Lijn's work: she is interested in the definitely solid object which dematerializes before one's eyes, the constantly ongoing process of flux and flow, the "ebullient quivering dance of the living." Only much later was the fact that she had a body to become a problem she attempted to solve in her art.

Over the years, her work has grown more refined but it has remained consistent. Early in 1960 she started experimenting with new materials to get the light and luminosity that she wanted. Her first discovery was a kind of mixed plastic stick with a wick in the middle which was partially teflon, a

plastic wax used by professional skiers (she actually found it while skiing). Once the wick was lit, the stick became molten. Lijn found a way of vibrating it in its molten state, creating filaments of colour that she would let drop on canvas, wood, and then perspex. Further investigations into plastics occurred. At the end of 1960, living in New York, she had found a plastic factory which accommodated her experiments as she burned "all sorts of plastics and nylons one at a time to see what they would do when they reacted with fire." The year 1960-61 was for her a time of process art: she was not interested in the results but only in what happened to the materials with which she worked.

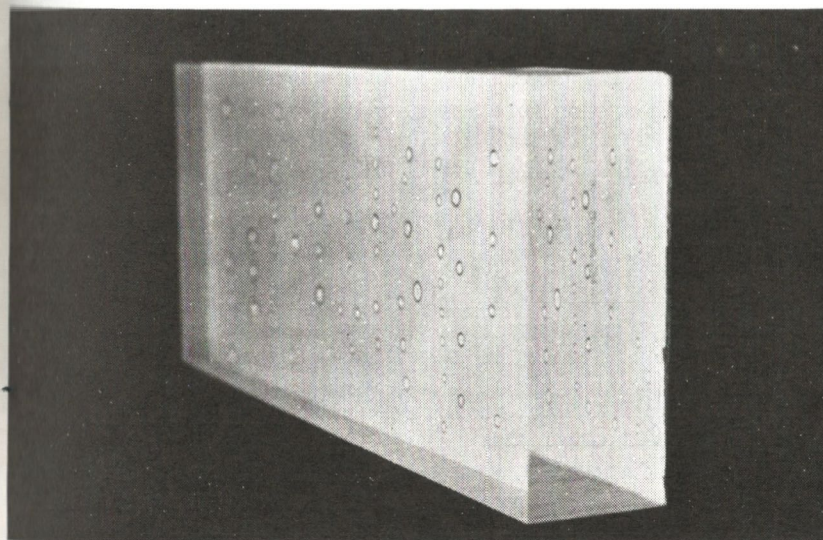
Eventually she found that what interested her were the clearer reflections of the plastics she used, and she was particularly interested by acrylic liquid polymer. Dripping it onto the surface of clear perspex, she got a totally transparent result. When the light hit it, the dripped polymer cast reflections onto the background. It was this result that interested her: coloured reflections without colour (and thus without substance), similar to the vision that she had had of herself in the airport as a young girl. Lijn's polymers became more formalized. She made lenses using a hypodermic syringe, injecting the polymer onto the surface of solid acrylic (plexiglass). The result was a perfect lens which would take the light and throw it onto the back surface of the block of perspex. In her mind were "those drops of water that are contained in crystals, a million years old," but she was always thinking of solids, and the results of this work did not satisfy her.

When she injected the polymer, the effect was exciting because it was wet and would move. But when the polymer dried, it became static: "When the sun or any kind of light lit these lenses, they cast a reflection. When you moved across the room, the reflection moved, it changed place." The artist wanted to make the work move as it did naturally; she made a projector which had a bulb and a turning motorized lens. As the light went through the lens, it changed its directions so the reflections started to move, in the process doubling and tripling, seeming to grow out of themselves. The solution was not perfect but in itself was interesting. Lijn took three years before she thought of putting water in a container and letting it condense on the surface to form its own lens.

From 1964-66 Lijn lived in Greece where she built a house outside Athens, in the construction of which she "learned how to deal with tech-

nicians, how to talk to them, and how to enjoy talking to them." In Greece it was easy to go into a machine shop and ask somebody to turn something on a lathe. The lesson of how to deal with people other than her friends or those involved in the arts was an important one. She was to find the knowledge "liberating" later, in London in 1967, when she had no studio and no tools but could specify work to be made by any company or factory.

Four forms became manifest while Lijn was in Greece: the "cones," the "columns," the "discs" and the "prisms." It is these four forms that the artist has refined and developed, moving back and forth from one to the other, over the years. Remembering her initial recollection of a drum she'd seen in the Paris museum in 1962-63, she began to use drums with lines on them which, when she simply turned them, became blue and red, vibrating and creating colour in the viewer's retina. Lijn felt excited about

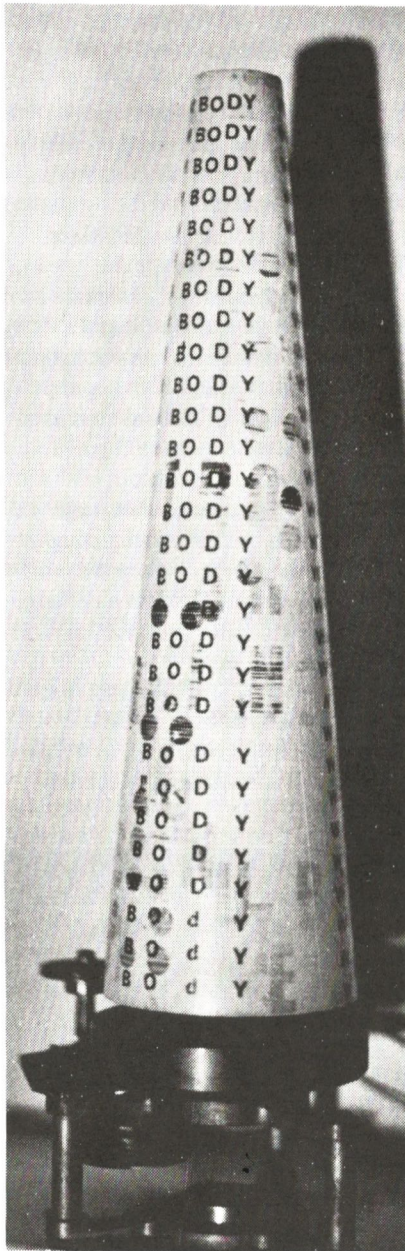


Echo-Light, 1963,
plexiglas and liquid polymer, 24" x 7" x 3"
Courtesy: private collection in Paris
(Photo: Jean-Loup Charmet)

this: "Words are made out of lines. I'll use words." She then began to Letraset words onto oil filters and put the filters into structures which would make them rotate. She worked with the poet Nazli Nour, cutting and condensing her poems, putting them on drums and rotating them at different speeds until they became vibrations. Through this process, she felt she was turning the drum into a visual form of sound: the words themselves were transformed into energy patterns. Lijn showed her "Poem Machines" first in Paris in 1963; it was the first kinetic poetry ever made, she said, "except for Tibetan prayer wheels." By 1964-65, using discards from industry and, in particular, oil filters or "found" drums which were "nicer because they had patterns on them;" she hand-painted on lines and caused them to spin.

In Greece in 1964, she didn't have electricity so she made hand-driven poem machines that the participant could flick into activity. Still later, working with the short poems of Leonard Marshall, an American who believed in reciting his work rather than in writing it out, she studied the repetition and spacing of each of the spoken lines and noticed that they generated a rhythm. She translated this rhythm into a vibration to see the way the poem would have been said. What she here achieved was an "interchange of the senses."

Among the oil filters Lijn found in Greece were some made out of either perforated metal or wound wire. When these turned, they vibrated and the lines formed a special pattern. One filter she found had a dent in it; when she turned it, light reflected along the form in a perfect thin line which



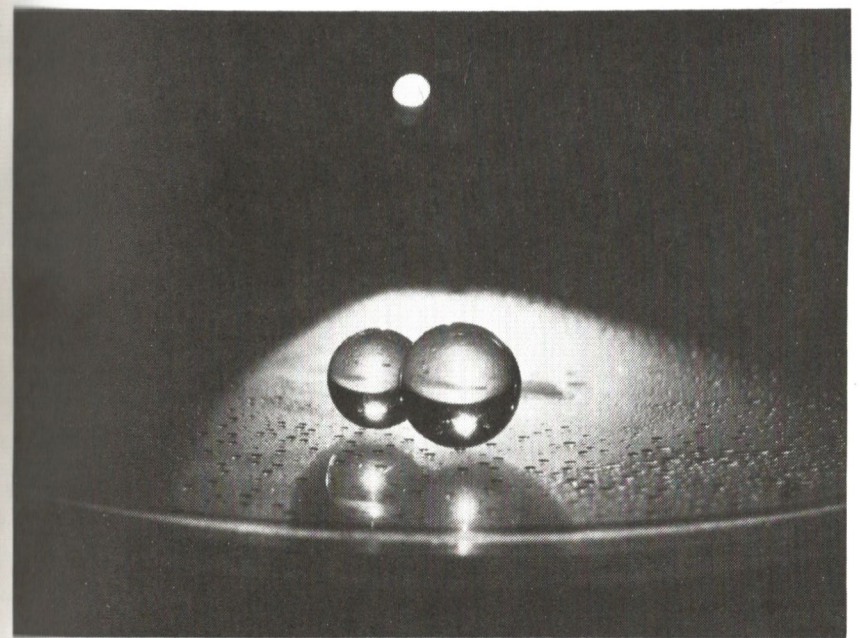
Poemkon, 1964,
painted and letraset wood, and motor, 3' x 21'' high

bounced when it hit the dent, making, as Lijn recalls, "a dancing line of light!" She determined to make better ones herself.

When Lijn moved to London in 1966, her first pieces were her "Liquid Reflections," which she made by rotating a hollow disc of perspex with water inside. She had discovered that water used in this way condensed into spheres, perfect natural lenses which reflected light onto spheres of clear perspex placed on top of her piece. But she was equally interested in pursuing her drum experiments, and made a very small cylinder similar to one she had found in Greece. She then decided to make a wound piece for herself.

Remembering that the inside of motors have windings on them, she went to a motor repair shop, and found it a revelation since the technology and industry were so much more sophisticated in London than in Greece: "There were all these drums full of copper wire and differently coloured wires. Fantastic." In making her own cylinder, she made changes on the surface by putting wire across it and then winding over the wire. As one wire crossed the surface vertically, another wire was winding it horizontally. Changes occurred on the surface, which were reflected and shown as a line of light.

She then went to a factory to find



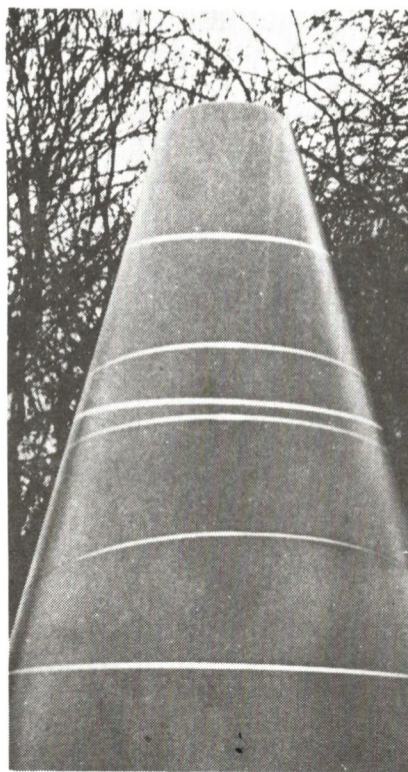
Liquid Reflections, 1967-8,
plexiglas, water, liquid paraffin, turntable and lamp,
43'' diameter disc, balls 4'' and 2 1/2'' diameter
Courtesy: The Tate Gallery, London
(Photo: Stephen Weiss)

turntables for the “Liquid Reflections” and saw, in passing, an “extraordinary” cylinder made out of perforated steel. About four feet long, the form had holes in it for displaying soap suds or a similar product. Lijn changed the proportions, doubling the length to eight feet by one foot in diameter, and used it horizontally. She then decided to make her own pattern on the perforated steel, and wound the wire on by hand, using the motor which ran the piece. This piece, her first large column, she showed at the 1967 Paris Biennale. The multitude of changes that occurred when the copper column was rotated as a horizontal drum had a violent effect, like lightning, in contrast to the vertical columns she made in subsequent years which undulate — rippling, dancing and alive — and which seem to flow continually in wave patterns as they move.

Besides the drums and columns, Lijn began to work with voluminous, heavy aerodynamic cone shapes, truncated at the top. The idea for these shapes came from the highway cones she’d seen all over Europe; she felt they were signals pointing the right way, sending symbolic but directed messages. “I started with the highway cone but I didn’t stay there.” Her favourite among the early works using this form was a very small one of wood, part of a set of three she had machined in Greece. These she painted, adding letters in Letraset and getting them to revolve. In Paris she had made cork cones of different diameters and sizes. With these, she felt she came as close as she could to a highway cone, using similar colours — red and white, or yellow and white stripes.

Then she put on layers of multi-coloured stripes, or instead, words. At first she used a simple motor, a working mechanism ripped from something else.

Lijn called each of these works a “koan,” thus punning on the cone shape and Zen problem. Koans are questions having no one answer, or no answer, paradoxes provoking sudden insightful views into the heart of things — e.g., “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” — which she

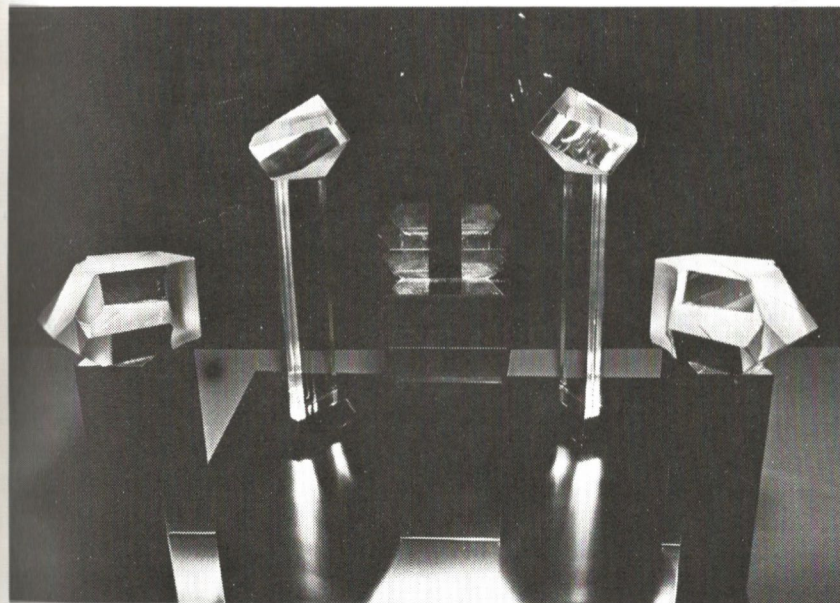


Anti-Gravity Koan, 1968, fiberglass cone dissected by 6 elliptical planes of green, orange and red plexiglas; turntable and fluorescent strip light inside cone, 5'6" high, 40" diameter. Courtesy: collection of Mme. Boissonnas, Flaine, France (Photo: George Lewinsky)

used as the title of a fifteen-minute 16 ml. colour film she made in 1972. In the period 1967-68, she developed the cone forms, using translucent perspex planes which cut through the body of a cone molded of white fiberglass. At the intersection of cone and plane, the viewer saw only edges or lines. Lit from within, the pieces began to have a life of their own, especially at dusk, when the lines became more and more luminous and the conic body faded away, dematerialized, until in total darkness, all the viewer could see were the lines of light. As they moved, wavering and undulating, the visual result was hypnotic, soothing and erotic. Six cones together created an

“erotic dance” of luminous lines. By now, Lijn had begun to work with large pieces outdoors — one twenty foot cone with neon ellipses sited in a city could truly be seen as a transformer of reality. As the artist pointed out, the result was actually a distortion of reality. During the day, the sculpture seen from a distance looked two-dimensional, like a cardboard cut-out; so did the surrounding buildings.

At this time, too, Lijn began to examine a “tool” she had begun to work with or at least “find” in 1963 — prisms. These refracting optical instruments were, for her, real transformers: they converted white light into a precise spectrum of colour. She had



detail of *In Sud Memoria*, 1971-2, stainless steel, chrome plated steel, plexiglas, and optical glass prisms, 24" by 19" x 21" & 14" resp. Courtesy: collection of Stephen Weiss (Photo: Stephen Weiss)

begun collecting them in 1960 in Paris but recalls, "I've never made things when I wanted to make them . . . when the idea occurs, but after, once it has had time to mature." In 1964 in Paris, a flash of intense monochromatic colour from a store window (a display of prisms, she discovered afterwards) changed her whole mood, making her feel "enlightened." Another incident, which occurred one summer in Greece when the sun hit prisms on a shelf in her home, had inspired her. In 1965 she made the *Periscope Eye*, with two periscope prisms she had had around as objects for several years but never really "got a flash out of them." Later, in 1966, she began to develop a cosmology based on prisms as "persona," stacking them into shapes reminiscent of cairns or stone circles, ritual events, and in one case, using them as a funerary monument. These found objects refracting rainbow-coloured light across the walls of rooms, created a simpler lightplay than she had used earlier. Eventually Lijn was to refine her structure even more. Since 1974 she has been using the "improbable relationship" of prisms with stones from Cornwall to suggest her real concerns: mind and body, yin and yang. For the artist the combination is important . . . she is trying to connect her mind with her body. She has lived too long, she feels, "without realizing she has a body." She looks for a harmony of body and mind and wants these works to be seen in a quiet place, peaceful sand gardens, an environment suitable for meditation.

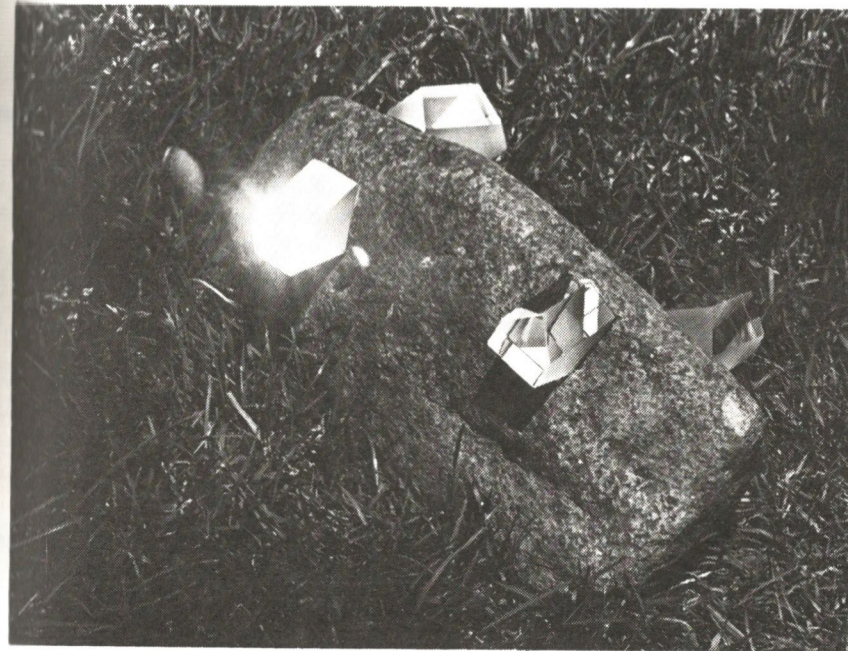
In 1974, in a work called *Denslens*, the artist attempted to place the viewer in a framework which she hoped, ideally, would lead to pure concentra-

tion, a meditative state of mind, by literally sitting the viewer down before a thick semi-circular lens and a column so that the observer looked through the lens at the column. What happened for the viewer was an "event," luminously and amazingly coloured and continually changing. The work was a three-part alignment where the lens magnified the windings, and the line of light reflected on her moving column.

In contrast to her earlier technological kinetics, these works are subdued, thoughtful and tranquil. The challenge of the transference of self into her art has been met. In this realization, the large body of her drawings plays an important role. They concern flow and movement, the kind of movement manifested by gases in outer space or liquids in rivers and seas. These are the passage for her to self-realization, the medium through which she meditates her own development through time, the flow beyond the image.



Landscape, 1978,
grisons stone, optical glass lens, prisms, 7" x 6"
Courtesy: collection of the artist
(Photo: Stephen Weiss)



Saurian, 1978,
Lake District stone, optical glass prisms, 16" x 8" x 8"
Courtesy: collection of the artist
(Photo: Stephen Weiss)

THE WRITER**Nicole Brossard****L'ÉCRIVAIN****Translated by Linda Gaboriau**

The English translation is excerpted from a pre-publication manuscript edition now available from Coach House Press, Toronto.

A woman presses down her pencil, firmly, wisely.
 But she is not writing love poems.
 She is drawing flat bellies. Whole vulvas.
 She is changing the order of the words.
 She misses a beat, the pencil is soft.
 It's midnight and it's still hot.
 I like lampshades and shadow plays.
 Something is stirring me and chilling me at the same time . . .
 Long fingernails.
 Thin skin. It tears too easily.
 The skin of a fanatic. Tattooed.
 Covered with ancient symbols and new words.
 Images, flashes beneath the lampshade.
 I don't want to put off anything until tomorrow.
 Tonight I am going to face myself. Take stock.
 I want to strip off all the cosmetic layers.
 Where and how will I carry myself away?
 To or from myself. To or from others.
 I wait for the nighttime to bring things to light.
 Somewhere between fiction and reality. Which tale should I spin Tonight?
 What difference does it make? My tales always precede me.
 Fiction preys on me.
 Sometimes I think I'm an adjective.
 I grew up as an adjective.
 Pretty, fat, feminine, bold, charming, skinny
 Not bad, smart little girl.
 Tonight I am tearing out my blank pages, my old favorites.
 I tear ahead.
 I speak to forge a path through silence.
 A break on the horizon.
 What am I. What am I not.
 An invisible sight in the blind spot.
 A woman thinks she's right. She finds herself alone. After
 all, a woman talking to herself is a woman waiting for something to happen.
 I talk. I speak. My words are a white light in the dark room.
 The negative of the dark words printed on the pages of sleepless
 white nights.

"L'Écrivain" originally appeared in La Nef des Sorcières (Montréal: Editions Quinze, 1976), a series of monologues for feminist theatre by Quebecois women writers.

Montréal, Mars 1976.

Une femme appuie savamment sur son crayon.
 Mais elle n'écrit pas de poème d'amour.
 Elle dessine des ventres plats. Dès vulves totales.
 Elle change l'ordre des mots.
 Elle détonne par en-dedans, le crayon mou.
 Il est minuit. Il fait encore chaud.
 J'aime les abat-jour et les ombres chinoises.
 Qu'est-ce qui m'attise et qui me refroidit en même temps?
 Des ongles trop longs.
 Une peau fine. Qui déchire à rien.
 Une peau de fanatique. Tatouée.
 Pleine de signes anciens et de mots nouveaux.
 Des images, des *flashes* sous l'abat-jour.
 Je ne veux rien remettre à demain.
 Cette nuit, je me rencontre. Je fais les comptes.
 Je veux faire fondre tous les fonds de teint.
 Où et comment suis-je en train de me déplacer?
 Par rapport à moi. Par rapport aux autres.
 Je choisis la nuit pour parler au grand jour.
 Entre le fictif et le réel. À quelle fiction me donner.
 Quand de toute manière celle-ci me précède toujours?
 Je suis une proie de fiction.
 Il m'arrive de me prendre pour un adjectif.
 J'ai grandi en adjectif.
 Belle, grosse, féminine, effrontée, charmante, maigrichonne
 Pas pire, brillante la petite.
 Cette nuit, je décolle mes pages blanches, mes vieux
 morceaux choisis. Je décolle.
 Je parle pour me donner une voix d'accès.
 Un trou d'horizon.
 Ce que je suis, ce que je ne suis pas.
 Cible fictive dans le centre blanc.
 Une femme pense avoir raison. Elle se retrouve seule. Au
 fond, une femme qui parle seule est toujours une femme qui
 s'attend à quelque chose de nouveau.
 Je parle. Je parle. Je parle en blanc dans le noir d'une salle.
 C'est comme le contraire des nuits sur papier blanches
 d'insomnie.

And my hands are free to speak. To find a new sense. A sixth sense for my existence.

As I speak, I have a political pact among women in mind.

Touch me. Private life is political.

The set starts to shake before my eyes and it is word-shaking.

Which words? I am improvising on new ground. I reclaim my right, my due. Words come to the surface.

They arrive from afar. Through the ages. Barely audible through the songs and the sobbing of women in labor I am laboring in a reality that dangles like live bait right under my nose. I am looking for words. Searching everywhere. In the folds of dresses, in tufts of hair, between my toes, under my tongue, between the sheets, in the bellies of statues.

Beeswax.

The small wax Venus melts slowly and reveals no more secrets beneath the lampshades. She salivates. She speaks a few words. My mouth is not sealed. But pain is everywhere in the ghost of my limbs. No time to waste, I must burn some pages from the past when I loved men, took care of them, cleaned for them.

The time has come to call their bluff.

I refuse to write simply to expiate collective stupidity.

Tonight I shall step into history without opening my legs.

I step into history opening my mouth not my legs.

I arrive with words and with solidarity. Like a mad woman at the time of the full moon I will follow a difficult but necessary course.

Perhaps it's obvious. Perhaps it isn't. But I am afraid.

Afraid of being lured. Afraid of trading my most vital convictions.

Afraid that they will cut off all dialogue. And that I will be cut off from other women's words and broken dreams. That I will be exiled and banished before I can reach them.

But there are bridges. There is a direct route from the brain to the belly, when we allow ourselves to move freely through our bodies.

Inside. Outside. I bend to understand and the rediscovery always comes in an uncontrollable orgy of words. Words from a grammatical erection.

It destroys the bridges. And leaves me alone like a silent 'e' weaving sentences where the masculine gender always dominates. I weave the web to my horizon. Adrift in the immense sea of my avid stare.

Listening.

My head is spinning with the planet. If it seems too fast, it's because I'm saying no, I'm resisting. Hysterical. Hysterical.

Et j'ai les mains libres pour parler. Pour me donner des sens nouveaux. Un sixième sens à mon existence.

Je parle dans la perspective d'un pacte politique avec d'autres femmes. Touchez-moi. La vie privée est politique.

Le décor me saute devant les yeux et je saute des mots.

Lesquels? J'improvise sur un terrain nouveau. Je reprends mon droit, me dûs. Les mots font surface.

Ils viennent de loin. Millénaires. À peine audibles dans le chant et les pleurs de femmes en labeurs.

Je suis en labeurs dans une réalité qui me pend au bout du nez comme un appât. Je cherche mes mots. Je fouille partout. Dans le repli des robes, les touffes de poil, entre les orteils, sous la langue, entre les draps, dans le ventre des statues.

La cire des abeilles.

La petite Vénus de cire fond lentement et ne livre plus de secrets sous les abat-jour. Elle salive. Elle dit des mots. Je n'ai pas la bouche cousue de fils blancs. Mais la douleur partout comme en des membres fantômes.

Il est urgent que je brûle quelques papiers du temps que j'ai- mais, soignais et torchais les hommes.

Urgent de déjouer les ruses.

Je refuse d'écrire pour expier la bêtise collective.

Ce soir, j'entre dans l'histoire sans relever ma jupe.

J'y entre avec des mots dans l'histoire sans relever ma jupe.

J'y entre des mots et une solidarité. Je m'inscris comme une folle de pleine lune dans un parcours difficile et nécessaire.

Ça paraît peut-être. Peut-être que non. Mais j'ai peur. Peur du leurre. Peur de trafiquer mes certitudes les plus vitales. Peur qu'on coupe tout discours, qu'on me coupe des paroleuses, des femmes rompues. Qu'on m'exile et me bannisse avant d'avoir pu les rejoindre.

Mais il y a les ponts. Des routes qui du cerveau au ventre sont irréversibles tant le plaisir est grand de circuler paisiblement dans son corps.

Du dedans, du dehors, je me penche pour comprendre et c'est comme toujours par une folie retrouvée et insaisissable avec des mots. Les mots d'une grammaire en érection.

Qui coupe les ponts. Et qui me laisse seule à tramer comme un "e" muet mes phrases où le masculin l'emporte toujours sur le féminin.

