

Canadian Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Winter 1998

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Gay & Lesbian
Writing

Canadian Literature
and
the Department of English
University of British Columbia
congratulate

Stephanie Bolster

on winning
the Governor General's Award
for poetry
for her book

White Stone: The Alice Poems
(Véhicule Press)



Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

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Canadian Literature welcomes submissions of articles, interviews, and other commentaries relating to writers and writing in Canada, and of previously unpublished poems by Canadian writers. The journal does not publish fiction.

Articles should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from 2 copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, #167-1855 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z2. Submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed return envelope, either with Canadian stamps or accompanied by International Postal Reply Coupons. Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.

Articles should follow MLA guidelines for bibliographic format. All works accepted for publication must also be available on diskette.

Canadian Literature reçoit des soumissions d'articles, d'entrevues et autres portant sur les écrivains du Canada et sur leurs oeuvres, de même que des poèmes inédits d'auteurs canadiens. La revue ne publie aucune fiction narrative.

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The deadline for submissions is 15 January 1999.

Sommes-nous partisans de l'égalité des droits?

Alain-Michel Rocheleau

The current situation in Canada is marked by two seemingly contradictory developments for lesbians and gay men and on the questions of human rights and sexuality more generally. [...] [T]he implementation of the equality rights section of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Charter's outlining of at least a partially different pattern of State formation has led to a situation of considerable pressure for sexual orientation protection in human rights legislation at the federal and provincial levels. This is, however, only one side of the picture [...]. Our rights as "private" individuals are recognized, while our real social differences [...], and the gender of those we love, are still not recognized as valid and equal. —GARY KINSMAN *The Regulation of Desire. Sexuality in Canada*, 1987: 212)

À première vue, il n'est pas évident que les historiens de l'avenir s'entendront sur la manière de définir, en la caractérisant, cette fin de millénaire: ère de l'informatisation pour les uns, elle sera, pour certains, celle de la mondialisation de l'économie ou de l'effacement des frontières—géographiques, sociales, culturelles, etc.—, pour d'autres encore celle des préoccupations écologiques. Mais il est une réalité qui disputera sans doute énergiquement à tous ces faits le privilège d'illustrer spécifiquement notre époque: celle de la recherche d'égalité entre les êtres liée au respect des différences, nonobstant le sexe, l'âge, la race, l'origine nationale ou ethnique, les croyances, les particularités mentales et physiques, de chacun. Jamais, sans doute, l'histoire n'a vu émerger autant de groupes d'intérêt mis en branle par cette quête fondamentale, d'études et de publications portant sur ce sujet.

Or, il est au sein de cet horizon, marqué par un profond désir d'équité, un mouvement qui a retenu l'attention générale au cours de la deuxième moitié du XX^e siècle: celui de la libération des gais et lesbiennes. À la suite des événements de mai 1968 et des émeutes de Stonewall, en 1969, s'est développée aux États-Unis, puis au Canada, une organisation parfois pugnace, bien résolue à dénoncer l'oppression exercée à l'endroit des individus

homosexuels. Les manifestations et les discours, proférés en ce sens, viseront à combattre la prépondérance d'images stéréotypées et d'anecdotes cliniques—décrivant l'homosexuel «typique» comme un être efféminé et passif, enclin aux démonstrations d'hystérie, à la promiscuité sexuelle et ayant une propension «naturelle» au travestissement (Jack Beaudouard. *Psychosociologie de l'homosexualité masculine*, 1971: 52)—, à revendiquer la fin de toute discrimination et à réclamer l'instauration d'un climat de «tolérance» sociale, à leur endroit. Dans le sillage de ces doléances et de ces prises de position, inspirées par la contre-culture, les écrits féministes et anti-coloniaux, l'homosexualité sera alors décrite comme une quête existentielle «authentique», comme un appel—celui du *coming-out*—à se révéler avec sincérité à soi-même et aux autres. Le mouvement de libération gaie forcera de la sorte les sociétés nord-américaines à se remettre en question et contribuera à faire de l'entourage immédiat des personnes homosexuelles—désireuses d'assumer pleinement leur identité—des récepteurs soucieux de mieux comprendre leur vécu diversifié. À la même époque, au Canada, la révision d'un certain nombre de croyances et de préjugés, liés à la sexualité, favorisera l'introduction de certaines lois—le *Bill Omnibus* en 1967, le *Bill C-83* en 1976—, puis l'enchassement de dispositions «anti-discriminatoires» dans la Charte québécoise des droits et libertés de la personne (1977), de même que dans la Charte canadienne (1981).

Au début des années 1970, des recherches pluridisciplinaires—en sciences sociales et médicales, notamment—seront entreprises aux États-Unis, dans des sentiers menant globalement à une «démolition» des représentations historiquement figées, altérées, mythifiées et ostracisées, du vécu des gais, et à la légitimation/revalorisation de celles-ci. De ces investigations émergeront deux écoles de pensée—nommées respectivement *essentialiste* et *constructiviste*—qui seront à l'origine de ce que nous appelons désormais les études gaies et lesbiennes. Alors que les chercheurs affiliés à la première école s'emploieront à réactualiser l'étiologie de l'homosexualité—celle-ci étant entrevue comme une forme «prédéterminée» de la sexualité—et à démontrer les «différences»—physiologiques, sociobiologiques, hormonales, comportementales, etc.—entre homosexuels (minoritaires) et hétérosexuels (majoritaires), ceux de la deuxième école—Jeffrey Weeks (*Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, 1977), Kenneth Plummer (*The Making of the Modern Homosexual*, 1981) et John D'Emilio (*Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority*

in the United States, 1940-1970, 1983), en tête—définiront l'orientation homosexuelle comme une réalité évaluée avec subjectivité dans l'histoire des sociétés, ou culturellement codifiée, et l'homosexualité comme est un concept moderne en tant que catégorie sociale stigmatisée. Plus tard, l'arrivée d'un groupe de chercheurs issus des domaines littéraires et culturels—Eve Sedgwick (*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, 1985), Teresa de Lauretis (*Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, 1987), Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990) et Diana Fuss (*Inside/Out. Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, 1991), parmi les plus connus—influencera, tout en l'amplifiant, la constitution des Gay et Lesbian Studies. Le contexte culturel plurivalent, à l'intérieur duquel se construisent, se manifestent et se déploient—sous forme de signes—de multiples portraits du vécu «gai», deviendra l'objet principal d'analyses diversifiées, où seront généralement considérées tant les marques identitaires liées à la sexualité et au «genre» (*Gender Studies*), au phénomène du sida, que les représentations de l'homosexualité dans des produits culturels de toutes sortes: littéraires (Robert Schwartzwald. "(Homo)sexualité et problématique identitaire," *Fictions de l'identitaire au Québec*. Sherry Simon et al. (dir.), 1991; Ralph Sarkonak. "Traces and Shadows: Fragments of Hervé Guibert," *Yale French Studies* 62, 1996: 172-202), théâtrales (Robert Wallace. "Homo création. Pour une poétique du théâtre gai," *Cahiers de théâtre Jeu* 54, 1990: 26-35; John M. Clum. *Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*, 1992; Alain-Michel Rocheleau. "Gay Theatre in Quebec. The Search for an Identity," *Yale French Studies* 62, 1996: 115-36), cinématographiques (Richard Dyer. *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*, 1990), musicologiques (Elizabeth Wood. *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 1994), pour ne référer qu'à celles-ci. Par l'entremise d'études de plus en plus étayées, auxquelles viendront se joindre les théories *queer*, un nombre croissants d'universitaires s'exerceront à démystifier, démythifier, reconfigurer ou recontextualiser, en les interprétant, les images stéréotypées ou les clichés accolés de tout temps aux minorités sexuelles et que bon nombre s'emploient encore à entretenir dans la culture occidentale d'aujourd'hui. Les recherches menées dans ces sentiers montreront, hors de tout doute, que le vécu des gais et lesbiennes ne saurait être décrit—ou défini—comme un phénomène «typique», ou «unique», et que l'on doit désormais parler non pas de l'homosexualité mais «des» homosexualités.

Après plus de trente ans d'études et d'analyses, de manifestations et de revendications orchestrées en vue de faire connaître la réalité diversifiée des

personnes homosexuelles, de légitimer l'expression de leur existence, de leur présence dans les sociétés et de promouvoir le principe d'égalité entre les êtres—nonobstant l'orientation sexuelle (pré-déterminée ou développée) de ces derniers—, il est possible de dégager un certain nombre d'acquis et de lignes de force. On remarque tout d'abord que les recherches entreprises, au Canada, cheminent certes mais à petits pas: depuis les sept dernières années, des colloques s'organisent sur une base régulière, des publications attirent de plus en plus l'attention, les thèses de doctorat se multiplient, alors que les études gaies et lesbiennes commencent à se tailler la place qu'elles méritent dans les universités. Au Québec, le GROUPE INTERDISCIPLINAIRE DE RECHERCHE ET D'ÉTUDE HOMOSEXUALITÉ ET SOCIÉTÉ, créé à l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) et auquel sont affiliés des chercheurs-pionniers comme Michel Dorais (*La sexualité plurielle*, 1982), fait, depuis belle lurette, la promotion de l'enseignement et de la recherche en ce domaine. Le TORONTO CENTRE FOR LESBIAN AND GAY STUDIES coordonne, de son côté, la mise sur pied de colloques thématiques et publie un journal destiné à faire connaître l'avancement des études menées dans ce secteur, à travers le pays. À ce jour, plus d'une vingtaine d'universités canadiennes et québécoises, incluant l'Université de Colombie-Britannique (UBC), offrent des cours—certaines d'entre elles, des programmes pluridisciplinaires—reliés à l'homosexualité.

Malgré ces acquis fort appréciables, on sent tout de même un certain malaise se profiler, parfois même une «résistance» bien affirmée, chez plusieurs intellectuels. Alors que dans l'esprit d'un nombre croissant de jeunes chercheurs, les études gaies et lesbiennes se présentent comme un champ d'explorations prometteuses, certains de leurs aînés, en revanche, évoquent parfois très rapidement le «sectarisme» de celles-ci, la trop grande «subjectivité» chez ceux et celles qui ont recours aux paradigmes qui y sont développés, ou encore, l'orientation idéologique prêtée à ces derniers, comme si les approches ou les modèles dits «classiques»—la sémiotique, la psychocritique, etc.—garantissaient, quant à eux, un maximum d'objectivité et étaient totalement dépourvus de fondements ou de biais idéologiques . . .

À l'instar des progrès enregistrés dans le monde du savoir, ceux qui se profilent dans le secteur culturel ont fait en sorte d'accentuer, au cours des trente dernières années, la visibilité de l'homosexualité et de briser quelques tabous et inepties. Si l'on peut dire que certains produits de la culture d'ici—en littérature, au théâtre et au cinéma, notamment—ont favorisé récemment une meilleure compréhension du sida et de la réalité de ceux qui en sont

atteints, on se doit d'avouer, en revanche, que le portrait qu'on y trace des gais et lesbiennes est le plus souvent constitué de stéréotypes assez grossiers. Dans l'ensemble, les personnages gais évoluent dans un cadre familial «mal ajusté»—qui laisse deviner l'étiologie conventionnelle de «l'inversion sexuelle» et le modèle «père absent, mère autoritaire, fils manqué»—, ou forment des couples fortement caricaturés, dans lesquels les relations sont strictement génitales, peu satisfaisantes et durables, où l'amour, entre individus de même sexe, est subtilement présenté comme «impossible». À bien examiner différents corpus, on remarque que la représentation de l'homosexualité rime généralement dans ses extrêmes, ou bien avec promiscuité, criminalité, mortalité—dans les drames psychologiques comme *Being at home with Claude* (Jean Beaudin, 1992)—, ou bien avec efféminement et travestissement—dans les comédies du type *The Birdcage* (Mike Nichols, 1996)—. Ce phénomène, par l'entremise duquel l'homosexualité n'est plus ignorée comme ce fut le cas jadis, «provides, selon Gary Kinsman, a creative way of dealing with social stigma—a way of fully embracing it, thereby neutralizing it and making it laughable [. . .], helps gays survive our oppression and provides us with a good deal of humour. At the same time, the camp homosexual also can agree 'with the oppressor's definition of who he is'» (*The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada*, 1987: 146-47).

Mais c'est certainement au niveau social que les acquis, pour les gais et lesbiennes, ont été les plus tangibles depuis 1968. Il est vrai que certaines Églises, associées ou non à des mouvements et discours de droite, s'efforcent encore actuellement de faire de l'homosexualité un «péché» que l'on doit—selon leurs représentants—condamner ici-bas, une «perversion morale» qu'il convient de réprimer, un mode de vie inacceptable qu'il faut publiquement désapprouver puisque son expression ouverte mettrait en péril les familles traditionnelles et les sociétés démocratiques. Bon nombre de Canadiens semblent, quant à eux, faire preuve d'une plus grande «tolérance» à l'endroit des personnes homosexuelles. Mais cette indulgence, inscrite dans un contexte beaucoup moins répressif qu'il ne le fût autrefois, n'a pas pour autant «naturalisé» le vécu de celles-ci. Il est certes possible en 1999, dans certains quartiers de Montréal, de Toronto ou de Vancouver, d'assumer sans trop d'inconvénients une vie de couple homosexuelle «en privé», ou encore, de défiler avec «fierté»—une fois par année—dans les rues de ces cités. En contrepartie, l'expression identitaire et des amours entre individus de même sexe demeure problématique, semble-t-il, dans l'e-

sprit de bien des gens, car un mode de vie socialement «toléré» ne veut pas dire qu'il soit pleinement «accepté». À ce chapitre, nos institutions veillent toujours à ce que l'homosexualité reste cantonnée, autant que faire se peut, dans la sphère du «privé». Ce qui fait qu'en cette fin de millénaire, il est encore très difficile, voire souvent «risqué», aux gais et lesbiennes de vivre *comme tout le monde*—de se promener main dans la main en public, entre autres choses—sans faire l'objet de regards étonnés, mécontents ou moqueurs, de sobriquets, de blagues grossières et parfois même, d'agressions physiques. Comment peut-on encore sourire devant cette forme d'injustice, ou d'oppression déguisée, dans un pays où les efforts visant l'égalité entre hommes et femmes sont si valorisés, où le multiculturalisme fait figure de «porte-affiche» du respect des différences entre les citoyens canadiens? Le droit à l'égalité, attesté et garanti dans notre Constitution, ne serait-il valable que pour les membres de la majorité hétérosexuelle? L'ignorance, à l'origine de nombreux préjugés, peut-elle encore être invoquée pour justifier ou même expliquer «l'homophobie libérale» (Daniel Welzer-Lang. *La peur de l'autre en soi. Du sexisme à l'homophobie*, 1994: 61)?

Aussi restreinte et minimale qu'elle puisse paraître, la revendication des gais et lesbiennes, en vue d'une reconnaissance pleine et entière de leurs droits civiques et juridiques, de même que de l'élimination de toute discrimination fondée sur l'orientation et l'identité, demeure un point d'engrage en deça duquel il ne saurait être question de revenir, sans menacer la notion même d'égalité entre *tous* les Canadiens. Cette admission véritable implique, plus que jamais, une reconnaissance beaucoup plus profonde de l'homosexualité comme variante «légitime» et «positive» du vécu humain, l'abandon d'une vision faussée de celle-ci comme tare morale (Marc Oraison. *La question homosexuelle*, 1975) ou psychologique (Richard A. Isay. *Being Homosexual: Gay Men and Their Development*, 1989), combinés à un respect plus concret de l'altérité des minorités sexuelles et de leur droit à la différence. Pour ne pas être purement théorique, l'acceptation sociale des gais et lesbiennes doit donc s'actualiser dans des lois justes et équitables, dans le discours de nos institutions, des média, de notre culture et de nos programmes d'éducation, car comment serait-il possible d'éradiquer l'homophobie, comme les autres formes de discrimination d'ailleurs, sans informer adéquatement, sans transformer les mentalités, les rôles, modèles et images stéréotypés, auxquels bon nombre de nos concitoyens sont encore largement contraints de s'identifier?

Hallowe'en

Hallowe'en—no thought of the pantheon
A.D. 609
in mind at all—
I noticed a window display
In a store on 4th Avenue—Kitsilano
A skeletal head and shoulders
Rendered female with a hat, a rainbow scarf. . . .
I thought bizarre
And then—reading
I discovered November 1st and 2nd
Both days—in Mexico—THE DAY of the DEAD
And there, I've read—in Mexico
They make special loaves of bread
Shaped like human skulls
And the children, in the darkness of the evening, march,
Processional,
With such coffins, pumpkins, candles, skulls,
To the graveyards
(While, I assume, the adults stay at home,
Silent as the dead)
So I have read.

* * *

And in my mind
The memory of the skeleton
In Verner Van der Vanckert's ANATOMY LESSON
(the posture renders feminine)
Swaying away into the background
From a group of men—all dressed in black

* * *

There are two places in Mexico
(so I've read)
THE DAY OF THE DEAD is mainly celebrated:

JANITZIO:

MICHOACAN.

In the first of these places
The graveyard is dominated by a giant statue
Of Jose Maria Y Pavon Morelos
(Former priest: executed—1815)
Guilty of securing independence
from Spain; of securing for the moment
The Christian Ideal
As possible political reality
From Guatemala to Oaxaca
(so I've read).