Je tisse ma toile d'horizon. La mer immense entre mes yeux fixés et avides. Dans le vague. Écoutant.

Je tourne dans ma tête avec la planète. Quand c'est vite c'est que je dis non, que je résiste. Hystérique, hystérique.

Give us a kiss. Give us a kiss. I stink, I swarm. I am fighting a strange body. I am spoiling the show that impotent spectators want to enjoy at my expense.

Otherwise, I turn slowly, like a variation and my head moves to the tic-toç of my thoughts. Sounds, words, sounds, words, sounds. Words. Woolly. Wild. Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? But in fact I don't want to take revenge on anyone. I am without a horse, without a shadow. Without a rider. And it feels good to be oneself, for oneself, quietly unfolding. I want to decipher the paperthin skin of my age. I want to exhibit for you, for us, all that we have in common. I write and I don't want to do it alone any more. I want us. I want to make history, to shake and shudder and growl.

Private life is political.

This rupture will be an inauguration. I am crossing thresholds. I am passing through something that is me, something determined to prove that it is not an image. Pastel prints. Pale pink rose mary. Bleeding hearts. Wild daisies. I don the dark of mourning when I cross the threshold, written black on white. Could we see the difference if the ink was white? Contrast, content, continuity. Woman of fiction. Where is my centre of gravity? I am afloat. It's difficult to live with your head caught in the "bottleneck of history." The night stretches out like a series of pendulums one after another marking time and unwinding memories. Men's memories. A souvenir of our love. Mon Amour. Eternally yours. Isolda. Eurydice. Sappho. Emma Bovary, the wife of Charles taking pathetic vengeance in her monologues. All of them buried in passion.

Fragments. Ancient parchment and modern parchment. All worn thin. Dismembered.

Not possessed. But dispossessed.

My memory delves deep tonight. A breath of odors to be exhaled. My memory is as deep as all the desires that remain caught in my chest. The writer and the woman are coming out of hiding. Something is exciting me but I can't quite call it by name.

Examine all the blemishes. And the circles under my eyes. It's late. Imagine imagination like a fan or like a mother tongue that has just had its first orgasm.

Ti-kiss, ti-kiss. Je pue, je pullule. Je combats le corps étranger. Je gâche le spectacle que les impuissants cherchent à s'offrir à mes dépens.

Autrement, je tourne lentement comme une différence et je bouge dans ma tête avec le bruit de l'horloge. Des sons, des mots, des sons, des mots, des sons. Le mot, le mauve, les fauves. Qui a peur de Virginia Woolf? Mais au fond je n'ai de revanche à prendre sur quiconque. Je suis sans cheval et sans ombre. Sans cavalier. Et c'est bon, d'être à soi pour soi, sagement son propre déploiement.

Je me déchiffre papier peau de mon âge. J'exhibe pour moi, pour nous, ce qui nous ressemble. J'écris et je ne veux plus faire cela toute seule. Je nous veux. Faire craquer, grincer, grincer l'histoire.

La vie privée est politique.

La rupture sera inaugurale. Je franchis des seuils. Je passe à travers quelque chose qui est moi et qui s'acharne pour se convaincre que ce n'est pas une image. Sage comme une image en rose. Rose de Lima, pétards de Sorel. Marguerite des champs. La couleur est le deuil quand je franchis le seuil, noir sur blanc qui s'écrit. Les yeux verraient-ils la différence si l'encre était blanche.

Relief, récif, récit. Femme fictive. Où est mon centre de gravité? Je dérive.

Difficile de vivre la tête dans le "goulot de l'histoire". De s'allonger la nuit comme de décisives pendules l'une à côté de l'autre pour traverser le temps et défaire les mémoires au fur et à mesure. La mémoire des hommes. En souvenir de notre amour. *With love*. Éternellement vôtre.

Iseult, Eurydice, Sappho. Emma, la femme de Charles, qui se vengeait si dérisoirement dans ses monologues. Ensevelies sous la passion.

Fragmentées. Jeunes et vieilles parcheminées. Usées sur toutes leurs courbes. Démembrées. Non pas possédées. Mais dépossédées.

J'ai la mémoire longue cette nuit. Une haleine à répandre des odeurs à exhaler. J'ai la mémoire aussi longue que tous les désirs restés coincés dans ma poitrine. Je sors de ma cachette de femme et d'écrivain.

Quelque chose m'excite que je ne parviens pas à cerner. Faire le tour de ses démangeaisons. Je dois avoir les yeux cernés. Il est tard. Imaginons l'imagination comme un éventail ou comme une langue maternelle qui vient tout juste d'avoir son premier orgasme.

Unnerving, isn't it?

It's a perilous transition. Passing from one state of consciousness to another. Such a violent quaking that it stirs even the intestines. Maybe that's why it is so easy to confuse having guts and having balls.

It's hot. There is no truce. I'm still talking. At my own risk and peril. Sagittarius in delirium. Intoxicated by the hidden spring. For the first time.

I am half delirious, on one hand not the other. One-sided paralysis. In my stomach, my nerves, my muscles. It proliferates and ramifies. The sleepwalker finds rest. I dream. I speak. Like an old haunted house. My half, my better half, my half of myself. Who wants to be half of someone else? Beauty and the beast. Enter. It's the victim speaking. Hysterical struggle. Writhing in the witches cauldron. The heiress of ridicule. A strange body doing public penance for its difference. But here the victim takes part in the show. She watches herself.

She talks to herself. With or without a mirror.

Rant, rave, radical.

Ready for hours and hours of acrobatics of the mind and the mouth. Amazon. Dart. Dash.

Beware of the harvest.

It is hot in the dreamwater.

Take a deep breath. My chest swells. Here in the evening. In your mindless gap. Ah yes, the sleepwalkers's ultimate glory: you raise your fists before they slit your throat. My hands are free. No fresh pork to cook. The book is sleeping. I am speaking. I rock myself. I'm sitting in a hollow space. Panic surrounds me. My posture is ridiculous: I piss squatting and I have pregnant women's cravings. Owls screech in my throat. I have been sleepwalking since Julie. I was so big. After months of getting up five or six times in the night, you get used to it.

You make friends with the night. In the dark of the night you rediscover yourself. Inch by inch. The freckles, the moles, your eyebrows. You take the real measure of your eyelashes. You keep your eyes wide open. My eyes are blue.

I have never enjoyed talking about myself. As if I always had the feeling that there was nothing special to say about my private life. When really that's all that matters. How you are born, how you play, how you laugh, how you cry, how you die. Men are so hot in public and so frigid in bed, the most private thing

Gênant n'est-ce pas?

Le transit est périlleux. Passer d'un état de conscience à un autre. Un tremblement si percutant qu'il éveille même les intestins. Ce qui fait qu'on confond si facilement avoir du coeur au ventre et avoir des couilles.

Il fait chaud. Pas de trêve. Je parle. À mes risques et périls. Sa-gittaire grisée. Aimantée par ce qui coule de source. Pour la première fois.

Je délire à moitié comme un côté parallèle et infirme. Un côté paralysé. Dans ma digestion, dans mes nerfs, mes muscles. Ça prolifère. Ça se ramifie. Assouvissement de somnambule. Je rêve. Je parle. Comme une vieille maison hantée. Ma moitié, ma douce moitié, ma chère moitié, ma moitié de moi-même. Qui veut être une moitié de quelqu'un?

La belle et la bête. Entrez. C'est la victime qui parle. L'hystérique qui se démène. Qui se tord dans son feu de sorcière. L'héritière de la dérision. Le corps étranger qui expie sa différence publiquement.

Mais ici la victime prend part au spectacle. Elle se regarde.

Elle se parle. Avec ou sans miroir.

Radi, radi frais. Radicale.

Je m'échelonnais des heures et des heures à faire babine et bouche acrobate. Amazone. Dard, dard.

Gare à la moisson.

Il fait chaud dans l'eau de rêve.

La poitrine gonfle. On respire. Ici dedans ce soir. Dans ma fissure d'écrvelée. Ah! Mais oui. C'est le comble du somnambulisme que de s'agiter les pendant qu'on vous égorge.

J'ai les mains libres. Pas de porc frais à cuisiner. Ça tranche. Le livre dort. Je parle. Je me berce. Je suis assise dans un creux. C'est la panique autour de moi. J'ai la posture comique: je pisse accroupie et j'ai des goûts de femme enceinte. Des hiboux dans la gorge.

Je suis somnambule depuis Julie. J'étais grosse! À force de se lever cinq ou six fois la nuit, on y prend goût.

On prend la nuit. On reprend à la nuit pouce par pouce ses morceaux de peau, ses taches de rousseur, ses grains de beauté, ses sourcils. On reprend la vraie longueur de ses cils. On garde l'oeil ouvert. J'ai les yeux bleus.

Je n'ai jamais aimé parler de moi. Comme si j'avais toujours eu l'impression qu'il n'y avait rien de spécial à raconter sur ma vie privée. Et pourtant c'est celle-là qui compte. Comment on naît, comment on joue, comment on jouit, comment on souffre, comment on meurt. Les hommes sont si chauds en public et leur corps si frigidité au lit qu'ils n'ont de privé que

they have is their property.

Sometimes I feel that I have been floating along beside myself since adolescence. Floating in a well-ordered private life. Perhaps it's because I've always had my own way. A man's way. A man's mind grafted to a woman's body. I have been efficient, productive. Like the prodigal son I have ranted and raved in the face of the powers that be. The revolution was on my side. I shouted as loud as any angry young man. My crises always came in October or the autumn. But you become a woman when you've been to jail. You cry and scream and thrash and shout, you bang your head against the walls, you tell yourself stories. You make mountains. It's funny how crazy obstacles can make you. Some afternoons when I'd like to be alone and Julie keeps hanging around, I go crooked and crazy. I call it a mother-ache. On my own, I can work my way out. With someone else, I get locked into loneliness.

The woman writer is juggling on a kitchen chair. Tossing her father's sentences into the air with her mother's and her sisters' silence.

I write in the kitchen. Coffee, street noises. I can see a tree through the window. I don't wash my dirty linen at home anymore. It's a public affair. It has to be seen and felt, let everyone know what is soiled and faded and mended.

Femmes fatales. Surely we must be fatal for someone, for something. Yes, I want to be fatal for thwarted love. Fatal for the family, fatal for insurance policies, fatal for our bodyguards. I am surrounded by bodyguards. Protected. Prevented. The body, my body. This is my body.

Little contractions. Release. Little contractions. My tongue is dry. It's hot. I am damp. It starts to flow. Push. Push. Breathe deeply. Relax. It's hot. Again. Enjoy it. Enjoy it. Push. Push. It's a girl.

My closely watched body. Overexcited. Full of electricity. Who does this body belong to? Where will it go? What will she do? Let me through. Let her through. I want to see up close and touch all over.

It is as if the penis and the vagina were two crippled stumps looking for a crutch. Let me through. It's hot. It's overcrowded. Pages are coming out. Words gather around the clitoris.

leur propriété.

Des fois j'ai l'impression d'avoir flotté à côté de moi depuis mon adolescence. Flotté dans une vie privée bien en règle. D'une certaine manière, parce que j'ai toujours fait à ma tête. À ma tête d'homme justement. Une tête d'homme greffée sur un corps de femme. Oui, j'ai été efficace, oui, j'ai été productive. Devant les pouvoirs, j'ai toujours enragé comme un fils maudit. J'avais la révolution de mon bord. J'enrageais comme un homme de gauche. Mes crises, elles étaient d'octobre ou d'automne. Mais on devient femme quand on fait de la prison. On braille, on crie, on cogne, on s'énerve, on se pète la tête sur les murs, on se fait des accroire. On se fait des montagnes. C'est drôle comme ça rend hystérique les empêchements. Certains après-midi quand j'aimerais être seule et que Julie tourne en rond autour de moi, je deviens maboule et marabout. J'appelle ça mon mal maternel. Ça fait drôle d'écrire maternel au masculin. Seule, je parviens à me débrouiller l'esprit. Mais à deux, je deviens isolée.

La femme qui écrit jongle sur une chaise de cuisine. Confrontant les sentences du père avec le silence de sa mère et de ses sœurs.

C'est dans la cuisine que j'écris. Café, bruits de la rue. Un arbre que j'aperçois par la fenêtre. Je ne lave plus mon linge sale en famille. C'est public. Faut que ça se voit, que ça se sente, que ça se sache ce qui salit le plus, ce qui déteint, ce qui est cousu de fils blancs.

Femmes fatales. Nous sommes sûrement fatales à quelqu'un, à quelque chose pour subir le mauvais sort. Oui, je veux être fatale à l'amour emmuré. Fatale à la famille, fatale aux polices d'assurances, fatale à nos gardes du corps. Je suis entourée de gardes du corps. Protégée. Le corps, mon corps. Ceci est mon corps.

Petites contractions. Détente. Petites contractions. J'ai la langue sèche. Fait chaud. Je suis humide. Ça coule. Poussez. Poussez. Respirez bien. Détends-toi. Fait chaud. Encore. Jouis. Jouis. Poussez. Poussez. C'est une fille. Mon corps surveillé. Surexcité. Plein d'électricité. À qui appartient ce corps? Où ira-t-il? Que fera-t-elle? Laissez-moi passer. Laissez-là passer. Que je vois de près, que je touche longuement.

On fait du pénis et du vagin deux grands moignons qui cherchent appui sur leur infirmité. Laissez-moi passer. Fait chaud. C'est encombré. Les pages se décollent. Les mots affluent autour du clitoris.

Every clitoral orgasm proclaims a historical trembling in the body of the species.

Pleasure in my own right with no holy hypocrisy. No ring, no papers. I celebrate on my own time, in my own unlimited space. It feels good to hear myself talk.

I am not playing a role. I am not playing a role. I am succumbing. That's all. Happy, bruised, delirious. I can relax my belligerent stance.

Do we look alike? I think we do. But we all have our husbands' mannerisms. You from Outremont. Me from Laval. You from Saint Henri. Me from Rosemont. We all look alike, it's easy, we all look the part.

It's hot in the galley. The shepherdesses are throwing off their sheep's clothing.

There is no time to lose. Impossible to retreat. We must seize the sense and the senses.

All over the body and inside.

I wrote the first poems after my first broken heart.

Pettycoats and ponytails. Lamartine and basketball. I started asking questions. That's all. The private life of an adolescent, the private life of an adult. It's all written in the color of our cheeks. All the secrets shared at four o'clock in the schoolyard. The afternoon on the telephone. My memory is hot. The lampshade is on fire. I'm a little tired after all these questions, all this talk. Afraid that the search will lead to the soft centre of my self. It's impossible to find the answer all alone. You cannot free a woman without breaking the chains of her childhood. The fear of inevitable death is greater than in our worst nightmares. Tonight I cast off without a rope, without arsenic, without acid, without arms, without pills. I sink surrounded by madmen, famous, political, sexual, public madmen.

Bitterness, anger, desire, fatigue, love, longing, paper, words: orgasm, cunt, baby, nocturnal pollution, anxiety. That is what it is all about. And I am hot. I am in heat.

I cannot breathe with my airs of a poet, a femme fatale, a fallen angel, a whore, a woman of the world, a charwoman, all caught in the menopause, the calendar, the diaphragm. I choke on the rumors that say I'm just a pastime, a casual affair. A special kind of wild animal to be mounted and tamed.

I liquidate.

Merrygoround. I turn round and round in my woman's hole. I'm learning, I'm learning. I'm speaking.

Toute jouissance du clitoris annonce un chavirement dans le corps historique de l'espèce.

Jouer en son nom sans épousailles macabres. Sans bague, sans papier. Je célèbre dans un temps inaloué. Mes espaces sont grands.

Fait chaud de m'entendre parler.

J'fais pas de théâtre. J'fais pas de théâtre. Je succombe. C'est tout. J'ai le délire heureux et *magané* cette nuit. J'assouplis ma forme de belligérante.

Est-ce qu'on se ressemble? Je prétends que oui. Mais on a les tics de nos maris. Brench et brench. Toi dans Outremont, moi dans Laval, toi dans Saint-Henri, moi dans Rosemont. On se ressemble c'est comme rien. On a toutes le physique de l'emploi.

Fait chaud dans la galère. La folie des bergères va sortir du manteau de mouton.

Il n'y a plus de temps à perdre. Plus de fruite en arrière possible. Il faut ravir le sens, du sens.

Sur toute la surface du corps et dedans.

Mes premiers poèmes, je les ai écrits après ma première peine d'amour. Crinoline et queue de cheval. Lamartine et ballon-panier. Je me posais des questions. C'est tout. Vie privée d'adolescente, vie privée d'adulte. C'est tout marqué dans la couleur de nos joues. De nos confidences après l'école à quatre heures. L'après-midi au téléphone. Fait chaud dans ma mémoire. L'abat-jour est plein d'incendies. Un peu de lassitude après toutes ces questions, ce bavardage. Peur de toucher le fond humide de soi dans la remise en question. Impossible de se remettre en question toute seule. Parler femme c'est dire toute la trahison de l'enfance. C'est craindre plus féroce que dans tous les cauchemars une mort certaine. Ce soir, je dérive sans arsenic, sans acide, sans corde, sans armes, sans pilule. Je coule entourée de maniaques publics, connus, politiques et sexuels.

Amertume, colère, envie, fatigue, amour, désir, papier, mot, orgasme, plotte, bébé, pollueurs nocturnes, angoisse. C'est de tout cela dont il s'agit. Et j'ai chaud. Je suis en chaleur.

Je bave avec mes airs de poète, de femme fatale, d'ange déchu, de putain, de femme du monde, de femme de ménage, de ménopausée, de calendrier, de diaphragme. Je bave sur la rumeur qui fait de moi un à côté, une aventure. Une pas pareille de bête sauvage à monter.

Je liquide.

Carrousel. Je tourne en rond dans mon trou de femme.

J'apprends, j'apprends. Je parle.

CENTRED SOUND

Vancy Kasper

there's a perfection in playing music
called a centred sound
a sound so high
and wet
and perfect
and ringing
that every musician longs to hear it
to drink it in
after hours of practice
sometimes hours of despair
and sometimes a few beers
seeking always that ecstatic centred sound

for 10 years of touching
and loving
and understanding
and entering each other
we heard it every day
at least once
and sometimes more than that

now
with you gone
i drink a lot
knowing that sweet centred sound
will never come again
because when you've heard it
oh when you've heard it
it cracks the soul to see it go

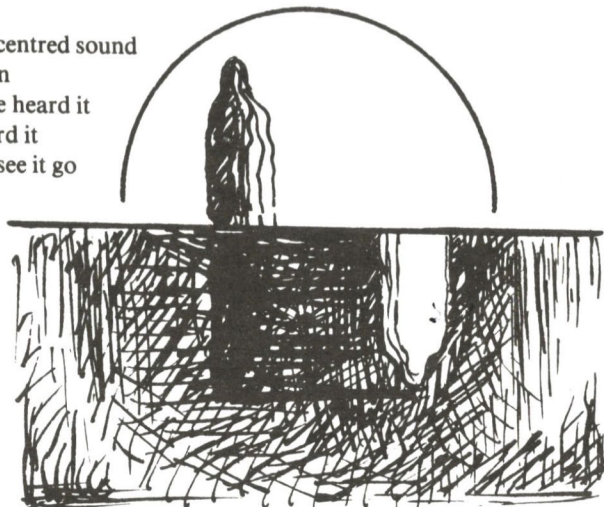


Illustration by Denise Maxwell

LUXURIES

(for J.O.H.)

Helene Rosenthal

Diamonds (for Aries), and
opals — splinters of fire
veiled in milk —

hard-edged women
tender-lipped
men

roast heart, love's
forked tongue
gleaming . . .

But the ram
no longer leaps
onto the platter

the articles of sacrifice
are stored,
the lamb of god

now sagely aged
turns
with the Zodiac

and if (domestically)
we heave
upon our water bed
(that gurgles
like a digesting
stomach)
that's not to say at peace
we're poor
as when the killing rapture was
beyond our means:
all gold
setting, a gaping
hunger in the middle
— a ring
without a stone

— where now Love sits
like a contented
Buddha, and laughs

TRANSGRESSIONS

Barbara Godard

Women's sexuality has rarely been allowed free expression — scarcely surprising when most love stories are told from the male perspective where the woman is “the other,” an object to be overcome through courtship or seduction as the male protagonist passes on to other adventures. Conventional feminine stories generally reinforce this perspective, furnishing the corollary of courtship-as-resistance, until the ultimate prize of marriage is offered. It is this pattern which has sustained the commercially successful Harlequin romances. Some women and some writers have dared to challenge this literary convention of passive femininity, have assumed their own sexuality, and have given free expression to their desires. To do so involves a transgression: to write or speak freely is to join the company of madwomen and witches, writing from the flames consuming their words.¹ Dido, abandoned by Aeneas, commits suicide; Héloïse, placed in the convent by Abelard, ultimately lapses into silence.² The women despair when their lovers mistrust them and their “possessiveness.” They had given their love freely, consciously rejoicing in it: they had become the subjects rather than the objects of love, confessing in their intimate letters the true nature of their sentiments and sensuality. A message which goes unheard, so much does it betray the conventional view of women. A revelation lost in death. Silence. Warnings to future generations of women writers. A tradition of erotic epistles is established, nevertheless, for women who dare to transgress.

And women have not heeded the warnings. Though scarcely heard, there is a tradition of feminist writing about love. Women have persisted in asserting their right to the experience of love, frequently flaunting their difference, their unconventionality, through adulterous love affairs. And as if confronting the social structures were not already a sufficient handicap, these writers pioneered in subjective interior monologues, defying literary canons as well. In Canada in the 1940's two lyrical feminist love stories were written, though they have since been ignored by literary historians, entering into that literary death which is silence. Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (London: 1945) is in many aspects of theme and form similar to Thérèse Tardif's *Désespoir de vieille fille* (*A Spinster's Despair*, Montreal: L'Abre, 1943). At the time of their publication, both books were subjects of controversy. Efforts to suppress them were successful. These women refused to keep quiet, refused to remain “the other”; in turn their work was censored.

The circumstances of their censorship mimic melodrama. An Ottawa woman writes a work of fiction which is eventually published in London in 1945. Only six copies of the novel are brought into Canada and these are burned by the author's mother.³ For thirty years the novel is ignored, brilliant though it is. The writer lives in England. She is silent. Eventually a new edition is printed. Since that time Elizabeth Smart has published a book of poems and has written two other novels (*A Bonus* (London, 1977), *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals* (London, 1978), and a new manuscript).

During the same war years in Ottawa, a French-Canadian woman also writes an unusual novel whose innovative stylistic features are recognized in reviews. Immediately on its publication in 1943 the novel is denounced line by line by Simone Routier, a major Quebec poet. Thérèse Tardif survives the blow, but waits eight years before publishing a second novel at her own expense. She too lapses into silence.

The questions raised by these episodes are also dramatic. What are the reasons behind the silences of these writers? What circumstances were lacking for them to continue as creative writers? Were these first memorable novels all the writers had in them because their lives were too thin for the pressure of their material? Or because their perfectionist attitude in art murdered potential creations in embryo? Or because other claims, other responsibilities interfered so writing could not be first? All of these reasons are frequent inhibitors on writers of a class, sex, colour still marginal in literature and whose coming to written voice at all against these complex odds is exhausting achievement. And all these reasons have been germinal in the silence of other writers in Canada. This is a country where the one book phenomenon is frequent.

A close parallel to Tardif may be found in Laure Conan. After publishing a frank, confessional exploration of a woman's feelings in *Angeline de Montbrun*, Conan was cowed by the criticism of Abbé Casgrain, and adopted the more acceptable form of historical fiction. Tardif's second novel, like Conan's, also changes direction. Though Tardif maintains her interest in the sins of the flesh in *La vie quotidienne* (Ottawa, 1951, “everyday life”), she writes about a religious

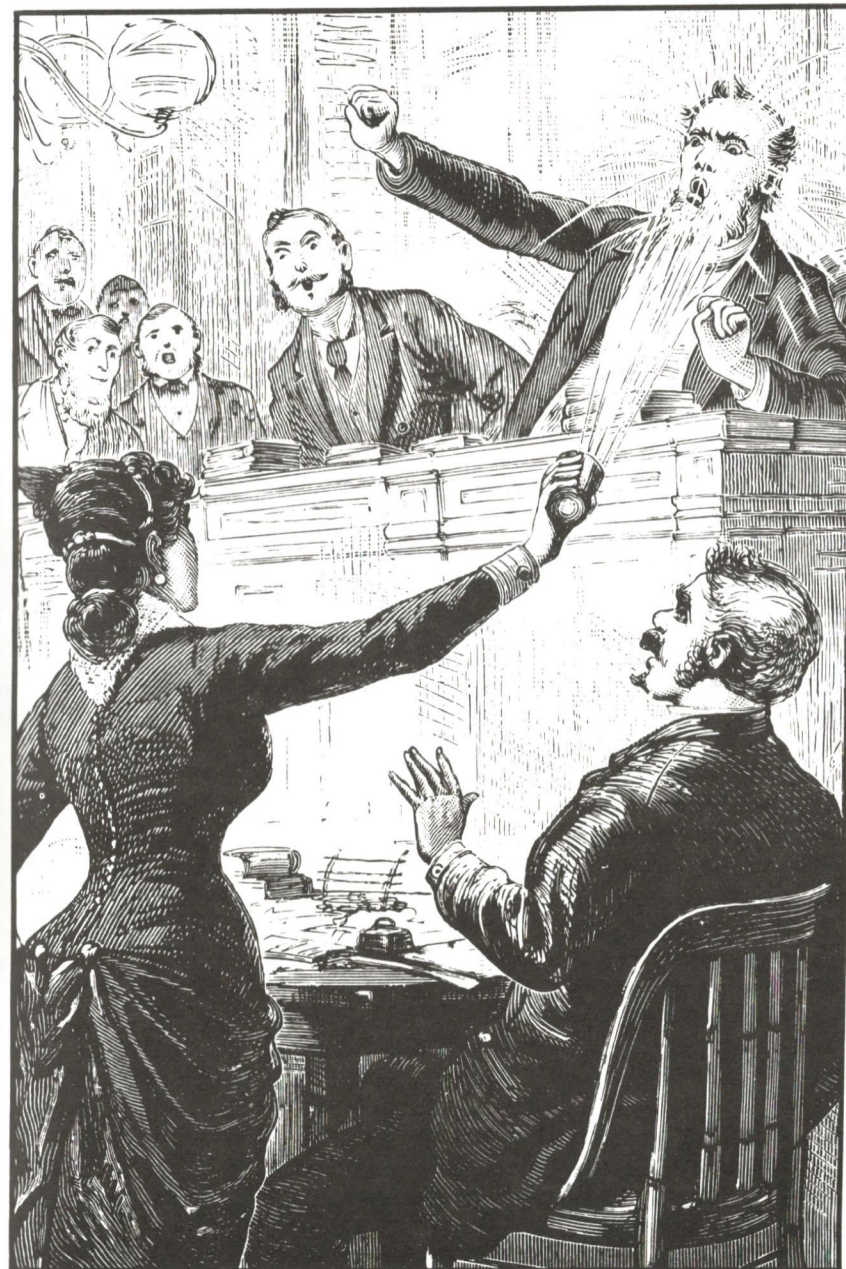
conversion. But as in Conan's case, the brilliance is gone from the later fiction, her innovative style inappropriate for the subject. This fact, as well as Smart's statement that she could not live in Canada, leads to the conclusion that their later silence is directly attributable to the impact of censorship on their work.

While undoubtedly the male-dominated publishing and literary establishments, through the conspiracy of silence, ultimately limited the influence of these writers, it is intriguing that those to hurl the first stones were women. Indeed those most immediately disturbed by the implications of the two novels were women who had accepted the image of themselves as the Lady in the Tower, on the Pedestal or as the Virgin Mother Mary, objects of courtship and love, sexless beings. Smart and Tardif's assertion that women are sexual beings challenged the pervasive stereotypes on which their society was founded and by which their own creativity was strictly limited.

In *The Feminization of American Society*⁴ Ann Douglas has described the major trends among women novelists of the nineteenth century, trends which contributed to the growth of mass culture and popular fiction. By challenging the accepted formulae, Smart and Tardif immediately excluded themselves from this large popular audience and reduced their voices to a whisper. For at the time the essential tenor of women's writing was conservative, emphasizing feeling at the expense of intellect, accepting rather than challenging the values of society. Women were seeking to substitute their moral influence for the effective action denied them politically, and thus to obtain power through the exploitation of their "feminine" identity. Domestic and religious concerns were considered appropriate subjects for women novelists, provided these were not as intellectual issues, but as pulp for the mill of the new leisure-time activity of reading.

Such attitudes in fact came to dominate the Canadian feminism of the early twentieth century. The Woman's Suffrage Movement reflected the "maternal feminism" of the National Council of Women of Canada who linked suffrage with women's supposedly inbred capacities for self-denial and purity. They aimed to make all homes ideal so that social and economic evils would disappear, for they believed that "our grand woman's mission" of "mothering" was what Canada needed. In the years between 1893 and 1911, the Toronto chapter worked hard for the passage of pure water and pure milk by-laws and "waged war on spitting, the white slave trade and *immoral literature*."⁵

Against a background of such preconceptions about the nature of women's writing, the attack on Smart's and Tardif's novels is more easily comprehended. They dared to question the twin deities of home and church by advocating adulterous love and sensuality and thus challenged the accepted portrait of pink and white woman writer. Both these fictions are extremely subjective — cries of pain and anger, fragmented in form, "rhapsodies, laments, tragic, pagan erotic rosaries."⁶ The passionate outpourings of these women seem incoherent, "*feuilles détachés*" (loose leaves) as Tardif calls hers, dependent on images to carry the burden of meaning. These novels were innovative in a period when social realism held sway, and symbolist novels of an early phase of Modernism were just struggling to appear; a period when the prime critical value was objectivity. Ironically,



the excess of feeling in these two novels places them in line with that sentimental feminine writing they would otherwise seem to challenge. The dominating literary standards have consistently "undervalued feeling and overvalued facts," as Miriam Waddington has pointed out. Unacceptable to this tradition are the descriptions of the motions of the inner soul or the exploration of emotion — those things which Waddington suggests⁷ constitute a distinctive and revolutionary female view of life.

Such indeed seems to be the case when we turn to the details of the reception of the two Canadian novels. The critics do not know how to react to them, take fright at the unfettered sexuality, the defiance of fictional conventions and seek to enclose them again.

Désespoir de vieille fille is the lesser known novel even today.⁸ It was published in Montréal by Les Editions de l'Arbre which was responsible for most publishing of the innovative writing in Quebec at that time. Despite the editorial confidence in the literary merit of the novel that such a gallery of peers would suggest, *Désespoir de vieille fille* touched no receptive critical cords. Though *L'Action Nationale* in these years reviewed most of the publications of l'Arbre, no mention is made of Tardif's work. Only in *La Revue Dominicaine* is it reviewed by Gabriel-M. Lussier, an oblate priest. He is perceptive, for he discerns the fundamental characteristics of Tardif's writing, but he condemns them for their violation of the fundamental laws of reason.⁹ And indeed, if viewed from the male pantheon of mastery, control and distance, Tardif's writing displays all the characteristics of what Christiane Makward calls a "texte de femme" in its diffused, disordered, circular, multiple, unpredictable, unstructured and uncensored nature.¹⁰

It is a novel in which nothing happens. A woman's lover has died and she cries out her anguish and despair at being left alone, lamenting the lost joys of love, the only consolation in a world without a heaven beyond. Tardif probes the depths of the psyche in allusive, poetic prose. One might categorize the novel as lyric, a form which Joanna Russ¹¹ has suggested is employed by women writers who wish to free themselves from the mythic love story almost universally employed by women writers. Modern writers interested in extending the range of possible plots available to them have favoured this lyric mode, sanctioned by Virginia Woolf. Woolf's own abandonment of chronology or causation for an associative principle of connection exemplifies these novels in which "nothing happens." The lyric structure sets images circling around a centre which, while unspoken, invisible, is nevertheless the subject of the novel. Characters exist, think, feel — nothing else. This lack of plot, the repetitiousness, the epiphanies, the denseness of the writing have all invited denigration from critics objecting to their excess of sensibility, their triviality, their lack of action, or their femininity. But then North America at this time was generally inhospitable to such writing. As another practitioner of the poetic novel, Anaïs Nin, wrote about the United States: "The climate of the forties was insular, provincial, anti-poetic and anti-European."¹² And this was even more true in Canada.

Significantly, as a critic Lussier understood the lyric novel but refused to sanction it. In one breath he decries the "contorsionisme" of Tardif's novel while in the next he speaks of the hold the book has over him. Annoyance vies with sympathy. He is willing to recognize the "magnetism" of her style and the intensity with which the author has experienced emotions to the limits of hallucination. Though he praised the density of her phrases, the poetic intensity of the opening section "*Augustin renvoyant la femme*" (Augustine rejecting the woman) and the magic of allusions, Lussier cannot accommodate Tardif's multiplicity, and condemns her use of paradox. Though he disclaims any moral prejudice, it is less the logic than the morality underlying her "*grossiers paradoxes*" that attracts his comment.

In her blistering denunciation of Tardif's work, *Réponse à Désespoir de vieille fille*¹³ Simone Routier quotes Lussier and extends his moral criticism while employing Tardif's fragmented form with its repetition and allusion.

Routier failed, though, to comprehend the literary intentions of the book. Her aphorisms and epigram echo Tardif's. Indeed they almost always allude to the original paragraph but are couched in a different idiom. The focus of her attack is Tardif's phrase "*Jouissance charnelle, unique jouissance, unique certitude*" (p. 69) (Carnal bliss, only bliss, only certainty). The argument proceeds as follows. Tardif writes "Love is a trick of the flesh" (p. 21) to which Routier replies "Love is the bait that the Creator was kind enough to add to the duty of 'Multiply'" (p. 22). Routier's aim is to confine women's sexuality within the bonds of marriage and motherhood. In answer to Tardif's cry of metaphysical doubt about mixed female nature (p. 34) — an echo of Pascal — Routier replies that the situation is certainly difficult: "Why don't you marry a businessman who'll give you lots of children? It's a good recipe" (p. 34) Tardif inverts sacred and profane loves in "*Augustine rejecting the woman*" in poetic phrasing echoing the Bible:

She does not say to Christ: I give him to You.

She is from Africa.

She does not believe in Christ.

She loves. (p. 12)

Routier counters with a parable entitled "*Magdalene acceptant Jesus*" pointing out the necessity for the adulterous woman to submit to Christ. Tardif extends her argument about the fundamental misogyny of western Christianity. She is a feminist virtually alone in her time in crying out against the double standard supported by the theological hierarchy: "Man has the right to sin. Only to myself is it refused." (p. 44) Routier rushes to defend the established image of womanhood in the Catholic church: "the wife who has conceived in abnegation is more maternal than the lover surprised by the child." (p. 27) The Holy Mother Mary was a virgin: all conception must be undefiled by sexual pleasure. And we remember another story of adulterous love: Elisabeth Tassy in Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska* conceives a child in passion and is named a witch and a criminal pursued by that good mother, Queen Victoria. Routier adopted a conservative position and reduced Tardif's poetry to rhetoric. Ironically it is her name that is remembered: it would appear that she emerged as victor in the battle between

feminism and Catholicism, another round which would have to be fought on the same issue by Denise Boucher in 1978.

Elizabeth Smart has been somewhat more fortunate. She did receive a belated recognition and enjoyed a rekindled creativity. Her fiction is an unqualified success, since she is able to sustain throughout the highly metaphoric language essential to the lyric form that Tardif struggles with less fruitfully. Like *Désespoir de vieille fille*, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* is both an adulterous love story and a questioning of conventional religion — themes which place it too in taboo. Slight variants exist in the sketchy plots.

In Tardif's book the lover has died, while Smart's protagonist loses out to the wife. Nevertheless both Smart and Tardif utter the same plaint in despair about the inability of men to love absolutely, as women do. "They have the courage to die for women whom they have not the courage to love" (p. 24) writes Tardif. While Smart's protagonist (who, like Tardif's, is the writer herself) is expecting a child, in Tardif's novel, though love is said to be "consenting to the child" (p. 46), "the complication of the child does not enter into the novel" (p. 85) — perhaps in direct refusal of the maternal role which Routier is so anxious to impose on women.

By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept needs less explication than Tardif's novel, since it is more familiar and several articles have already appeared on it. A story of love in exile beyond the gates of paradise, its discontinuity is emphasized, as in Tardif's fiction, by a series of juxtapositions of incongruities. The technique is most notable in the title, where the allusion to the psalm jars with the reference to modern, mechanized rootlessness. Through this yoking of discordant pairs, Smart makes us aware of the existence of two worlds: one where love is all, and one where it appears as an outrage. Here, too, as in Tardif's world, this division does not represent a simple dichotomy of body and soul, heaven and hell. Paradoxically these entities are interrelated, for in the language of the world sexual love is confined within the walls of a prison, while in the language of love sexuality is free. And the aim of Smart's novel is to play on and challenge this abyss between prosaic discourse and hyperbolic, poetic discourse.

At the heart of the fiction is a passage comparable to Tardif's evocation of Augustine. In an extravagant burlesque the grotesque and the sublime clash. The interrogation by dull-witted officials is sharply juxtaposed to *The Song of Songs*.

But at the Arizona border they stopped us and said Turn Back, and I sat in a little room with barred windows while they typed.

What relation is this man to you? (My beloved is mine and I am his: he feedeth among

the lilies).

Did you sleep in the same room? (Behold thou art fair, my love, behold thou art fair: thou hast doves eyes).

In the same bed? (Behold thou art fair, my

beloved, yea pleasant, also our bed is green).

Did intercourse take place? (I sat down under his shadow with great delight and his fruit was sweet to my taste). (p. 51)

The Song of Songs is used throughout as this sort of counterpoint. Like Tardif, Smart is taking aim directly at the religious ethos that would imprison sexual love in marriage. By returning the *Song of Songs* to its original meaning as an erotic love poem, she is deliberately subverting the conventional Christian interpretation wherein the beloved is allegorically transformed into the church and the lover becomes Christ. Such a pairing of concrete and abstract terms is a fundamental and disruptive feature of Smart's poetry. Here style mirrors thought. Love's infinite power is her subject: sexual passion is divine and creative.

By Grand Central Station embodies a remembered vision of love, of the world transformed, which is destroyed by the fall, the move from California back "East of Eden" to New York, paralleled by the change of seasons from summer to winter. And the reason for this despairing fall is that the lover is less than the perfect angel the protagonist had believed him to be.

The wife, as nun and emulator of Christ's sacrifice, is juxtaposed to the novel's protagonist, the whore of Babylon. The wife is "the innocent who is always offering. She is the goddess of all things which the vigour of living destroys. Why are her arms so empty? . . . Her shoulders have always the attitude of grieving, and her thin breasts are pitiful like Virgin Shrines that have been robbed." (p. 25)

While the whore, "Naked I wait . . .

I am over-run, jungled in my bed, I am infested with a menagerie of desires; my heart is eaten by a dove, a cat scrambles in the cave of my sex, hounds in my head obey a whipmaster who cries nothing but havoc as the hours test my endurance with an accumulation of tortures. Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic orders? (p. 25)

Both are rivals for the angel.

One of the greatest paradoxes in the inverted world of this book is that it is only the Whore of Babylon who can attain the angelic vision of vitality. And here is underlined the failing of the man who turned away from love towards pity, and those human institutions which would enclose love.

And in this conclusion, Smart prophesied the fate of her own book. Within the text she has illustrated the confinement of her parents' vision of the world. That her mother destroyed the book comes as no surprise. In England the novel found a few admirers and established an underground reputation. One of these is the novelist Brigid Brophy who describes the book in her preface as "one of the half-dozen masterpieces of poetic prose." Another reader was Patrick O'Connor who read the book in the late forties. Despite his astonishment, and his impression that this indicated the future direction of the genre, nearly thirty years passed before he translated his admiration into action and published its first North American edition. The silence into which this book fell has been ultimately as damaging as the controversy occasioned by Tardif's book.

Lest we congratulate ourselves on our enlightenment today in recognizing the importance of these two books in challenging the restrictions society places on women's sexuality, we might well remember two other examples of censorship which have occurred in this last decade, concerning two books which share thematic and formal elements with these novels. In Portugal in 1972 occurred the trial of the three Marias, authors of the *New Letters from the Portuguese*,¹⁴ letters written by three women inspired by the erotic epistle of the French book, *Portuguese Letters*,¹⁵ so popular in the 18th century. Choosing the figure from the earlier book, Mariana Alcoforado, the nun, because she was "shut up" and had broken the law twice (in taking a lover and then in writing about her passion), they wrote new letters using her persona. Their case, and their book, taken up by the women's movement in France and elsewhere, as this repression of women's right to write freely of their passions became a rallying cry. Indeed, as Monique Wittig, translator of their book into French, has shown in her own novels as in those of her "*commères*," the subject of women writing in the seventies has been the expression of the body and its realities. "*Le corps, les mots, l'imaginaire*" (body, words, imagination) is the title of an important collection of feminist texts edited by Nicole Brossard in Quebec, a reminder that the right to sin demanded by Tardif in the forties is becoming a reality.

Nevertheless, while the tradition of the erotic epistle begun with the letters of Héloïse seems now to be released from the silence of its marginality, the iconoclasm typified by these novels of the forties has been suppressed once more in last year's censorship in Montreal of Denise Boucher's feminist play, *Les Fées ont soif*. Her subject too is sexuality, and explores women's subjectivity. In her play, she dramatizes the impossibility for a woman to experience sex in an active manner when the models for her behaviour are a plaster Virgin Mary and the prostitute Madeleine. On stage, these two figures — confined, repressed, controlled within their stereotypes — confront Marie, a Quebec mother struggling to free herself. While the stage version of the play was allowed to run — suggesting that theatre is still viewed as immoral by the Church — a group of Catholics sought to have the book version of the play banned. The lengthy trial which ensued became a rallying point for feminist groups, resulting eventually in their victory. But the conservative forces are not yet defeated, and there is some doubt as to whether censorship will not be requested when an English translation of the play appears shortly.

Erotic fiction and feminist iconoclasm have come to the fore in the seventies: Tardif and Smart are two pioneer feminist writers who battled with the dragons of containment. No longer isolated, placed within a new context, they deserve to find comprehensive readers who would free them from the silence of oblivion.

NOTES

¹Marguerite Duras to Xavière Gauthier in *Les parleuses* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974), pp. 37, 50 and 164.

²Lorraine McMullen in "The Female Adultery Novel", *Atlantis* IV, no. 4, 1978 refers to this background at great length. See also Jean Mallinson "The Figures of Love: Rhetoric in *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*," *Essays in Canadian Writing*, no. 10 (Spring, 1978), pp. 108-118.

³Elizabeth Smart in "Interview," William French, *The Globe and Mail*, Saturday, December 20, 1975, p. 27. Other biographical information is from this interview.

⁴Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Avon, 1978).

⁵Wayne Roberts, "'Rocking the Cradle for the World': The New Woman and Maternal Feminism, Toronto 1877-1914," in Linda Kealey, ed. *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880's-1920's* (Toronto, 1979), p. 22. Italics mine.

⁶This is a paraphrase of Brigid Brody's "Introduction." Elizabeth Smart, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (New York: Popular Library, 1975).

⁷Miriam Waddington, "At the Mermaid Inn," *The Globe and Mail*, Saturday, January 6, 1979.

⁸Jeannette Urbas, "La femme d'aucun homme" read at the Conference of Inter-American Women Writers, Ottawa, June 1978. Thanks to Jeannette for this subject. Thérèse Tardif, *Désespoir de vieille fille* (Montreal: L'Arbre, 1943).

⁹Gabriel M. Lussier, O.P., "Book Review," *Revue Dominicaine* v. 50, no. 1 (février, 1944), pp. 125-7.

¹⁰Christiane Makward, "Communication," Inter-American Women Writers Conference, Ottawa, June, 1978.

¹¹Joanna Russ, "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write" in Susan K. Cornillon, ed. *Images of Women in Fiction* (Bowling Green, Ohio: University Press, 1972), pp. 3-21.

¹²Anaïs Nin, *The Novel of the Future*, p. 1.

¹³Marie de Villiers (Simone Routier), *Réponse à Désespoir de vieille fille* (Montreal: Beauchemin, 1943).

¹⁴Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa, *Nouvelles lettres portugaises* (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

¹⁵G.J. Lavergne de Guilleragues, *Lettres portugaises* (Paris: 1669).

LOVING CUP

Helene Rosenthal

When spiders hang on the clothesline and Stella Lovejoy has to break the web, pulling against the tension, she cries. Today again she is hanging out the diapers and is still too close to the newness. It is her first baby. Glass beads — blue and green-reflecting raindrops — string the wire. The yard, after the rain, is like a varnished playpen. It is shiny, aggressive in the light. The sunshine makes her glad, but it is a troublesome thing, this gladness that is no longer Stella's own, very-own, gladness. It is the gladness of Stella/Baby. It is the smug gladness of the diapers, flaunting their breezy whiteness at the spider crawling frantically up his watch-chain gilt with sunlight, his time-link disappearing fast as he tries to spin back to his net of safety. She has pulled his dangling skywalk off its cables, but he doesn't know yet (time is, to start over, make again, kiss the nothing air with drooling silver in the loving cup of space). Two-handled cup. Let go. Baby/Stella is walking for the first time. Mother's arms are handles. Let go. Let me go! Baby/Stella's body wriggles, tries to tell her, reaches out eager, terrified, out onto the first free-belonging-to-her-self. It spins out of her, the joyful line, the shiny thing she is making. Baby is so proud, she swells up, can't see the air any more and drops the shine. It rolls up behind her, a big sudden silver ball that catches her below the knees and she doesn't know why she is sitting down. Laughter, anxious cries from Mother, warm noises, milk noises, but Baby wants to make that thing again . . . she struggles as she's snatched up. Baby cries . . . Stella/

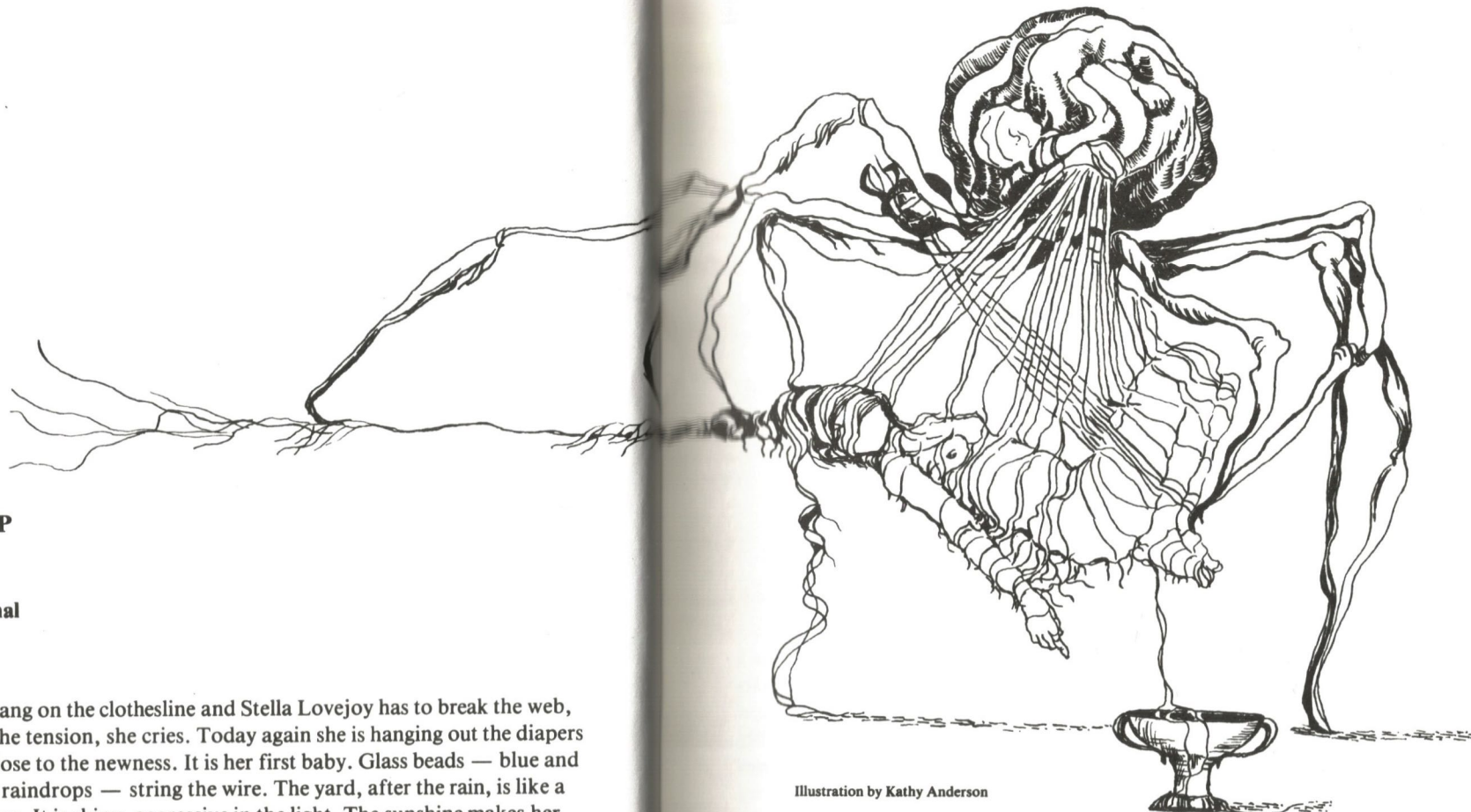


Illustration by Kathy Anderson

Mother suddenly feels something, shudders, hates, trembles, flings the spider from her hand and crunches it beneath her shoe in panic. She knocks over the not-yet emptied clothes basket, running into the house. There, there — you're upset again says her Mother, gripping her in solid arms — it's still too much . . . depression, perfectly normal . . . you'll see, be yourself in no time. Stella Lovejoy stiffens, tries to contain herself. What self. The love-death. Poisoned cup on a genetic chain. Always. Loving-handled, like this. Comfort. Comfort power, containment power . . . the consolation prize in woman's-world. Baby to hold onto, cup of one's own. But already a willed self struggling to be free, of her, the Mother, the SELFLESS ONE. No! Step on it. Spin back. Stella rages, laughs, cries. Submit: for now, for now.

LITTORALS

Helene Rosenthal

1

Entrance, First Narrows.
Here I found
mother and child
and lover Something
implicit, a seed
that could force stone
raise miracle pine
like those
uplifted
in Stanley Park.

Here leaves pierce,
hairshirt the air
of misty dawn.
Even the gentle maple
leaf is split,
triumph of diversity
where cultures take root-
hold of each other
in hard love
surviving hate.

One mother killed me long
ago. I have her enshrined
— a statue in
Nitobe Garden.
Year-round ceremonial,
teacups
fill with Niobe's tears.
It rains all the time.

Another raised
me innocent, then left
broken egg to rot
on rocks
above her slow
Pacific tide.
Wheel, wheel
white feather.

2

Ferried across the Gulf
I climbed the lighthouse
with a question.
Panted, peered
for the answer —

The keeper was an instrument!
LOOK OUT
click
LOOK OUT
click clack. I did.
The waves
gave me their quick
quip back.
The keeper flashed
white wings on black.

Mother smiled
out of a cloud,
another local metamorphosis
— the ghost of Hamlet's
mother this time saying
child child
look to your own
soul,
leave off
past rockings.

3

The child
smiled, a stretch
of love's image.
Her eyes, my lips
never to kiss
but on the lids.
Cover me cover
me mother
with blinds
against this innocence
you destroyed.

He walks

limned in
Apollo's
light

Adonis walks
reborn
de-
light

I lean from the banks
of the North Shore
at night, catch
glimmers of ice,
melt them
against my breast,
nurse my love
awake, shiver
with desire.

This tenderness of milk
this purity of self-
love, child
the lover:
Lion's Gate
between birth and recover-
y.

4

The gull not ever
the gulled, nor prey never-
more gullible
lovers
once
we parent of each other
are become
the complete mother.
Connective
to these shores: the arch.
A random boy
comes and goes
over, flows and soars
past physical reach.

How explain
the absent father.
The machine that does
the lighthouse keeping? What
is gender?

Possibly,
lover, Something
conceives
in a blueprint sky
and as I strain
teaches me
traffic
in mechanics of
suspension.

STYLISTIC EXPERIMENTATION IN MILLETT, JOHNSTON, AND WITTIG

Susan J. Wolfe (Robbins)

In a paper entitled, "Toward a Feminist Aesthetic,"¹ Julia Stanley and I maintained that certain twentieth-century feminist writers consciously adopt a style which is uniquely suited to their sensibility, to women's perceptions and interpretations of reality. Printers' conventions, academic style, standard English usage and the like constitute male language, which reflect patriarchal modes of perception and, in the words of Mary Daly, "serve patriarchal social arrangements."² Aware that women's liberation is contingent upon finding a new language and style to express the new possibilities for women as we move into women's time-space, some feminists have discussed the relationship between their lives and their writing style. Susan Griffin describes the interweaving of our language and our experiences:

Why we write, as feminists, is not separable from our lives. We have woven together a kind of textured echo chamber, a flexible moving acoustical system, the new sounds we utter changing the space even before we hear each syllable. Our writing, our talking, our living, our images have created another world than the man-made one we were born to, and continuously in this weaving we move, at one and the same time, toward each other, and outward, expanding the limits of the possible.³

Male expressive modes reflect linear, cause-and-effect, hierarchical thinking, an epistemology that perceives the world in terms of categories, dichotomies, stasis, and causation. Female expressive modes, if they are to reflect women's epistemology, must embrace ambiguities, pluralities, process, cycles, and continuities. To express a male epistemology, writers use conventional punctuation and labels; abstract or general nouns and verbs; complex sentences in which some clauses and phrases are clearly subordinated to others; "objective" descriptions of events (that is, events seen from a male standpoint, and seen without apparent emotion: see Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*⁴ for passages which demonstrate male style and show how it serves the interests of the patriarchy — the subjugation of women). In the traditional work of prose fiction, characters interact in predictable ways because they are clearly-defined and change relatively little in the course of the work (they develop in ways foreshadowed by the author/narrator); the development of the plot is roughly chronological, with flashbacks and flashforwards indicated as such. To express a feminist consciousness through women's style, writers replace abstract, general nouns and verbs with concrete, specific ones; write in the continuous present; employ run-ons, fragments, and other unconventional punctuation to reflect

their thought processes and experiences; wrench words from their patriarchal meanings and uses, or create new words. The new feminist novel often breaks the boundaries between the world of the art work and reality, between events and the character's and/or author/narrator's perception of them, between past, present, and dream-world — fusing all into the unique perspective of an individual woman seeking the meaning of her own existence or into an apocalyptic vision of a Lesbian nation.

It should not be surprising that all of those Stanley and I discussed as innovators choosing "women's style" as an embodiment of the feminist aesthetic were Lesbian authors. Few women who continue to identify with men can risk the male censure of "women's style," and few escape the male perspective long enough to attempt it. Hence, as I attempt to demonstrate that Millett, Jill Johnston, and Monique Wittig use what we have called "women's style" as well as what others have called "archetectonic" narrative structure, the names of their predecessors may suggest themselves: Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein . . . Lesbians all. While each of them used a style and structure which mirrored the movement,

flux, and chaos of life to express a subjective view of life, however, none did so in order to articulate a feminist philosophy. Similarly, while many contemporary male novelists employ archetectonic structure and the open form, and at least one twentieth-century male author, James Joyce, may be cited as using "women's style" in writing English prose, they do so for the purpose of stylistic experimentation — *not* to express the essence of their being and perceptions.

In her preface to *Gullible's Travels*, Jill Johnston, sounding for all the world like Gertrude Stein, comments on the changing writing style which describes and causes change:

*It is all a change.
writing is changing.
the writing is changing.
changing is such good writing.⁵*

Writing is a vehicle for a political vision and self-expression, which, for a Lesbian feminist, are one and the same. *Lesbian Nation*⁶ is an autobiographical history of Johnston's evolving consciousness as she moved from a belief that "there wasn't a dyke in the land" to the conviction that a Lesbian nation is the feminist solution which will reunite mothers with their daughters and sisters with

"Few women who continue to identify with men can risk the male censure of 'women's style,' and few escape the male perspective long enough to attempt it."

each other. Of the book's style and its non-linear narration of events she says:

This book should read like an interlocking web of personal experience and history and events of the world forming a picture of an evolving political revolutionary consciousness of one who was female who emerged from straight middle unconscious postwar amerika.