In the second of these places
MICHOACAN, is a sanctuary named El Rosario
For the Monarch Butterfly
(A very common North American butterfly)
Danais Plexippus; colours red and black
Might be seen winging its way down
To the winter breeding grounds:
El Rosario

* * *

The image in the window display
In the store on 4th avenue—Kitsilano
Reminded me—the hat reminded me
Of Louis Cranach's VENUS
Naked
Wearing such a hat—framed against a background of trees
With a small boy—naked as she.
(The hollow tree-trunk behind him
Suggests he may be—despite his wings—Adonis)
Her hand hovers above his head
Love—I believe.

* * *

And I—
'Think' is not the correct verb—
My mind is the landscape: Monarch Butterfly flutters,
To the sanctuary on the prevailing wind
That boy,
Socrates described to the Athenian *jeunesse dorée*,
Follows her
(maybe looking more like Picasso's version
Of Cranach's Venus than Cranach's)
Follows her if only with his eyes
Stretching—himself wingless—out his hand
To the butterfly fluttering to sanctuary
On the prevailing wind
Trusting she'll hold out hers
In the gathering darkness of the land of the living
Here.

Jane Rule's Sexual Politics

... truly, it felt like Year One, when all that was holy was in the process of being profaned and we were attempting to grapple with the real relations between human beings. . . . I can date to that time and to some of those debates and to that sense of heightened awareness of the society around me in the summer of 1968, my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a *woman*. How that social fiction of my "femininity" was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing. —CARTER 70

To write directly and overtly as a woman, out of a woman's body and experience, to take women's existence seriously as a theme and source for art, was something I had been hungering to do, needing to do, all my writing life. It placed me nakedly face to face with both terror and anger; it did indeed imply the breakdown of the world as I had always known it, the end of safety. . . . But I felt for the first time the closing of the gap between poet and woman. —RICH 182

With the advent of Women's Liberation, a very different set of problems has emerged, for, while at first the lesbian was considered a discrediting threat, gradually the independence of lesbians became a symbol of a new political identity for women. —RULE *Images* 10

Generations of 1968

Many women writers have attested to the importance of the Women's Liberation Movement, the second wave of feminism, for their lives and their writing. These three quotations indicate some of the variety of ways it affected the "generation of 1968," according to their age and experience. For some, like Angela Carter who was twenty-eight in 1968, the historical advent of this new wave of feminism was marked by a sense of a new world opening up in both their sexual-emotional lives and their political awareness. It coincided with their emergence out of youthful uncertainties into a process of maturation where they could feel centrally located in the debates of their time, "when one's very existence is instrumental in causing changes the results of which one can't begin to calculate" (Carter 76). This was an optimistic feminism, revolutionary in spirit, impatient to shed past "social fictions" like femininity itself.

For women of a slightly earlier generation born, like Adrienne Rich, around 1930, feminism came at a time when they were well embarked on

their life-paths, if not already established as writers. By 1968 Rich, married and the mother of two children, had been engaged for nearly twenty years in writing out of “the gap between poet and woman.” For her, feminism felt like coming into her own, like freedom from that “constant footwork of the imagination, a kind of perpetual translation, and an unconscious fragmentation of identity” that the gap between woman and poet had demanded (175). For her, as for many others whose political formation had begun well before the revival of the women’s movement, feminism was always seen as part of the broader effort to “build a political and cultural movement in the heart of capitalism,” dedicated to anti-racism and the elimination of poverty at home and imperialism abroad (183). What was new for this generation of women was the placing of women at the centre of their politics. What was also new, for Rich, was the discovery of her love for women, erotic as well as sisterly. This was indeed to experience “the end of safety” on several levels.

For novelist Jane Rule, born in 1931 and so Rich’s contemporary in age, the advent of the Women’s Liberation Movement meant other things again. She had long been aware that femininity was a social fiction which gave the lie to the most important aspects of her own life. As a lesbian she had never experienced the “safety” of sexual conformity, and she had left her native United States, looking for a place to live in peace beyond the long reach of McCarthyism, and settled in Vancouver with her partner Helen Sonthoff in 1956. She had already understood that “the personal is political,” that basic tenet of women’s liberation. Nor had there been such a separation between her writing life and her life as a woman: from her first published novel onwards, lesbian experience was a central, though not exclusive, concern of her fictional world. She was one of the first writers of serious realist fiction to address love between women directly, and sign her own name to it. Indeed, she might have welcomed some degree of separation, on the part of critics, between their attitudes to her subject matter and their judgement of her art: when her first novel, *Desert of the Heart*, was published in 1964, reviewers took it upon themselves to chide her for choosing a socially unacceptable subject, while colleagues at the University of British Columbia were only persuaded to reappoint her as a teacher by the argument that if writers of murder mysteries were not necessarily murderers, then writers of lesbian fiction were not necessarily lesbians (*Images* 1).

The seven novels, three volumes of stories and the study, *Lesbian Images*, which she published over the succeeding 25 years met with a variety of

responses, and her writing took some pronounced changes of direction. But the impact of the new women's movement was not, for her, so much a revelation (as it was for Carter and Rich) as an ambivalent confirmation. It nurtured a much larger audience for her fictions of human relationships than had previously existed, but it also continued to designate the lesbian as a special category of women, soon to be as often idealised as vilified, but nevertheless still singled out. Furthermore, her refusal to write fiction exclusively about or for lesbians attracted some fierce criticism. A certain wariness borne of this experience can be detected in her general comments about the significance of the women's movement for lesbians.

For many of Rule's contemporaries in Canada, the impact of the new feminism was less immediately, less intimately connected to both their lives and their writing. Margaret Laurence, for example, only five years Rule's senior, was already being recognised as a major writer by the time the movement arrived. She won the Governor-General's Award for *A Jest of God* in 1967, and was awarded the Order of Canada in 1972. After her return to live in Canada in 1974, she published no more fiction. She had already written about "the problem that has no name" among women. She saw the new feminism as confirming her own insights, but it did not prove to be enabling for her as a writer (Atwood 24). Younger contemporaries Margaret Atwood and Marie-Claire Blais (both born in 1939) had been publishing since their early twenties, were already established as a poet and a (Francophone) novelist respectively. Atwood vehemently denied that her work derived from the movement: "Some feminists insist that my work, things like *The Edible Woman* and *Power Politics*, stem from the women's movement. But they didn't . . . parallel lines do not usually start from the same point . . ." (Miner 163). Several of Rule's exact contemporaries who had married and had children published their first books in 1968 (Alice Munro and Marian Engel) and 1970 (Audrey Thomas). While they, like Laurence, had all developed their own sharp insights into male/female relations, and agreed that there was a constant tension in their lives between "woman" and "writer," they are unlikely at that time in their lives to have welcomed Women's' Liberation's fierce critiques of marriage and the nuclear family.¹

Rule, like these other writers of her generation, had shared the experience of reaching womanhood in middle-class North America in the 1940s and 50s, and was vitally involved in the female-led renaissance of Canadian fic-

tion which took place in the 1960s and 1970s. She knew and corresponded with all these women writers, and they reviewed each others' work. Rule, for instance, wrote an essay on Atwood as a satirist ("Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Normalcy"), and reviewed titles by Munro, Engel and Thomas, while Laurence wrote several glowing endorsements and reviews of Rule's fiction. Indeed, at one point in the early 1960s they all, except Engel and Blais, were living in Vancouver and its environs. All of them were engaged in one way or another in expanding the resources of fiction to explore female experience, including sexual experience. All had urgent reasons to question the assumptions about female fulfilment that were dominant in their generation. For most of the writers, however, this questioning was done in their fiction rather than in more political forums.

Jane Rule participated in the new women's movement, not only as a writer to inspire it but also as a women's rights activist, women's studies teacher and member of consciousness-raising groups (Hancock). Unlike Rich, who participated in similar ways in the United States, she had been a part of such lesbian and homosexual communities as had pre-existed the new feminism, and which in the 1970s were being themselves transformed under the influence of women's and gay liberation.² Also unlike Rich and many lesbian feminists of the 1970s, she maintained contact with gay men's groups, and was for several crucial years in its beleaguered history a regular columnist for the Canadian journal *The Body Politic*.

Because of this, the significance of feminist, lesbian and gay cultural politics in Jane Rule's writing life—both for her own work, and for its reception—makes a complex and intriguing story. I use the term "sexual politics" in my title, not only as an umbrella term embracing feminist, lesbian and gay politics but also so as to invoke and honour Kate Millett. Her book, *Sexual Politics* (1969), important to so many who became feminists in the early seventies for its insistence on the cultural implications of sexual politics, played a key role for Jane Rule. As she testified in the essay, "Before and After Sexual Politics," "By the time I had finished reading that book, furious with the misogyny it revealed, I was not a different private person, but I had come out of the critical closet to know that if moral and political evaluations of literature were important to me as a person, they were important to everyone." So wedded had she been to the aesthetics-only, "form is content" school of literature in which she had been educated that she had "high-mindedly" omitted to tell her students "mere gossip" such as that Gertrude

Stein was a lesbian and Virginia Woolf had committed suicide. This discretion now appeared to her a closeted form of reading and teaching which allowed critical prejudices to remain hidden and untested (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 18).

It was only after making this discovery with *Sexual Politics* that she could have conceived of, and written, *Lesbian Images*, as a study not primarily of literary achievements but of how the writers “are influenced by religious and psychological concepts and by their own personal experience in presenting lesbian characters” (*Images* 3). Over twenty years later I would name what I am trying to do here somewhat differently, but it falls within the same tradition of broadly cultural rather than strictly literary studies: to examine how Rule’s writing, and the way readers responded to her work, is produced out of their interactions with a culture in the process of being transformed by feminist and gay liberation ideas and politics. I am not by any means seeking to find in her work a mirror of the women’s or gay movements, but to ask more open-ended questions about the ways in which writing and reading changed “before and after [the advent of] sexual politics.”

How much could the literary climate be said to have changed between the publication of Jane Rule’s first book in 1964 and 1975 when *Lesbian Images* brought her fame and fortune? And how much of the change can be attributed to the advent of the new liberation movements, especially feminism? Certainly, the fiction which she published after 1970 was received very differently, in a reviewing climate already agitated, if not polarised, by feminist ideas. It was received, too, by a larger and more vociferous female reading public who welcomed women’s books with enthusiasm, but who made new demands on them. I want to look first at the way her books were reviewed over the period 1964 to 1975, and then at her own responses to the women’s movement.³

The Reception of Rule’s Books, 1964 to 1975

Margaret Laurence wrote to Jane Rule she thought the heroine of her own novel *The Fire Dwellers*, Stacey (“white, anglo-saxon middle-aged mum”), a most “unlikely” literary figure, and one that many male critics had recoiled from (King 255). Elaborating on this response to another correspondent, Laurence wrote that she would have been better to have written instead about “a negro homosexual heroin-addicted dwarf” (King 264). Rule’s

commitment to presenting non-sensationalised homosexual and lesbian characters brought her similar problems with critics who appeared to resist the ordinariness of her fictional worlds, apparently preferring to see deviancy either demonised or idealised, if they had to see it at all.

Rule's publishing history from the mid sixties to the mid seventies was a series of frustrations. She published her first novel, *Desert of the Heart*, in 1964 with Secker & Warburg in London, three years after it was completed. Although MacMillan of Canada accepted it, on the condition (usual in those days) that she found an English or U.S. publisher to share the costs, it took twenty rejections by United States publishers, before she gave up and looked to England, where it was immediately accepted (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 11-12). Her next, *This Is Not For You*, was completed in 1965 but did not appear in print until 1970. After two years of submitting it unsuccessfully, she had given up writing and it was only when her New York agent told her in 1968 that he had finally placed it with a new company, McCalls, who wanted another to accompany it, that she returned to writing and completed *Against the Season* (1971). Different as they were, her second and third novels both displeased the majority of reviewers. Then, to add injury to insult, the publishing company failed, and it was another six years before she published a fourth novel, *The Young in One Another's Arms* (1977). In the interim, she worked on the non-fiction work commissioned by Doubleday, Canada, *Lesbian Images* (1975) and a volume of short stories published by a small Vancouver press, Talonbooks (*Theme for Diverse Instruments*, 1975).

Desert of the Heart told the love story of two women finding each other in the unlikely but vividly-rendered setting of Reno in the late 1950s, where Evelyn Hall, an English professor, has gone to wait for her divorce, blaming herself for the failure of the marriage. There she meets Ann Childs, an uninhibited younger woman confident of her own sexuality, who works as a casino change-girl as well as at her cartoonist's art. In the desert these two, each of whom has been burnt by her experiences of life, find a renewal of the heart's desires and of faith in loving.

Reviews in 1964 of this novel habitually expressed distaste for its subject matter, as Rule herself reported, quoting such gems as these:

"extremely frank in its treatment of lesbianism. Perhaps a little too frank. The author almost makes it seem desirable." "I learned a lot more about Lesbians than I care to know." "There are facets of mental illness that are not particularly

pretty—is it necessary to bring them into print for display?” “But all the time you keep turning to the photograph of the author on the jacket and wondering how such a nice looking woman could ever have chosen so distasteful a subject.” “Miss Rule’s writing has a kind of perverted good taste about it.” (*Images* 1)

English reviews were less negative, including such praise as “subtle and courageous” (*Sunday Times*) and “an intelligent novel, not afraid of ideas and not committed to them over-diagrammatically” (*New Statesman*); but there was condescension as well: “like a basic phrase book in strange territory, it remains a useful and interesting read” (*Observer*). Reviewers everywhere, while hastening to note that the book was extremely well-written, were unable to ignore the subject matter (or “ideas”), but rarely knew how to take it: one even wanted to deny that “the problem of a lesbian relationship” was anything but a minor theme (Stephens).

Most interesting of all are the reviews in the United States gay press of the period, which placed the novel in an already-existing context of gay fiction. The homosexual *Mattachine Review* (August 1964) was enthusiastic about it as a “lyrical love story” that was “very reminiscent of the hot house stories of a less sophisticated day,” and disliked the symbolism of the desert and the gaming-tables (was there some nostalgia for the gay romances of the 50s operating here?). On the other hand, the long-established lesbian journal, *The Ladder* (June 1964) approved both the symbolism and the romance (“we seldom today have a romantic novel about Lesbians”) but objected to the “amateur psychiatry” which attributes to Evelyn both narcissism and thwarted motherhood, and to Ann “the greatest number of reasons for her Lesbianism yet awarded to a single character in a novel” (Rule box 33). The possibility of narrative irony—that pop-psychology’s currently favourite explanations for lesbianism are invoked only to be dismissed by the characters’ self-understanding—is not entertained here. In this context—the only two well-known homosexual publications in North America at the time—the kind of aesthetic and ideological sophistication Rule brought to her work was not altogether welcome.⁴

Thirteen years later, the 1977 Talonbooks reprint of *Desert of the Heart* elicited much more positive responses from the few reviewers who took it up for notice. Among these Elizabeth Brady, in *Canadian Book Review Annual*, wrote that, while her lesbianism “is by no means incidental to the kind of fiction she writes,” it was unfair that Rule’s reputation as a writer had been dependent on shifting public attitudes to her subject matter, from

the hostile reactions in 1964 to “the recent media celebration of her as a lesbian writer (as though there were some innate virtue in being gay)” (Rule box 33). As Brady indicates, this was no simple progression from rejection to acceptance, but a movement from silence to stereotyping (and thence, perhaps, to more complex understandings on the part of a more informed and differentiated audience). Broadly speaking, one can discern a change from relief (in the 1960s) that Rule is so “tasteful” to a later relief (in the mid seventies) that she “does not project a masculine image.” This relief is evident in feminist reviews by Sandler and Armatage of *Lesbian Images* (Rule box 36), expressing the common 1970s feminist preoccupation with whether lesbian writers were male- or female-identified. As well, there is evidence of the recurrent concern on the part of gay and lesbian activists about whether novels projected a positive image of homosexuality.

The fact that Rule’s work attracted multiple audiences was a further complication in her literary reception. It emerged as early as 1970, when *This Is Not For You* appeared. This technically and thematically ambitious second novel, again set in the 1950s, takes the form of an unsent letter from a lesbian woman, Kate, to her closest friend, Esther, who has gone into a convent. Kate confesses that she could more easily have died for Esther than lived with her: her character is such that she cannot risk overcoming the distance she keeps between herself and even those she loves. Esther’s character is such that she has no real idea of how the world might look through another’s eyes. It is a story of an impossible love—but not because it is love between women. In an unpublished “Autobiography,” Rule wrote that the establishment press mostly presented this novel as a morality tale of self-sacrifice and approved of it, while reviewers in the gay press made the same mistake and hated it. Almost no one realised the extent to which irony dominated the narrative, working against the confessional narrator, Kate, and the author resolved never again to risk such misunderstanding of her intentions (Rule box 37/5). The results of this decision can be seen in her later fiction in her choice of multiple narrative points of view, and indeed in a move away from one or two protagonists to whole groups of people in their interactions.

However this ironic narrative was not always “approved as a morality tale of self-sacrifice,” but was just as often censured as if the protagonist’s faults of character—sententiousness, humourlessness—were the novel’s. Established lesbian novelist Isabel Miller conscientiously describes the novel in her review for *The Ladder*, but finally exclaims in exasperation: “Why does

[Kate] despise lesbianism? Damned if I know. . . . Does Jane Rule know? I think if she did she would have said." Keath Fraser's review in *Canadian Literature* 47 (1971) is one of the few to recognise the "cauterising" function of the irony, and to offer a more complex understanding of the characters than could be afforded by any conviction that "lesbianism" has a single clear-cut meaning (Rule box 36).

About *Against the Season* (1971), the first novel of her new style, Jane Rule wrote that she wanted to try creating a whole community, to get away from exclusive focus on one or two central characters, but that reviewers still tended to single out the one they wanted to be central anyway, so it was hard to believe they were all reviewing the same book ("Autobiography," Rule box 37/5). This novel about a group of friends and neighbours in an unnamed American city⁵ as they form new alliances and relationships elicited a more overtly angry response than her two earlier lesbian novels had done. Although it included male and female lovers, gay and straight, young and (very) old, the women were considered too strong, or just too prominent. Rule speculated that critics found it alarming precisely because heterosexuals and homosexuals mixed without problems and "the confrontations were gentle and playful" (Craig).

Kildare Dobbs, who had claimed to have recognised a good novelist immediately on reading the first draft of *Desert of the Heart* (Hofsess 6), now attacked the very sensibility of Rule's third book, condemning the "absence of erotic energy which expresses itself most aptly in the narcissism of lesbian love." He concludes that "a world in which only the women are real is at least sterile and airless. We are left with an image of death" (*Toronto Daily Star*). This sounds more like panic at female self-assertion than literary criticism. Another male reviewer (Lorne Parton in *The Province*), threatened more by the suggestion of male redundancy than by lesbian love, writes intemperately: "Look: the contrapuntal theme is the encroaching due date of a pregnant girl—and she is unmarried, the male having played his necessary bit part and gone." His review includes a useful insight into the direction of changed sexual attitudes at this time: "It is increasingly hazardous to criticise such 'modern' themes because you run the risk of being considered un-small-l-liberal. . . . (Refusal to play the game shows your own sexual hang-ups)" (Rule box 36).

Still other reviewers appear to have been struck by the novel's emphasis on romances. One called it a good "women's novel, if Kate Millett and her

ilk haven't banned the term" (perversely, this critic in the *Globe and Mail* says he would have preferred the novel without any male or heterosexual women in it). Some United States publications (*LA Times*, *Best Sellers*) preferred the more dismissive term, "soap opera" to "women's novel." All this outright rudeness suggests reviewers more aware of, and more threatened by, both feminist criticisms of men and high claims for women writers—a reading and reviewing audience more polarised around "feminism" and "gay liberation" than previously. Certainly most of them allude to the women's movement and/or gay liberation as a factor (however unwelcome) in the contemporary cultural scene (Rule box 36).

There was also a mixed response to *Against the Season* from lesbian readers.⁶ Two distinct generations are represented in the disappointment expressed by the long-established gay women's magazine, *The Ladder* ("one misses the intense romance of *Desert of the Heart* and the concentrated introspection of *This Is Not For You*"), and the enthusiastic endorsement in *The Lesbian Feminist* broadsheet in 1973, where the book was likened to a "spring thaw" compared to *This Is Not For You*, with its "iceberg" of hidden menace and its heroine who embodies "the Butch syndrome" (Rule box 33). The distance between these two views gives a good indication of the gap which had developed between two generations of lesbians, the "pre-Liberation" civil rights lesbians, and those who saw themselves as part of the new feminism, who rejected butch and femme roles and saw themselves as politically aligned with all women who called themselves feminist, rather than with other lesbians and gay men.

Surveying the book reviews for Rule's first three novels suggests that the emergence of the women's movement on the Canadian cultural scene in the early seventies served to muddy rather than clarify the critical climate in which her books were read. Both the lesbian novels sank from sight, and *Against the Season* seems to have pleased almost no one. It is perhaps not surprising that she did not publish another novel for six years. Certainly, she had not yet established what was to prove her distinctive series of multiple-focus novels, from *The Young in One Another's Arms* (1977) to *After the Fire* (1989). Yet there was also a growing chorus of voices which recognised the quality of her explorations of love as her central theme, led by Margaret Laurence endorsing *This Is Not For You* as "a beautiful, ironic, civilised novel" (Hofsess 6). Welcoming the reprint of *Desert of the Heart* in 1977, Elizabeth Brady wrote: "Ultimately what is 'deviant' about Rule's fiction is

her somewhat unfashionable conviction that love is, or just might be, an attainable state of grace." Many reviewers of *Lesbian Images* in 1975 also chose to read it as a study of some of love's many forms: another prominent Canadian woman writer Marian Engel, for instance, hailed it in the *Globe and Mail* under the headline, "Brilliant and Touching: One Kind of Loving." Engel is eloquent in her praise for a book which tells us so much about human sexuality and about loving, which is "surely the greatest human accomplishment" (Rule box 36).

By 1977, when *Desert of the Heart* was reprinted, reactions to the new feminism were less violent, and indeed many reviewers themselves espoused feminist views. In 1978, Jane Rule was awarded Canadian Authors Association Literary Awards for both *The Young in One Another's Arms*, and "Joy," a story published in *Chatelaine* magazine in August 1977. By this time Rule had published *Lesbian Images*, the book which may well have been the turn-around her career needed. It was widely reviewed and sold extremely well. She was interviewed and profiled in many newspapers and magazines. Ironies abound, however—that the novelist achieved such recognition for a non-fiction study, and that by then she had given up the teaching career which would have been radically changed, not only by her coming out so publicly in this book, but also by the way it broke the traditional rules of "aesthetics only" literary studies (as mentioned above). It also won her a large audience in the United States (a prophet in her own land?). And, as we have seen, within an expanded and more articulate audience of women came an expanded audience of lesbian and feminist readers to whom literary accounts of lesbian experience were of intense, and contentious, interest.

What were the effects of the vicissitudes of her literary reception over this decade of social and cultural change? Clearly, they did not determine everything that happened in her writing life. Rule wrote in her essay, "Free to Live," that she had learned early that "The terrifying judgemental world out there isn't all it's cracked up to be" and that "it was my fear that crippled, nothing else." This knowledge sustained her when "No one would publish my work for ten years, and I was nearly as frightened of my eventual success as I was of my failure. When my third novel was finally accepted by a publisher, I had no idea how much of my world I was risking" (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 75-6). Yet while force of character (and her grandmother's example) sustained her faith in herself, she also made some significant changes of direction during the first decade of her public life as a writer—

most notably the shift in her novels to multiple centres of narrative consciousness, to the portrayal of voluntarily-formed, self-creating communities, as alternatives to conventional heterosexual families. It is not far-fetched to suggest that such a shift was profoundly influenced by her participation in the revolutionary surge, and the new forms of community, that began in the late sixties. Equally, this was not a one-way flow of influence, and Rule's impact on the feminist and gay literary scenes, in Canada and elsewhere, has also been vital. In the third and final section of this paper I want to look at her responses to some issues concerning literature and politics.

Sex, Politics and Literature

On the relationship between women writers and Women's Liberation, Jane Rule wrote:

The women's movement arrived in Canada at a time when most of the country's respected writers were women, on whom the movement belatedly tried to put its stamp. Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro bridled; Margaret Laurence tried to be polite; Dorothy Livesay, an old hand at politics, took it as one more arrow in her quiver. Gradually nearly everyone agreed that in one way or another the women's movement in Canada had helped women writers by being a newly honoring audience, by making men nervous enough to want to know what women were saying. (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 23)

Shelagh Wilkinson confirms: "If in general there was a new audience for Canadian literature in the 1960s, then in the 1970s the women novelists enjoyed a rapidly expanding readership," not only because of the spread of the women's movement beyond the universities, but also because of a broader cultural concern with women's issues and achievements, which had been growing throughout the 1960s, as evidenced by the setting up of the Royal Commission into the status of women (345).

However it was by no means agreed among women writers that this "newly honouring audience," nor indeed the "nervousness of men" were unmixed blessings. Several women writers who were already established in Canada by the early 1970s have commented on the way women's writing had anticipated many of the issues that would become politicised by the emerging women's movement. "We took the creative leap into issues of our age which others had not yet defined clearly as issues, and which they have begun to use our fiction to help them understand," wrote Adele Wiseman. Another, Miriam Waddington, claimed that the feminist movement "didn't spring up full-grown in 1970, but long before that, and this needs to be remembered.

Every woman who was an artist and who wrote out of herself, her life, and her values was a feminist whether she knew it or not" (Wilkinson 346). Margaret Atwood was more positive about what the new feminism offered to writers: "Feminism has done many good things for women writers, but surely the most important has been the permission to say the unsaid, to encourage women to claim their full humanity, which means acknowledging the shadows as well as the lights" (Wilkinson 348). But she was wary of the development of "a one-dimensional Feminist Criticism" of women's writing that would "award points according to conformity or non-conformity to an ideological position" (*Second Words* 192).

The "nervousness of men" to which Rule refers also produced at times a highly polarised cultural climate which was not necessarily conducive to creativity. Marian Engel, in her novel *The Glassy Sea* (1978), gives a chilling account of her heroine's shock at discovering the extent of men's misogyny at this time: "there is a ghastly woman-hate in the air and [the men] are acting it out; and women are responding with either aggression or fear . . . war has broken out" (160). As we saw in the reviews of Rule's books from this period, there was often a strong whiff of gunshot in the literary pages. Even in a less embattled critical atmosphere, now that "women" had become a subject of public debate there was a danger, Margaret Atwood felt, of a new ghetto forming, where women's books were only reviewed by women, men's books by men (*Second Words* 106).

As for writers' anxiety that the women's movement would try to dictate what and how they should write, Jane Rule is characteristically forthright in her claim that "Canada still does not have writers either created or controlled by the movement," and so those who do write "have developed voices which do accurately describe for us the climate in which we live," and so "we have an opportunity to make more informed political judgements." Ultimately, she wrote, the issue is not whether particular writers are feminists but "whether the women's movement is confident enough to claim their power without reducing it to any sort of narrow political correctness." "Our collective voice must grow stronger for the singers in our midst," she declared, "learning both to deserve and to defend our gifts, our gifted" (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 24-25).

For Jane Rule, however, it could never be a question of "feminism" alone, but also of lesbianism. Of her own association with the new feminist movement, she wrote: "My reluctance to be identified with Women's Liberation

at first was my concern that it be protected from the label of 'lesbian', which my presence would encourage; but the issues mattered so much to me that I could not stay away." This modest statement barely touches on what must have been a frequent experience for lesbians like herself whose social conscience and political convictions drew them to the women's movement, but where they were never sure of their welcome in the early days before the emergence of strong lesbian feminist communities.⁷ She went on with this account, in the Introduction to *Lesbian Images*, to tell of the consciousness-raising group to which she belonged, and how the subject came up, and lesbians came out, and how several younger women came to her to discuss their fear of being labelled, and dismissed. She continued: "Those uncertain young women have now been replaced by militant lesbians who find me a political sell-out of the worst sort, living behind money and class protection, writing books which don't suggest that the lesbian way of life is the best way of life for everyone in all circumstances always, male-identified because I teach at the university and am published by 'the man'" (*Images* 10-11). The comic exaggeration belies hurt: willy-nilly, as an established writer she became a prominent figure, and as a prominent figure she was subjected to the kinds of attacks ("trashing") for which early feminist groups, including the radical lesbians, were notorious.

In her essay "Lesbian Leadership," acknowledging that she was often considered a leader because of her visibility as a lesbian and a feminist (and therefore to be trashed, according to one young lesbian who interviewed her), she asked herself "why writers particularly have been singled out as leaders by both the women's movement and the lesbian community." It seems, she wrote, that those who have created a voice for formerly silenced women, and new visibility for lesbians, are also expected to "lead the way into freedom," despite the fact that as writers they have never claimed any such leadership position. Her response is to debunk both this way of hero-worshipping writers, and the very need for any such "claptrap" about leadership among the lesbian community (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 109-12). She was only too well aware, also, that "within the gay community there are not only different but morally and politically conflicting tastes" (*Outlander* 203).

For her there was an additional tension between writer and "politically involved lesbian." It was a tension created by others, who insisted that either the two roles were mutually exclusive or that they were inextricably bound together. For her, both views are false. She has always insisted on her right

to be a political writer when she chose (as she wrote in introducing *Lesbian Images*, “I am so far from objective disinterest that my life, or at least the quality of my life, depends on what people think and feel about what it is to be a lesbian”), but also not to be limited, in writing or being read, by the label ‘lesbian.’” Then there were those for whom she was the lesbian as exotic Other, both denigrated and celebrated—even blamed, at times when homosexuality was in the news, for having evoked such celebration of qualities ostensibly unrelated to her art (as we saw above, in the reviews of her 1971 novel). She was only faintly bitter about those magazine editors who sought interviews with her principally “because I am a lesbian, a far more titillating title than novelist.” Yet her response is characteristically practical, if wry: she used such interviews as an opportunity to “make educational points about my sexuality” (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 42-43).

Yet while she was quite willing to use herself “for propaganda” in this way, she would not use her fiction for political purposes, as she explained in the essay “Lesbian and Writer.” She was as fiercely opposed to being told what or how to write as she was about being told how she should live. Yet as a politically-committed liberal (the “hot-eyed moderate”), she was caught in the crossfire, not just between two sexualities (as she implies here) but between two kinds of politics, between that liberal humanism which decried any difference as “bias,” and that revolutionary absolutism which demanded “political correctness”:⁸

Though one heterosexual critic [probably Adele Wiseman] did call *Lesbian Images* a piece of propaganda because in it I make my own bias quite clear, even that book does not satisfy the real propagandists who would not have me waste time on politically incorrect lesbian writers like Radcliffe Hall, May Sarton, Maureen Duffy . . . but concentrate only on my most radical contemporaries, who are writing experimental erotica and separatist utopias. (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 43)

Bertha Harris, the radical lesbian writer who made this latter criticism in her grudging review of the book in *Ms Magazine*, was expressing a view made more famous by the French feminist Hélène Cixous that women’s writing almost universally corrupted by having been produced in a patriarchal culture, and that only the most avant garde writing could properly be called feminist (Cixous 245-64). What Harris was calling for was a new lesbian political consciousness, something to be created out of a rejection of “the conciliatory survival patterns of the old lesbian worlds.” This would not be “propaganda” (a term which Rule had persisted in using, though approvingly, when discussing recent lesbian feminist texts) but revolutionary

art (Rule box 34/4). Both parties to the debate maintained the old opposition of art and propaganda intrinsic to liberal humanism, but while Harris tried to change the meaning of “art” to include the political, Rule insisted on there being circumstances where “propaganda” was needed.

Reading the feminist and/or lesbian reviews of *Lesbian Images*, it is fascinating to see the extent to which these reviewers saw this text through the lenses of their current preoccupations. In the early years of the new feminism, those lenses most often brought into focus an intense and horrified realisation of the magnitude of the problem of patriarchy. In retrospect it sometimes seems to have been *de rigueur* to scare ourselves with this problem: anything that seemed achievable in the near future, anything that brought pleasure in the attempt, was suspect. Despite what I see now as Rule’s emphasis on the variety of means by which her lesbian subjects (both authors and their characters) tried to survive in a hostile world, and her clear indication that she found some of these strategies unsympathetic, some of the most interesting feminist reviewers read her as doing quite the opposite. Harris’s review concludes that the book is only “a love affair with a ‘pretty’ past,” because it seems to her more sympathetic with the work of past lesbian writers than with “the zeal of the new lesbian-feminist writers” to create a new civilisation however “ugly” their art might have to be at first.

Similarly, Judith Barbour’s review in the Australian magazine, *Nation Review*, accuses Rule of idealising lesbian experience as a “serene singleness of being” through detaching it, not from artistic struggles (as Harris accused), but from “personal conflict and the more wasting emotions,” and relegating evil to the male world “out there.” Here “singleness” connotes an undivided consciousness rather than a unified community. Its achievement is placed by the implicit contrast with Sylvia Plath’s tragically divided self, one of the subjects of the other book which Barbour was reviewing, Joyce Carol Oates’ *New Heaven, New Earth*. It is probably no accident that such an apocalyptic theme seemed more attuned to the mid-seventies climate of radical feminism than Rule’s compassionate acceptance of deviance among the deviant. (Rule Papers Box 34/4)

Could it be women’s own misogyny, lesbians’ own homophobia, that was surfacing here? Rule proposes exactly that, in her laconic response to one of Harris’s more famous raves:

I understand why Bertha Harris wants to insist that lesbians, the only true lesbians, are monsters. She is trying to take our homophobia into her arms and

transform herself/us into lovers 'bad enough to be true', incestuous, self-centred, addicted, mad. Begin to love there. I lack the romantic flair, live in too small a community (by choice), have been too long in a central relationship (twenty-three years, by choice). I need more ordinary solutions. Or hopes. (*Outlander* 184)

Yet Jane Rule's "lack [of] the romantic flair," her desire for "more ordinary solutions" is by no means repressive. Some of the most intelligent and helpful points about the broad issues of sexual representations, and the sub-question of censorship, are included in her brief essays and reviews from the 1970s, reproduced in *Outlander* (1982). The essay from which I have just quoted, "Homophobia and Romantic Love," concludes:

Sex is not so much an identity as a language which we have for so long been forbidden to speak that most of us learn only the crudest of its vocabulary and grammar. If we are to get past the pattern of dominance and submission, of possessive greed, we must outgrow love as fever, as 'the tragic necessity of human life' [Willa Cather], and speak in tongues that set us free to be loving equals. (185)

It was for this reason that she valued Adrienne Rich's "attempt to describe and live in terms of a relationship between two equals." But she also wrote of how, as a novelist trying to represent a range of sexual experience, she could learn a great deal from writers like Monique Wittig and Kate Millett, writing of "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" (150).