All repetitions of thoughts ideas material projections plans reflections reveries fantasies in the same or varied phrases in different contexts constitute my way or working circles within circles, like the quadriga, the four horsed chariot, constantly returning to its point of origin. Every departure from a point of origin carries with it a renewed approach to it. Each return to the point of origin completes the cycle of one existence and begins another. The style and the subject are the same: the return to the harmony of statehood and biology through the remembered majesties of women.

Seeking to mirror the process of creation as she re-creates an Amazon reality, Johnston must merge past and future, capture the fusing and confusing of events, the non sequiturs and contradictions of the real world on the printed page. To do so, she uses sentences which move rapidly, like thought itself, sentences flowing together virtually without punctuation. Commas, periods, and other phrase-final punctuation contribute the certainty of fixedness; instead,

Johnston's sentences interweave thoughts and themes, punning on patriarchal language to turn words to Lesbian feminist uses as she returns women to their "primal commitment":

. . . we are getting to the bottom of women's lib we are going down on women's lib I am beside myself with love for you when you are beside me my love the beginning of the unfirst is rite now if all thinks are at this momentum being cremated and the end of the unihearse is right now for all thinks are at this momentus passing away . . . until women all the women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love they will be denying themselves the love and value they have readily accorded to men, thus affirming their second class status for within the heterosexual institution no woman can be the equal it is a contrafiction in terms the heterosexual institution is a male institution and a homo ecce homo institution and you can't ever change the absoluteness the institution is political is built out of the institutionalized slavery of women so it is a contradiction in terms such an institution must only collapse of its own accord from within the heterosexual institution is spiritually over and the new thing now that is happening is the withdrawal of women to give each other their own sense of self a new sense of self until women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love they will be denying themselves

the love and value they readily accord to men thus affirming their second class status (pp. 270-271).

Within an eight-page passage (pp. 266-273), Johnston does not simply argue that our self-denial through acceptance of the "homo ecce homo institution" of heterosexuality has isolated us from our mothers; she also reintroduces the names of the mothers — Biblical, historical, and mythical — who have been denied us in our diaspora, woven through with phrases from popular songs, literature, and news releases, all warped into a true image of our reality as we "dream the myth onwards":

. . . and rewrite the stories we will reunite Electra and her mother Clytemnestra and Jocasta will be well pleased in her daughter Antigone who will be more involved in her mothers and her daughters than in the proper burial of her brother and we will remember the histories of say how Eleanor of Aquitaine made a crusade to the holy land and dressed all her ladies in waiting as Amazons in leopard skins and dressed herself as Pan Athena and that's how they rode through Greece for the queendom of heaven is a woman travelling into a far country

. . . Wring out the clothes! Wring in the dew! Before all the King's Hoarsers with all the Queens Mum her birth is uncontrollable and her organ is working perfectly and there's a part that's not screwed on . . . I am and therefore lesbian which means nothing we could say it over and over again over lesbian-

lesbianlesbianlesbianlesbianlesbianlesbianlesbian . . . Womens lib and let lib new official position on lesbians: Hey ladies it's okay, like Red China is there so we might as well recognize it

As we are reborn unto ourselves, we become born-again Lesbians, restored to the natural state of women who have, until the millennium, been permitted only sons, and who have been ignorant of their Lesbianism:

. . . and saying Verily Verily except a woman must be born again to be herself for her own eminence and grace the queen queenself whose mother has pressed upon her mouth innumerable passionate kisses Sail away where the wind blows sweet . . . and take a sister by her hand . . . Lead her far from this barren land . . . ON A CLEAR DAY YOU CAN SEE YOUR MOTHER (pp. 272-273).

Like Johnston, Kate Millett meshes the personal with the historical, and breaks the boundaries of linear time in *Flying*.⁷ Millett assumes a "women's style" and an open structure. The sequence of events in the book reflects the associational patterns of Millett's thought processes as she attempted to recover her being. The exploitation of her Lesbianism by the media, her condemnation by a straight sister who felt she had discredited the movement, her writer's bloc, and the many themes and variations that constitute the "fugue state" from which she must emerge cannot be captured in a linear, hierarchical, hypotactic style. Instead, Millett painstakingly records every

thought and emotion she experiences during an event, interrupting herself, hurling her readers into the subjective time of her mind. Phrases and sentences cut in and flash back like frames in a film, events are seen from multiple perspectives in a kind of continuous present of the mind. Her character, seen from her own shifting vantage-points, is not static. She creates portraits through the use of fragments lacking finite verbs, and uses the simple present and progressive aspect to lend immediacy and continuity to past events:

“As we are reborn unto ourselves, we become born-again Lesbians . . .”

I look across the pond now as my mind's eye drinks that moment in color — and matches it against the black and white a Pentax saw, saw and held last summer at Brookfield as the sun fell in scatters through sycamore leaves. Celia, her hair uncombed after breakfast, played the lute for us in the open air. Now only these portraits remain: my mind's version in motion and sound, and the still shot upon paper. Celia bending then upon her lute, playing it in sunlight one fine morning our summer of delight, her straight hair merely braided, not dressed as now in five choirs upon her head for concert. A figure outlined against a white New England wall, wearing the yellow jersey that with the true cheekiness of an aristocrat she never seemed to change, and a pair of faded jeans I bought her on the Bowery. Celia a profile learning over

the great pear-shaped lute. Strange instrument, only its face showing in the photo, its back hidden against her body, the wonderfully carved facets of polished wood fileted together in perfect laminations, the very shape of craft and song. Examining again her tomboy succulence that Connecticut June day, the extravagant delicacy of her face, something even of her eyes' fine beauty captured one forever time ago to pierce me now as they did that muddled September night I scrawled on yellow paper, cursing

her good-bye. Eyes light a light through the tunnel of loss. And now the music rises, sound in air expanding as the lyrics come crisp and Elizabethan . . . superior art of song defeating mere prose in its finer medium. Time, and again in time recurring. Sound once lost in space, now miraculously reassembled here within the same stones' echoes as it echoes in the mind while I sit again, this moment erasing the bird's chatter about the pond a hundred miles upriver from where the sound now echoes to their miracle performed. (pp. 116-117).

In sentences at once fragmented and fused, Millett describes the torrent of sensation which overwhelms her during love-making. Questions, commands, and statements run together without punctuation; subjects are omitted; progressives appear

without auxiliary verbs; most of the passage is in the simple present and simple future:

. . . I must doubt it, even this, her hand on my breast will she touch the nipple with exquisite care, feels like it connects to the clitoris begins the heat between my legs . . . What sick thought is this, or is it that final safety with her, bewildered at the joy in her hand searching me, opening to her fingers upon the lips of my other mouth wet making little noises, silence to be filled with her tongue while she sifts me, reams, files, selects, and plays upon the nerve like a button pressed all heat flooding out I open wider to receive her will split myself take her whole up to the elbow, straining in hope. I love the way you move as I move dancing under your hand's power deep in me shaking when you press hard fast against the wall deep like a storm in me. I must stop breathing, so fierce you are. So powerful. Coming, dragged even, making no effort, believe only in what she does, cease to give directions from your mind spoken or strained in thought ESP of the will gives over and follow be taken, hurled by a hand shaking the fear one hopes for, away from the Ferris wheel, then when it plummets terror you are the uncontrolled, taken to the place beyond thought or knowing . . . (pp. 480-481).

Millett's novel has been criticized for its lack of discipline and structure. The book is structured, nonetheless — by the thematic motifs which structure

Millett's perceptions, the patterns of her mind. As the story moves forward in chronological time, as Millett lives her life, memories of past events intrude. She thus evolves her own style and structure — circular, fragmented, paratactic — to reflect the thoughts which break off, collide, or flow into each other. Her narrative consists of blocs of time, spatialized upon the page, reconstructing her mental processes as she ascends from madness.

The novel is autobiographical, an “elaborate key to the confusion . . . the glimpses of self snatched on planes.”

Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères*, is in both structure and subject-matter more revolutionary than the work of Millett and Johnston. Millett chooses an exploratory style and structure to recover her being as a Lesbian feminist author, Johnston to politicize while explaining her own growth in political awareness. But Wittig, whose first novel, *The Opoponax*,⁸ used present tense, fused sentences and paragraphs, and open structure to allow us to enter the mind of a French schoolgirl turned warrior, in her second takes us beyond the world of the patriarchy to a world of Amazon warriors. In *Les Guérillères* “the style and the subject-matter are the same,” (as Johnston has said of her *Lesbian Nation*) “the return to the harmony of statehood and biology through the remembered majesties of women.”

The narrative and descriptive passages of *Les Guérillères* are written in the present tense, shifting to the past tense on the last page, when the women have conquered their male adversaries. Wittig illustrates the profusion, the chaos, the contradictions, of an entire world ruled by women who are sen-

sual, savage, strong, heroic — bearers of tales, weapons, and children. Wittig uses concrete language, imagery, and figures comparing women's genitals to natural and manufactured objects; she describes specifically their actions, garments, and dwellings. The primitive, rhythmic quality of the oral tradition is found in her repetitions of both subject-verb-object order and of specific phrases, especially of "the women say," "they

"Wittig illustrates the profusion, the chaos, the contradictions of an entire world ruled by women ruled by women who are sensual, savage, strong, heroic — bearers of tales, weapons, and children."

say." The novel flows over with lists, many lacking in punctuation. Its sentences seem even shorter and less complex than they are because of their parallels and repetitions. In the continual present of her Amazon reality, events and pictures are placed on the pages, separated by an inch of blank space, each of them blocs building a world. They are somehow thus part of the main action whose progress they interrupt, the tribal warfare against men. No continuity or linearity necessarily links two individual paragraphs, but occasionally they *are* connected in theme. Like the feminaries of women's books described by Wittig, any generalization made about *Les Guérillères* must contain its own contradictions and qualifications:

The women are seen to have in their hands small books which they say

are feminaries. These are either multiple copies of the same original or else they are several kinds. In one of them someone has written an inscription which they whisper in each other's ears and which provokes them to full-throated laughter. When it is leafed through the feminary presents numerous blank pages in which they write from time to time. Essentially, it consists of pages with words printed in a

varying number of capital letters. There may be only one or the pages may be full of them. Usually they are isolated at the centre of the page, well spaced black on a white background or else white on a black background.⁹

The feminaries themselves restate patriarchal history, myths, legends for which the women have provided Amazon interpretations, and which the narrator simply repeats without comment. Within forty pages vulvas are figuratively compared to things beautiful, delicate, and dangerous, made the symbolic center of relics of patriarchal myths and legends, described anatomically. Such passages are written in the perfect aspect, as actions completed; within the same pages, the value of such comparisons

and descriptions and of the books themselves is questioned — the women have moved beyond such comparisons

They say that as possessors of vulvas they are familiar with their characteristics. They are familiar with the mons pubis the clitoris the labia minora the body and bulbs of the vagina. They say that they take a proper pride in that which has for long been regarded as the emblem of fecundity and the reproductive force in nature.

They say that the clitoris has been compared to a cherrystone, a bud, a young shoot, a shelled sesame, an almond, a sprig of myrtle, a dart, the barrel of a lock. They say that the labia majora have been compared to the two halves of a shellfish.

They say that they have found inscriptions on plaster walls where vulvas have been drawn as children draw suns with multiple divergent rays. They say that it has been written that vulvas are traps vices pincers. They say that the clitoris has been compared to the prow of a boat to its stem to the comb of a shellfish. They say that vulvas have been compared to apricots pomegranates figs roses pinks peonies marguerites. They say these comparisons may be recited like a litany (pp 31-32).

The women say that it may be that the feminaries have fulfilled their function . . . All they can do is to avoid being encumbered with useless knowledge is to heap them up in the squares and set fire to them. That would be an excuse for celebrations (p. 49).

While it is stated that the women do not compare their vulvas to planets and their movements, that they do not favor any parts of their bodies, the symbol of the circle dominates the book: the bold outline of a single circle interrupts the text in several places, centered on pages which are otherwise empty. The symbol resonates throughout the text, in the circles the women form, in the hoops they catch, in their dances, identifying them "like the eye of the Cyclops," like their single forenames (lists of which also interrupt the text). The circle, the sign of the goddess, becomes the symbol of disorder and war against males and male language, the violence and the discourse with which the women will overthrow patriarchy. Old categories and dichotomies, the remnants of so-called logic and reason, are swept away by new meanings the women introduce into the lacunae and the margins of patriarchal texts.

In speaking of their genitals the women do not employ hyperboles metaphors, they do not proceed sequentially or by gradation. They do not recite long litanies, whose refrain is an unending imprecation. They do not strive to multiply the intervals so that in sum they signify a deliberate lapse. They say that all these forms signify an outworn language. They say everything must begin over again. They say that a great wind is sweeping the earth. They say that the sun is about to rise. (p. 66)

The women say, unhappy one, men have expelled you from the world of

symbols and yet they have given you names, they have called you slave, your unhappy slave. Masters, they have exercised their rights as masters. They write, of their authority to accord names, that it goes back so far that the origin of language itself may be considered an act of authority emanating from those who dominate . . . The women say, the language you speak poisons your glottis tongue palate lips. They say, the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you. They say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated. Whatever they have not laid hands on, whatever they have not pounced on like many-eyed birds of prey, does not appear in the language you speak. This is apparent precisely in the intervals that your masters have not been able to fill with their words of proprietors and possessors, this can be found in the gaps, in all that which is not a continuation of their discourse, in the zero, the O, the perfect circle that you invent to imprison them and to overthrow them. (pp. 112-114)

Wittig's violence outside the text of literary conventions and the patriarchal epistemology they serve is, as she states, "ACTION OVERTHROW." Lesbian feminists exist on the periphery of the patriarchy; it is only recently that our spokeswomen have begun to exploit this existence by expanding our separation into a new women's time-space. The critical establishment has

praised Wittig for the intensity and clarity of her language and the imaginative daring of her vision, or discussed her book if it were a fictional account of the battle of the sexes, ignoring the fact that males are largely absent from the narrative. As a Lesbian feminist epic/novel, *Les Guérillières* attempts to achieve in style and form the perspective of the world she depicts, a culture freed from the divisions, separations, dualities, and hierarchies that now dominate our language and the male society which created it.

NOTES

¹Julia P. Stanley and Susan W. Robbins, "Toward a Feminist Aesthetic." Paper presented at Conference on Language and Style (New York, April, 1977) and published in *Chrysalis* 6 (1978).

²Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 22.

³Susan Griffin, in *Sinister Wisdom* 1, 2 (1976), 7.

⁴Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

⁵Kate Millett, *Guillible's Travels* (New York: Links Books, 1974).

⁶Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation: the Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1973).

⁷Kate Millett, *Flying* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974).

⁸Monique Wittig, *The Opoponax*. (Plainfield, Vt.: Daughters, Inc., 1976).

⁹Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillières*. (New York: Avon Books, 1973), pp. 14-15.

⁹Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillières*. (New York: Avon Books, 1973), pp. 14-15.

S P A R R O W / F I R E

A Story by Janice Steinberg

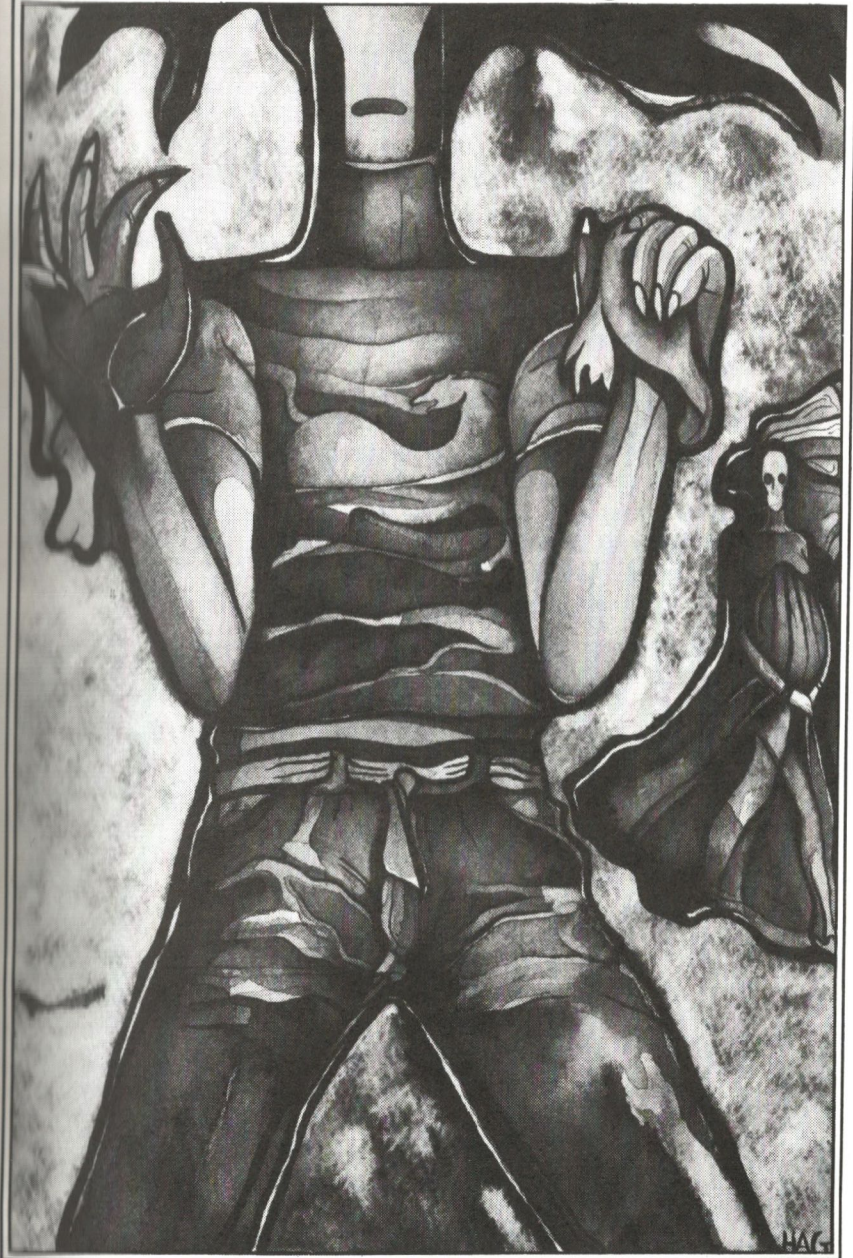


Illustration by Heather Graham

Beat, drum

Call the air and earth to witness

Call down the stars from the greatness of night

Beat

Cry out the rabbit from his warren

Cry out the red fox

Call the great bear from the forest and the white bear

Summon them

Cry them out, drum

The great beasts and the gentle creatures

This day there is peace and great rejoicing

Beat

Call the swift fishes that sparkle, the great fish from the deep waters

Wake the owl

Beat out the sparrow, send her on her soft flight

Sound the rejoicing for the son of men, this bird-swift brave

*Call the deer that flash through the forest to the
marriage of the son of men, Blue Eagle*

Chant the marriage song



Illustration by Heather Graham

I

Blue Eagle is getting married tomorrow in the place they call Winnipeg, a great city of the north where the forest meets the prairie in a rise and spread of pine treed hills. It is summer in the northern sky. The sun will bless the marriage of Blue Eagle.

Blue Eagle is getting married tomorrow in the great hall of justice that is scoured all the cruel Canadian winter by the tall wind from the Rockies and the snow that rages like the white bear from the north. Awesome it rises from the plain that cradles Winnipeg in the whiteness of the prairie sun.

Blue Eagle is getting married tomorrow to a bird-soft woman who has come without memory like the sunrise from the east. They journeyed on wings of thumbs from Ontario's clear waters and he has named his bird-love Dove.

But that is not her real name. She is not an Indian.

Blue Eagle is getting married tomorrow at 3:15 in Winnipeg. If the blood tests have come through.

II

You can be married in Winnipeg at the courthouse by a justice of the peace.

Blue Eagle and Dove go to the courthouse every morning when the hostel closes. They panhandle at the harbor in the afternoons. (But not tomorrow afternoon.)

They sit on the lawn in front of the courthouse. Blue Eagle calls the lawn a park.

III

The sky is night over Manitoba. Above us constellations resemble animals and warriors. The sun that rises across the world blinds the arctic and fills the northern sky with colored light. I see shooting stars falling.

I see Blue Eagle flashing. I see his eyes like torches on the porch of the hostel where we're eating peanut butter sandwiches — is there a knife?/there must be, to spread the peanut butter. Blue Eagle is a fire, moving, dancing, when he speaks the syllables ignite the air. Where's the knife, it's sharp.

The house the hostel's in is old, wooden, midwestern. It's on a street of old wooden midwestern houses, some of them abandoned, weeds in the yards. I imagine other women sitting, stolid and pregnant as Dove, passing long summer evenings on these porches silently as she, their hands — idle? moving with knitting, quilting (the winter will be cold)?

We eat peanut butter and bread and honey. Blue Eagle doesn't want a sandwich. He rubs his stomach, he and Dove got a free dinner at the Y, salad and milk and vegetables and buns and chips and raisin pie, Dove has brought her pie back with her for later. He says he has killed a woman

WHERE'S THE KNIFE

I hear him saying he was in Vietnam and it happened there. The Great Bear and Orion move slowly across the sky. I am afraid for Dove.

I am afraid for her thick slow body with a baby inside it and her easy smile and the name she abandoned somewhere in Ontario or Quebec, and for her dreams.

IV

Blue Eagle has 87¢ in his pocket.
Light explodes from his sides.

V

Flash! Dance!

Hot black eyes in his wild beautiful face molten copper he talks incessantly
nervously his eyes don't stop moving flash! dance!

Stalk, Blue Eagle, Pride of the Fathers!

Bravest of Warriors!

Strongest of Hunters!

Swoop, Blue Eagle, aieeee! aieeee!

Soar, Blue Eagle!

Down the street sparks flying stars flashing white in darkness. His face is on
fire. His arms and his legs and his sides are on fire. He goes into a grocery to buy
Dove a Hires Root Beer — she gets a kick outa Hires — and the walls are too
small for him, why aren't they catching on fire? Why isn't the store flying into the
trees that made it and the trees disappearing onto the plain?

VI

Flow

Flow, Great Assiniboine

Life Giver

River that the sons of men have named

Nourish the gold expanse of Manitoba

River who sparkles with swift fishes, who shudders

with the great fish in the stillness of deep waters

Bless this land, Assiniboine

Nourish it and us creatures who inhabit it

*Flow, Assiniboine, like the lifeblood of the sons of
men*

Like the quick bright blood of the bright-eyed one,

Blue Eagle

He too that the sons of men have named

Who flashes like Assiniboine in sunlight

VII

They're going to a valley in British Columbia. They want to find work on a
farm there. Blue Eagle will help the farmer and Dove will help the farmer's wife.
The valley is called the Okanagan and it has fruit and beef and dairy farms. Dove
would like to be around animals on a beef or a dairy farm.

She's sitting on their sleeping bag saying this. She's talking about what she's
going to do when she and Blue Eagle are married and have hitchhiked to British
Columbia and found work in the Okanagan Valley and she is getting more
pregnant her thick legs getting thicker and she is Dove Eagle living on a beef or a
dairy farm and her husband father of the little bird in her belly is helping the
farmer and she is helping the farmer's wife.

VIII

She calls Blue Eagle Honey. She calls him Sweetheart.
He calls her Honey and Sweetheart and His Wife and His Wife-To-Be and His
Woman (there was another name once, does she remember?).

IX

He wants to borrow Dorothy's bicycle. Dorothy doesn't answer. She grips her
handlebars and what is Jesus telling her outside the gate of this old house where
she and her young husband spend their nights reading the Bible and listening to
dopers?

I see him on a spotted horse, riding, riding, feeling the sun on his body, feeling
the wind at his side — or master of ten horses, brown, spotted, palomino, each
one faster than the one before it, each one stronger.

Dorothy is quiet for a long time. She's eighteen years old, I know she wants to
trust him.

She says no. Horses vanish.

X

Riding riding riding riding riding riding, proud warrior, proud stallion, flesh
warm, muscles firm, motion, motion, air on their bodies, they take it into their
nostrils, faster, chasing the sun, chasing the wind, faster, racing the hawk.

Horses vanish. Sparrows appear.

Sparrows pump their wings against the wind, their bodies small and quick.

XI

Dove dreamed a powerful dream. The dream came to me, to my sleep, but it
was not my dream but the dream of Dove. Dreaming, I felt my legs thicken. A
baby was in my womb.

Three oracles appeared to her. They faced her.

On the left was an old Indian woman. She had long gray hair in braids and
wore a deerskin dress. Dove knew that she was very wise and that she had brought
the dream.

On the right was an owl. Dove didn't know its meaning.

The oracle in the center was her own severed head. She saw that it didn't bleed.
Its mouth told her that she would die soon.

Then the oracles disappeared.

XII

In the morning the hostel gives us breakfast. Each person gets one hard-boiled
egg, two pieces of bread, an orange, and coffee.

Blue Eagle says to a woman, "You look like good meat to put in this sandwich,"
referring to two pieces of Wonderbread he's eating.

XIII

Dove can't finish her egg sandwich. Will Blue Eagle eat it?
No, leave it for the birds.

SEEING YOUR WORLD FROM THE OUTSIDE

Daphne Marlatt

outside night, light
absence is whirling down. down the order of night, not upside, out —
alleyways, all ways the walls say no.

standing inside your world is
full of holes floating doors: “a scream is an appraisal.” you.
apprised of what we see are messages off walls.

& let me read
the black tint under your eyes from banging your head all night, against
the wall of your own want. “salud! ladies of the night.” who do not
win (*Express yourself*)

Do Not phone. Do Not move on to Go.

this game is rigged. because somebody has to be at the bottom, lottery system,
lots have to be at the bottom so somebody else comes out on top. because
everybody wants. & chance is the midnight bus with the winning number: will it
stop where you stop? is this the right spot? is this a stop at all? stop.

the night is full of losers & empty buses, palisades of light adrift. nosed in
to the curb, some slight collision, lights still on, sits under neon, nothing
left to lose. black are the scrawls of want on the walls that do not see us
(“annie was here”) to be lost (“take me home”) in want, o baby, “will you still
feed me? will you still need me?”

black & white. & you. standing inside your world are photographing doors or
holes in the wall night pours thru. “a scream is an appraisal.” you. a scream
is a refusal. we. refuse to keep in all that silence pressing thru the walls,
o women, women who write

“because the night belongs to us!”

TAKING IT ON

Daphne Marlatt

“I feel alienated,” he says. “I’m being taken over by everything else. There’s no
time left for my own work.” Sitting at the table well into morning, cocooned in
smoke (days of coming awake) suffused by sun pouring in from outside. And I
was still in the dream still moving what?

“Couldn’t,” I ask his smoky figure, “you be something miscellaneous?”

“That’s out of date. It’s back to the system now, the Three R’s.”

In the dream it was a fridge. Which I never questioned, faced only with the
difficulty of helping him move, this friend, something that large, a fridge that was
taller than either of us. & he, not taller than me, was hefty enough in his coveralls,
dressed like a mover, & he did move, fast, almost dancing with the same lightfoot
sleight of perception his sentences took, taking shape on the pages of his novel
back there in that little room. They called him Paul tho I knew that wasn’t his real
name & we were in some vestibule of a grand hotel which was where the fridge
had to go, against the far wall. Hang onto it, he said, because they had to pull the
rug out from under, his favourite rug, with a pattern of sardines woven in blue he
said. Here was I holding the fridge, how could I see?

& when we finally had it positioned, that metal grid
protecting the electrical insides as close to the wall as we could get it, & *that* was
done, straightening up, Look I’ll show you, he took me through a pair of French
doors into another room where he unrolled, as reverently, as elegantly as some
Levantine salesman, a hall runner worn from white to grey, & the faded blue at
each end woven in an abstract design. What sardines?

So light it sat, I remembered, it was only a cardboard fridge.