This brief discussion of the many uses and purposes of erotic literary language, "Sexuality and Literature," is a persuasive—and representative—example of the creation of community which is Rule's frequent concern in her non-fiction, much of it, as we have seen, written for the gay magazine, *The Body Politic*. When that magazine was prosecuted in 1977 for publishing an alleged obscenity, an article on paedophilia, she had offered, as a gesture of solidarity, to contribute a regular column, called "So's Your Grandmother," while the court case continued. As it turned out this became a longer-term commitment than she had anticipated, as each time the magazine was acquitted, another charge would be brought, in a five-year campaign aimed at ruining it financially (Cavell 163).

Canadian writers of all persuasions became experienced in dealing with censorship during the 1970s, and some came to the support of the beleaguered *Body Politic*. In the mid seventies books by women like Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro were being set in high-school syllabuses. Yet it was a paradox of their success that in engaging so directly with mainstream

Canadian life, they both endeared themselves to a wide range of readers, and aroused the ire of those members of the dominant classes (male, Christian) who were not accustomed to having their judgement questioned. There were calls for the work of these women to be withdrawn from schools, because of their frank treatment of female sexuality. Laurence was hurt and angered by these reactions, although fellow writer Alice Munro, whose *Lives of Girls and Women* had been similarly attacked, wrote that she thought it was “hilarious” to be thought a scarlet woman: “it gave me a new lease on life” (King 441).

Yet the form of censorship Rule experienced was that “nobody ever suggested that my books should be read in schools in the first place” (*Outlander* 199). In her case there was also, of course, de facto censorship from publishers, as mentioned earlier, and then—a final irony towards the end of her writing life—her novel, *The Young in One Another’s Arms* was detained by Canada Customs during Freedom to Read Week in 1990—fully thirteen years after it was first published in 1977. Absurd as this incident was, given the seriousness, even sobriety, of her writing, she nevertheless took on the broader issues of censorship and appeared in court in the defence of the Vancouver radical bookshop, Little Sisters, which had been charged with selling obscene material. She defended the publication of pornography, arguing that “censorship is the cheap solution to violence against women—governments will introduce censorship but not fund women’s shelters.”⁹

In an essay entitled “Why I write for the *Body Politic*,” she addressed those members of the gay community who object to its openness to controversial sexual practices, writing that although she has reservations about s/m sex and man-boy love, she supports this magazine which airs such issues freely because

Until our right to consenting sexual acts is established, limited only by the rights of others, no homosexual behaviour will be protected because anything any of us does is offensive to the majority. Policing ourselves to be less offensive to that majority is to be part of our own oppression. Tokenism has never been anything else. (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 64)

The creation of community is Rule’s recurring preoccupation in both her fiction and her essays. What is clear in this passage is that her sense of “the gay community” is always of a varied, morally and politically divided group which nevertheless must, for its sanity and survival, work out a bottom-line agreement on the rights yet to be won and protected. Equally, she insists on

that community's complex location within straight society, and rejects separatism as anything more than a political tactic. For instance: "I object to lesbian separatism because it, like all forms of bigotry, judges people by gender and class rather than as individuals . . ." and in particular, "where lesbians refuse to cooperate with gay men simply because they are men is self-defeating." She concludes this essay, "Integration," with an apt but surprisingly biblical image: "Instead of passing the buck endlessly between the sexes we might come to understand that we lost our innocence together because we wanted to know, and only together have we a chance to use that knowledge with integrity, some as lovers, all as friends and equals" (*Hot-Eyed Moderate* 96-98). For her, the freedom of homosexuals, of women, and of writers as well, is connected with a secular notion of the necessity of community, and of love, both relationships continually under construction.

Within Jane Rule's sexual politics, elements of civil rights discourse combine powerfully with those of seventies women's and gay liberation, a combination by no means incompatible with more recent queer politics and sexual radicalism. Her emphasis on the importance of creating communities, while at first it seems diametrically opposed to the postmodern destabilisations of identity favoured by queer theorists, can be reconsidered in the light of that reconceptualising of community occurring in 1990s feminist as well as queer political thought.¹⁰

For Jane Rule the advent of the women's movement did not seem to bring a sense of living in "Year One," as it did for Angela Carter. She had already experienced that questioning of reality "when all that was holy was up for grabs," but in the terms current in her own postwar youth, and in ways made necessary by her different erotic choices. Yet she had already, in her first novels, begun to "take women's existence seriously as a theme and source for art," as Rich, her contemporary, had found so difficult to do as a poet. The new women's movement emerging in the late sixties brought to her lifework as a writer expanded possibilities of subject and language, as well as new expectations on the part of feminist and lesbian readers. The critical climate she had to weather, along with other women writers, was marked by a polarising of views under pressure from a bold and vehement movement of women for sexual freedoms as well as social changes. But that critical climate was also significantly changed by the presence of feminist and lesbian readers, with their new and fiercely-articulated political expectations. As a pioneering lesbian and feminist writer, at the time when it was

becoming possible to be both, Rule demonstrates in her fiction and essays the intelligence, courage and compassion needed to engage in such sexual politics. "I try not to make a principle of being politically incorrect," she wrote in "Integration," "for rebelling against a code can be as limiting as serving it. I depart, valuing the journey" (96).

* * *

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I thank the Special Collections librarians at UBC Library for access to Jane Rule's papers. All otherwise undocumented reviews have been consulted in this collection. Further references to the collection are given in the text as "Rule" with box and folder number.

NOTES

- 1 See interviews with Graeme Gibson by all these writers, most particularly Munro, in which they talk about the conflict between their lives as writers and as women.
- 2 By "communities" I mean such activities as publishing in *The Ladder*, the magazine for lesbians and voice of the lesbian civil rights organisation, Daughters of Bilitis.
- 3 Since I did not have access to the private correspondence held with Jane Rule's papers, this study cannot take into account the responses of readers and students, but Marilyn Schuster mentions this dimension of Rule's popularity in her 1998 article.
- 4 See Marilyn Schuster's insightful point about the growth of the protagonists' self-awareness in "Strategies for Survival."
- 5 Based on Eureka, California (Jane Rule, correspondence 7/7/1998).
- 6 Though I have confined my enquiries to the period 1964-1977, there is evidence that these divided responses continued with later publications: Jane Rule indicates as much in several interviews, and Marilyn Schuster reported in 1981 that "the publication of *Contract with the World* last fall caused immediate furor in feminist and gay circles," where the characters were deemed "not only politically incorrect but distasteful as well" ("Strategies for Survival" 445).
- 7 It was not until the early 1980s that significant connections began to be made between Québécois and Anglophone lesbian feminist writers, according to Coral Ann Howells (1987), who cites Nicole Brossard's edited collection, *Les Stratégies du réel / The Story so far* (1980) and the special issue of *Tessera* VIII (4) 1984. A comparative study of the reception of the work of some of these writers, such as Marie-Claire Blais, and Rule would be of great interest.

- 8 It is important to note crucial changes in the uses of this term since late 1970s, when it was used within radical political movements to resist pressures to conform, as Rule uses it in such essays as "For the critic of what isn't there" and "Intregation," in *A Hot-Eyed Moderate*. In the 1990s it is a term used principally by reactionaries objecting to the presence and voice of formerly marginalised groups in public debate.
- 9 The excellent 1994 NFB film about Jane Rule by Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman, *Fiction and Other Truths*, recounts these incidents and Rule elaborates her views on Dante and literary sado-masochism, among other things.
- 10 Marilyn Schuster, in "Inscribing a Lesbian Reader, Projecting a Lesbian Subject," usefully places Rule's work in the context of Teresa de Lauretis's proposal that feminist theory should use the trope of "home" deconstructively (de Lauretis 136).

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Chet Baker's Dog

The pet he left behind in a mid-west hotel
prisoners dragged out randomly at night, to be tortured
every misery in the world collects
in a sticky pool
losses drip down
my father's birthday tomorrow
(no celebration this year)
the poem I wanted to write earlier today,
about cherries and virginity,
clever as dark glasses hiding puffy eyes
Surely a chambermaid pitied Chet's dog,
took him in, loved him
not like Laika left in space until she died, alone
this is not about pets or fruit
leave all that and sit with the sorrow
my mother fattened herself on this brand of
loneliness: big bowls of whipped cream after school
dust in my garden
tomatoes still green, even though it's August
the child my body never gave me
(who pulled that string?)
and then there's the dog again;
it cries, it scratches.

Rites of Passage

Rite 1

Not yet an elegy, I wait in autumn's arms
hunkered against rainfall. Sodden newspapers cling
to the words of their own blurred obituaries.

Deciduous ghosts shed foiled, shredded tarnishes,
leaves melting to pulpy juice-stains on concrete steps,
like inked handprints, dank outlines, rotten pentangles.

There was a question that I meant to ask myself.
A stiff wind wheezes through its broken wisdom teeth,
a ladder with two rungs missing, a fence short slats.

Rite 2

Autumn a colour negative, layered rust-scales
conceal the tufts of old-man's-beard that clutch
flecked limbs; someone clears crap from a collapsed eavestrough.
My father's father died in early October.

At the funeral, his namesake balked when the angels
called him home too; the next morning, barely awake,
I glimpsed an old man's face in the mirror, and jumped
at my own reflection, a palimpsest, a ghost
in the jawline, the chin, the eyes. When the time comes
to break the mould, we peel back one last polaroid.

Rite 3

Ransacking attics of doubtful inheritance,
you learn the price of disconnectedness, the sense
of never having listened to stories of ducks
or stock-market reports or rusted-out dump trucks,
or whatever else he once might have talked about.
I never knew him when he was alive. Now, out
of time, I finger scrapbooks, pasted snapshots, dumb,
hungry for lost words like crumbs of the *viaticum*.

Bugging With History

Sexual Warfare and Historical Reconstruction in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*

the past is the fiction of the present
— MICHEL DE CERTEAU *The Writing of History*

In 1901, Henry James wrote to Sarah Orne Jewett: “The ‘historical’ novel is, for me, condemned . . . to a fatal *cheapness*.” However careful the historical background, says James, “the whole effect is as nought . . . it’s all humbug” (202-03). James’s unease with the cheapness and humbuggery of the “historical novel” evidences its position between seemingly opposing genres: a location at once liable to a certain fictional “cheapness” in its reliance on “fact” and catcalls of historical ineptness in its reliance on “fiction.” It is a genre between genres that will not make up its mind. But, as the epigram from de Certeau prefacing this essay suggests, history itself is by no means a stable base of fact, but is rather a fiction created by the subjective and thesis-driven ways in which we reconstruct the past into the history *we need* for the present. As Linda Hutcheon echoes: “The meaning of the past is not coherent, continuous, or unified—until we make it so” (16). And it is this “we” we must pay attention to. Astride this study of the relationship between the writer and his present epoch and how this relationship shapes his constructions of history—where the present, through the trickery of the past tense, becomes a “distant mirror” (Cowart 8)—I would like to discuss Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*.

Richard Dellamora, describing Findley’s unique position within the Canadian canon, states that “Writing from a minority subject-position has provided a location from which, without expatriating himself, Findley can contest the cultural and sexual politics of Anglo-Canadian hegemony” (177). Within this category of “minority subject-position”—what Findley himself

calls his “*aberrant*” position (“My Final Hour” 6)—I want to place the author of *The Wars* as a gay male writer. And although this categorization seems both lavishly vague and critically reductive, it remains vital that we understand the differing social responsibilities and weights of each of these words—“gay,” “male” and “writer”—and how they each, and collectively, contribute to Findley’s rewriting of the First World War. From this reconstruction of Findley’s own history perhaps we can appreciate and critically understand some of the sexual wars from which *The Wars* originates.

Findley’s purpose in *The Wars* is not the homosexualization of history, nor is it a fiction of recuperation whereby homosexuals from a previous time are “outed,” anachronistically, by the present. Rather, *The Wars* explores the queer erotics, both loving and violent, inherent in male-male bonds especially heightened in the greatest of “homosocial” (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 1) events, war. I want first to examine how the novel reveals an architectural break between pre-war male relations and war-time male relations and to document Robert Ross’s voyage through the novel and his slow accretion of “manhood.”¹ Secondly, I would like to investigate *The Wars* as a study in effacement whereby Findley posits his “fictional history” as generic, that is, the construction of an ahistoric and almost unknowable researcher. It is through this circuitous displacement that Findley escapes while covering his political behind, as it were. Yet, I would argue, this displacement leaves the novel scarred with an uneasiness that this “behind” may be uncovered and the novel exposed as a thesis-driven fiction produced by a gay male writer belonging as much to the 1970s as it does to the First World War.²

Findley’s War-Erotica

In *Inside Memory*, Findley relates a discussion with Margaret Laurence over the problematics of the rape-scene in *The Wars*. Findley tells Laurence that “It has to be there because it is my belief that Robert Ross and his generation of young men were raped, in effect, by the people who made that war. Basically, their fathers did it to them.”³ He argues further: “I cannot remove it. As a scene, it is intrinsic—deeply meshed in the fabric of the book as I first conceived it” (151). Findley’s insistence on the rape-scene and its significance to the total construction of the novel has been left, though not untouched, somewhat neglected.⁴ However, Findley’s conception of violence and violation combined with the supposedly allegorical nature of his sexual metaphor (where rape reveals a “higher” social and moral injustice)

enmeshes the book not only in a constant play of what I would call war-erotica but also in a construction of male-male relations before and after the start of the First World War.

Findley makes explicit the connections between sex and violence when, near the start of the narrative, Robert Ross's beloved sister Rowena falls to her death while her "guardian" Robert "was locked in his bedroom. Making love to his pillows" (21). The juxtaposition of the sister's death with Robert's masturbation sets a discomfiting tone which much of the book will echo. Mrs. Ross's subsequent demand that Robert be the one to kill Rowena's rabbits—"BECAUSE HE LOVED HER" (24)—intensifies this psychological link: just as Robert's masturbation *seems* the cause of his sister's death, so his mother, in a similar psychological fusion, connects the rabbits with the cause or at least the result of her daughter's accident. This association between violence, death and sex becomes the filter through which Robert reads any ensuing sexual activity.

Only fifteen pages later this formulating link becomes a palimpsest in which sex and war become so intertwined as to leave little distinction between the two. During his training at Lethbridge, Robert encounters Eugene Taffler, a seasoned soldier who had already been wounded in France, who Robert quickly realizes is "the model he could emulate" (35). It is also at this time that Robert and some fellow soldiers make a trip to the nearby "Lousetown" and the brothel fittingly nicknamed "Wet Goods." Here Robert meets the prostitute Ella and, after some nervous dancing, they proceed "up the stairs" to the encouraging chant: "Enjoy. Enjoy" (40). After some initial complications and embarrassments—namely Robert's premature ejaculation—Ella reveals to Robert a hole in the wall through which they view the couple in the next room. Through this hole Robert watches his hero Eugene Taffler and "the Swede" (40):

There were certainly two naked people—but all he could see at first was backs and arms and legs. Whoever it was who was there was standing in the middle of the floor hitting whoever else was there. . . . He'd never even dreamed of such a thing—of being hit and wanting to be hit. Beaten. Or of striking someone else because they'd asked you to. (44)

Fittingly, Robert views this scene of sado-masochistic beating through a hole in the wall, like a camera's aperture or an orifice. Stunned and confused by the tangle of "backs and arms and legs" and two people willingly beating each other, Robert cannot imagine what is taking place before him.

Findley invites a comparison to rape by layering the scene with a sense of sexual violation. Ella physically “forces” Robert to watch: “[her] hand remained on the back of his neck so he couldn’t step aside, even if he’d wanted to” (44). In addition, this scene of sexual violation occurs on the night of Robert’s supposed introduction to manhood and the ceremonial loss of virginity, a ceremony interrupted by Robert’s “coming” up the stairs. Ironically, Robert does not lose his virginity with Ella, the “whore” (41), but rather he loses his already battered sexual innocence in his inverted position as viewer penetrated through a “camouflaged hole” by the disquieting image of Taffler and the Swede—“he wondered what it was she meant to do with him and what sort of perversion this was” (44). This episode is made even more violating through the use of what Victor Shklovsky calls the “naive observer focalization.” Writing of Shklovsky, Vladimir Tumanov states that “when a phenomenon familiar to the reader is presented directly through the eyes of a character unfamiliar with this phenomenon,” defamiliarization—that is, shock—is achieved (Tumanov 110). The reader, in effect, becomes surprised by what may not surprise him through a process of empathetic reading just as Taffler and the Swede are made all the more shocking by Robert’s reaction. The use of the naive observer cloaks this scene in an air of violation.

Findley’s use of the naive young viewer spying a scene of “preposterous pleasure” (Cleland 157) through a hole in the wall recalls another familiar scene of so-called male “sexual impropriety” in John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. The parallels between *The Wars* and *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* not only establish a literary link to the tradition of the *risqué* but also partially feminize Robert Ross (Ross’s fear of feminization entails much of his “horror” in the Taffler and Swede episode) and reinforce his sexual *naïveté*. Fanny Hill, that immortal libertine, spies “two young sparks romping, and pulling one another about” in what at first seems like innocent play but soon develops into amorous love. Fanny watches all she can stand before jumping down from her stool to “raise the house upon them” but she falls on her face and passes out long enough for the perpetrators of “so criminal a scene” to escape (159). Findley’s brothel scene not only alludes to Cleland’s but seems indebted to its very structures. Just as Fanny is overwhelmed by a confusion of faces, fronts and backs (Fanny suggests of one of the perpetrators that “if he was like his mother behind, he was like his father before,” that is, he was like his father’s *front* in the *front* and like

his mother's *front* in the *back*),⁵ so Ross seems equally confused by the ever reversing roles of hero/enemy, top/bottom, passive/active, viewer/viewed, penetrated/penetrator, feminine/masculine. The homosexual scene presents such a distortion of binary logic as to render it almost impenetrable in its myriad of reversals. Findley gives both Ross and the reader, fused in their mutual roles as "viewer," an unsolvable conundrum of dissatisfied binaries.

Just as Cleland's scene begins with some light foreplay, Findley's scene soon progresses from its strange "fight" to overt consummation:

One was lying on his back with his back arched off the mattress while the other sat astride his groin exactly like a rider. The one who played the horse was bucking—lifting his torso high off the bed, lifting the weight of the rider with his shoulders and his knees—and bucking, just like the mustangs Robert and the others had broken in the summer . . . both horse and rider—were staring into one another's eyes with an intensity unlike any other Robert had ever seen in a human face. Panic. (44-5)

The image of horse and rider become inextricably confused with the image of "the Swede" astride Taffler's groin; Robert cannot deal with the shattering violation of his hero, Taffler, "the model he could emulate" (35), having sex with another man and so seems to couch the scene in a metaphor of militaristic coupling. And yet this metaphoric construction is not completely Robert's own but integral to the scene itself where "[t]he rider was using a long silk scarf as reins" and "a soldier's stiff-peaked cap [to] beat the horse on the thighs" (45). Findley advances this disturbing figuration by having Taffler, whom Ross earlier compared to "David" (35) ridden by "Goliath" (45), in a queer inversion of the David and Goliath story. Yet "Goliath," if I am reading the positioning right, is penetrated by "David." Ross's hierarchical imagining of Taffler as epitome of heroic manhood becomes completely reversed with the hero ridden by the "enemy" yet reversed again, if we attach any power to the passive and active positions (where passive "equals" feminine "equals" submissive), with the "enemy" penetrated by the hero. The register of the heroic becomes strangely reversed and re-reversed in a moebius loop of tops and bottoms.

A chain reaction of violent confusion ensues and, from the hierarchical complexities of the homosexual coupling, culminates in Ross's reaction of vehement and baffled disavowal. After witnessing Taffler and the Swede, Ross, in the fit of what Eva-Marie Kröller calls "a man driven to near-madness by vertigo" (70), throws his "boot across the room and shatter[s] the mirror" (45), just as, only pages before, Ross had witnessed Taffler "throwing

stones at a row of bottles lined up on a board” (33).⁶ Taffler’s throwing parallels and unites Ross’s own in a “mirror” image Ross cannot understand and so must shatter and destroy. In effect, Ross uneasily *becomes* Taffler and mimics his positioning; he penetrates the sodomitical scene with his view but is in turn *overridden* by its disruptive confusion of roles and its destabilization of hero/enemy hierarchical binaries. Findley challenges the reader to explicate this scene: is Ross’s violence an expression of disgust or of repressed attraction? is Ross a “real man” though he has not lost his virginity or is he, by his witnessing of Taffler, something “other”? who is “winning” between Taffler and the Swede? who is, metaphorically, on top? David or Goliath? The homosexual scene effects a queer breakdown of meaning and the reading process is set on its back with this plurality of signification emanating from a climax of clashing symbolic structures. In this one scene, Findley gives us images of horses, warfare, love, photography, mirrors, broken glass, and throwing which are all symbolic structures expanded elsewhere.

This sometimes bewildering construction of war-erotica is employed again when, after his near death escape from a gas attack, Ross shoots a German sniper:

The shot that had killed him rang around and around the crater like a marble in a bowl. Robert thought it would never stop. He scrambled for the brink only in order to escape it and Bates had to pull him over the edge, falling back with Robert on top of him. The warmth of Bates’s body was a shock and the two men lay in one another’s arms for almost a minute before Robert moved. (130)

What had begun as a shooting ends with something like a post-coital embrace. Findley collides the two registers of war and love so that the two, *vis-à-vis* each other, become as indistinguishable as the image of Ross on top looking at Bates. The proverbial act that makes Robert finally a soldier and, therefore, a man, the killing of the enemy, is closely followed by an act that almost undoes everything the previous scene had tried to create. Robert makes himself a soldier but comes dangerously close to crossing the “shocking” line between a social and sexual embrace, a line which for Ross has not yet become firmly entrenched. As Ross states after his rape at Desolé: “[He] wished with all his heart that men could embrace. But he knew now they couldn’t. Mustn’t” (171). In his progression through the novel, Ross slowly learns the architecture of what he understands to be manliness: manliness is fighting “Tom Bryant” (19), a man he’d never seen, for a woman Ross didn’t love; manliness is not writing “love” on a letter, “It seemed unmanly” (51); manliness is

having sex with a “whore”; manliness is knowing the strict lines that exist between social and sexual interests; manliness is, after his rape, knowing what else men could not only do to each other but do to him.⁷

Yet *The Wars* not only documents Robert Ross’s learning of manliness, but also constructs an opposition between pre-war and wartime male-male relationships. Findley engineers a structure in which a large gap exists between the ideal homosocial relationships among men before the war and violent homosexual relationships after its start.⁸ Homosocial relations in the novel before the war, such as those between Robert and Harris (they were both soldiers but had not yet been to the front) and Jamie Villiers and Clive d’Orsey, where every action seems to be on the verge of the sexual yet sex is never mentioned, seem never to have the same atmosphere of violence around them. If anything they are pseudo-portraits of the “bourgeois homosexual” exposed and established by the trials of Oscar Wilde at the turn of the century;⁹ the clichéd “sensitive men” who loved men as an expression of some heightened sense of aesthetics. As Lady Juliet d’Orsey states: “the fact is that extremely physical men like Robert and Jamie and Taffler are often extremely sensitive men as well”: they “seek beauty through perfection” (103). This highly idealized vision of pre-war male relations, of course, belies many of the repercussions that sex scandals had on the labelling and control of “perverse” male sexuality; a sexuality which had only recently, according to Foucault, been given the medicalized taxonomy of “species” (43). Yet, this idyllic view changes drastically when Findley actually presents us with men having sex, and it should be noted that all homosexual encounters in the book occur between “soldiers,” such as Taffler, and Ross, who had been to the front or are at the front; sex itself becomes synonymous with war.

Findley’s novel conflates war and sex on different allegorical scales: one takes place on the human body, the other on the social. Pages after Robert’s rape where “[a]ll he could feel was the shape of the man who entered him and the terrible strength of the force with which it was done” (169), the narrator describes what “was to be the most determined push the British had made on the salient” (172): “penetration” becomes both a sexual endeavor and a military maneuver. In the same way, Frank Davey describes how the penis in *The Wars* is continually figured as “a misfiring gun, a weapon that kills unpredictably and indiscriminately” (119).¹⁰ The body becomes the site of a dialectical tension between its function *in* the war and its function *as a*

figuration of the war. But also, and problematically, violent sex seems predominantly a product of homosexuality, a sexuality, as Robert learns, that must be feared. Or, perhaps, the violent homosexual encounters we see in *The Wars* result from a violence inherent in any war-time expression of male sexuality. When Juliet D'Orsey witnesses Robert and Barbara making love, "hurting one another" (156), it becomes clear that the violence of the heterosexual encounter is decidedly one way. The two lovers are not hurting *one another* but it is Robert who, as Juliet states, "must be trying to kill her. . . [h]e hated her" (156). Although violence seems intrinsic to these expressions of male sexual desire, it is a violence intrinsically male and largely—and this makes sense since most relations in the book *are* between men—homosexual. Again, Davey states that, "The only sexual possibility constructed by the novel remains an immensely destructive homoeroticization of society" (122), yet this construction of an "immensely destructive homoeroticization" may be less of a "construction" and more an intrinsic corollary of any representation of homosexuality than we may first think.

Lee Edelman states in his discussion of the historical connections between homosexuality and violence that "[sodomitical relations] constituted, more than an assault upon the flesh, an assault upon the logic of social discourse" (94). *The Wars* literalizes the violence inherent in the tense interlining of homosocial and homosexual and the queer disruption of binaries in which homosexuality seems to exult. The presence of homosexuality within social discourse, according to Edelman, is inherently violent not because of the binaristic battle of an "other" trying to get in but precisely because of homosexuality's murky operations *within* accepted social discourse; it is an "other," an outsider, already in. Precisely because homosexuality is an unknown insider, it accrues an imaginative guerilla warfare-like stigma of suddenly attacking or being suddenly attacked. Because Robert Ross cannot know the meaning or intentions of the men around him after the rape, not knowing becomes violence itself. As Diana Brydon states: "The narrator [of *The Wars*] is obsessed as much by the paradoxes of how we know as by the horror of what we know" (76) and, I would append to this, the narrator is also concerned with the horror of not being able to know and the violence that any unknown seems to harbor.

While Findley portrays pre-war male relations in an idyllic light, signifying the possibility of camaraderie and friendship, his portrayal of male war relations seems based on violence and predation. On his way back to the

front Ross stops at Bailleul and, during his short stay there, decides to go to Desolé, a nearby psychiatric asylum that also functioned during war-time as a military bath-house. It is here, upon being trapped in his dressing room after his bath, that Robert is gang-raped:

He struggled with such impressive violence that all his assailants fell upon him at once. . . . Then he was lowered onto his back and held there by someone who was lying underneath him. His legs were forced apart so far he thought they were going to be broken. Mouths began to suck at his privates. Hands and fingers probed and poked at every part of his body. Someone struck him in the face. (168)

The fact that Robert's "fellow soldiers" (169) rape him is an irony emblematic of the paradoxical nature of male relationships in war that the novel has already constructed. Just as men fight with men for their country so *The Wars* also shows men of the same country fighting each other to save themselves, as when Robert's men "turn" on him during the German gas attack (124) or, as when Robert is raped, for other men's sexual pleasure. This predation seems a construction integral to a war where men are used—in the Somme offensive "*between 7.30 a.m. and 7.30 p.m. 21,000 British soldiers were killed—35,000 were wounded and 600 taken prisoner*" (103)—at such an alarming rate as to render their lives disposable. Soldiers begin to use other soldiers as they themselves are being used; as Diana Brydon suggests, "[m]odern warfare, like the rape, is impersonal, anonymous" (79)—it renders life into a play of statistics. Yet this internal predation must also result from the intense metamorphosis that the soldiers go through from killing an "enemy" to embracing a fellow soldier within seconds; Findley highlights this living paradox just before the rape when Ross, entering Desolé, comments that he "had seen them [the nuns] throw the inmates up against the walls and batter them senseless with their fists. Then they would kneel and sweetly attend to the wounds they had inflicted" (165). Findley's war is such a battle of contradictions and contradictory emotions, such a toss-up of binaries, where beating and healing are accomplished almost in the same swing, where, during war time, sex and violence become one and the same and fellow soldiers become rapists. This portrayal is a marked discontinuity when compared to the pre-war male relations Findley has shown us.

Having considered the structure of sex and violence in *The Wars*, we can perhaps now see the importance of Findley's reply to Margaret Laurence's question about his inclusion of the rape scene. The war, Findley seems to argue, had changed male relationships irrecoverably; if men were loving

fathers and sons before the war, they were abusive and molesting ones after. Just as Robert comments after his rape that he “wished with all his heart that men could embrace. But he knew now they couldn’t” (171), so the war itself was a rape which would forever change the way men related to other men. Men could no longer be trusted because they had learned to kill in such great numbers that the act itself became trivial. Just as Sasoon argues that “an ordinary human being has a right to be horrified by a mangled body” (104), so we too have the right to be horrified by what Findley shows us of men (and I mean specifically men, especially given the almost heroic nature of many of the female characters—such as Mrs. Ross, Juliet d’Orsey and Marian Turner) and what they have done to each other. Findley’s portrayals of men are not here to comfort us. Rather, they “are like statements: ‘pay attention!’ (11); these are the things they, or we, have done.

Historical Reconstruction

A Tergo

from the backside of Dallas her mind drifts back to other days
—JEANNIE C. RIELY “The Backside of Dallas”

In his 1993 book, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, Ed Cohen discusses the process of reconstructing the 1895 Oscar Wilde trials:

The more I read the newspapers, the more I realized how amazing it was that they had engendered the meanings now attributed to them; the more I pondered the underlying assumptions that made the stories cohere as stories, the more I understood that in order to prize apart their narrative frames I would have to delve back into the meaning and events that preceded them. And, given what was centrally—if unarticulably—at issue in the case, perhaps this regressive process was ultimately the most appropriate way to proceed, i.e., ass-backward. (5)

Cohen’s process of delving back into the history of the Oscar Wilde trials is itself engendered with a larger metaphoric motif of getting at the problem in an “ass-backward” fashion. Yet, what does Cohen mean by “ass-backward”? The phrase itself seems an interesting double reversal of what must obviously be “ass-forward” which, by the switching of the posterior to the anterior, seems backward already. Is it that the “normal” anthropomorphized vision of historical reconstruction is this “ass-forward” technique whereby the face looks back and the back faces forward? Cohen states that previous accounts of the Wilde trials by H. Montgomery Hyde were faulty and that “[u]nfortunately, while the social and sexual dynamics crystallized by Wilde’s numerous courtroom

appearances quickly emerged from my reading of this incredibly engaging material, they were disturbingly unaddressed by Hyde's text itself" (2).

Cohen, a gay man, accuses Hyde of leaving "unaddressed" precisely what Cohen hopes to find by going "ass-backward." It appears that Hyde has left much unaddressed precisely because he is "dressed," faces the wrong direction and lacks the propensities and acute vision of Cohen's uncovered ass.

In this long preamble I hope to engage a certain allegorical structure of historical reconstruction that is necessarily "ass-centred," or, as Cohen puts it, "ass-backward." Cohen seems to suggest that the only way to get at the "truth" behind the Oscar Wilde trials is through a necessarily ass-backward historiography. With this ass-backward historiography in mind, I want to suggest that Findley's *The Wars* is also necessarily ass-backward. Although Findley's approach may be the ass-backward view of a gay male writer, his book is a literal breeding ground of backside paranoia.

Findley's historical reconstruction is appropriately ass-backward not only because it is the product of a gay writer but because *The Wars*, as I hope to have shown in the preceding section, deals with the tensions and complications in the social and sexual interactions between men—interactions that, as so many recent theorists have pointed out, lead to a sometimes homophobic fear of what exactly the backside means.¹¹ Findley's rewriting of the First World War, while simultaneously investigating its sexual nature, seems a process very much akin to Cohen's getting "at the bottom of things" in the Oscar Wilde trials. However, this gay historiography (if I can in fact group both books into this category) is also very much a product of the sexual "warfare" of the late 1970s (and the present) and the increased public attention gays had only recently garnered in what can be sweepingly called a Post-Stonewall discourse.¹² Yet, I would argue, Findley, unlike Cohen, has tried to erase the gay from his gay historiography. He has tried to displace the narrative from that of an openly gay man to an almost genderless and unknowable researcher. The reasons for this procedure are multiple.

Findley mentions in *Inside Memory* how all-pervasive the issue of book banning had become when *The Wars* was originally published; to have an openly gay narrator would not only have brought the book more controversy than it had already received but would probably have led to the all-too-easy categorization of the novel as being more interested in gay politics than in creative writing.¹³ But Findley's use of the metafictional narrator is not only a panicked attempt to write himself out of the novel—just as

George Bowering uses his narrator in *Burning Water* to, in effect, write himself into the novel; it is also part of the book's subversive nature. Even a straight audience cannot easily pass *The Wars* off as being a too-subjective look at history only interested in how "gay" it was, because, other than a few scenes and an overall thematic concern (only one of many), the novel does not posit itself as being gay at all but decidedly straight. Although I would argue that Findley's novel *is* decidedly gay, the fact that this has not been openly argued before evinces the novel's almost convincing drag.