NANCY NICOL: REMARKS ON HER MINATURE THEATRE

“An Oval Bowl of Long Stemmed Red Cherries in Cream” and “The Case of the Disappearing Saxaphonist” are two short stories from a work called the **MINIATURE THEATRE**. Other stories from the **MINIATURE THEATRE** include: “Notes from an Unknown Source . . . A Science Fiction,” “The Pressman’s Revenge,” “Sacrificial Burnings,” “The Revival Meeting,” and “The Requiem.” “Notes from an Unknown Source . . . A Science Fiction” also exists as a 28-minute colour video tape.

I really started off writing these stories to investigate ‘formula’ writing, and the interrelationship between popular language forms and concurrent ideological structures. In this sense the central story of the entire work is “Notes from an Unknown Source,” which juxtaposes ideas of miniaturization technology with ideas of ‘relative’ processes — including ‘relative time.’ In its ‘gravest implication’ realm this work illuminates the subtle manipulative aspects of our contemporary ideological structures. Humour and image are the tools employed to unmask these forms throughout all of the stories.

(Photo: Nancy Nicol)



Tales From The Minature Theatre

NANCY NICOL

After the press the master printer turns to the piano white ivory and black ebony. By the side of the keyboard is an oval bowl of long stemmed red cherries in cream.

The printer has just finished “the best print I’ve ever done” which is a total surprise to him — having been formed by a man climbing under the press blankets just before the motor was turned on; and pulled through the cylinders. His cries were obscured by the pressman’s motor. I just now realize that I am writing this backwards.

How did the man come to be hiding under the pressman’s blankets?

That question demands some return to a beginning — and in returning I find that I have altered the truth, altered the story in the interest of the poetic.

In fact, the man did not crawl under the pressman’s blanket, he was placed there by the pressman while hiding in a box container.

The press was enormous, not at all a graphic press but a monstrous piece of equipment utilized for compressing matter into sheets or leafs — a form of disposal or storage. I cannot decipher which possible intent.

But that still does not tell how the man came to be under the pressman’s blanket. But for that I must return to the beginning, and that is the story. That is fiction. That is the tale of suspense and escape ending in tragedy or compression. (Depending on your viewpoint.)

TALES OF SUSPENSE FROM THE MINIATURE THEATRE: AN OVAL BOWL OF LONG STEMMED RED CHERRIES IN CREAM

An analysis:

I am amused by the symbolic confusions and associations of the story, so I’ve decided to tell you them. They will probably make sense to you. These associations seem more interesting than to maintain the illusion of fiction.

In the first image (which is actually the last, the colours are black and white and red, associates of death.

The pressman is both garbage compressor and graphic artist.

The pressman’s blankets and the bowl of cherries in cream could also be sexual associations.

I altered the story, I say in the interest of poetry, but actually it must be in the interest of motivation, that the victim was an agent in his demise, but in fact his part in his tragedy is more obscure than that. He may still be an agent (how did he come to be in the box?), but that would require a lengthier story and thus development and climactic order. In fact the whole tale has been compressed to the final image, the pressman’s “print”.

Well! the saxophonist is gone. — You don't know what I'm talking about, but that's alright. Well! the saxophonist is gone — could open lots of stories. You're hooked already — and I'm gonna give 'em all to ya — maybe.

So! about two weeks ago the saxophone arrived. But that's not all — a few days after the saxophone arrived — a piano arrived. So for a while there was muffled saxophone scales, followed by scratches of boogie woogie on the piano, followed by muffled saxophone scales, followed by cluster chords reminiscent of Phantom of the opera, followed by muffled saxophone scales, etc. until one day the unmistakable snap of a snare drum was added to the ensemble.

That was it! Actually! That was the infamous straw. My curiosity was aroused. I mean what manner of man would accumulate instrument upon instrument which he couldn't play/or at least which he couldn't play all at once. I decided to investigate.

The length of time that has passed since I noticed the absence of the sound of the saxophone ripping through my studio wall or ceiling is just about equal to the length of time that it has taken me to trace the sound to its source, about four days. So: I found out its location and its personal history all in one trip.

I knocked on the door, she answered. She: "You're not exactly catching me in a great space!"

Me: "I just came up on an errand."

She: "Sure go ahead, sign — do anything you want."

I set up while she talks.

She: "He's gone. Gone! Gone to New York. Wants to get into jazz. Got a saxophone a week ago and today he's gone, sigh., Gone.

Now what does a girl with the highest I.Q. at O.A.C. do? What does it mean when you turn from painting to stringing beads? I mean it just doesn't make sense to me. All this fucking time and off he goes, down to New York, the big apple. The big dream. Ten years. Sigh. I've thrown my life away. Sigh, on this man. It's just not worth it."

Me: "Ever get into feminism?"

She: "Oh well, Yes, I mean of course I know all those theories — but when you really love somebody — I mean I'm a woman who really likes sex. Sigh. What's your sign?"

Me: "Aquarius."

She: "Oh, sigh, well I really don't know why I asked you that, just then — it was just in my mind. I'm a Cancer — Cancers are so deep. So moody, so manic depressive. I'm just hanging out trying to keep myself from going out the window."

Aquarian: "A friend and I figured out the other day — when thinking about fire, that if you jumped from my space you would be hitting 60 miles an hour on impact."

Cancer: "Sigh. I can't relate to Aquarians at all — I mean they're always so up — everything's so light and easy. Life's a bowl of cherries."

(I go on taking photographs. She stretches out on the divan, lights a cigarette, and rereads the letter, the letter of her heartless persecutor, the letter of the absent protagonist, the letter of the disappearing saxophonist, the letter which signals the end.)

TALES FROM THE MINIATURE THEATRE:
"THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING SAXOPHONIST"

Epilogue:

So, the saxophonist is gone, the piano and the snare drum remain. She plays bars from Bach remembered from her grade 8 piano, and their son plays Indian on the drum.



Suzette A. Henke

AGAINST THEIR WILL:

RAPE AND SEDUCTION IN MODERN LITERATURE

According to Susan Brownmiller, "a female definition of rape can be contained in a single sentence. If a woman chooses not to have intercourse with a specific man and the man chooses to proceed against her will, that is a criminal act of rape."¹ It is not my intention to provide still another description of Brownmiller's thesis or to summarize her impressive array of scholarly evidence on the topic of rape. Instead, I want to focus on the possible impact that Brownmiller's work, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, could have on women's studies and, in particular, on literary interpretation. The book is far more than a text on criminal rape. It provides a coherent feminist analysis of the power relationships that dominate male-female interaction in modern society, and it suggests a radical sex-role ideology as influential as the theories proposed by Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, and Germaine Greer. *Against Our Will* might well serve as the primary text in a feminist re-evaluation of various academic disciplines. How many works of literature, for instance, idealize masculine fantasies of sexual conquest? What psycho-sexual myths has society constructed around rape and incorporated into popular culture?

¹ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), p. 18.

Brownmiller describes rape as “man’s basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood” (p. 14) The impetus for rape is not sexual attraction but rage, hostility, and an obsessive will to power. The act is motivated by a desire to conquer and to demean, to reclaim woman’s body as a psychic extension of phallic space. According to Dorothy Dinnerstein, sexual coercion might well be attributable to an unconscious desire for vengeance on the “mother-woman,” whom the male sees as both goddess and authority figure, and wants to divest of matriarchal power through an act of erotic violation.²

As Stevi Jackson explains, “sexual conquest becomes an acceptable way of validating masculinity, of demonstrating dominance of and superiority over women . . . If sexuality was not bound up with power and aggression, rape would not be possible.”³ Jackson suggests that subtle manipulation and coercion are tacitly condoned by the emotional scripts governing male-female relationships in our society.

For the most part, rape is disguised in works of literature under the more civilized heading of seduction and betrayal. Few literary heroines could win criminal prosecutions in a court of law, and many remain oblivious to the hostility and aggression that characterize erotic exploitation. The epithet of “seduction” screens an entire literary genre devoted to the fictional execution of sexual conquest by force or coercion.

As early as the Middle Ages, Andreas Capellanus insisted that the horny squire could rape a woman of the lower classes with impunity. In *The Art of Courtly Love*, he urged the knight simply to “have his will” with peasants and servant maids: “And if you should, by some chance, fall in love with some of their women, be careful to puff them up with lots of praise and then, when you find a convenient place, do not hesitate to take what you seek and to embrace them by force. For you can hardly soften their outward inflexibility so far that they will grant you their embraces quietly or permit you to have the solaces you desire unless you use a little compulsion as a convenient cure for shyness.”⁴

Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa Harlowe* provided a perfect model of the passive victim. Although raped while drugged, she so internalized the guilt of defloration that she eventually died of mortification. Richardson’s *Pamela* fared better, at least by eighteenth-century standards. After interminable skirmishes with her potential rapist, she managed to trap and domesticate him in a bourgeois marriage. Thus are patience and virtue rewarded.

Henry Fielding parodied the hypocrisy of *Pamela* in his satirical novel *Shamela*. But most of Fielding’s robust heroes have few compunctions about seducing available females, so long as they refrain from despoiling women of the upper

² See Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), Chapters 6-9, *passim*.

³ Stevi Jackson, “The Social Context of Rape: Sexual Scripts and Motivation,” in *Women’s Studies International Quarterly*, 1 (1978), 31.

⁴ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 150.

classes. And how should we judge a nineteenth-century classic like Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*? Was Tess seduced or raped?



As we approach the twentieth century, fictional examples of rape proliferate, though the phenomenon is often cloaked in a literary mythos of female sexuality. Most of D.H. Lawrence’s heroines joyously submit to sexual coercion in the name of blood knowledge. Women may be co-equal stars; but in the final analysis, every *real* woman yields to the electric thrill of male dominance. According to Lawrence, the female nature is characterized by a primordial desire to be overpowered and mastered by the male. Constance Chatterley discovers a bedrock of bliss when she is sodomized by an angry Mellors, apparently against her will. The scene unfolds in lyrical, apocalyptic imagery:

It cost her an effort to let him have his way and his will of her. She had to be a passive, consenting thing, like a slave, a physical slave. Yet the passion licked around her, consuming, and when the sensual flame of it pressed through her bowels and breast, she really thought she was dying: yet a poignant, marvellous death . . . She felt, now, she had come to the real bed-rock of her nature and was essentially shameless . . . At the bottom of her soul, fundamentally, she had needed this phallic hunting out.’⁵

Connie sings a hymn to the cult of true womanhood as she arises, phoenix-like, from the bed of violation.

Even James Joyce believed, along with Freud, that every female secretly desires

⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), pp. 258-59.

to be raped. In *Ulysses* he portrays Molly Bloom as a modern-day Wife of Bath who enjoys sexual pleasure with healthy delight and gusto. But as she drifts off to sleep, Molly amuses herself with nocturnal fantasies of rape: "I was thinking would I go around by the quays there some dark evening where nobody know me and pick up a sailor off the sea thatd be hot on for it and not care a pin whose I was only to do it off up in a gate somewhere or one of those wildlooking gipsies in Rathfarnham . . . or a murderer anybody."⁶

The drama of rape has been glorified, stylized, and distorted by modern authors. I would agree with the judgements of Kate Millett and Susan Brownmiller that almost every novel written by Henry Miller or Norman Mailer celebrates the *machismo* ethic spawned in the nineteen-thirties by Ernest Hemingway. The brawny male ploughs his way through America and Europe, singing hymns of phallic glory. When Erica Jong tries to create an analogous female protagonist in *Fear of Flying*, she discovers that the "zipless fuck" may be a thrilling fantasy, but in reality, it is little more than a sordid and unpalatable invitation to rape.

Twentieth-century male authors frequently use paradigms of sexual conquest to assert mastery over that last bastion of threatening femininity, the "uppity" or aggressive woman. A female who demands her own social identity or who refuses to cooperate with men will get her "just deserts" in bed. Consider, for instance, the following scene from Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn*:

He took pleasure in degrading her. I could scarcely blame him for it, she was such a prim, priggish bitch in her street clothes. You'd almost swear she didn't own a cunt, the way she carried herself in the street. Naturally, when he got her alone he made her pay for her highfalutin' ways. . . . Sometimes he'd stand her on her hands and push her around the room that way, like a wheelbarrow. Or else he'd do it dog fashion, and while she groaned and squirmed he'd nonchalantly light a cigarette and blow the smoke between her legs. Once he played her a dirty trick doing it that way. He had worked her up to such a state that she was beside herself. Anyway, after he had almost polished the ass off her with his back-scuttling he pulled out for a second, as though to cool his cock off, and then very slowly and gently shoved a big long carrot up her twat. "That, Miss Abercrombie," he said, "is a sort of Doppelganger to my regular cock."⁷

So much for "Miss Abercrombie and her high-tone Narrangansett ways." Her body is a space to be invaded, a refuse-bin for the smoke, carrots, and ordure of society. Penetrated by an inanimate object, she becomes a mechanical object of debasement, pathetically writhing in the throes of insatiable desire after her smug lover has raped her with a vegetable.

Often in the novels of Henry Miller and Norman Mailer, the sexual act is perpetrated by the male on the female not so much "against her will" as apart from it. Women characters become flat, two-dimensional victims who apparently enjoy physical debasement and collude in their own oppression. Desperately

⁶James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922; rpt. New York: Random House, 1934 ed., reset and corrected, 1961), p. 777.

⁷Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* (New York: Random House, 1961), pp. 180-81.

searching for love or affirmation, they reap the whirlwind of physical brutality, unwanted pregnancy, traumatic abortion, or death.

It is interesting that a black author like Ralph Ellison is able to portray sexual coercion more realistically — not as a valorization of manhood, but as an act of either personal desperation or fantasized self-assertion. The young protagonist of *Invisible Man*, forced to participate in a "battle royal" of ritual violence, recognizes that his affinity with the blonde "circus kewpie doll" brought in to arouse the leering men in the hall. By virtue of this parodic Joycean "bird-girl," the hero has a negative epiphany revealing the connection between sex and violence. He and the dancer are partners in alienation, mutual victims of a white patriarchy that needs to demean both women and blacks. The dancer is a vacuous figure of otherness: she has surrendered her identity to the lascivious will of the crowd. Like the hero, she submits to physical humiliation and psychological rape. The young boy recognizes "the terror and disgust in her eyes, almost like my own terror."⁸ Though he at first despises this woman with "eyes hollow and smeared a cool blue, the color of a baboon's butt" (p. 19), he comes to realize that she is just as exploited as he.

Later in the novel, when the protagonist decides that political success might be achieved "through woman," he makes the same mistake as the Brotherhood: "Why . . . did they insist upon confusing the class struggle with the ass struggle, debasing both us and them?" (p. 408). His sexual scheme backfires into a grotesque drama of mock rape. His inebriated victim, Sybil, becomes an amorous predator. She relishes the prospect of forcible sex with "Brother Taboo." Sybil delights in choreographing the entire scene of erotic violation. She wants a "domesticated rapist . . . house-broken and with a convenient verbal pushbutton arrangement for the ladies' pleasure" (p. 510). "But why be surprised," the hero wonders, at Sybil's rape fantasies, "when that's what they hear all their lives. When it's made into a great power and they're taught to worship all types of power?" (p. 509). Ironically, Sybil is thrilled by a sense of mastery in surrender: she wants to conquer the conqueror, to manipulate her partner in mimetic gestures of sexual coercion.

Recently, we have witnessed a startling trend in novels written by male authors who address themselves to the emerging problems of female liberation. Waving a banner of liberal rhetoric, they nevertheless find rape a convenient dénouement in the woman's search for self-realization. The female protagonist asserts her independence, escapes traditional moral strictures, and is sexually liberated from conjugal monotony. In the end, however, she must pay for her new-found freedom through rape, madness, or both. The demented heroine of Alan Lelchuck's *Miriam at Thirty-four* follows an "irresistible perverse desire" to explore Boston Commons at night. She is predictably attacked, and one of her rapists mouths the following compliment: "You got spirit all right . . . jes like a tough little filly that needs to be broken, tha's all."⁹

Contemporary women authors tend to portray their female characters in

⁸Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1947; rpt. New York: Random House, 1952), p. 20.

⁹Alan Lelchuck, *Miriam at Thirty-four* (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 233.

clearer, more realistic strokes. They divest rape of its folkloric trappings and try to expose the pain, confusion, and terror suffered by the victim whose body has been invaded and personal dignity compromised. In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou recounts an autobiographical incident of childhood rape, a trauma exacerbated by ignorance and helplessness. The turgid, laconic prose of Angelou's style contains the chaos of her experience. Through ironic understatement, she successfully renders the feeling of horror that invades the child's consciousness:

Then there was the pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight-year-old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can't. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot.

I thought I had died . . .

What he did to me, and what I allowed, must have been very bad if already God let me hurt so much.¹⁰

The young girl is all the more pathetic for her naive trust in adult authority and her belief in the power of the word. She confuses simple affection with sexual desire and judges herself guilty of complicity. The trial becomes a parody of society's tendency to blame the victim, and the child fully expects to be stoned for harlotry.

In *Will There Really Be a Morning?* Frances Farmer portrays rape as the final indignity suffered by women incarcerated in a mental institution. Farmer's autobiographical account of this chamber of horrors is chilling indeed. Rape of women by women adds to the nightmare of a world where ordinary social sanctions no longer apply. Farmer herself manages to avoid erotic assault. But her description of the lesbian rape of a schizophrenic patient suggests that sexual coercion may be the ultimate humiliation suffered by the powerless. In this case, the rape victim loses all sense of reality and becomes hopelessly catatonic.

As Susan Brownmiller insists, rape must not be seen as a remote crime or a sociological statistic. The threat of rape is an ever-present reality that severely inhibits female autonomy. Every woman in contemporary society inbibes the social proscription that if she becomes *too* independent, she may be punished with sexual violation. Training in behavioral restriction has ramifications in all areas of social activity. It daunts initiative, limits creative vision, and stifles imaginative energies.

So long as men and women are programmed to believe that sex is an aggressive act of conquest and domination, performed by an active male on a passive or masochistic female, rape will remain a part of our cultural fabric. Fantasies of seduction and forcible sex will continue to dominate male-female interaction, both in literature and in life; and ritual patterns of courtship will run the risk of degenerating into rites of erotic violence.

¹⁰ Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1971), pp. 65, 68.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOAN BARFOOT

Anne Bolgan



Anne Bolgan and Joan Barfoot

*Last year your novel, *Abra*, won the Books in Canada Award as the best "first" novel of the year. *Abra* has been widely reviewed as an exceptionally controversial novel or, as one reviewer put it, as "a very risky novel, but one that works." Perhaps we should begin by giving a barebone's synopsis of the novel's basic story line.*

Abra is the story of a woman of about 32 or 33 who, without warning or explanation of any kind, without guilt or regret, one day suddenly rejects her life as wife and mother, buys a cabin in northern Ontario with some money she'd inherited from her grandmother, and then goes to live there in almost total isolation. The framework of the novel is provided by a visit, nine years later, from her daughter Katie — now 18 — who wants to find out why her mother had left her and to see if she can persuade her to return. During the intervening years, however, *Abra* has learned a great many things about being, and being alone. She has learned how to survive and how to enjoy being on her own. So, after wavering a bit, she decides to stay where she is. That, basically, is the situation.

Joan, I've read a fair number of the reviews of your novel and I've noted that many of them do little more than provide just such a barebone's outline of the novel as you've given us; what I find distressing about such an account is that it gives no idea whatever of the really quite extraordinary novel that lies behind it. The other thing that reviewers tend to do is to express their personal assessment of the novel. Now is that just my impression of conventional reviewing technique or do you find that as well?

Yes, I think that is a pretty standard way to proceed but I'm not as distressed by it as you are, perhaps because I work on a newspaper and I know how reviews are done. The plot synopsis of a novel may be boring if you read 20 or 25 of them for the same book, but a synopsis like that is necessary for the general reader trying to decide whether that novel would be of any interest to him at all. As for judgments, a book reviewer working for a newspaper has to be quick about it. He hasn't got time to really think about a novel or to mull over its implications before writing his review. In Canada, and perhaps elsewhere, reviewing is not something that a lot of effort goes into. Many times, reviewers do it just to get a free book out of it and perhaps a bit of money, so it's not worth it to give a great deal of time or thought to the process.

I've noted that in these reviews — and I may say that the novel has generally been very, very favourably reviewed — the heaviest emphasis has generally been given to the fact that this is a "first" novel. Tell us a little bit about your reactions to this kind of reception to your novel. Did you sort of go around on Monday thinking you were Joan Barfoot and then on Tuesday thinking "I'm a novelist"?

The emphasis given to *Abra* as an award-winning "first" novel is due probably to the fact that expectations for a "first" novel are much lower than they would be for a second or third. But, no, I certainly did not begin to think of myself as a novelist because I don't believe a first novel qualifies you for that. A first novel is exciting and it's fun, but then you have to get down to the much harder job of doing a second one, and then a third, and then you just might begin to think of yourself justifiably as an author.

As to my reactions to getting the book published, at first I was scared — not of the reviewers so much as of people I know reading the book and identifying

the character of *Abra*, and the weird things she does, with me. When it came out, however, everyone was really kind and supportive. Whether they liked it or not, they said they did and they certainly didn't confuse me with *Abra*, so those worries never materialized into anything.

When the reviews began to come in, at first I was greedy to read them — and particularly William French's review in *The Globe and Mail*. For me, the *Globe* is mecca and French the most important mass publication book reviewer around, so that that was all very exciting. I went out and bought all the copies of the *Globe* that there were in London. I think after that, as more and more reviews kept dribbling in, I began to read them more critically and for awhile I actually began to think of doing a piece on Critic Criticism because most of them are so badly done. I couldn't believe that people read so poorly, think so poorly, and express themselves so poorly. I was just astounded. Now I read the reviews more disinterestedly. I'm pleased if someone has liked the book, because in a business sense, I know that will help it along financially.

I think what this whole experience has really done for me is to give me some confidence — some confidence that I really do exist out there in this book form. I've heard so many stories of people having to go to 27,000 publishers before they get their books accepted that I can hardly believe how smoothly everything has gone for me. McGraw-Hill just picked it up and I had no problem. It was all so easy that I keep thinking there must be a flaw in it and that God will get me for it yet — perhaps in my second novel. We'll see.

*I find *Abra* so impressive that I wonder whether you'll ever really be able to match it again. I guess what I'm saying is that it seems to me that only a very special set of circumstances, coming together in highly unexpected ways, could possibly have released the powerful dynamisms which are at work in this particular novel and that circumstances like that are not likely to come together in quite so overpowering and successful a way again. I'm certainly encouraged to think otherwise because of your reference to a second novel that you now have in hand. Could you tell us something about it?*

It's certainly not another *Abra*, I hope, although it has a female main character too. I agree with you about *Abra* — although I haven't read it in awhile and I can't read it as if I hadn't written it yet. *Abra* is sort of elemental in a way — earth, fire, water stuff — and I think you're probably right: you can't recreate that, but I learned a lot about the craft of writing from writing it. I think, I think the next one's better — better written, better structured and perhaps more human. Personally, I like it better, but I'm still working on it and we'll see how it ends up. I don't really want to get into what it's about.

*I can certainly understand your reluctance to speak about your second novel, so let's return to our consideration of *Abra* and its reviewers. I would say that, on the one hand, it's been read primarily as a kind of escapist fantasy — "the*

ultimate escape fantasy” — as one reviewer put it. Or, if it’s not taken exclusively as an escape fantasy, then it is taken as a *Woman’s Lib* book, with “escape” viewed as an essential part of such liberation. Joan if, in your view, such statements are largely irrelevant, what then do you think it’s really about?

I will quite happily admit that *Abra* could involve an escape fantasy on one level, and that perhaps, on another level, it can be read as feminist, but that’s not really what it’s about. Reviewers sometimes like to slot things. It makes their job much simpler, but it is annoying to have the book narrowed down to those themes. When I started to work on it, when I had the original idea, and when I was writing it, I was interested in the concept of someone (and I don’t necessarily mean a woman, but a person) being alone, and in the idea — it’s the old existential and Zen thing — the sound of one hand clapping. Do I exist if there’s no one around to see me existing? That was the premise. *Abra* was the character, the “someone,” and her situation was developed to illustrate that premise, to test her existence — not, not the terrible tribulations, nor the inertia and apathy of being trapped in a household with two kids and a very nice husband.

But the second part of the novel was the key to me. Things go on without you. *Abra*’s family grows up without her and, as she says, one way or another they turned out. Sure, they’re screwed up because she left, but they would have been screwed up if she stayed. It’s...

It’s just a different screw.

A different screw, yes. Excellent. A good headline. Anyway, the roots of the book are in that sort of thing, but since the book has come out, I can see the other points of view because they’ve been expressed to me so often. I didn’t understand fully, while I was writing it, that *Abra*’s situation in the first part of the book, where she is this woman in a house with two kids and a husband wondering what in hell is going on, is such a common one. I didn’t know how many people felt like that. It has just astonished me since then to have people say: “How did you know? You don’t have this situation yourself. So how did you know, how I feel?” And I thought, Jesus, that’s terrible if people really feel that way and if there are thousands of people who are actually feeling that way. And that was a revelation to me, and it’s frightening to me that people are going around with feelings like that.

Let’s look at some of the negative reactions: “Where the author fails us,” one reviewer says, “is in the philosophical area. She does not resolve the powerful moral questions raised in her novel — questions such as: at what point is it justifiable for one human being to turn from another and pursue her own self-satisfaction? When does ‘ME-TOO’ become immoral? What right has a parent to divorce herself from her children?” Joan, what about all this?

I don’t know the answers to those questions. I wish I did. Perhaps God knows the answers and the reviewer ought to read only His books but He didn’t write *Abra*.

I did and I get irritated by people who want easy “answers” from a novel or a list of “do’s” and “don’ts.” As a reader, I’d rather read a book that makes me think about the character and the situations than to have a book that tells me everything that the author believes. That leaves me nothing of the book. It just gives it to me on a plate. A book that causes me to think lets me share in creating it, in a way. I deliberately didn’t put in any of my own feelings and judgments about *Abra*. I did present both sides of the case. I didn’t let *Abra* cop out. I did make her confront the questions of duty versus desire or love. She is a creature who responds to what is most natural but the question of what is really natural, or super-natural, or human — these are some of the questions for which I have no ready answers. And if I didn’t advance a “position,” it’s because I don’t have one to advance. What these reviewers call a “moral perspective” is just simplicity itself. They want novels to tell them how to make a life. What they really want are recipe books.

*Joan, I’m very interested to have heard you mention Zen and existential anxiety, and such interesting Oriental concepts as that of “the one hand clapping.” You show such sensitive understanding of *Abra*’s interior depths that I am reminded of Virginia Woolf, who was also interested in probing those states of dissociation which people sometimes experience, and the way people’s identities can become fragmented into a number of discordant selves. Have there been any particularly significant literary influences operating on you which affected the creation of *Abra*?*

I’m not sure whether I can be very specific about literary influences. I’m a huge reader and, though I haven’t studied Zen or existentialism, I’ve read quite a few books about them. I was even meditating for awhile though not, I think, in the Zen way and with no hopes of getting involved in it particularly, but it’s fascinating and it certainly fascinated me for quite awhile. It was appealing because it triggered the same sort of questions I was triggering for myself.

In terms of other books, I guess there’s a sort of amalgamation of all sorts of literary influences. I read everything from Virginia Woolf to Agatha Christie — depending on my moods, so obviously there must be huge amounts of derivative-ness but I don’t think the theme of dissociation came specifically from Woolf. I think it’s a fairly common experience: you’re concentrating on something very intensely — so intensely that you’re lost in it — and suddenly, for some reason, the concentration is broken and you find yourself watching yourself concentrating. You can go on into an infinite mirrors routine on that one, and that sort of thing, vis-à-vis identities, is very interesting. It’s also something that practically everyone, I would think, shares.

Specifically, however, I remember reading Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and thinking, at the end, that she should have stayed and I felt — perhaps from that — that there was something to be said about someone who doesn’t go back, someone who stayed and could live in isolation. And that’s what I wanted to do with *Abra*.