Yet, I would also argue, Findley's eliding of the narrator's (and his own) sexuality from the novel has characterized it with a behind-sighted paranoia, a paranoia stemming from the fear of being found out, the fear of realizing that this is not "normal history" as we have learned it. Hardly can we turn around without running into some character worrying about his behind. As Robert Ross lies with the prostitute Ella, the narrator tells us: "Robert wanted to cover himself but he didn't know how to do that without making it look as if that was what he was doing. He thought of rolling over—but that would expose his backside" (43). What does exposing the backside mean for Robert Ross here? Is it not that exposing his backside to Ella would characterize him as someone who thinks of his backside like he thinks of his frontside? *The Wars* lies, as Robert Ross does, in an uncomfortable position of exposure; it revels in male sexuality (much of the novel is decidedly male-focused) yet keeps this focus tempered and somewhat dis-solute. It is a straight novel (front facing) that wants to turn around, that wants to be openly ass-backward yet knows that it cannot do so without larger social consequences. The narrative fear of the backside has marked almost every male character with a fear all their own, as if each were a living projection, a simulacrum, of the novel's closeted nature.

The backside becomes a place of possible and likely attack. Robert attacks Teddy Budge from behind: "Robert regained his feet and lunged, butting his head like a battering ram between the giant's shoulder blades. Teddy only knew that he was being attacked. He couldn't see who by and he couldn't imagine why" (25). Teddy cannot imagine why he is being attacked from behind just as Ross is "confused" by what Taffler and the Swede are up to—their "behind" the scenes play—something of which he had "never even dreamed" (44). And just as Teddy is attacked from behind, so Robert enters his cell at Desolé and hears the door "swinging closed behind him" (167) and, during the rape, the "shape of the man who entered him" (169) from

behind. And Robert is finally caught by Major Mickle when he “sent four men around behind the barn by a route Robert cannot have seen—behind the wall” (185).¹⁴ The behind, the route that “cannot be seen,” or “imagined,” or “even dreamed,” becomes the site of violation. If there is any route through which the novel can be attacked it is one leading to the backside in that the novel has been *too* sexually violent, *too* homosexual, *too* ass-centred, *too* behind-sighted, *too* ass-backward. *The Wars* manifests a fear of the backside, a fear that the novel, like Robert Ross, and its front-sided history might not be front-sided at all.

In a sense, my “outing” of Findley’s narrator as gay and the constructor of a gay historiography is a critical violation—a violation stemming from a conscious confusion of narrator and author or author and speaker; yet it is only through this violation that we can attach a real (homo)sexual/political nature to the novel. It is a novel not only about war but about sex *and* war and about the ways in which war has irreversibly changed the social construction of male sexuality. In effect, I want to label *The Wars* as a necessarily ideologically-led narrative to rescue it from the somewhat empty and dangerous category of the post-modern, a categorization all too often seen as textually playful yet socially useless. Findley’s novel is necessarily political and the implications of this cannot and should not be ignored.

First, Findley’s novel is partially a fictional examination of male relations in the first half of this century and, simultaneously, a tracing of one character’s progression to “manhood.” Second, Findley’s examination is itself reflective of the political and historical moment out of which the book was written, a moment that has effectively left its marks on the construction of the novel. Although this has been a very male-focused critical examination of the novel, the idea that this “ass-backward” process of historical reconstruction may have applicability outside of gay male writers seems certain from Jeannie C. Riely’s country song “The Backside of Dallas.” Evidently, the backside, even if it is of Dallas, seems the surest way from here to whatever is meant by those “other days.”

NOTES

- 1 Critical work coming closest to this approach has been Allan Weiss’s examination of the evolving constructions of public and private space before and after the First World War (91) and Frank Davey’s “Homoerotic Capitalism” which discusses *The Wars* as a “recon-

- struction that violently condemns the phallic authority on which nearly all the 'official transactions' of Canadian culture are conducted (124).
- 2 My figuration of the Canadian gay liberal moment of the 1970s owes much to Kinsman (179-97) and to an extrapolation from gay history in Britain and the United States (for example, Weeks's "The Permissive Moment" in *Sex, Politics and Society* and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*).
 - 3 This comment perhaps seems just as, if not more so, applicable to Findley's later novel, *Headhunter*, where we are presented with the rape and murder of the adolescent George Shapiro by his father and others during an after-hours session at the infamous "Club of Men" (419-20).
 - 4 For different aspects of sexual violence and warfare in *The Wars*, see Diana Brydon (79-80), Allan Weiss (96-97), Frank Davey's "Homoerotic Capitalism," and, especially in the realm of what she calls Findley's "gender wars," Lorraine York (34-45).
 - 5 I am indebted to Lee Edelman's reading of this scene and all its confusions of placement. Edelman deduces that "The sodomite, therefore, like the moebius loop, represents and enacts a troubling resistance to the binary logic of before and behind, constituting himself as a single-sided surface whose front and back are never completely distinguishable as such" (105). It is also important to point out that Findley's scene is moebius-like. In it, in fact, there exists no behind, that is, Ross states that "everything was flat and undimensional" (44). Ross's peek behind the scenes of sodomy is, seemingly, all up front.
 - 6 Also, as Bruce Pirie reminds us, "We may remember the mirror-smashing scene that begins Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*" (77).
 - 7 In an interview with Alan Twigg, Findley states that "Maybe we have to get rid of the word *manhood*. It's done a lot of damage to both men and women. I don't know why, but I always associate the word manhood with killing" (86). Findley's concern with manhood is also key to the historical setting of the novel in the early half of the century and that era's reevaluation of Victorian sensibilities, of which manliness was a central term.
 - 8 In my distinctions between homosocial and homosexual relations I am borrowing from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* in which Sedgwick states: "'Homosocial desire,' to begin with, is a kind of oxymoron. 'Homosocial' is a word occasionally . . . applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality" (1-2). Sedgwick further describes what she calls the "homo-social continuum" as existing between "'men-loving-men' and 'men-promoting-the-interests-of-men'" (3) and how this continuum has been radically broken since the ancient Greeks.
- My calling the pre-war male-male relationships "homosocial" can be somewhat misleading, I fear. What I mean to signify by this categorization is that though these relationships may be homosexual there is no "sex"—or none, at least, as far as I understand it, even allowing Juliet d'Orsey's warning that "'Love' has so many ways of expressing itself outside the physical" (*Wars* 103).
- 9 For more on the Victorian "bourgeois homosexual," see Ed Cohen's *Talk on the Wilde Side* where he discusses the Wilde trials as the simultaneous point of homosexual persecution and dissemination of what, exactly, a homosexual was. The trials led to the

coincident oppression and “emergence in England of ‘the male homosexual’ as a distinctly counternormative category” (211). Also see Jeffrey Weeks’s “The Construction of Homosexuality” which discusses how “male friendship became more suspect” between the turn of the century and the First World War (108).

In addition, the importance of Oscar Wilde as a “type” and euphemism of homosexuality can be seen in Barbara d’Orsey, who can only understand Clive and Jamie as “*Oscar and Bosie*” (102). Also see “‘These Things may Lead to the Tragedy of our Species’: the Emergence of Homosexuality and Lesbianism in Canada” in Kinsman (81-107).

- 10 Lorraine York also describes another blending enacted in *The Wars* where “the domestic shows signs of military activity, and the battleground becomes strangely homelike” (34). Although my argument focuses mainly on the body, it is important to realize that all of these fusions—whether between the social and the physical body or between the battlefield and the domestic front—are part of the more general aim to clash together opposing symbolic structures.
- 11 For example see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “Is the Rectum Straight?” in *Tendencies* or Leo Bersani’s “Is the Rectum a Grave?”
- 12 In June of 1969, Stonewall signalled the start of large-scale gay demonstrations and open outcries against government and police oppression. The events surrounding Stonewall are often cited as the origin of the “gay liberation” movement. This is of course “American History,” yet a history with results and mythical importance which were not strictly American.
- 13 In his journal entry for July 1977, Findley mentions the effects book banning had on two other Canadian writers, Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro (*Inside* 150).
- 14 The sexual nature of this rear attack becomes even more apparent given the various connotations of “taken” in Robert Ross’s emphatic “We shall not be taken” (185).

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Delicate as the Shapes of Spirits

In a field of gray grass
the clouded sky fierce white,
as though bled of colour, and below,
beyond my sight: it is dusk,
anywhere setting. Just it seems
I walk farther in, the grass
still not lush. The blades
the far bank of cloud gathers,
Something nearly alive. Nearly
I would say it was someone they
shot neatly through
have fought forever. I might
stand so still that bullets
with such precision.
with rain, I am wet through
ashes, of what I imagine
then I stop imagining.
I am wet through and dissolving,
and ashes, but this is not despair,
let yourself say, ever fighting.
I hate you. For this

I walk the river's edge
rocky with your memory
furious, water roars hidden
though I can't see the sun
the light is darkening.
thicker and higher, but
offer nothing. Ahead of me
coalesces into a shape. A form.
once alive. If I knew no better
brought to the riverbank once and
the heart, who otherwise might
wonder how they made you
could find your moving form
The gray of the grass beads
and dissolving. My mouth tastes of
is the flavour of despair, but
I work so hard against belief.
my mouth against the wound
not something you would
For this more than anything
and that river below.

Coming out to my mother

This flower I want to give her
droops in my hand; I stand & knock
but some Aryan Jesus got there first
and now she's nailed the door shut
even to her child whose confidence
grows and dies in one burst

how I could blossom under a warming sun
open up, as my body does now to
female hands

she offers only the old withering look
no bread for my hunger, no water for my thirst

stone-cold fruits in the garden betray her

He said they would.

Swimming with the Words*

Narrative Drift in Daphne Marlatt's *Taken*

In her Foreword to *Salvage*, her last solo book of poetry, Daphne Marlatt described the process of writing those poems as “aquatic”:

working with subliminal currents in the movements of language, whose direction as “direction” only became apparent as i went with the drift, no matter how much flotsam seemed at first to be littering the page. (n.p.)

In writing *Salvage*, Marlatt translated herself from reader to writer, returning to poems she had written in the early seventies and re-reading and writing them again “on that edge where a feminist consciousness floods the structures of patriarchal thought” in an attempt “to salvage the wreckage of language so freighted with phallogocentric values it must be subverted and re-shaped, as Virginia Woolf said of the sentence, for a woman’s use” (n.p.).

The reader and writer find themselves in a fluid narrative in the drifting space and time and half-light of Marlatt’s latest novel. In *Taken*, as in much of Marlatt’s writing, one genre interrupts another, the lesbian body swimming with the words of memory and mother against the current, but with the drift that moves language in new directions, and, thus, lives to change. Strands of gender and genre, of the real and the imagined, break and attach, tangling stories and lives with past and place. The tangle, the interruption, the flow, and the drift are ways to write about how closely language and the body are intertwined for, as Marlatt asks in her Preface to *Ghost works*, how can “autobiography be seen as divorced from poetry— . . . or lesbianism divorced from heterosexuality—that haunting family” (viii)? Breaking one script, threads are salvaged to weave another story, and to those salvaged

strands cling still others, the “stories that we invent or refuse to invent ourselves by, all unfinished . . .” (*Taken* 130).

In Marlatt’s porous narrative is her recognition of a permeable body; her awareness of how our sense of ourselves as “isolated, self-contained creatures”¹ is as artificial as the closed construction of a story, and as limiting as language, when it encourages the illusion that we do not form part of an interactive field that extends beyond the human to “another here” (*Taken* 111), where our words do not exist, where the living body is its own language.

Understanding the connection between language and the body, or, as Marlatt calls it in “What Matters,” “the interrelating of bodies/ words” (153), is to understand the relation of touch to tongue. As Lorraine Weir describes it,

language makes us things to each other, puts us in the same relation to other humans as we are to things and, on those rare occasions when a response comes which is not silence but the discovery of place in an/other, makes possible community which is con/text. Relating words to each other as we do things in the world . . . we create a possible world through an act of love. . . . (62-63)

Swimming with the words, Marlatt’s narrative drifts, urges, draws us to consider the relationship of words and things, to feel then and there as ‘another here’, part of us: “not to take but to *fill* place” (“Taking Place” in *Net Work* 97). In *Taken*, Marlatt is reaching “for another kind of story, a story of listening way back in the body” (25), to imagine all that we are. In this paper, I would like to look at how her narrative lets bodies drift beyond human relationships, and language, letting the reader listen through the body, through her body, to what haunts us, and to those who “skim the air . . . swim in the water breathing there” (25), wordless.

Marlatt has said that “writing is about sensing one’s way through the sentence, through (by means of) a medium (language) that has its own currents of meaning, its own drift” (“Reading MAUVE” 27-8).² The suggestive texture of *Taken* resists airtight arguments and lines of reasoning; it is difficult to document the experience of transformation.³ Indeed, Marlatt writes against the definitive: “the holes we make in such a definite body leak meaning we splash each other with” (“Between the Lines” 81). In the contradictory currents of *Taken*’s drifting prose are found the twinning of celebration and resistance that Weir has found in Marlatt’s poetry, the “process of invention that gets you *here*, heals lostness, [and] resuscitates memory which is imagination (60). Marlatt’s immersive texts flow, seek openings. Her language, “leafings out and leavings, these passages” (*Taken* 6), is

pulling at the ghosts that haunt us, and branching beyond what limits us from opening to other possible worlds.

In *Ana Historic*, Marlatt was reaching for a different kind of story, too, looking for the women lost in the archives of patriarchal, heterosexual history. The historical research Annie had been doing for her husband turned into the writing of her own story. Annie became the writer, and her reader, Zoe, her lover: the woman writing, the woman reading, “we are, i am . . . swimming, swimming to save herself” (150). As Marlatt explained, the reader enters into “the generation of the work so the last scene represents the author making love to her reader, which is perhaps what all writing is about” (Marlatt 1996). Julie Abraham points out in *are girls necessary?* that tangling lesbian love and the act of writing inextricably together creates

a non-narrative model of the relation of lesbianism to the literary (“love is writing”) that undercuts the heterosexual plot by shifting the focus from narrative . . . If love might be writing, or writing love . . . plot is no longer the repository of value. (15)

In *Ana Historic*, with the use of “the metaphor of the continual turning of the page as the working of desire,” the linear narrative is translated into “the moment of writing” (Marlatt 1996), as transient as conversation, and the inevitability of closure into the anticipation of “the next page, even if it’s not yet written” (Interview 180). Marlatt refuses to “follow . . . the plotline through” (*Ana* 17), interrupting one story with another, with conversations over what she has just written, or what she has never imagined.

The site of the story is not a solid construction built to hold us in, or keep us out, but rather a tidal ebb and flow: it is “out and in. out *and* in” (*AH* 125). In “musing with mothertongue,” Marlatt wondered, “where are the poems that celebrate the soft letting-go the flow of menstrual blood as it leaves her body” (47)? In *Ana Historic*, she writes that flow, Annie Torrent’s story resisting closure, the period/full stop giving way to the period, “bleeding and soft. her on my tongue” (152).

The powerful freedom found in that moment of writing/loving is intoxicating, and full of possibility, the “reach of your desire reading us into the page ahead” (*Ana* n.p.). But *Taken* turns on a different idea of a story; that it is not one’s own, but constrained by other and others’ stories; that desire is complicated by complicity; and that like the past, ‘the page ahead’ is a palimpsest. Against the current of their mothers’ expectations, Suzanne, and Lori, her lover, take “issue with the given” (“musing” 47), breaking “the marriage script . . . the familial ties we each were meant to perpetuate”

(*Taken* 77-78). But in spite of that conscious resistance to the destiny script, both are still susceptible to “the claiming currents of that mother-pull” (47). When Lori leaves, returning to her mother, Suzanne uses words as a talisman, words her mother taught her, to try to “alter the destiny freight” (77), and bring her lover back. One story of family is rejected while another continues, like a “thread of magic litanies running back, uncut, like Ariadne’s to a safe place” (77).

Just as Suzanne had received a destiny script from her mother, Esme, so Esme had been loaded with one by hers. But Suzanne, because “she has had access to so much more thought about women’s position in the world” (Marlatt 1997), is able to deconstruct the script that her own mother was unable to escape. Esme could rarely see “beyond the uncertainty she was intimate with and by which she defined herself” (24). The destiny script works its spell on Esme. When, at a party, her own name and fate are spelled out on her mother’s ouija board, she cannot read that as an example of her mother’s power over her; as a medium, the mother is “colonizing the daughter for the sake of social magic” (Marlatt 1997).

Marlatt is very aware of the inheritance of “scripts (the opposite of gifts)” (*Labyrinth* 3), and their tenacious grip:

I don’t know if we can escape them completely. . . . The fragments are so deeply embedded in us; they have so much emotional resonance for us that it would be a shame to lose them completely. You can’t just throw them out. The task, once you’ve broken them apart into those resonating fragments, is to reconstitute them so that you can write a different story but with the same elements . . . to think in a different way from the thoughts that the scripts represent. (Marlatt 1997)

In her novel, Marlatt ‘reconstitutes’ these scripts in a fluid narrative where time and space leak. Words are broken by hyphens, and sentences fade rather than finish. Ellipses abound, like loose threads. And everywhere is the sound of water: rain dripping from the cedar boughs, torrential tropical storms; splashing pools; waves and waterfalls, the running tap; dew, mist, wet skin.

Taken surfaces and fades in the “half-light” (3), that “transition hour just before dawn, when light begins to intimate the differences between things still rooted deep in earth’s shadow” (129-30). The story hesitates, tentative, beginning without words, with listening, “behind the hand over my mouth (my mouth, as if i should not say anything, not yet, now now)” (3). “Ghost leaves,” the threads of stories, are “translating themselves” (3) into hers. These stories, the residual energies of “the ghosts of the psyche, the so-called dead

who haunt us, whose words so easily stir to the surface of memory,"⁴ not only arrive in the resonance of words or thoughts, but through the body, through a faint scent carried on a breeze, or a touch.

In her conversation with Janice Williamson, Marlatt talked about the "murmur in the flesh," the "very deep subliminal connection with the mother":

what we first of all remember is this huge body which is our first landscape and which we first remember bodily. We can't consciously remember it, but it's there in our unconscious, it's there in all the repressed babble, the language that just ripples and flows—and it isn't concerned with making sense. It's concerned with the feel: the 'feel' of words has something to do with the feel of that body, of the contours of early memory. (Interview 185)

Suzanne is haunted by her mother's words, her parents' lives, "the ambience . . . what they took for granted, the smell the feel of their time my own beginning intercepted" (*Taken* 25). She remembers Lori's essentialist opposition to the ghostly presence of Suzanne's mother, Esme:

But she's not a ghost, you said once. She's in photos, on film, in letters. You have all these mementos you carry around with every move

Yes, but—*mementos* is not a word i wold have chosen for the evidence i felt compelled to keep . . . Maybe ghosts have something to do with presence and absence, both

But how is that different from memory? (103-04)

Memory holds some of our stories, but there are others, as Marlatt explains:

There's a lot that stands outside of language because it stands outside the systems of thought which allow us to recognize anything. And it's often written in the body, it's kept in the body, in the cells, in the neural sheets of the brain, and it's a kind of residue that language can't reach. . . . Sometimes . . . we begin to recognize what these pieces are so that [they] can be pulled at through language . . . [These] I think of as the ghosts. These are what haunt us, what lies outside the systems of thought that we're trained in. (Marlatt 1997)

As a writer, Marlatt is trying to find "a way of writing that will bring in more of what haunts it, what lies outside the conventionally linear" (Marlatt 1997). Interrupting the habitual modes of daily life, of reading and writing, is one technique. Another is working the shoreline of meaning: "bringing each little piece to the edge it cannot go beyond, and then putting it next to another edge and seeing what happens" (Marlatt 1996). Another is using reading to write, to become aware of meaning, and see beyond the chosen foreground. As Marlatt describes it,

I think reading is a very essential part of writing, and I don't mean reading other work; I mean reading what the words are saying on the page, because language has this incredible facility for saying more than our willful reading of it. And you can see that if you just accidentally misread something; you just transform a letter and the whole word changes or you suddenly hear an echo with another word in a preceding sentence that you've never heard before and you see what the connection is. The unconscious plays a large part of writing and I suppose reading is becoming more aware of that. (Marlatt 1996)

And there is writing as reading. Using words and voices as openings,

the words i've heard, the phrases i seem to remember, part of a background that shaped me, take on a glow of meaning i never sensed. To make this strange composition, fiction and memory, so interlaced it is difficult to tell the difference. (*Taken* 30)

The photograph, too, bears "witness in the imprint of place or person on the 'taker's' imagination."⁵ Suzanne sifts through the evidence of photographs and films of her mother and father, and wartime correspondence between them, searching for clues to who they were, who she is. She reads one of her father's letters, filled with restraint and the cautious phrasing of an intelligence officer with much at stake. A letter from Esme follows the prescribed narrative patterns of a dutiful wife's correspondence ("Her duty, as her mother would remind her was to stay here with them and cheer him on from the sidelines" [11]) until in the postscript she writes against that duty, and "against his absence, against fate to bring him close" (13). Reading these letters, Suzanne realizes how much of the story was not written down, how many feelings were left untranslated into words; how the story "involving certain feelings gets passed on in an intonation, a hesitation, a gap between two sentences" (42).

The story is in the connection between things. In a photograph, the story is written in light, and, as Roland Barthes remarks in *Camera Lucida*

[a] sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed. (81)

In "On Distance and Identity: Ten Years Later," Marlatt cites *Camera Lucida*, quoting Barthes' description of the still photograph as "a kind of *Tableau vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and madeup face beneath which we see the dead" (32), the "*that-has-been*" (94). But if the photograph presents the '*that-has-been*', Marlatt recognizes that the poem, or the immersive text of *Taken*, "less presence than presentiment, runs in a sort of controversy

between what can be identified and what remains nameless, what has been said and what is unsayable" ("Distance" 94).

There are many careful descriptions of photographs, as Esme, Charles, and Suzanne, each in their turn, search the images of absent others for clues. Marlatt admits a fascination with the image, even as she writes against it:

The image on the one hand is equivalent to the story in that it is a self-representation. It helps in the construction of our identity. We look at these photographs of ourselves over time, and we say this is me then, this is me now, and each image—I learned this from Robert Minden when we were working on Steveston together—the image is as much the intention of the subject as it is the intention of the person who takes the photo. The subject poses himself or herself in a way they want to be seen. Now what Susanne and Esme do looking at photographs is they try to see through that. (Marlatt 1997)

A photograph seems to be fixed, a frozen image, but that is nothing more than an optical illusion; "the frozen moment is a lie, and in that way it is equivalent to a script" (Marlatt 1997). There is movement in the photograph, connections behind and beyond it. Consider the photograph of Esme, walking with Suzanne's father, Charles, just after a visit to the doctor has confirmed her pregnancy:

There they are . . . The forward motion of their step stilled for a second by some street photographer she is smiling for, having just caught the camera's swivel towards them . . . yes, they are at the turning point of history in this part of the world, though she hadn't known it then. She'd been too thrilled by the turn in their own private history.

He is looking askance, frowning slightly at something he doesn't approve of, or something that worries him, more probably . . . What was he looking at? A newsboy, she thinks now, a headline. Already preoccupied with war, the signs of destiny running ahead of their moment . . .

But she, she was only there in that moment given back to her, the surprise and pleasure of a stranger's snapping them on that day, in that split second. (4-5)

With the knowledge of her pregnancy, the confident delight written across the face of Esme is a look ahead to an imagined future. In capturing that delight, the camera caught the significance of the pregnancy, a 'turn in their own private history', but in the background were also details of the impending war, details that went unnoticed until a later viewing saw the tangle of history and personal stories.

No moment is fixed, no story is free of other stories, no body unconnected with another, and yet so many assumptions are made about the time and

place we live in, about the stories we are told and which we tell ourselves, about what is real and what is fiction. Rituals and scripts contain us, and because they are there when we arrive, we think of them as inevitable, not as constructions that we might change. We are taken by both history and photography. Each deceives

not because it distorts what is out there and presumably real, but because it seems to reproduce it with such an excess of clarity that it leaves us no other option but to believe blindly in it. This is the precondition of all magic; not the suspension of belief, but its exaggeration to a numb certainty in which the repetition of a thing is enough to make it a truth. (Morson 273)

From photograph to home movie, the technology of image-making continues to evolve, so that by the time the Gulf War is taking place in 1991, the media can supply images of war, often digitally processed, of distant, impersonal destruction. On the rainy west coast of Canada, as they watch these mediated images of that war, Suzanne and Lori are “appalled for different reasons, historically accountable and furious at a complicity neither . . . wanted to recognize” (81). Both recognize connections to a war in Southeast Asia. For Lori, “this is another Vietnam, stacked in much the same way” (35). Her anti-war response is unambiguous, her perspective narrow. Suzanne finds herself “caught in the echoes of an earlier war, caught in the meshes of defending brutality to stop brutality” (38). The lovers frustrate each other, and a chasm opens between them.

As war becomes the concern of all the media, Suzanne reads newspaper stories, spun from the rhetoric of politicians, introducing the new vocabulary of this war in the Gulf, and words for the magic charms which will ward off war:

This new obsession with high-tech fighters and tanks: charms against evil, against the threats of a “mad-man” who spent \$50 billion on armaments in the last decade but is not considered mad for that reason. Mad because he takes on the world’s mightiest power, this two-bit dictator invoking “the Mother of Battles.” And our media repeat his rhetoric so they can celebrate the American arsenal (equipped of course with Canadian components—yes Lori, I read that, too). (57)

As a young girl, Suzanne had “half-listened to the names that preoccupied” her mother and the other women waiting for the war to end so their own lives could begin again: “Changi, Burma, Geneva Code, dysentery. She didn’t know these names” (101). Now she hears more words for war. “Operation Desert Storm is underway and our papers are alive with threats

of terrorism. A new vocabulary has taken hold: Tomahawk cruise missiles and Stealth fighters, plague-laden warheads, a holy war” (19). But is this vocabulary new? ‘Tomahawks’ and ‘holy wars’ mark the bloody clash of colonial and religious aggression in other times, “this sense of the enemy again” (19).

The Gulf War on “the other (the same?) side of our world” (19) translates the relationship of Suzanne and Lori. Their preoccupation with the images of war on the television screen, edited to threads of the big picture and sound bites, seems to create another gulf between them, makes them feel irresponsible to curl their bodies around each other’s and let the days pass without “any consequence. The fatal idea of islands cut off from the main” (16): “the mainland, the mainstream, the main thing” (85). But Suzanne thinks it “is not this war that divides us. . . . It’s something further back in our own lives. Still unread” (81).

When Lori leaves to help her mother, and to be part of things that matter, Suzanne writes ‘her’, reaching for what is not ‘here’, across time to find Esme, across the world to Lori in ‘another here’:

Anxiety pushes me out of bed in the dark, to write her, reach her, bring her bodily out of nothing, which is not nothing because she is there, leaning against me on the other side of a thin membrane that separates, so thin we communicate, but not in words. I reach toward her with these half-truths, half-light fading into ordinary time and space. (21)

Esme waited for her husband, waiting for life to resume, but Suzanne’s world is not on hold, even as she writes Lori, as imagined dialogues with her lover play in her head. Her body remembers “the murmur, mer-mère” (“Booking Passage” in *Salvage* 117) of mother and child, the “nameless inter-being we began with” (*Taken* 21); the “[k]notting and unknotting” of lovers, “. . . our own foetal curl, soft gone and long gone, impossible to know where each of us ends” (15), the interbeing of mother and infant daughter played out again between lesbian lovers in their exploration of intimate geography. But with Suzanne and Lori, “the permeable bond between mother and daughter [is] being replayed with a whole lot of junk in it” (Marlatt 1997):

Even as i dream you, desire that bliss of total surrender, bliss at the dissolution of blockage—old wounds, the ones we tell over and over as if they were our selves. “You” escape, you other than my dreaming designs. I forget (are we always complicit?) that dreams are drawn to the blurred ideal each of us carries—home, the impossible place, love, the mother our own mothers, amid the urgent particulars of their lives, could never live up to. (96)

There is so much 'junk' that "the loss of Lori feels like the loss of everything" to Suzanne, but her relationship to the "sensual environment is almost as important a relationship for Suzanne as the relationship with Lori" (Marlatt 1997). Her body, the present, her body in the present, can give Suzanne a feeling of home without mental and emotional anxiety. The sensual floats, letting the images of otters who "live here with all the pleasure of beings who belong . . . sliding into water, their dark coats slicked back" (15) lap up against Suzanne while making love: "Knotting and unknotting ourselves by candlelight, i think of them even as we submerge in hunger searching out the soft parts, undoing nipples, lips with tongue talk . . ." (15)

Even as she makes love, Suzanne is thinking. Our propensity to constantly assess, compare, evaluate, and question; "can human beings ever feel at home?" (Marlatt 1997) It is this non-thinking, the envy of beings without words, that lets a narrative drift to find itself, not in the story line, or the rigid constraints of a particular genre, but in a flow of words which lets the body go, a narrative that is feeling its way through what is not known: the aquatic narrative dives and surfaces, replaying the past, surprised by the new in what has been before, letting the ear hear what the eye cannot see, and changing the rhythm of writing into a process at least as sensual as it is cerebral. As Marlatt describes it in "Writing Our Way Through the Labyrinth":

the labyrinth of language . . . requires an inner ear, a sensory organ i feel my way by (sentence, sentire, to feel), keeping my feet by a labyrinthine sense of balance as the currents of various meanings, the unexpected "drift," swirl me along. of course the labyrinth is filled with fluid, as the membranous labyrinth of the inner ear is, women know the slippery feel of language . . . (*Labyrinth* 33)

Words, worlds, lap against each other, and change the way we see them. In writing *Taken*, Marlatt sought to make meaning mobile, "trying to get as many different associations as possible" (Marlatt 1997), letting consonants shift and vowel sounds surprise, and moving words to new meaning by evoking images through different collocations and connotations. 'Taken' is played with, turned over and over, so that all its usages are found in the context of the novel. There is the nebulous meaning of 'taken' in the title⁶ and its crucial connections with photography; with capture and seduction; with giving; with the occupation of space; and the success of a seed. No meaning stands alone; the porous relationship between bodies is evident in the relationship of words, as well.

At the same time that she tosses in her useless bed, missing her absent lover, Suzanne is haunted by the images that place human activity in a wider

context: "The image of a greased cormorant struggling to lift itself from oil-thick waters in the Gulf of Bahrain repeats and repeats" (92). Just as the entwined lovers' bodies evoked the slick bodies of otters utterly in their element, Suzanne's thoughts move from the distress of oil-covered birds to ponder the loss of her own place in the arms of Lori: "how could the tenderness that soaked our skin have come to this?" (92)

Marlatt's narrative drift writes the interbeing of women's bodies, in the mother and in the "particular murmur" (Marlatt 1997) of the lesbian lover, as it writes a profound ecological consciousness, for if "dreams are narratives made of those words which arise from the flaming of things within us, their opposite is the poisoned world of the 'exploited earth'" (Weir 61). How does lesbian love and the sensual environment of body and nature make sense of human war? The distinctive construction of Suzanne's questions, "How put it together with the news we are occupied by, preoccupied" (15), and "How put together a narrative" (26), recalls the title/question of Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone*. In her discussion of Marlatt in *Body, Inc.: The Poetics of Translation*, Pamela Banting suggests that that title is a question as to "the possibility of embracing the family of ancestors and of replying to the wild heartbeat," that it asks "how we can deploy our bodies in relation to the physical world of which bodies are a part" (176). These issues seem to aptly apply as well to Suzanne's questions of how to connect writing, somatic memory, heterosexual history and lesbian love in a wholly present narrative.

"Where can we be if we aren't where we are, inside so many levels of connection" (86)? Wrapped in layers of other lives, the desire to be at home with 'where we are' is a thread of connection between the war in the Gulf and Suzanne's life on the island and the memory stored in tissue. Suzanne's yearning for an inner and outer geography of home is like the desire of

[m]igratory birds flying, whole flocks across the oil-slick in that other contested Gulf. Driven by homing desire past fire, through impenetrable smoke. While below them the bombing and the firing go on. (96)

These threads connect the reader with other writing in which Marlatt has posed the question, "[W]hat attaches her to the world?" and brought women's bodies, memory in the tissues, war, and exploited species together. In "Litter. wreckage. salvage" she writes:

. . . What matters, mattered
once has seeped away. like fluid from a cell, except she
keeps her walls intact, her tidal pool the small things of
her concern still swim alive alive-oh-

The salmon homing in this season, spring, the sewer out-falls upstream, oil slick, the deadly freight of acid rain—she reads the list of casualties in the ongoing war outside her door. (Salvage 15-16)

As she digs into the earth, planting lettuce seeds and thinking of the past, of Lori gone—“Lori has become one of her ghosts” (Marlatt 1977)—Suzanne simultaneously thinks of “death again, of burned bodies in desert sand.

Perhaps we don't deserve this place . . .

Perhaps thinking *that* is the problem . . . Perhaps we don't understand where we really are (109).

Too much thinking, and yet not enough. Marlatt is concerned with the thinking that gets in the way of being at home, as she is with the habitualization, the “assumptions the daily is grounded on, housed in” (113):

I think that we spend huge amounts of time in our daily life trying to forget everything except what immediately concerns us, because this is how we construct our inner narrative which allows us to be who we think we are. And we know far more than we think we know, than we allow ourselves to know. We carry all this stuff with us. (Marlatt 1997)

Suzanne cannot remember what was eaten at dinner the night before Lori's departure, and “this seems terribly important, like a sign i haven't read” (52), as a sign lost in the automatic, unconscious response of living every day.

We tend to prioritize our own lives, our individual futures, and to think of the past as finished, over and done with. Marlatt feels “it still present. And the consequences of that keep getting played out.” (Marlatt 1997) Sites of past and ongoing pain exist and affect all of us. The Gulf War; the bombing at Hiroshima; the lime pits and ovens of a concentration camp; the insidious colonization of a Native child in a residential school: these are not “elsewhere so much as another here” (111) that we do not recognize, and “what we cut off from us by cognitive amputation, comes back to haunt us” (113). The nameless narratives of suffering in war camps in the italicized passages within the novel tell us of women, taken, “*yes, but not completely*” (67), acquiring strategies for survival; learning new definitions of time and space, of family: “*your heart swells to hold this ragtag retinue lost somewhere in a mapless world*” (88). These stories of war, of women taken prisoner, are written here, not forgotten. But along with such human suffering, there are the circumstances of “an oil slick on a different gulf drift[ing] toward a herd of breeding sea cows soon to be forgotten, immaterial finally in the human struggle for dominance” (86).