THE TELLURIC WOMEN OF JOVETTE MARCHESSAULT

Gloria Feman Orenstein



(Photo: Josée Coulombe)

Jovette Marchessault's TELLURIC WOMEN, WOMEN OF HOPE AND RESURRECTION are the artistic revelations of the new feminist seer whose spiritual quest for cosmic renewal brings about the resurrection of the lost soul of Earth Mother in the form of totemic sculptural visions of woman's mythic origins and feminist rebirth.

Poetically conjuring up associations with the telluric currents that flow beneath the surface of the Earth indicating the location of subsurface structures such as sedimentary basins and layered rocks, her Telluric Women seem to point metaphorically to the existence of surfacing Goddess forces, womanspirit forces and female forces alive on the planet today. They are natural guideposts that mark the sacred sites of the recovery of 'womanmana' on the Amerindian land, the Promised Land of female hope and desire.

In this pre and post-patriarchal Edenic vision, woman's primordial spirit-powers are at last restored to their full magico-ecstatic dimensions and are united with the newly emerging social and political forces of her liberation.

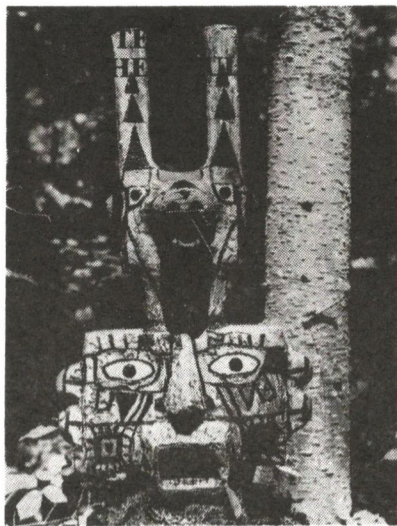
They are analogous to the stars in the female constellations of the night-sky, which Jovette Marchessault has envisioned in her paintings of the Constellations of Mammalian Sky Mothers, the Great She Bear, The Otter, The Ermine and The Marten. When placed in their natural settings on the land and in the water her Telluric Women form similar earthly constellations of charged magnetic currents linking Mother to Daughter in terrestrial and aquatic circuits that illuminate the entire globe with womanvision in celebration of their ancestral matrilineal heritage.

The bodies of Telluric Women are traversed by networks of root and twig antennae connecting their sexual, emotional and intellectual centers, creating a subtle psycho-physical circulatory system through which vibrations from the cosmos and the natural world can be received, transmuted, and retransmitted in the form of creative energies and healing forces. Their broad mouths are like roads upon which their songs of resurrection travel. They broadcast telluric messages proclaiming across time and space the passionate rediscovery of their lost sister-spirits and female mentor figures. They speak in ancient wisewoman words and new poetic languages of prophetic, incandescent solar visions. Their outstretched arms which seem to be vestigial wings or fins, can touch, fly and swim; they navigate through the elements of earth, fire, air and water, through human and etheric matter to welcome women, reaching out with their radar-palms to embrace the fullness of life in its most fertile aspects.

Telluric Women often have multiple visual and sexual centers. They are many-breasted, many-mooned, many-spiraled beings whose bodies bear the imprints of the ancient mysteries of the Sun, the Pyramids and the World-Egg. Their vibrant skin-surfaces proudly display the emblems of all their mythopoeic alchemical transformations. As Great Mothers, their minds give birth to imaginary new beings, to animals and children of the psyche, all symbolic of non-biological creation.

Their gaze stares directly into eternity; it sees beyond the illusions created by patriarchal history and religion to the original vision of female grandeur in the universe. It is a clairvoyance that demystifies and clarifies simultaneously; it recaptures the memory of a time when women revelled and jubilated in the full exercise of their many pleasures and powers; it foretells the advent of a holistic, gynocentric, ecological age to come.

Whether constructed of discarded wooded crates or objects of refuse which are swathed in plaster, etched in midnight hues and glazed in earth and plant light, Telluric Women transmute rejected material forms into totemic force fields. Their auras radiate harmonic waves that resonate with the momentum of woman's return to the source of her own creation, to Plant Mother, to Earth Mother, and to all her mothers both biological and spiritual that have birthed her and guided her towards the reclamation of her true feminist destiny.



Translated by Josée Michaud LeBlond

Tellurian Mother and her Daughter, 1979
(Photo: Josée Coulombe)

I have been exposing for ten years now. Exposing myself! For me, as for all women, making ourselves conspicuous in the field of patriarchal culture always carries a risk of making ourselves ridiculous. One rarely exposes under the cloak of anonymity: only slightly disguised, to please the dealers.

Accustomed from my earliest days to cramp, to limit and to clip the wings of my imagination, I understand now, years later, and because I have explored my land and my mother-sources and roots, that each of my works and exhibitions, was, is, a manifestation of energies, and also, a loud and intelligible intervention in the silence of virile Knowledge, of this Knowledge that has always chosen to negate us or ridicule us. Sometimes, both at once.

And I continue to paint as a reminder of everything that has been created by women. Out of internal need, desire, with others, among others.

And I continue to sculpt because creation, all forms of creation, can interest my body, mind, eye and heart passionately.

And I continue to write because the spirit of hope tells me that we will soon be so numerous and conspicuous, so alive and apparent, like the blossoming mother-tree that bursts forth everywhere in the vast nights of the American land, that it will no longer be possible to hide us. We will be together, on this promised land or elsewhere, in places that we will have invented, seeded with the pollen of our works, of all our work forms, gentler and stronger than dreams. (It will take at least that much to clear up the appalling delirium of the History of Art).

And our works will sum up all the earthly growths, all the motions of the air and the water, in the new spiral cycle of our own return. To our own self.



Woman of Hope, 1979
(Photo: Josée Coulombe)

NIGHT COWS

LES VACHES DE NUIT

A Story by **Jovette Marchessault**
Un Conte de

Translated by **Yvonne M. Klein**

"Les Vaches de Nuit" was first presented at Le Theatre du Nouveau Monde in Montreal (March 1979) by Pol Pelletier; it was given a bilingual dramatic reading by Pelletier at The Woman's Salon in New York (September 22, 1979).

My mother is a cow! That makes two of us. Two beautiful milk cows, butter cows; creators of those sweet oceans of magnetic milk which surge through the human body. As the saying is, two beautiful brown beasts. All the cows, without regard to race, weight, or colour, are castrated young. Why, you ask? Because, with certain rare exceptions, the beautiful brown beasts are nymphomaniacs. My mother has drunk deep of holy water and dish water all day long with nothing to do, the ancestral defect in her as it is in all of us. Cows are on the bottom rung of the ladder of infinity! Damned cows!

Throughout the centuries, the operators of the Order of Castrators have recognized to a man that a castrated cow behaves herself more dependably, more normally than a cow who is intact. Not to mention that her moral attitudes are directed more forcefully toward the nutritive principle. Oh, yes. No more of that



Pol Pelletier in "Les Vaches de nuit"
(Photo: Josée Coulombe)

Ma mère est une vache! Avec moi, ça fait deux. De belles vaches laitières, beurrières, créatrices de ces doux océans de lait magnétique qui circulent dans le corps des humains. Du beau bétail brun, comme ils disent quelque fois. Toutes les vaches, sans discrimination de races, de poids, de couleurs, sont castrées en bas âge. Pourquoi? Parce que le beau bétail brun, à quelques rares exceptions, est nymphomane. Ma mère a beau brouter de l'eau bénite et de l'eau de vaisselle à journée longue, rien à faire, la tare ancestrale est en elle, comme en nous toutes. Au bas de l'échelle de l'infini, les vaches! Damnées vaches!

Depuis des siècles et des siècles, il est universellement reconnu chez les machinateurs de l'Ordre-des-Castrants, qu'une vache castrée a un comportement plus uniforme, plus normatif qu'une vache qui ne l'est pas. Sans compter que sa tenue morale est forcément plus élevée en principes nutritifs. Ouais! Ouais! Ouais! Fini

so-called milk from nymphomaniac cows — all curdled and no butter fat! No more of that putrid so-called milk that tastes of rotten clay and oily water. Forget that milk that turns red from its scandalous blood-secret. Castration is really a kind of blessing for these day cows, these cows of good will. This discovery of the miracle of mutilation transforms a nymphomaniac cow into a beast which can be specialized to produce meat, milk, butter, or labour.

By day, my mother's general outline comprises all female forms. A well-made cow, my mother has broad haunches, abundant mammary secretions, high buttocks, wide pelvis, deep chest and broad hips. Altogether her body is long and well-padded. Her eye is limpid and sweet, sweet, sweet; her head yielding and her ears small. In short, she has everything which indicates a tranquil and submissive character. Very important also is that she walks on all fours.

By day, I see her wandering aimlessly, sweating, slobbering and swelling. By day, you could say that my mother is made of a mud that will not hold its shape, of clay that would crack in the oven. But the moment night approaches with its waterfalls of dreams and the birds of the earth mount the wind of the branches, I see my mother transform herself. She transforms herself fleetingly, from the outside. She transforms herself smoothly, from the inside. I, the heifer, the little cow, have observed my mother for quite a long time so that I can tell you at what precise moment the happy metamorphosis of a day-cow to a cow of the night begins. It begins when the evening songs start floating freely through the old kitchens of our houses. Everybody to bed! Everyone is asleep. Then my mother begins by bathing her body, the vast expanse of her body, in the heavenly water. This is the first step by which she will presently emerge magnificent.

By day, my mother appears shabby, even drab, but at night she takes out her black and white gown, the one that has spots scattered here and there, their flickering producing an extraordinary suggestion of midnight blue. And that gown, I must tell you, has a splendour of its own. It seems to have swallowed up the starry sky on a night when the moon is full. And that gown clings to her body from neck to foot. My mother is so beautiful! A beauty. Her fine, supple, living skin, covered with short and shining hair, her milky teats, her belly where the fur lies in sweet and lustrous waves, her horns, which she flattens out by day, tucking them discreetly under her chignon, but which at night she wears like the crescent moon, with their points thrusting forward. A beauty, my mother a beauty perpetually tempered by the drops of milk which noiselessly fall in our solitude.

le soi-disant lait caillé et sans beurre des vaches nymphomanes! Fini le soi-disant lait putride au goût d'argile maudite et d'eaux visqueuses! Oublié le lait virant au rouge et son scandaleux secret de sang! Pour ces vaches de jour, ces vaches de bonne volonté, la castration c'est comme une espèce de bénédiction. La découverte, la mutilation miracle qui d'une vache nymphomane, fait une bête qu'on peut spécialiser dans la production de la viande, du lait, du beurre et du travail.

Le jour, la conformation générale de ma mère possède toutes les formes de la femelle. Cette conformation se défénissant surtout par la netteté de ses caractères sexuels primaires et secondaires. En vache bien faite, ma mère a les hanches écartées, des sécrétions mammaires abondantes, la fesse longue, le bassin large, la poitrine profonde, le sacrum saillant. Dans l'ensemble, son corps est long et étoffé. Son oeil est limpide et doux, doux, doux, sa tête inclinée, ses oreilles petites. Bref, tout ce qui est l'indice d'un caractère tranquille et soumis. Il est aussi primordial qu'elle marche à quatre pattes.

Le jour, je la regarde déambuler d'une façon lente, avec ses sueurs, sa bave, ses larmes, ses reniflements. Elle flaire partout, elle hume partout, même le fond des lits, le fond de poches, les lettres du courrier guettant, je le sais, les présages de sa prochaine disparition. Le jour, on dirait que ma mère est faite d'une boue qui ne tient pas, d'une terre qui pourrait éclater au four. Mais à l'instant où la nuit avance d'un pas avec ses cataractes de songes et que les oiseaux de la terre montent au vent des branches, je vois ma mère se transformer. Se transforme du dehors, fugacement. Se transforme du dedans, suavement. Moi, la génisse, la vachette, ça fait assez longtemps que j'observe ma mère pour vous dire à quel moment précis commence l'heureuse métamorphose d'une vache de jour en vache de nuit! Ça commence quand le soleil se couche et que le nocturne se met à circuler librement dans les vieilles cuisines de nos maisons. Tout le monde au lit! Tout le monde dort. Alors, ma mère commence par se laver le corps avec de l'eau de ciel, toute la vaste étendue de son corps. C'est la première étape de ce qui sera magnificence de tout à l'heure.

Le jour, ma mère est plutôt en vêtue terne, mais le soir elle sort sa robe pie-noire, celle qui a des taches blanches, des taches noires, disposées irrégulièrement et des mouchetures donnant une extraordinaire nuance d'un noir bleuté. Et je vous dis que cette robe est une splendeur! On dirait une gorgée de nuit étoilée un soir de pleine lune. Et cette robe lui colle au corps, la découpe de la tête aux pieds. Elle est belle ma mère! Une beauté. Sa peau mince, souple, mobile, couverte de poils courts et brillants, ses mamelles bien irriguées, son ventre où des vagues luisantes de fourrure se dressent en douceur et ses cornes, ses cornes que de jour elle porte aplaties, insérées sagement en arrière de la ligne du chignon, voicé que le soir, elle porte ses cornes en croissant de lune avec les pointes rejetées en avant. Une beauté, ma mère, une beauté perpétuelle trempée de gouttes de lait qui tombent sans bruit dans notre solitude.

When she invests me, in my turn, in my night dress, a double enchantment binds us to one another. My most beautiful dress, far more beautiful than my Sunday clothes; a dress which varies in colour from palest red to the red of blood buried in the depths of the heart. At the top of my dress, near the flanks, there is another shade of red, the kind of red seen on the backs of trout which dart like threads in the shadowy bottoms beneath the icy waters of the rivers of our North. It's strange, strange, but each time my mother drapes me once more in my red gown, I feel she has given birth to me anew.

And we are off! We are going elsewhere, jubilation for our bodies, food for our hunger, air for our lungs and veins; we are going elsewhere toward our night of the fleshy cows. And we mount higher and higher through the cycles of the heavens. Next to each other, turning toward each other, bearing the scars of our mutilation, sharing the desire to travel together out of the depths of the time we serve by day in the old kitchens. This exploding desire cannot be conquered and expands our sweet orifices. Cradled in ecstasies! The millennial swing which sweeps us out of the daily eclipse of the slaughterhouse. There we are, all naked within our garments, within the flesh of our garments of night, within the embrace of the hairs of our skin. Daughter, mother, mother, daughter, the hierarchy goes off to look around somewhere else when the cows of the night bathe themselves in the lakes of sweaty tenderness.

And we are off! And we fly to our rendez-vous in the Milky Way. How beautiful! The great river of milk, the land of birth where mothers and daughters are reunited at long last. So beautiful! Canals of milk blooming with water-lilies. Milk-drunk, white-flow, liquid star, the fruit of our mother's guts expands across the brisk climate of the sky. All the breasted creatures of the universe come to the meeting place. Lightfootedly they come, laughing in the gorgeous milk-dawn which flows from the cows of the night. Mad dashes down the curve of the spine, misty hooves of comet-mammals. All breasted creatures are uniting with each other in a wave of scales, of hair, of tenderness. The milk flows! The milk spurts! The milk comes in floods! Beautiful, beautiful bovine bounty. A snowstorm of milk! Gulps of milk! Scents of milk! Drifts of milk! Gusts of milk! Hurricanes of milk! Clouds of milk! Milk clotted with images! Rainbows of milk! Milk erupts from bursting females, from breasts which make nourishment from the throbbing of life. And from all sides arise rallying cries, a tumult of emotions stimulated by the milk. The daughters' implacable thirst demands the milk lap through the heavenly shallows; it demands the milk not clot in the teats nor run off down the steep sides of the void. I know and will say it. The living world does not derive from dream! The living world does not arise from wrath! The living world springs from the mothers' mammalian brains. Oh yes, oh yes. Their white brain matter is yet another glorious milk which starts to flow in times of celebration.

Un double enchantement nous lie l'une à l'autre, dans un seul corps, quand elle me vêt à mon tour, de ma robe de nuit. Ma plus belle robe, plus belles encore que ma robe des dimanches; une robe qui varie du rouge clair à ce rouge sang enterré dans le fond du coeur. Dessus ma robe, près des flancs, il y a une autre nuance de rouge, ce genre de rouge rutilant que porte le dos des truites dans l'ombre lancée comme un filet au fond de l'eau glacée de nos rivières du nord. Étrange, étrange, mais chaque fois que ma mère me revêt de cette robe rouge, j'ai l'impression qu'elle m'enfante à nouveau.

Et nous partons! Et nous allons ailleurs, jubilation pour le corps, farine pour la faim, air pour nos poitrines et nos veines, nous allons ailleurs, vers notre nuit de vaches grasses. Et nous montons de plus en plus haut dans les cycles du ciel. L'une à côté de l'autre, l'une tournée vers l'autre, portant à la cicatrice de notre mutilation, le désir de voyager ensemble. Bercements d'extases! Balançoire millénaire qui nous élance en dehors de l'éclipse du quotidien des abattoirs. Voici que nous sommes toutes nues dans nos robes, dans la chair de nos robes de nuit, dans l'embrasement de nos poils. Fille, mère, mère, fille, la hiérarchie s'en va faire un tour ailleurs quand les vaches de nuit se baignent dans les lacs de la tendresse en sueur.

Et nous partons! Et nous volons vers notre rendez-vous dans la voie lactée. Beauté! Le grand fleuve de lait, la terre de l'enfance où mères et filles sont enfin réunies. Beauté! Beauté! Ivresse lactée, fluidité blanche, liquide astral, le fruit des entrailles de nos mères se répand dans le temps frais du ciel. Toutes les mammifères de la création sont au rendez-vous! S'en viennent à pieds légers, à gueules rieuses dans la belle aurore de lait qui coule des vaches de nuit. Courses folles dans la courbure des échines, sabots vapeurs des mammifères comètes. Toutes les mammifères sont en train de se rejoindre à flots d'écailles, de poils, de tendresse. Le lait coule! Le lait gicle! Le lait coule à flot! Beauté, beauté, bonté blanche. Le lait neige! Le lait goutte, le lait odore! Le lait poudre! Le lait rafale! Le lait ouragane! Le lait nuage, le lait est maculé d'images! Le lait arc-en-ciel! Le lait éructe des femelles éclatantes, des mamelles faiseuses de nourritures en battement de vie. Et ce lait suscite de partout des cris de ralliement, des émeutes d'émotions. L'implacable soif des filles invite le lait à se répandre dans les hauts-fonds du ciel et le doux breuvage ne se coagule pas dans les mamelles, ne glisse pas dans les à-pics du vide. Je le sais! Je le dis! Le monde vivant ne dérive pas du songe! Le monde vivant ne dérive pas de la colère. Le monde vivant dérive du cerveau mammalien des mères. Ouais! Ouais! Ouais! La blanche matière cervicale est un lait de gloire en partance dans les temps de la célébration.

And we are there! There where the wind pants in the fullness of the moment. And they are there, they are all there, those tempestuous breasted creatures: those with hooves and those with nails; those with claws, with webbed feet, and with greedy, churning, milky, buttery mouths. They come on two feet and on four, the terrestrial motors of their hearts are disturbing the white cantata of the milky way. They come, the mammals mistaken for fish because they swim. And the mammals mistaken for birds because they fly on wings of skin. Horns, antlers, claws, and scales, each is gorgeously bedecked here where the passionate questions fall like bursting grapes. Animal emanations, a definitive perfume to be bottled in memory. These arise from that great intimate desire which distends their membranes, stretches the tips of their antlers to the point where they take off into female identity, into the recognition of blood, roots, excess, and passion!

Milk is running! A flood-tide of milk. Here is a holiday of hooves in the milky way. The hooves of those cursed cows of the night make the roof of heaven vibrate. My mother is a cow! That makes two of us. Oh how happy my mother is at this moment. What hope dawns in her imagination? What moist resonance, grainy with salt and sound, slides down the back of her tongue? My mother is filled to bursting, she expands, she beds herself down in the estuaries of her body. My mother is larger than giants, larger than underground cities, larger than those sheets of water which mix with the salt sea in the ocean gulfs. My mother is happy. That's obvious — she tastes herself as she starts to secrete her beautiful milk through the roots of the hair of her black and white gown. I slide toward the perfumed flavour which wells up from her body. Oh the hot odor of foaming nectar at the fringe of her forest of fur, at the break of a particular light which streams toward my mouth. I drink; I suckle. My thirst is a conduit for my mother's strength, for immortal desire, for the white bounty in the life of my body. The milk dribbles from my lips. I am distended. Now she envelops me in her skin which she has unfolded. A wool rug, my mother ripples through the length of her skin and I can see through her body because her flesh has almost the transparency of crystal polished by fire. My mother opens herself in two, she splits herself in four so that I may reunite with her, so that I may find her again in her own substance and in the coursing currents of her night-dress.

Oh, the beautiful fabric absorbed in the fullness of its fibres, of its network of nerves, its green foam, its salty sponges. Oh the foliage of its internal stars where the tangles of slaked thirst, of satisfied hunger are centred. I visit my breast mother, my fruit-mother, my plant-mother, my scaly, visceral mother in the heart of her blood, the geology of her layers of skin. I view her soul, her vulva, her womb, her rosy nectar, the mineral illuminations of her grottoes. I taste it all. Near the elevations of her throat, a weeping willow sheds its tears of sap. My night-cow swallows me, digests me as if I were a weed of half-ripe fruit and I glow, I touch her everywhere.

Et nous arrivons! Et nous y sommes à folle haleine, émergeant du vent à plein présent. Elles sont là, elles sont toutes là, les mammifères tempétueuses: celle à sabots, à ongles, à griffes, à pieds palmés, à mains veloutées, à bouches goulues, barattées, écrémées, beurrées, deux pattes, quatre pattes, le moteur terrestre de leur coeur agitant la cantate blanche de la voie lactée. Mammifères qu'on prend pour des poissons parce qu'elles nagent! Mammifères qu'on prend pour des oiseaux parce qu'elles volent avec leurs ailes de peau. Cornes, bois, griffes, écailles, insistance des parures où l'amour s'interroge en égrenant sa grappe généreuse. Émanations de bêtes, parfums définitifs à conserver dans le flacon de la mémoire. Il y a jusqu'au grand désir intime qui étend ses membranes, ses branches à longueur d'envol dans l'identité des femelles, les reconnaissant de sang, de racine, de démesure, de passion!

Le lait coule. Le lait coule à flot. C'est le sabbat des sabots dans la voie lactée! C'est le sabot des maudites vaches de nuit qui fait vibrer le toit du ciel. Ma mère est une peau de vache! Avec moi, ça fait deux. Oh! comme ma mère est heureuse à cet instant. Ma mère est comblée, elle s'allonge, se couche dans les estuaires de son corps. Elle est plus grande que les géants ma mère, que les villes souterraines, que les nappes d'eau qui se dissolvent en saumure dans les golfes. Ma mère est heureuse et ça se voit, se goûte quand elle se met à sécréter son lait de beauté dans le sous-poil de sa robe pie-noire. Je me glisse vers cette saveur parfumée qui sourd de son corps. Oh! la chaude odeur du nectar écumant à l'orée de la forêt de ses poils, à l'essor d'une certaine lumière qui navigue vers ma bouche. Je bois. Je tête. Ma soif conduit la force de ma mère, l'immortelle espérance, la bonté blanche dans la vie de mon corps. Je bave. Je me détends. Elle m'enveloppe maintenant dans ses peaux qu'elle déplie. Tapis de laine, ma mère ondule dans toute la longueur de ses peaux et je vois à travers elle car on dirait que sa chair est d'une transparence polie par le feu.

Oh! le beau tissu englouti dans sa totalité de fibres, d'entrelacements de nerfs, de mousses vertes, d'éponges salines. Oh! le feuillage de ses astres intérieurs, beauté beauté où se concentrent tous les réseaux de la soif apaisée, de la faim comblée. Je visite ma mère mamelle, ma mère fruit, ma mère plante, ma mère écailles et viscères, ma mère dans la santé de son sang, dans la géologie de ses pelures. Je vois son âme, sa vulve, sa matrice, sa rosée sauvage, son nectar rose, l'éclair minéral de ses grottes. Je touche à tout. Je goûte à tout. Dans son coeur pourpré je vois des poissons immenses et lourds qui avancent vers le futur. Ma vache de nuit m'avale, me digère comme si j'étais un fruit mûrissant ou une herbe folle et je m'irradie, je la touche de partout. Au bout de ses membres s'allument des brasiers qui sentent la vie.

My mother gives a leap! I know we are leaving once more and I anchor myself in the river which flows around her heart. My mother is galloping. We are going further. She speeds up to the same beat as the wings of the thunderbird. We are leaving again and I stick my head out to look around. We are galloping toward the northern tundra where the body of North America ends in a bleached and pallid gesture. We are galloping toward the tundra and my mother's hooves leave in their track a trail of stars. I leap on my mother's back. She is galloping. We are vaulting through caverns of air. The whole flock of breasted creatures is leaving. We are going to the tundra to wake the crows. How beautiful! The birds of calamity are asleep in their dormitories. How beautiful! Don't touch the crows with your dead man's hands; don't interfere with these women who aspire only to fly. How beautiful! The sly and distrustful ones sleep in their nests in spirals under the snowy clumps of firtrees. Notice the colour of the crows — part black dirt and part blood from the shafts of their feathers. Tell me, mother, why are the crows so black? Because, my child, the night of the doves has fallen on their feathers.

And we are going to wake the crows! Northward to snow's end, then southward to where they flock in their millions in the rookeries of the open sky. We find our way south by following the belt of corn. A-gallop, a-gallop. They welcome us, instantly bracing themselves on the fresh night air. Once more we raise the incantation of flight and the whole American continent, from north to south, is lovely in the beauty of the flesh and feathers which fly over it. It is a celebration for the sister crows and the mammals; a time of rediscovered joys, of all possible embraces in body and in memory. All is made visible in a dazzling conjunction of feathers, scales, and cries. The crows' little beaks give great big kisses, the mammal's great mouths make huge lapping kisses, there is a grasping of small hands and embracing in the sweet land of hair, of sensory silks. Each touches the other's splendid garments, her rosy openings, her female roundness moist with dew. Each feels the pulse of the other, each feels the other's tenderness and her firm-fixed desire to welcome. From mouth to mouth, how can I express it! What can I say of the arousals, the endearments? They touch. They nuzzle. They lick. The devil is in the cows!

And later, but only after this sweet dance of recognition, the crows light their corn-cob pipes. This is the long-awaited moment! The crows light their corn-cob pipes, puffing deeply while ruffling their feathers and start to relate, to recount in every way, to skim the radiant surface of everything they remember regarding us. In their bird-brains they seem to have some recollection of everything. We can but learn, among them, from what each one, in her turn, recollects. What they recount to us is troubling. What they are saying is terrible! Every night when they open their beaks it is as if a kiss of fire empties itself down our throats.

Ma mère fait un bond! Je sais que nous partons encore et je me noue en rivière autour de son coeur. Ma mère galope! Plus loin, nous allons ailleurs. Cela s'accélère ainsi que le battement d'ailes d'un oiseau-tonnerre. Nous partons encore et je sors la tête pour regarder dehors. Nous galopons vers le nord de la toundra, là où le corps de la terre d'Amérique se termine dans un mouvement d'extrême blancheur. Nous galopons vers la toundra et les sabots de ma mère laissent derrière eux une traînée d'étoiles. Ma mère galope! Nous rebondissons dans les cavernes de l'air. Tout le troupeau des mammifères est en partance. Nous allons vers la toundra réveiller les corneilles. Beauté! Beauté! Les oiseaux de malheur dorment dans leurs dortoirs. Beauté! Beauté! Ne touchez pas aux corneilles avec vos mains de morts, ne touchez pas à ces femmes qui n'aspirent qu'à voler. Beauté! Beauté! Les rusées, les méfiantes dorment dans leurs nids en spirales sous les massifs poudreux des sapins. Attention à la couleur des corneilles; c'est un peu de terre noire et de sang dans l'étui des plumes. Dis-moi ma mère, pourquoi les corneilles sont-elles si noires? Parce que, parce que la nuit des colombes, est descendue dans leurs plumes!

Et nous allons réveiller les corneilles! Vers le nord, au bout de la neige, puis vers la distance du sud où elles s'assemblent par millions dans des corneillières à ciel ouvert. Nous allons vers le sud en suivant la ceinture du maïs. Galops! Galops! Elles nous accueillent, aussitôt arc-boutées sur l'air frais de la nuit. L'incantation du vol est retrouvée et la terre d'Amérique vers le nord, vers le sud est belle de toutes ses beautés de chairs, de plumes qui la survolent. Entre les dames corneilles et les mammifères, à chaque fois c'est la fête, la joie des retrouvailles, tous les embrassements possibles du corps et de la mémoire. Tout cela rendu visible dans une conjoncture éblouissante de plumes, d'écailles, de cris. Les petits becs des corneilles donnent des gros becs, les grandes gueules des autres, des baisers de léchage, les mains prenantes des petites, des étreintes dans la douce terre des poils, des soies sensorielles. Chacune faisant toucher ses parures, ses échancrures roses, ses rondeurs femelles trempées de rosée. Elles se tâtent mutuellement le poul, la tendresse, le désir bien ferme d'accueillir l'autre. Du bouche à bouche, que je vous dis! Du stimulant, des mamours. Ca touche! Ca fouine! Ca lèche! Le diable est aux vaches!

Et après, mais seulement après ce doux mouvement de reconnaissance, les corneilles allument leurs pipes de maïs. C'est le moment tant attendu! Les corneilles allument leurs pipes de maïs, tirent une bonne bouffée en s'ébouriffant les plumes et se mettent à raconter, à dire en long et en large, en superficie rayonnante tout ce dont elles se souviennent à propos de nous. Dans leur cervelle d'oiseau, on dirait qu'elles ont souvenance de toute! Avec elles, on ne peut qu'apprendre à se rappeler, chacune à son tour. Ce qu'elles nous racontent est troublant. Ce qu'elles disent est terrible! Chaque nuit, quand elles ouvrent le bec, c'est comme si un baiser de feu se déversait soudainement dans nos gorges.

Every night the crows tell us the same story and every time the tale becomes richer because they continually add to it further detail and a new clarity. When, between two puffs of tobacco, they start to relate the appearance of the first mammalian brain on earth, in the silence which the reigns it is easy to believe that we hear the first drop of milk falling on the promised land.

The crows repossess us of our female history before the establishment of the Order of Castrators. It is staggering to hear described out loud the texture of the lives of our ancestral mothers, those mammals of the heights and depths, to hear about those beasts who reaped and were gentle, rapturous, and kind; who held their children's hands the night through; to know their ardor, their dreams, their affections, their extended outings by the springs in the islands, and their mutual discoveries which flourished like an apple tree in bloom on the verge of summer. What they told us, moved us. What they told us gradually became ominous as though a funeral must always follow a time of joy.

The story of what followed the Mother-age speaks only of exterminations, massacres, extortion, the long march of the females to the slaughter-houses, of the stake, the mass-grave, the bridal suites of torture. Nothing relieves the account of rapes and murders, of knives drawn in vengeance across miserable throats. Now, at dusk, it is all said; it all has to be said. The smoke rises, the crows light another corn-cob pipe and recount it all again. Every night, someone rises while her sister crows tamp their pipes, someone rises in her turn to relate what she remembers. Sometimes it is a whale who speaks of extermination. Sometimes a bison who speaks of massacre and slaughter. Or a ewe-lamb, who speaks of sacrifices. Or a jenny-ass to tell of the pitchfork in her belly. Or a she bear, a baby mammoth, or a bat, all speaking their fury, their rage. They speak it, they yelp it, they bay it, they croak it, they screech it, they weep it, they sing it, because, after all, the Age of Females has now no more substance than a wisp of fog or a moment of silence in their memories. And the greatest curse, among all these plagues, is that bit by bit vagueness and non-existence are resurrected.

How quickly time passes as we listen to each heart speaking in the Milky Way. We have hardly had time to begin to understand when the sun threatens to rise and the men down below threaten to investigate the joyous noise they heard all night above their heads. We leave in a final gallop, seeing the crows back to their dormitories, and each of us heads back to her perch, her old kitchen, her pool of mud, her sliver of space. Farewell! But only for now, my sisters. Of course we will see one another again.

Because every night, each cow of night loves herself so well and hopes so hard, and teaches herself so much consciousness and pride, I know that we approach the moment when we will redeem the promised land and that then, oh then, in one rush of recognition, in one cry of passion, we will call it by a new and better name.

Chaque nuit, les corneilles nous racontent la même histoire, et chaque fois cette histoire s'enrichie car elles y apportent sans cesse des précisions, des clartés nouvelles. Quand, entre deux bouffées de tabac, elles se mettent à raconter l'apparition du premier cerveau mammalien sur la terre, c'est bien simple, dans le silence qui règne alors, on croirait entendre tomber la première goutte de lait sur la terre promise. Les corneilles nous rendent notre temps de femelles d'avant l'Ordre-des-Castrants. C'est bouleversant d'entendre dire à voix haute toute la vie de nos mères anciennes, mammifères de hauteurs, des profoundurs, bêtes moisonneuses, douceurs, ivresses, bontés, la main des enfants tenue dans la nuit, chaleurs, songes, amitiés, longues randonnées à source des îles, gaietés, fêtes, reconnaissances qui fleurissaient comme un pommier en fleurs à l'orée de l'été. Ce qu'elles nous racontent est émouvant. Ce qu'elles nous racontent devient peu à peu sinistre comme si après le temps des joies, devait toujours venir un temps funéraire.

Après le temps des mères, tout n'est qu'exterminations, massacres, chantages, longue marche des femelles vers les abattoirs, les bûchers, les cimetières de l'anonymat, les chambres nuptiales de la torture. Tout n'est que viols, tueries, mainmise des couteaux et de la vengeance sur la gorge de la misère. Ici, entre chienne et louve, tout est dit, tout doit se dire! La fumée monte, les corneilles allument une autre pipe de maïs et racontent, racontent encore. Chaque nuit, quelqu'une se lève, pendant que les dames corneilles bourrent leurs pipes. Quelqu'une se lève, pour se raconter à son tour, quand la souvenance lui est rendue. Quelque fois c'est une baleine, qui dit l'extermination! Quelquefois c'est une bisonne, qui dit les massacres, les tueries! Ou une brebis pour dire le sacrifice, ou une ânesse, pour dire les coups de fourche au ventre. Ou une oursonne, une mammoth enfant, une chauve-souris, qui disent la colère furieuse. Le disent, le jappent, le hurlent, le croassent, le glapissent, le pleurent, le chantent pour qu'enfin le temps des femelles ne soit plus ainsi qu'une brume errante, qu'une minute de silence dans leurs mémoires. Et les plus maudites, d'entre les maudites, se relèvent peu à peu de l'imprécision et de l'inexistence.

Comme le temps passe vite à s'écouter parler le coeur dans la voie lactée. A peine le temps de commencer à comprendre que le soleil menace déjà de se lever! Que ceux d'en bas menacent déjà d'enquêter sur les bruits joyeux qu'ils ont entendus toute la nuit, sur leur tête. On se quitte dans un dernier galop, le temps de reconduire les corneilles dans leurs dortoirs et chacune est en route vers son perchoir, sa vieille cuisine, sa mare de boue, sa parcelle d'espace. Au revoir! Ce n'est qu'un au revoir mes soeurs. Oui nous nous reverrons!

De tant s'aimer, de tant espérer, de tant s'enseigner la conscience et la fierté, chaque nuit, chaque vache de nuit, je sais qu'on se rapproche du moment où cette terre promise nous sera rendue et qu'alors, alors, dans un élan de reconnaissance, dans un cri de passion, nous la nommerons autrement.

ON THE USAGE OF

<input type="checkbox"/>	Miss
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mrs.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ms.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mr.

MAIJA S. BLAUBERGS

DISCOVERING SEXIST LANGUAGE

The oppression of women in language and by language has been a focus of debate in academia and the media throughout the 1970's. Four major books appeared in close succession during the mid-70's: Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place*,¹ Mary Ritchie Key's *Male/Female Language*,² Casey Miller and Kate Swift's *Words and Women*,³ and Una Stannard's *Mrs. Man*.⁴ Indicative of the proliferation of writing on the topic are the various collections of articles and papers, e.g., Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley's *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*,⁵ Betty Lou Dubois and Isabel Crouch's *The Sociology of the Languages of American Women*,⁶ and a section with five papers on "Woman's

Language" in Reza Ordoubadian and Walburga von Raffler Engel's *Views on Language*,⁷ and the various extensive bibliographies, e.g. Nancy Henley and Barrie Thorne's annotated bibliography,⁸ Mary Ritchie Key's comprehensive appendix, Norma J. Shepelak's (1977) bibliography on "generic language,"⁹ and Maija S. Blaubergs and Marilyn Partridge Rieger's annotated bibliography on nonsexist language guidelines.¹⁰ I have previously categorized the various proposals for changing sexist language in terms of their underlying rationale and sometimes conflicting implementation strategies,¹¹ and have analyzed the various arguments against changing the sexist usage of masculine terms as generics.¹²

This paper is an overview of another aspect of changing sexist language: the introduction of *Ms.* into language usage. I consider the history of the term as reported by others, the rationale for its introduction, the alternative terms that have been suggested to meet similar needs, the opposition to the introduction of the terms, and the current use and misuse of the term.

INTRODUCING MS.

Mary Ritchie Key, Casey Miller, and Kate Swift have discussed in detail the early introduction of *Ms.* into the English language. Key notes that *Ms.* "occurred in secretarial handbooks decades ago" (p.49). Miller and Swift contend that *Ms.* "has been around as a title of courtesy since at least the 1940s" (p.97). Alma Graham has reported its first appearance in a dictionary, the 1972 *American Heritage School Dictionary*. She wrote the definition: "An abbreviation used as a title of courtesy before a woman's last name or before her given name and last name, whether she is married or not" (p. 60). In the first issue of *Ms.* magazine (Spring, 1972), the choice of the magazine's name is described as follows: "*Ms.* is being adopted as a standard form of address by women who want to be recognized as individuals, rather than being identified by their relationship with a man . . . It's symbolic and important. There's a lot in a name" (p.4). In the same article, Bella Abzug's effort to prevent government agencies from using prefixes that indicate marital status, is described as the introduction of the "*Ms.* bill."

WHY?

Why was *Ms.* needed? One could answer simply that sexism in language includes the existence of nonparallel expressions such as the *Mrs.* vs. *Miss* distinction in comparison to the undifferentiated-by-marriage *Mr.* Similarly, Varda One points out the following "double standard" in *Manglish*: "Because there is no differentiating title for married and unmarried men, women cannot tell the marital status of men as easily as men can determine theirs. Some people have adopted *Ms.* (pronounced 'miz') to mean either Miss or Mrs. as an equivalent form to

Mr.”¹³ While the foregoing explanations of the need for *Ms.* focus on the sexism of the lack of parallelism in forms of address for women and men, the following quote more specifically addresses the implications of such a lack of parallelism: “The existence of two contractions for Mistress (Miss and Mrs.) and but one for Mister (Mr.) underscores the cultural concern and linguistic practice: women are defined in relationship to men.”¹⁴ This argument is virtually identical to the arguments for a woman’s retention of her birth name at marriage and for her right to pass on her name to her children. In fact, the editors of *Ms.* magazine have explained the necessary connection between *Ms.* and names as follows: “In practice, *Ms.* is used with a woman’s given name: *Ms. Jane Jones*, say, or *Ms. Jane Wilson Jones*. Obviously, it doesn’t make sense to say *Ms. John Jones*: a woman identified only as her husband’s wife must remain a Mrs.” However, the usage of *Ms.* is not seen as conflicting with the adoption of the husband’s *surname* upon marriage. Thus, in effect, the introduction of *Ms.* to replace *Mrs.* and *Miss* would eliminate only one aspect of married women’s definition in relationship to men.

Research conducted by Madeline E. Heilman has suggested another advantage of the title *Ms.* She found that both high school and college students rated potential courses as more enjoyable and more intellectually stimulating when the instructor was presented as *Ms.* rather than *Miss* or *Mrs.* The ratings for *Ms.* were virtually identical to those for *Mr.*¹⁵

In brief, introducing *Ms.* would eliminate a sexist aspect of language and perhaps reduce other forms of sexism that derive from women’s definition in relationship to men.

THE ALTERNATIVES

There have been a number of attempts to introduce distinctions in the forms of address for men according to their marital status rather than to eliminate the distinction for women. These typically have not been perceived as or intended to be serious suggestions. Mary Ritchie Key has reported the early suggestion of *Mush* (abbreviated *Mh.*) to refer to unmarried men as well as the suggestions of *Br.* or *Bch.* (for bachelor) that were coined in response to a suggestion of *Mark* (abbreviated *Mk.*) that was described as meaning “a mark worth shooting at” (p.52). More recent suggestions have been reported by Casey Miller and Kate Swift: *Bar* for bachelors and *Wow* for widowers; *Murm* (abbreviated *Mrm.*) and *Smur* (abbreviated *Smr.*) for married and unmarried men, respectively.

There have also been at least two suggestions for titles that are not differentiated by marital status or sex. One is *Person* (abbreviated *Pn.*); the other is described as follows by Bobbye Sorrels Persing: “Some revisionists urge that sex-identifying courtesy titles be eliminated and ‘M.’ (pronounced ‘em’) be used. However, the chance for sweeping acceptance of ‘M.’ is small. Therefore, ‘Ms.’ is the immediate solution. Use ‘M.’ as an alternative, however — particularly when the sex of the receiver is not known.”¹⁶

THE DEBATE

The debate centers around the alleged unique importance of marital status for women. Robin Lakoff has responded at length to the proposal for titles that indicate the marital status of men: “At almost every turn, because of the way social and business events are arranged, one needs to know a woman’s marital status, and the position held by her husband. But one does not need the same information about a man, since his social status can be gauged, generally, purely by reference to his own accomplishments” (p. 41). Thus, while a feminist perspective points to the need for parallel forms of address for women and men, whether the change be to introduce new distinctions for men or to remove old distinctions for women, one response to changing this aspect of sexist language has been an emphasis on the continuing need for sexist terminology to reflect existing sexist practices in society. Lakoff makes this point over and over again in different words, e.g. “The change to *Ms.* will not be generally adopted until a woman’s status in society changes to assure her an identity based on her own accomplishments” (p. 41); “women must achieve some measure of greater social independence of men before *Ms.* can gain wider acceptance” (p. 42); and “the attempt to do away with *Miss* and *Mrs.* is doomed to failure if it is not accompanied by a change in society’s attitude to what the titles describe” (p. 42).

On the other hand, Shirley Davy contends that “The introduction of *Ms* into a world-view that was still largely patriarchal constituted a profound disruption,” and that each time *Ms.* is used “the women’s movement has achieved an important victory.” She further describes the use of *Ms.* as “the means by which women may publicly declare themselves as mainstream human beings,”¹⁷ in contrast to Lakoff’s declaration that “Since a significant part of the opinion one normally forms about a woman’s character and social station depends on her marital status — as is not the case with men — it is obvious that the title of address should supply this information in the case of women, but not of men” (pp. 40-41). Davy contends that individuals are changing society, while Lakoff maintains that individuals must comply to societal realities. Bobbye Sorrels Persing has synthesized these two viewpoints as follows: “(A)s soon as a significant number of women accept the responsibility to refuse to announce marital status (as is done through the use of ‘Miss’ and ‘Mrs.’) . . . the outdated forms can be abandoned. And, depending upon the definition of ‘significant,’ that day is closer than insensitive traditionalists are willing to acknowledge” (p. 25). Thus, as for other aspects of sexist language, one can argue that all language change should be indirect, i.e., follow societal change, or that active idiolectal change by part of the population can result in widespread language change and (possibly) accompanying societal change.

THE RESISTANCE

The resistance to the usage of *Ms.* has several variations. One argument has been that *Ms.* is not a true abbreviation like *Miss*, *Mrs.* and *Mr.* However, Alma Graham reports that *Ms.* is derived from *mistress*, just as *Miss* and *Mrs.* were.¹⁸ This argument is related to the “word-etymology” argument against changing sexist language that specifies that a word correctly means what it once did.¹⁹

In the case of *Miss*, this was once a young girl, while *Mrs.* referred to women whether married or not (Miller and Swift). Thus, *Ms.* could be construed as unnecessary, and the former meaning of *Mrs.* could be revived. This has actually occurred in some other languages, e.g., Hughes has reported the passing of legislation in Austria that requires all women government employees to be addressed as “Frau” (*Mrs.*).²⁰ However, the opponents of the use of *Ms.* have not carried the “word-etymology” argument to its logical conclusion; they have simply questioned the origin of the word. Closely related to the “word-etymology” argument is the “appeal to authority” argument. This argument has been commonly applied to the use of *Ms.* The authorities have included governors and etiquette consultants. Miller and Swift reported a memo sent by the governor of New Hampshire to all secretaries employed by the state in which he ordered that “The practice of using *Ms.* instead of *Miss* or *Mrs.* is to be discontinued immediately” (p.100). In a question-and-answer etiquette column, Elizabeth Post was asked about the use of the form *Mrs. Mary Jones* by a reader who had been criticized for using it on her return address labels. Post’s reply was that such usage clearly implied that the woman was divorced; that if she wanted to use her own first name, she should use the form *Mary Jones* and that if she wanted her marital status to be clear, she should include a second line reading *Mrs. John Jones*. No mention of *Ms.* as a possible title occurred.²¹ Jean Ward reports conflicts in the adoption of *Ms.* in the news media: “*Ms.*” is used in wire service stories, confounding those local editors who have banned it from their newsrooms.”²² Thus, although dictionaries are increasingly including *Ms.* as an entry, other appeals to authority are attempting to block its usage.

The argument that “change is too difficult, confusing, inconvenient, impractical or whatever” has also occurred in response to *Ms.* The characterizations have included “ugly” and “cumbersome,” e.g., “The pronunciation of ‘*Ms.*’ has received unkind attacks by some who hear it as a very ugly combination” (Key, p.50); “The arguments that it cannot be pronounced, that it has an ugly sound . . . are often offered with a vehemence not justified by their merit” (Miller and Swift, p.97); and “The term was cumbersome to use in direct speech” (Davy, p.47). Concerning *Ms.*, most of the difficulty that has been reported has concerned its pronunciation. Alma Graham reported the sequence of events leading to the inclusion of *Ms.* in the *American Heritage School Dictionary* as follows: “(A) problem arose over its pronunciation: it was an abbreviation that anyone could write but that no one could say. Arguments over ‘miz’ or ‘mis’ or ‘em es’ continued through the summer. Then, in October . . . our usage editor, urged

that we enter *Ms.* in the dictionary as an abbreviation whether or not the title could be pronounced with ease” (p.60).

A final argument against the use of *Ms.* has been a version of the “freedom of speech/unjustified coercion” argument: that the use of *Ms.* must not be forced upon anyone. Repeatedly, one sees the following kind of criterion concerning the usage of *Ms.*: Persing’s stop-gap measure of “using ‘*Miss*’ or ‘*Mrs.*’ and the husband’s name for married women only for women who so specify, and using ‘*Ms.*’ for all other women” (p.19). However, on the other hand, women who expressly make known their preference to be addressed as *Ms.* may not be granted their wish. Casey Miller and Kate Swift report the following forceful use of *Mrs.*: “Having reported that Billie Jean King prefers to be known as *Ms. King*, the *Times* continued to call her *Mrs. King*” (p.101). In fact, women have been denied the right to vote for refusing to specify a *Miss* or *Mrs.* title (see both Hughes and Stannard), just as Lucy Stone was once denied the right to vote for refusing to use her husband’s name. It appears that the use of *Miss* and *Mrs.* against women’s wishes has been far more forceful than the use of *Ms.* against women’s wishes. Barbara Bate has reported the following response of a male university faculty member to the use of *Ms.*: “I think I have a right to know whether or not she’s a *Miss* or *Mrs.*”²³ However, as I report in the section on usage, it appears that *Ms.* is more often than not just an option for women along with *Miss* and *Mrs.* It is not yet a parallel form to *Mr.* and the resistance to its use, however motivated, is continuing.

THE USAGE

To what extent has *Ms.* entered the language and what is the pattern of its usage? In a survey of female and male faculty members concerning new usage, Barbara Bate found that 16 of the 20 individuals whom she interviewed found both *Ms.* and *Mrs.* acceptable and almost as many (15) found *Miss* acceptable. Thus, there is a hint in these findings, that although *Ms.* is entering the language, it is not doing so as the parallel form to address to *Mr.*, but rather as an alternative to *Miss* and/or *Mrs.* The intent of the introduction of *Ms.* may well be being misunderstood, just as the intent of the introduction of *chairperson* has been misunderstood.²⁴ In a recent overview of the misunderstandings and misapplications involved in the change towards nonsexist language (see “Sociolinguistic Change . . .”), I reported the usage of *Ms.* in a number of magazines published in the Summer of 1978. In the study, I examined the form of address used in coupons and postcards that were to be returned to advertisers. A number of writers have suggested that advertising readily incorporates changing usage patterns. Mary Ritchie Key mentions the early use of *Ms.* by “junk mail” advertisers, while Casey Miller and Kate Swift actually attribute the increased usage of *Ms.* to “the growth of direct mail selling (which) made the abbreviation an effective time and money saver” (p.97). Bobbye Sorrels Persing specifically addresses the writers of forms and coupons with the following advice for nonsexist

communication: "(If a writer is responsible for designing forms or coupons on which names are to be supplied, he or she should list only 'Mr.' and 'Ms.' as the courtesy titles to be encircled by the respondents — or list no courtesy titles at all" (p.25). Thus, a good indicator of the usage patterns for *Ms.* may well be the usage on such forms and coupons. Interestingly, the final recommendation of Persing seems to have been the one followed by the advertisers that I surveyed. Of a total of 224 forms in 8 different magazines, 192 or 85.7% simply specified "Name." Of those forms that specified titles, 69% included *Ms.* as one of the options. However, the parallel titles of *Mr.* and *Ms.* occurred in only 41% of the forms which included *Ms.* as an option. In another 41% of the forms, *Ms.* occurred along with *Miss* and *Mrs.* while in the remaining 18%, *Ms.* appeared in lieu of *Miss*. Apparently, then, *Ms.* in current usage is being treated either as the replacement or abbreviation for *Miss* or as a third alternative form of address for women. Three of the same magazines were again surveyed in the Summer of 1979. The three magazines selected have been classified as representative of three different types of magazines for women by Sheila J. Silver: *Redbook* as "General Interest"; *Cosmopolitan* as "Young Modern"; and *Ms.* as "Vanguard."²⁵ Again, the forms and coupons to be returned to advertisers were tabulated for the specification of titles. The June 1979 issues of the magazines provided the data base. Of a total of 94 forms, 84 or 89% did not specify any title. Of those that specified titles, 60% included *Ms.* as one of the options. The parallel usage of *Mr.* and *Ms.* (always in that order) occurred in 33% of the forms that included *Ms.* while in 50% of such forms, *Ms.* occurred along with *Miss* and *Mrs.* Again, there was some usage of *Ms.* as the replacement of *Miss*: in 17% of the forms including *Ms.* Both *Ms.* and *Mrs.* appeared in all three magazines, while *Miss* did not occur only in *Ms.* magazine. Overall, the patterns of usage were highly similar in both years. It appears that usage is still in a state of co-existence of old and new forms. It will be interesting to see if future usage will be the abolition of all titles, titles based on marital status and/or sex, or a long period of continued inconsistency.

OVERVIEW

The problems in the introduction of *Ms.* in parallel usage to *Mr.* have included the misconceptions that *Ms.* is to be used 1) only in reference to women who so insist; 2) only in reference to women whose marital status is unknown; 3) only in reference to unmarried women (as a replacement for *Miss*); 4) only in reference to those unmarried women who wish to hide their unmarried status; 5) only in reference to married women if they wish to hide their unhappy marriages; 6) only as a label for feminists. In other words, all of the above usages suggest that *Ms.* is to be an alternative only for a select subset of women, unlike *Mr.* which traditionally has been used for all men except those unworthy of such a courtesy title. More detailed discussions of the various misunderstandings concerning the use of *Ms.* may be found in several of the references previously cited (e.g., Shirley Davy and Laurel Walum).

The status of *Ms.* is closely tied to other phenomena concerning the role of marital status in women's lives. Women are increasingly keeping or reverting to their birth names regardless of marital status.²⁶ Both women's name usage and the usage of titles are in a state of flux, but as Una Stannard has thoroughly documented, the issues in the labelling of women relative to their husbands have been variously addressed long before the 1970's only to surface again.

NOTES

¹Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975). Subsequent references cited in the text within parentheses.

²Mary Ritchie Key, *Male/Female Language* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1975).

³Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Words and Women* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976).

⁴Una Stannard, *Mrs. Man* (San Francisco: Germain Books, 1977).

⁵Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley, eds. *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance* (Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1975).

⁶Betty Lou Dubois and Isabel Crouch, eds., *The Sociology of the Languages of American Women* (San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University, 1978).

⁷Reza Ordoubadian and Walburga Von-Raffler Engel, eds., *Views on Language* (Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Inter-University Publishing, 1975).

⁸Nancy Henley and Barrie Thorne, "Sex Differences in Language, Speech, and Nonverbal Communication: An Annotated Bibliography," in *Language and Sex*, pp. 204-311.

⁹Norma J. Shepelak, "The Generic Language Structure: A Bibliography" (Unpubl. ms., Indiana University, 1977).

¹⁰Maija Blaubergs and Marilyn Partridge Rieger, "Guidelines for Non-Sexist Language: A Bibliography" (Unpubl. ms., University of Georgia, 1979; available from the authors at the Institute for Behavioral Research, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, U.S.A. 30602).

¹¹Maija S. Blaubergs, "Changing the Sexist Language: The Theory Behind the Practice," in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2 (1978), 244-261.

¹²Maija S. Blaubergs, "An Analysis of Classic Arguments against Changing Sexist Language." Paper presented at the meeting of the Southeastern Women's Studies Association, Johnson City, Tennessee, February 1979.

¹³Varda One, *Manglish* (KNOW, Inc., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1971), p. 13.

¹⁴Laurel Walum, *The Dynamics of Sex and Gender* (New York, Rand McNally, 1977), p.19.

¹⁵Madeline E. Heilman, "Miss, Mrs., Ms., or None of the Above," in *American Psychologist* (April 1975), 516-518.

¹⁶Bobbie Sorrels Persing, *The Nonsexist Communicator* (East Elmhurst, N.Y.: Communication Dynamics Press, 1978), p. 19.

¹⁷Shirley Davy, "Miss to Mrs: Going, Going, Gone!" in *Canadian Women's Studies*, 1, 1 (1978), 47-48.

¹⁸Alma Graham, "The Making of a Nonsexist Dictionary," in *Language and Sex*, pp. 57-63.

¹⁹Maija S. Blaubergs, "Sociolinguistic Change Towards Nonsexist Language: An Overview and Analysis of Misunderstandings and Misapplications." Paper presented at the Ninth World Congress of Sociology, Uppsala, Sweden, August, 1978. See also notes 11 and 12.

²⁰Marija Matich Hughes, "And Then There Were Two," in *The Hastings Law Journal*, 23, 1 (1971), 233-247.

²¹Elizabeth L. Post, "Etiquette for Everyday," in *Good Housekeeping* (July, 1979), 98, 100.

²²Jean Ward, "Attacking the King's English: Implications for Journalism in the Feminist Critiques," in *Journalism Quarterly* (Winter, 1975), 700.

²³Barbara Bate, "Nonsexist Language Use in a University Faculty," p. 10. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, San Francisco, December, 1976.

²⁴Maija S. Blaubergs, "Misunderstanding the Need for Eliminating Sexism in Language Use." Paper presented at the meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, New York City, December, 1974; Sharon R. Veach, "The Linguistic Treatment of Powerless Groups." Paper presented at the meeting of the Modern Language Association, New York City, December, 1978.

²⁵Sheila J. Silver, "Then and Now: Women's Roles in 'McCall's Magazine' in 1964 and 1974." Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism, College Park, Maryland, July-August, 1976. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. Ed 124 985).

²⁶Maija S. Blaubergs, "Professional Women's Name Usage Patterns, 1975-1979" (Unpubl. ms., in preparation).

TWO DECADES OF FEMINISM 1960-1979 IN QUEBEC

MICHELE JEAN

This article was presented to the Eighth Annual Conference of the Association of Community Colleges of Canada in Montreal (May 1979).

As a historian, I cannot speak about the role of women in Québec's political and social evolution without going back a few years to see how the women's movement has evolved, let us say, since 1960. I will try to examine what has been happening on the feminist scene since what we call *la révolution tranquille*; then I will look at what is currently happening and how this ties in with Québec nationalism; and finally what I think is going to happen to the women's movement here during the coming years.

When the Liberals took office in 1960, I think that women, like all other population groups, thought that things would be changing for them — that in the province where nothing was ever supposed to change, finally things were going to move. It quickly became evident, though, that this political party was not "for" everybody, and clearly not for women. A few gains were made, however, during the Liberal decade of the sixties. School reform, based on the *Parent Report* (1963-66) stated that girls should receive in education the same things as boys. Bill 16 (1964) marked the end of legal subordination of women. This bill was sponsored by Claire Kirkland Casgrain, the first woman elected to the National Assembly. The foundation of the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* in 1966 took over the Catholic *Fédération Nationale St. Jean Baptiste* which was founded in 1907.

Another important event for Quebec in the sixties not directly related to the political climate of the province, nonetheless proved to have tremendous repercussions. The publication in 1968 of the Papal Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, condemning the use of the birth control pill cut, for a large number of Québécoises, their last link with Catholicism.

The end of the sixties was globally marked by student rebellion, the black liberation movement, and many national liberation movements; these were to influence Québec both in our nationalist and in our feminist thinking, and were to give new theoretical foundations to feminism in Québec. "Feminism" came to be perceived as a specific ideology and mode of action which defines women as an oppressed group that has to make *its own* struggle for liberation. "Feminism" signified that analysis or action which regards the relations between men and women as antagonistic and tainted with discrimination, and tries to understand and change the very nature of these relations.

This was an important step towards making a distinction between the evolution of the status of women and feminism. For example, a strike to obtain better wages in a women's factory, in my view, is not necessarily a movement resting on a feminist analysis of the working conditions in that factory, but it is certainly a consciousness-raising step towards the identification of the specific conditions of the working woman.

Feminism, since the end of the sixties, has attempted to show the historical and social — therefore arbitrary and reversible — character of the sexual hierarchy, and to maintain that women will exist as an oppressed group as long as there continue unequal power relations based on the oppression and exploitation of one social group. On that platform were to rest the major events on the feminist scene in Québec from 1969 up to the present.



In November 1969, two hundred women were arrested for publicly chaining themselves to each other in protest against an anti-demonstration law in Montreal. Later some of these women organized themselves as the *Front de libération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ). In 1971, that movement was dissolved and a group of its members started the *Centre des femmes* with its bulletin *Québécoises Deboutte!* which was to last about two years; the FFQ presented the Liberal government with a memoir asking for a Women's Bureau; and the same year *Le Manifeste des femmes Québécoises* was published.

In the succeeding years we were to fight for abortion reform, an end to sexism in school books and in the socialization and orientation of girls. The unions reorganized their Status of Women committees and the leftist movements began to be preoccupied with feminism which was, at that time, mostly identified with reactionary ideology. In 1973 the Status of Women Council was created in Québec.

L'Année Internationale de la femme (1975) was very important for les Québécoises because many regional meetings took place all over the province, and for many women these were their first consciousness-raising step. The year ended in a big meeting called *Carrefour* at Laval University where I met a great many women who had come with the hope that things would be changing. From that meeting originated a document formulating all our demands.

During this same period, two women's publishing houses were founded: *Les éditions de la Pleine Lune* and *Les éditions Remue Ménage*, along with a women's house (which closed in May, 1979) and the *Centre des Femmes*. In March 1976 we started a feminist paper, *Les Têtes de Pioche*, which took, ideologically speaking, a radical feminist platform. The first Québec feminist novel, *L'Eugélonne* by Louky Bersianik, was published in 1976.

The following year Lise Payette, who had been elected with the Pequist government in November 1976, announced a series of consultations with women's groups which, it was hoped, would result in a *global politique* expressing what Québec women want. Many associations refused to participate, saying that everything had already been said, and that memoirs, studies and many other documents were already available for the government to consult towards creating pertinent legislation. This was the most virulent response the women of Québec had made to the government up to that point, and I think it testifies well to the actual state of mind of the Québécoises.

In June 1978 *Le Regroupement des femmes Québécoises* was founded by a group of disenchanted Pequistes to promote "a revolutionary feminism which gives support to the transformation of the social, political and economic structures of our society to obtain the abolition of all oppression and exploitation."

I identify three main currents on the feminist scene in Québec which, although they are not represented in the National Assembly, are going to influence the course of our social and political evolution. The reformist current is composed of the FFQ and the *Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale*, which mostly fight to better the economic and social status of women. The Marxist current believes that socialism would create the conditions necessary to liberate women. There are also some women, identifying themselves as feminist-Marxist, who form an autonomous group which is trying to define the conditions under which women will be willing to embark on a revolutionary strategy. The radical current holds that the patriarchal system is the main source of women's oppression and identifies male power as the enemy. Radical feminism also maintains that this point of view is the most challenging one because it promotes a basic questioning of the relations between the two sexes, and therefore promotes the most fundamental reorganization of society. I, too, think that radical feminism has been a useful tool for other feminist groups, regardless of their particular ideological platforms, because it has helped them to specify their actions and to say, "We are women, we don't want to be men, nor to have to act like men in order to take part in the management of our society. We want, as women, to have complete equality, and the freedom to exercise this equality without being penalized because we are women." Politically speaking, this argument is both threatening and extremely challenging to the existing power structure. In Québec, as in the

rest of the world, the women's movement is asking for a new society; it is asking for changes in the conditions of work, in the home and family — everywhere. For us, Québécoises, this is a time of thorough bargaining. We have now, for nearly a year, had a "global politique", called *Pour les Québécoises Egalité et Indépendance*, which contains more than three hundred recommendations stating our basic demands in every field. The Council on the Status of Women has given every provincial Ministry specific recommendations concerning them; and an interministerial committee has been established to implement these recommendations. And now we, Québécoises, are waiting and watching with more aggressiveness and attention than ever before. After all, women count for 52% of the electorate, and they are no longer quite so willing to put their own priorities in second place.



Rencontres entre la Librairie des femmes Paris et des Québécoises, 1978

Since the turn of the century there have been large women's organizations trying to obtain some rights for women, but these were largely limited to church work. After the war and until the end of the sixties there was an effort to merge women's associations with men's associations so that we would not become ghettoized. In the seventies, I think that women have once again felt the need to be together in order to define things for ourselves; and, what is new, we have felt the need to find our own words and to define our own type of action and our own way of living. We have also felt and expressed the necessity that these ways of living not be confronted and compared with the supposedly "objective" (or male) norm.

Another major step has been the discovery that private life is political. Beaten or raped women can now speak out about their condition. Women are trying to gain the right to decide for ourselves if we want children. Women have learned to



*Marche pour la libéralisation de l'avortement, Printemps, 1979
(Photo: Claudine Kurtzman)*

speak of our body. All these things make it possible for us to exercise some control over our destiny in the political and national arena. Québécoises are becoming aware of the fact that to have the right to vote is nothing if you don't identify your political power and the weight of your vote.

Women have played a major role in the social evolution of our province, but previously our power was restricted to the kitchen. However great it was within that place, it was limited to that place! Now the "global politique" is the government table, and I think that we want and expect very soon to have legislation make realities of our recommendations. Nationally speaking, we don't go empty handed any longer; we intend to use the tools we have! During the last ten years women have learned, with much difficulty, to speak in terms of power. We have been educated to speak in terms of love; love is not a very useful political tool.

Quebec's women want to continue to be as actively involved in our province's social and economic life; now, however, we are no longer willing to do this at the cost of being deprived of our full rights to decent working conditions, decent education, decent housing and decent health care. And we now understand that solidarity does not mean thinking all the same at the same time, but rather uniting on certain specific objectives. And that should be taken into consideration by our political leaders.

BOOK REVIEWS

Room of One's Own, Vol. 4, Nos. 1 & 2, Vancouver, Canada, 1978, 164 p., \$4.00, paper. ISSN 0316 - 1609.

Are there such entities as a woman's way of writing and a woman's discourse? Is it possible to create a woman's language? A woman's writing? A woman's mode of thought? These questions, raised at the Congress of Women Writers held in Ottawa (May, 1978), are echoed in France in the writings of Hélène Cixous, Claudine Hermanns, Annie Leclerc and Monique Wittig; they are answered in Quebec by the voices of Nicole Brossard, Monique Bosco, Louky Bersianik, Cécile Cloutier, Madeleine Gagnon, and many others. This issue of *Room of One's Own* has undertaken the praiseworthy task of offering for the first time in English translation, a representative overview of this same Quebec literature.

With pleasure we discover here again the names of Brossard, Bosco, Cloutier, Bersianik — which an earlier issue of *La Barre du Jour* had published (a parenthesis is called for here to mention the excellent translations of Josée M. LeBlond and Barbara Godard, a difficult task, since it involves creative works whose unique quality is an original mode of writing which rejects all established syntactic and morphological norms) — and with no less pleasure we read here the texts of France Théoret, Geneviève Amyot, Miréille Lanctôt, Madeleine Gagnon, Yolande Villemaire and Gail Scott. Eleanor Wachtel's introduction to the selection, meant to underline the originality of the diverse modes of linguistic experimentation now taking place in Quebec, is followed by Patricia Smart's more historical article, in which the feminine figures of the past are re-examined in the light of the contemporary feminist search.

Though one might deplore the lack of a more theoretical situating of the grounds of the French and American feminist move-

ments, of the significance of the various modes of writing proposed, and of what they tell us about the emergence of this new subject — the feminine subject — this collection does offer a probing example of the actual existence of a new writing in the feminine gender, writing which ranges itself under the sign of differentiation and of multiplicity with respect to established norms. And it is with real delight that the reader may sample the various modes of writing that speak about her without ever repeating themselves or trampling on her, without becoming rigid and dying. The reader can move back and forth from one to the other, loitering, savouring the discovery, beyond the words, of a discourse which speaks to and of her, happy too to encounter at the end of her journey a forgotten relationship with her body, and with all she has repressed.

The relationship of words to the body, to the imagination, to the unconscious: this system of relationships, implicit in the discourse of every speaking subject lies at the heart of the concerns of French feminists; however, it remains foreign to an English-speaking community of feminists who, not unlike their American counterparts, remain preoccupied with social grievances and issues. The selection of texts offered signals the affinities of Quebec feminists with the European women's movement, especially with French feminists. For it is in France that such efforts are receiving their most radical articulation, largely due to the influence of Lacan's work in psychoanalysis, which has marked all French cultural thinking. To Lacan's famous dictum "The unconscious is structured like a language," are addressed multiple attempts to subvert established linguistic structures. Indeed, the

logic of this statement — which makes all language the basic expression of the subject — implies that all subversion of discourse brings about the return to the subject of her repressed feelings, mute until this moment. Now what a woman represses is her relationship with her body, with her mother, with her own imagination; this repressed element, the established discourse (essentially masculine discourse as L. Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and J. Kristeva have well illustrated) institutes and feeds on it. The major consequence is that a woman cannot express herself through established linguistic structures. Thus she must find others; she must "capture the word," begin to speak, but another speech, one that rejects established, reductionist norms in order to take account of her otherness. This would consist of a speech which keeps open the lines of communication with the body and the feminine imagination, and which refuses to see the woman as the negative side of a norm which the masculine model, centred on unity and identity, would impose on her. Instead, the new speech substitutes the values of diversity and multiplicity.

It is this new relationship with language which Brossard, Théorêt, and Lanctôt illustrate in their texts and which can be detected in the purposeful fragmentation of form and in the inspiration of Villemaire, Amyot, and Scott. A new relationship with the body, with the mother and with the child are established in the texts by Bosco and Bersianik; a new relationship with literary criticism, with words, with discourse, is established in a more academic fashion by Louise Forsythe and Harriet H. Mowshowitz; Gagnon's text lies somewhere between these two approaches, reiterating in its own manner the disease of words, a nausea which Artaud (whose shadow hangs over the entire collection) was one of the first to experience.

To break with established discourse, not in order to substitute for it a new discourse which merely perpetuates the norm, but in order to replace it with a different speech, a

pluralistic speech, a speech marked by its otherness — here lies the ultimate meaning suggested by a reading of these original modes of writing.

— **Josette Feral; translated by Michelle Lacombe**

Les nuits de l'Underground, by Marie-Claire Blais, Stanké, 1978, 267 p. ISBN 0-88566-097-8. Translated by Ray Ellenwood, Musson, 1979, paper, \$8.95. ISBN 0-7737-1031-0.

This is Marie-Claire Blais' fourteenth novel and her most affirmative one to date. For most of her literary career, Blais has denounced, exposed, pastiched and revealed the absurdity of our myths about childhood, religion and love. Not that her techniques of inversion have completely disappeared in this novel: the "Underground" is, after all, the "other side" of life. But gone here are the distorting lenses of narration through which we encountered the world of Isabelle-Marie, or Tête Blanche or Jean-le-Maigre. And although the narrator, Geneviève Aurès, is detached from the café world of the Underground, and casts a cool artist's eye over it, here, through her love for the doctor Lali Gorman, Geneviève comes to accept her lesbianism.

Geneviève's awakening, however, is not without its complications. Though she rejects her ten-year relationship with a French man and falls in love with Lali, this love receives only passing response. The casual liaisons established in the winter evenings in the lesbian café are viewed through the prism of Geneviève's melancholy. With the spring, though, comes her return to Paris, and an encounter with an older woman, Françoise, lightens Geneviève's despair. She now feels she is passing into life.

Nevertheless, for Geneviève, as for Françoise, to love is to die: it is a lucid act of choice whose occurrence destroys the fabric of years of habit. This attitude

separates Geneviève from the habitués of the Underground with their insouciant thirst for adventure. Her gravity contrasts with the lively, racy humour of Marielle, Jill, and René who change their loves at a whim, killing themselves more each time. It is this depiction of the gay world which constitutes the literary novelty of Blais' book.

Among contemporary French women writers, lesbianism has become a literary fashion. Hélène Cixous has recently embraced lesbianism, at least intellectually, suggesting that she will be changing her position with respect to the creation of a woman's discourse which hitherto she has been postulating on the basis of women's libido. Monique Wittig has established another foundation for women's discourse in suggesting that its uniqueness stems not from woman's biological functions of reproduction, but from life in a sex-segregated world where the possibilities for new relationships between women and culture, women and language are no longer subject to the grid of traditional masculine values.

The dawning of hope at the end of Blais' novel suggests that she, like Wittig, locates the genesis of a new discourse and a redefinition of women's roles in a female world. Her characters, too, celebrate life with bacchic frenzy, lesbians making love violently under the smiling eyes of Sappho: images of women not yet conventional or commonplace to readers of either gender. Nevertheless Blais has not moved as far as Wittig in this feminization of context. There has been little experimentation with language. Indeed, much of the terminology of the Sapphic world remains in English, occasioned by Lali's native language: it thus loses the force of novelty in French. Moreover, Blais has not gone on to explore the female implications in the text itself — as has her compeer, Nicole Brossard in *L'amer*, a work which rejects the notion that an "écriture féminine" will arise from woman's liberated body and desire, crying and singing her subconscious. Brossard "kills her womb" and discards her

biological destiny of reproduction, her links with a masculine world, to produce texts. Like Wittig, Brossard experiments with pronouns and nouns in order to rupture the gender confines of traditional discourse.

Les nuits de l'Underground marks a step forward, though, for Blais has described the gay world in detail and has debunked certain myths of our society, most notably those referring to her old enemy, religion. Blais inverts traditional imagery in developing an extended metaphor linking religion and Sapphism. Her lesbians are "angels of life and death," their gestures are "monastic," they form a "homosexual Pieta." The curtains of a bar close like the grid of the confessional. To furnish her restaurant Lea has used church benches, and the women coming there to eat, prolonging the tenderness of the night's bacchic festivities, take their "communion" around the tables.

In all of her novels, Blais has ironically inverted mythic patterns. In *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel* she equated sex and religion, while in the trilogy of *Pauline Archange*, she played with the divine and demonic potentialities of the artist. Irony and ambiguity are the hallmarks of these novels, where the abyss between the systems of reference is so great. Undoubtedly such is the case in this most recent novel, though these metaphors might be a vehicle for penetrating the incommunicable vision of the mystic, lost in the darkness of these nights. Geneviève, the artist, remains detached, watching, refusing to involve herself in the world of the Underground, opening the possibilities for irony. Nevertheless, she finds there a great love. One is tempted to read her narrative as a woman's revision of the *Song of Solomon*.

— Barbara Godard

A Glance at Editions HMH: *Paliers de Paroles I & II*, by Rina Lasnier, and *Une mémoire déchirée*, by Thérèse Renaud, Montreal, HMH, 1978.

It is rare that we remember poetic texts — especially after the memorizing reflexes formed in primary school have faded — but these two volumes by Rina Lasnier, *Paliers de Paroles*, have their own way of remaining in the meanderings of memory, not clearly (this poetry is neither clear nor simple) but elliptically. These are memorable texts for several reasons, but primarily because they are solidly anchored in mystic soil. Mystic poets are a rare breed today and Lasnier's fierce determination to project the word in this direction is as striking as it is surprising. But we mustn't assume that herein lies a feminist reinterpretation of the Judeo-Christian myths, or even a radical questioning in the mode of Denise Boucher's thirsty "fées." When Lasnier speaks of Mary, she is referring to the mother of Jesus and certainly not to a contemporary revolutionary archetype. "Against the mainstream" is a term easily applicable to Lasnier: the passions and upheavals of the feminine identity do not concern her. She writes not in an ivory tower but in an austere monastic cell, well white-washed. And if the entire universe is observed from between hard iron bars, it is nonetheless marked by a mind as passionate as it is attentive, one so thirsty for flight that it will accept the cloister of four walls. Because eternity is always elsewhere, Lasnier's language has the richness of medieval illuminations: its geometric arabesques must be decoded to free the words. Research, the science of language and semantic exoticism are the characteristics of these words, and if Lasnier's poetic space seems totally foreign, old-fashioned, or even precious to us (a monument inherited from a distant past), her inscriptions are worth the effort of scrutiny: this is a woman as greatly inspired as she is reclusive.

different qualities: a sharp sense of the present, a total awareness of the fluctuations of history, an extroverted temperament, supple but lacking persistence, solidity, and continuity. *Déchirée*, or *torn*, is an appropriate adjective, not only for the author but also for her text. This text is not intended to be a chronicle of the *automatiste* milieu, nor of Quebec in the 40's, but simply a record of the backwards movement of a camera with a floating lens in the corridors of a woman's memory. This narrative is weak because discontinuity has never been a virtue in biography. What in the world of fiction would have conferred upon a text contrast and shock value, here seems only an imperfection which too often amounts to limpness, with occasional gaps betraying indecision. This is a pity because Renaud's voice is compelling: she tells us about moments and people worthy of more serious attention. She knows how to please better than Lasnier, but this work does not linger as long. All in all these are two books with opposite characteristics which nevertheless testify to the vitality and diversity of HMH, a press open to contrasting currents and very different women's voices.

— Carolyn Bayard;
translated by Barbara Godard

FIREWEED FESTIVAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The members of the Fireweed Festival Committee and the Fireweed Collective would like to express our appreciation to all the artists who so generously, willingly and enthusiastically offered their time and talents to the creation of the Festival.

We would also like to thank the following individuals without whose patience, work, good humour and good will the Festival would have remained simply a good idea:

JOANNE AKALAITIS for generously offering us the premiere showing of *Other Children*.

CHARLIE AVNI for her patience, her tolerance of our technical innocence and her calm in the face of certain and utter chaos.

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HARBOURFRONT STAFF, with a special thanks to Catherine MacLeod and the Communication Dept., The A/V Dept. Mary-Helen Spence, Wendy Setterton-Swinkin, Elve Foote, Adrian Baker and the Graphic Arts Dept., Hannah Fisher, Doreen Browne and the Property Dept.

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LORRAINE SEGATO, who contributed more time, energy and concern than can sensibly be expected from any living person.

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CONNIE BRISSENDON, **CHARLENE ROYCHT**, and **LISA STEELE** for generously donating their time to M.C. our programs.

To the women who are helping during the Festival: Rita Barrill, Val Carlo, Cheryl Daniels, Jay Mayotte, Chris Meyers, Wendy Mellenby, Susan Turner, Cher Toal, Diana McMeekin, and Heather, Cari, Bonnie, Gail, Lisa, Vicki, Jane and Anne. For anyone we may have missed, you know who you are, and we thank you.

To the Toronto Musician's Union, Toronto Women's Bookstore, Times Change Information Centre.

Fireweed Festival Committee:

Ayanna Black, Liz Brady, Rina Fraticelli, Sandra Hellard, Giselle Igier, Lorraine Segato, Charlene Sheard, Rhea Tregobov.



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SPECIAL THANKS

To **Gay Allison**, **Hilda Kirkwood** and **Charlene Sheard** who, as founding members of *Fireweed*, originated and sustained our journal through four issues. It would take an entire issue to describe and fully pay tribute to their work and commitment. Our love and thanks.

A special debt of gratitude to **Vancy Kasper** who, since Issue No. 1, handled with cheer and conscientiousness our Subscriptions.

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WE MADE IT: INTO OUR SECOND YEAR

Dear Readers,

With this issue, *Fireweed* begins its second year of publication, and we feel that it is timely, both for you, our readers, and for ourselves, to discuss our goals for the coming year as well as to give an account of some of the successes and problems we have experienced in conceiving and printing the journal.

As a collective, we remain committed to our original goals for *Fireweed*: to publish a quarterly journal of women's culture from a feminist viewpoint, to attempt to provide a forum — for the general reader as well as for those of you involved in particular feminist groups or disciplines — and to communicate the ideas and evolving images of women from as broad a spectrum as possible. If anything, as a collective, we are more deeply committed to these goals than we were when *Fireweed* was still only an idea, an exciting possibility which a group of women were discussing. Over the past year and a half, as we have developed and learned the skills necessary to publish a journal, we have become even more aware of the importance of the survival and expansion of a strong and growing feminist communication network in Canada. We would like to share some of our experiences with you so that you may participate in making this possible.

The Fireweed Collective

Personally, it has been a rewarding, but not an easy, year and a half for all of the women on the collective. There have been personnel changes, with some women on the original collective leaving and new women bringing their skills and energy to ensure that it would continue to publish. All of us are involved with other work in order to develop a career or to pay the rent, some of us are mothers, some of us have yet other commitments to our own art, writing, and political/cultural organizations. In short, we are involved in a situation which occurs within all feminist organizations: in order to exist we must depend upon volunteer labour, contributors who are willing to publish without payment, and a budget which is so thin that it is nearly non-existent.

Organizational problems, partially resulting from the fact that *Fireweed* has not had the funds to pay for an office or working space, resulted in delays in responding to submitted manuscripts, an inability to follow up on all your suggestions, and in the neglect of areas of publication due to lack of time or energy to "ease in" or "recruit" new members to the collective. Personal problems resulted from the amount of work involved in publishing a journal such as *Fireweed* — exhaustion and resentment as we each tried to balance an overload of work with our other commitments and personal relationships; guilt from not achieving as much as we would have liked; and struggles with the "super-woman" complex whenever we failed, made errors, or did not achieve "absolutely everything" in one year. While problems similar to these can be expected in a new enterprise, and do occur in

almost all collectives, we have had to realize that they occur with more intensity under the continual pressure of meeting publication deadlines. Because of these deadlines, we often did not have the time to fully discuss, as a collective, all the political or ideological aspects of submitted material, not the time or energy to ensure that, on a personal level, we were communicating with one another when strong differences of opinion or difficulties arose.

On a more positive level, we feel that we have developed personally and professionally from the difficulties and situations which arose. Not only do we have a year and a half publishing experience behind us (with a less naive knowledge of the million details and the amount of routine work this involves), and have learned new skills ranging from copy-editing to production, we have also learned, sometimes painfully, how to confront and communicate personal problems and misunderstandings among us as they arise — an area which is perhaps more difficult to learn than the publication skills, and certainly, because of our conditioning as women, as valuable. While working under these time and financial constraints has caused problems which we are attempting to ease, we have also felt the satisfaction and joy that comes from having helped *Fireweed* to fulfill its commitments for the first year, something we are proud of and which we feel is important to continue.

Business

Fireweed has existed for over a year and a half on an unfunded, non-commercial basis, barely paying the costs for each issue as payment deadlines drew near. Funds to cover the costs of publication were raised by members of the collective, with invaluable help from other women in the community, by seeking advance subscriptions and donations as well as hosting fund-raising events. The funds raised have just covered the printing and distribution costs of each issue; they have not been adequate to pay for an office or work space or many of the miscellaneous expenses which arise between production times.

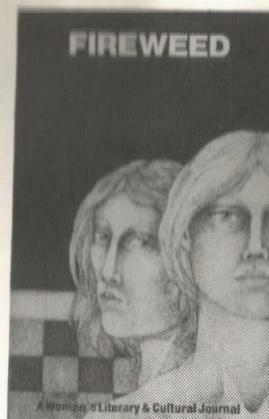
Fireweed prints 1,000 copies of each issue, 400 of which are sent to subscribers, 300 to bookstores, approximately 100 to contributors and for promotion and/or publicity; the remaining 200 are sold individually or are left in the archives for future sales. Like most small or feminist publications, *Fireweed* sells its books at or below cost. The total actual cost for each single issue of *Fireweed* is \$3.00. From subscription sales (at \$10.00 for 4 issues), we receive \$2.50 per copy — a loss of \$.50 per copy; from bookstore sales, with a retail price of \$3.00, we receive \$1.80 (due to the 40% bookstore discount rate) — a loss of \$1.20 on each single-copy sale. Paper and printing costs will be rising this year due to inflation. We are hesitant to pass these increases on to the reader as we realize that a price increase could make it more difficult for many women to buy *Fireweed*. While *Fireweed* recently obtained an Ontario Arts Council grant, we do not feel that it is healthy for a feminist publication to depend for its economic survival on government granting agencies. Therefore, we have relied, and continue to rely on your donations and our fund-raising efforts to make up this loss.

Future Survival

We realize that there are many areas in the publication of *Fireweed* that remain to be developed and expanded. Problems such as near "burn-out" and over-work can be eased if the Collective becomes larger and an office becomes available. Areas such as distribution and subscription could then be improved upon, and this would result in helping financially by reducing the discrepancy between our cost and our income, because a larger print run results in a lower cost-per-issue. In order to accomplish this, we need your help. We would like to invite you to join us in expanding and ensuring the survival of what we feel is becoming an important part of the feminist network in Canada. Here are some of the ways in which you can ensure the future survival of *Fireweed*:

- If you are already a subscriber, give a gift of a *Fireweed* subscription. Just fill in the reply card and we will send a gift card in your name. If you are not a subscriber, subscribe to *Fireweed* right now.
- If you can afford to send a donation of any amount whatsoever, make this your year to support a feminist concern.
- If *Fireweed* is not carried at your local or school bookstore or library, show them your copy and ask them to carry it. Bookstores depend on you to survive and will often order copies to their customer's specifications.
- If you are living outside Toronto, become a *Fireweed* representative in your area by selling subscriptions, promoting the journal in bookstores and/or at public events, soliciting manuscripts, etc. Write to us for further information.
- If you are living in Toronto and are a responsible and hard-working woman with a definite number of hours you could devote to *working on Fireweed*, either weekly or monthly, we will provide an opportunity for you to learn and get involved in all aspects of its publication. Write to us for further information.

In order to grow and survive, we need to hear from you: we welcome your comments, ideas, criticisms, suggestions and help. There is an increasing conservative and reactionary trend in Canada and a growing activism among anti-feminist sectors in our society. These tendencies threaten to reverse or shelve both the emotional climate which "tolerates" and publicizes feminist goals, and the few pieces of progressive legislation which have been implemented to date. *Fireweed* is published because we feel that dialogue covering a wide range of topics and issues is essential to our survival as feminists and as women — and your active participation and support is essential in order for it to continue.



Forthcoming: Issues 7 & 8 Women in the Performing Arts

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The cover "Dear Patty" is from a Polaroid SX 70 print by Barbara Astman. The colour cover was made possible by a grant from the Polaroid Corporation.