If we cannot recognize the suffering of other human beings in our own

lives, our complicity in the creation of their stories, and theirs in ours—
 "We *are* complicit, yes" (130)—how difficult it is to imagine lives beyond
 our human ones. Indeed, how does one species of life understand another?
 "What do cat and deer make of each other?" (19), and what does either
 make of the speeding car, "this apocalyptic machine splitting their world for
 an instant" (19)? There are worlds beyond words, beyond human stories,
 and to recognize them is to situate one's life in an eco-system, "the largest
 sense of what we're involved in as living beings" (Marlatt 1997).

Marlatt recalls the profound sense of a system not built on a human scale
 that she encountered on a visit to Steveston:

First of all, you're standing on an island that's below sea-level so it's an incredibly
 liminal place between water and earth. But especially if you're standing there in
 the Spring, with the freshet pouring down the Fraser, you get an incredible sense
 of the power of that water moving out to the sea. (Marlatt 1997)

In *Steveston* (1974), she was trying to write that, to "imitate the flow of the
 river in long, long extended sentences,"⁷ writing "the motion of fluid
 space" (118) as Smaro Kamboureli describes it, but she "didn't have any the-
 ory for it then,"⁸ hence the attempt to rewrite those poems again in *Salvage*.
 Feminist theory familiarized Marlatt with the idea of foregrounding the
 background, of making present what was absent.

The unspoken of women's experience until recently was the background; it was
 what never was acknowledged. And now we've been making it the foreground,
 foregrounding it over and over again, so it's now visible. We can now recognize
 it. And we have all kinds of language for talking about it. But then what about the
 area that lies beyond the human? You know, the interdependency of all beings;
 the eco-system? (Marlatt 1997)

Narrative drift recognizes an ebb and flow in background and foreground,
 in the oscillating rhythms of reading and writing:

reading our world, we act upon it, are acted upon—inter/read, inter/act—receive
 the earth's reading of us, are netted in a context which we mime, which we are
 as, netting ourselves we encounter death. (Weir 62)

Language is mortal, too, Marlatt knows: it "generates itself & it dies, but it's
 all there in the body" (Interview by Bowering 60).

In *Taken*, Marlatt reaches for the language, for 'how put it together', a story
 profoundly present, yet pregnant with past and future, and with the inter-
 dependency of all living beings, of the energy of place. She writes "as an inhab-
 itant of language, not master, not even mistress" ("musing" 48) of discourse,

letting her attention drift, demonstrating for us a narrative in which, as Sue Ellen Campbell suggests in her essay, “The Land and Language of Desire,” “we pay attention not to the way things have meanings for us, but to the way the rest of the world—the nonhuman part—exists apart from us and our languages” (133); that the “systems of meanings that matter are ecosystems” (134).

To open ourselves to answers other than our own, to listen with our bodies and drift beyond cognition to the feeling of home in the skin: “the body being in its place”; to open our minds, and “take in everything around it without getting caught up within analysis” (Marlatt 1997): how does one position oneself to write that? Narrative drift is an immersion in the process of writing/loving. The sensation of a body in water is that of a body aware of its element. The differences Marlatt perceived between writing poetry and transparent prose can be applied to her narrative drift:

It’s like the difference between being land animals &—we don’t usually experience air, you know. We breathe in & we breathe out without being aware that we’re breathing any medium at all . . . Once we get into the water, which is a foreign element to us, we’re very aware of the difficulty of moving thru that element . . . You are aware that you are moving in an element, in a medium, & that there is a constant resistance to your moving forward. And that, in fact, any moving forward you make is thanks to that element that you’re moving in. So that language . . . writes the story as much as you do. (Interview by Bowering 62)

The medium rubs against the skin, is as tangible as the skin. Immersed, the body/text floats, drifts, aware of the support and the risk of this essential component of our inner and outer worlds. Slowing time down, slowing everything down, there is a rhythm writing against the pace of information. In wet, sensuous writing, ‘the interbeing we were born with’ is played out (again) in writing the woman reader here:

I want to write you here, translate you, into this fabulous air so drenched with the syllables of birds. I want to pour you into this bowl of misty half-light, everything merged, submerged. . . . (*Taken* 77)

This is writing in the threshold between breaths, where words give way to a sense of being home, in her element.

* * *

* For my title I have borrowed a phrase from Nicole Brossard who spoke of “a space to swim with the words” to describe her relationship with her translators, her active readers, who share a “network of minds, a connection of consciousness . . . in the way they posture themselves within language and in their relation to the act of writing.”

NOTES

- 1 This quotation is from one of two personal interviews with Daphne Marlatt which took place at her home in Victoria, BC, the first, in April 1996, and the second, from which this quotation is taken, on August 27, 1997. I thank Daphne Marlatt for permission to quote from these interviews. I also gratefully acknowledge the participation of Mitoko Hirabayashi at both interviews. I thank Steve Cornwell for his careful transcriptions.
- 2 I thank Carolyn Guertin for bringing this quotation to my attention.
- 3 Indeed, as Carolyn Guertin so persuasively argues in her paper, "Gesturing Toward the Visual: Virtual Reality, Hypertext and Embodied Feminist Criticism," "Using our bodies to reorganize our thoughts as critics, we need to reinsert our proprioceptive sense and our material awareness of the body. . . . [W]e as critics must plug ourselves back into the territories of the unspeakable that our artists are exploring by using the same narrational and navigational tools."
- 4 From a letter following the 1997 interview, dated September 2, 1997.
- 5 From "On Distance and Identity: Ten Years Later," the afterword to the Longspoon edition of *Steveston*, 92.
- 6 The novel's working title was *Taken By Surprise* but was shortened to increase its mobility, its mutility: "I wanted all those usages of 'taken' to be played out in the context of the novel" (Marlatt 1997).
- 7 From an interview with Ellea Wright, quoted in Smaro Kamboureli's *On the Edge of Genre* 118.
- 8 Marlatt discusses her introduction to theory in her interview with Williamson (Interview 182-3).

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For Phyllis in Hospital 2

& courage, a kind of gallantry
that goes along with men on horseback & walrus mustaches.

Like your husband, when you first met him
at the ranch. The bustle & ruckus of packing for upcoast.

Women in aprons buckling down
to the serious business of feast-making;

anointing salmon with garlic & lemon, making potato
salad & chocolate mousse for beloved company.

Mornings, it is picnic weather, summer when sun
on the cloudless mountains is the beginning of the world;

seawater around your island is green
& the *hish hish* of waves is a friend beckoning us on

to adventures. There are no bears on the beaches.
They are high

up the mainland slopes eating early berries
& in the garden at home

the clematis vine is studded with fat, lightly-perfumed
buds that are just about to open.

The waking

one morning—
it may have been in
april, perhaps november—
we found we no longer were
the people we'd started
out to be

your hand
at the window
traced circles in the frost
until the world revealed
itself to us, naked
as we'd been

the bird
tangled in blue branches
ruffled its feathers
in your throat, singing
something we only half
remembered

and the dream
of a shape we might
still take shone
in the porcelain sky, a dream
to be had
for the waking

Daryl Hine at the Beach

In one of the few articles ever written on Daryl Hine, Robert K. Martin says that “[o]ne of the ironies of Canada’s intellectual life is that the greatest Canadian poets are often unknown or disliked in their own country” (“Coming Full Circle” 60). We can see what Martin means if we consider Carl F. Klinck’s categorical statement in a standard reference work from 1976 that “[i]n no respect whatever is Daryl Hine’s poetry ‘Canadian’” (324). By that point, Hine had lived outside Canada for well over ten years. But even as early as 1961, when Hine still lived in Canada, Louis Dudek had taken him to task for deviationist tendencies:

[Hine’s] kind of poetry—however admirable it may seem—contains a peculiar vice of “this age of hard-trying”: a desire to excel in some direction completely irrelevant to poetry, an excess setting art above ordinary men and even ordinary poets, a kind of culture-mania that began in 1910, but that in Canada we associate with Toronto. (23)

Clearly, it is not enough for poetry to seem admirable. Poetry should be at the level of ordinary men, a level which is even below that of ordinary poets. Canadian poetry is ideally something done by poets for their intellectual inferiors, and Dudek feels that Hine’s vice prevents his poetry from being fit for mass consumption.

One of the assumptions behind Dudek’s review is that Canadian poetry should always be tied to landscape. Poetry not rooted in the soil will fall victim to the culture-mania which has already devoured Toronto. Dudek fought energetically against what he saw as the cultural elitism of the

Canadian poetry of his day and he accused various poets of various things. In the case of Hine, the crucial word is "vice." We can use Martin's study of the attacks on Patrick Anderson as a way to interpret this talk of peril, infection, and impurity in reference to Hine's work. Martin has shown how Dudek and others were ultimately so successful in promoting a vision of Canadian poetry as manly and as distinct from high Modernism that Anderson is now barely acknowledged as a Canadian poet ("Sex and Politics"; see especially 118-19). Dudek's latent homophobia is more obvious in his comments on Anderson than in the article on Hine, but in both cases his strategy is to present the things which make him uncomfortable—a connection with international modernism and a clear, if hardly explicit, homoeroticism—as betrayals of the Canadian ideal. In *Homographesis*, Lee Edelman points out that homosexuals are traditionally considered inauthentic people and that their sophistication is therefore seen as false "sophistication," a term which

for nearly a century, has been to the homophobic designation of gay men what "cosmopolitanism" has been to the anti-Semitic designation of Jews: the label by which they are stigmatized as posing a threat to the natural order through their embodiment of an urbanity that counterintuitively calls the natural into question. (227)

Without perhaps consciously sharing these homophobic assumptions, critics have tended to follow Dudek's lead in appealing to regionalism as a way to define and confine Canadian poetry and sophistication, under a variety of names, as a way of stigmatizing what is seen as inauthentic. A Canadian poem is supposed to be typical of the metropolitan region in which it is produced: virility for Montreal, culture for Toronto, and, I suppose, trees for Vancouver. A related, if more subtle, view of what Canadian poetry should be was set out by A.J.M. Smith in the *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* the year before Dudek's review appeared. There are three poems by Hine in this anthology; because of the year of Hine's birth his are the last poems in the book. In his introduction, Smith says that "whatever else it may be Canadian poetry is and always has been a record of life in the new circumstances of a northern transplantation" (xxiv). Smith ignores the fact that many Canadians were born in Canada rather than being transplanted and that many are transplanted to other parts of Canada or North America; he goes on to talk about two kinds of Canadian poetry, the second of which is linked to international Modernism: "The danger for the second

group was to be merely literary" (xxiv). More discreet than Dudek, Smith speaks of danger rather than vice, but the point is similar: verse which is modernist or cultured or, heaven forbid, literary may lose the right to call itself Canadian.

In her revision of the Oxford anthology in 1982, Margaret Atwood also included three poems by Hine, including "Point Grey," to which I shall return. Like Smith, Atwood sees the Canadian landscape itself as *fons et origo* of Canadian poetry; the poems in her anthology "record the collision between a particular language and a certain environment, each of which has affected the other" (xxvii). Any activity is displaced from the poetry itself, which becomes a passive recorder, like a tourist's slides of Niagara Falls or Lake Louise. Towards the end of her introduction, Atwood sums up her philosophy of the connection between poetry and landscape: "Of all the art-forms, poetry—rooted as it is in the inescapably concrete, both in images and in verbal usage—is the least easily translatable from place to place as well as from language to language" (xxxix). Atwood's dictum does not allow for poems which are, so to speak, rooted in rootlessness, poems which deal with dislocation and with not belonging and, most importantly for my purposes, poems which present dislocation and not belonging as desirable and good. While both Atwood and Smith are distinguished poets and critics, the definitions of Canadian poetry which they and the many critics who follow them promote (with widely varying levels of subtlety) leave out too much. With the laudable aim of identifying the distinctive qualities of Canadian poetry, the most famous and influential critics of our country have tended to impose a rather unappealing and restrictive orthodoxy.

One way to escape these generally unhelpful definitions is to leave Canada altogether, as Hine did. For the few American critics who have written on Hine, as for Americans in general, Canada is irrelevant. For them, Hine is really an American poet. For instance, at the beginning of a discussion on Hine, Richard Howard dismisses British Columbia as "that Boreal accommodation" (174). J.D. McClatchy speculates on the neglect of Hine in the United States: "his talents and achievements have been ignored not because he is considered a 'Canadian poet'; even if such a category can be invoked it is a matter of geography, not of sensibility or ambition" (167). What McClatchy means is obviously that Hine's Canadian qualities are *merely* "a matter of geography." The regional classifications of Canadian literary studies are swept away and replaced by the larger distinction of

American/not American, which is perhaps as far as American critics are interested in going. Although both Howard and McClatchy make many excellent points about Hine's poetry, I think something is lost in ignoring or being unaware of the fact that Hine is not just another American on whose national origins it would be unconstitutional to dwell. Even after Hine moved to the United States in the 1960s he continued to write frequently about the country in which he grew up.

I

For me, the aspect of Hine's poetry which deals with Canada is inextricably linked to the aspect of his poetry which deals with homosexuality. Unfortunately, Hine's reception as a gay poet has not been significantly better than his reception as a Canadian one. There are no poems by Hine in Stephen Coote's influential anthology of gay verse for Penguin, for instance, and no mention of Hine in St James Press's recent reference work on gay and lesbian literature. Examples of Hine's neglect by specialists in gay studies could easily be multiplied, perhaps partly because the critics seem to have been baffled by Hine's treatment of sexuality. Klinck remarks that

A good deal of erotic behaviour seems to be going on, or to have been going on—satiety and remorse are two discernible moods in a few of the poems—and the words “vice” and “lust” recur as words; but syntax and imagery combine to veil from the reader exactly what is happening. (325)

Even Robert K. Martin appears to be unable to lift the veil: “There are gay themes in almost all his work . . . but these are generally discreet and, in any case, ‘literary’” (“Coming Full Circle” 69). I would say that all the themes in Hine's poetry, and particularly in his early poetry, are handled in a way which is discreet and literary. This may well be the problem: gay critics tend to like open and explicit sexuality, at least in literature.

The clearest example of critical refusal to appreciate Hine as a gay poet is demonstrated in Douglas Chambers' article on Canadian literature in English for *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage*. Hine does not measure up to Chambers' standards of gay poetry. Chambers contrasts him with Edward Lacey, who is not “constrained, as Hine often is, by the traditional forms his poems often take, and his risks are sometimes full of juicy joy. ‘“Wanna get sucked off?” he said; is better than prosy melancholy” (139). By contrast, in his article on Hine for the same work of reference, Patrick Holland sees him as one of the poets who “have given serious homosexual poetry a place in

the mainstream of American poetry” (365). Here again, though, Hine is classified as an American. Holland tells us that “[a]s an intensely literary poet with enviable classical learnedness, Hine’s affiliations are with the gay American formalists Richard Howard and James Merrill, rather than with any Canadian school of poets” (364). Unfortunately, Holland is probably right, but Hine’s lack of affiliation with Canadian poets should not disqualify him from being considered Canadian.

The poem which Chambers describes as characterized by “prosy melancholy” is “Point Grey,” from Hine’s 1968 collection *Minutes*. I want to use this poem and two others from the book (“August 13, 1966” and “Among Islands”) to show that Hine’s poetry can be both unmistakably Canadian and unmistakably gay (if not perhaps up to the standard of “juicy joy”). In order to do so, I shall use the theories of W.H. New and M. Travis Lane, who seem to me be to the most helpful of the critics who have attempted to define the role of geography in Canadian literature. New’s comments come from an article which asks a number of questions: “Is B.C. literature something happening in B.C.? or something B.C. people understand about themselves and their relation with the rest of Canada, the rest of the world? or something others perceive about people and life in B.C.? or all three?” (“A Piece of the Continent” 3) At the end of his article, he sums up his findings:

I have referred to the function of B.C. in others’ eyes as periphery, as playground, and as paradise; I have mentioned the tense relations between local aspirations for social propriety and an equally strong impulse to celebrate the wilderness; I have alluded to the mythological underpinnings of cultural attitude and to real socioeconomic inequalities, and I have implied a contrast between the prophet’s promise of absolute order and the trickster’s offer of a temporary balance. (“A Piece of the Continent” 27-28)

All three of the poems I shall discuss take place in British Columbia, in settings which could be considered paradisiacal: “Among Islands” in the Strait of Georgia and “August 13, 1966” and “Point Grey” on the beaches around Point Grey which have been for decades a place where men go to have sex with each other—both paradise and playground. Perhaps the most relevant part of New’s summary is the contrast between absolute order and temporary balance. These poems of Hine’s celebrate temporary balance: the speaker’s intimate connection with the unknown men with whom he has sex and with the landscape in which he is not quite a tourist, but certainly not a resident.

In her article, Lane proposes replacing regional considerations with formal ones (179). The fourth kind of poem she proposes—the self-displaying

lyric—fits the poems of Hine's which I discuss. In fact, it does so literally, as two of these poems take place on beaches. Lane says that this kind of lyric explores "the poet/persona/self in its relation to something outside the self"; the "something outside" may include family and local history; nature; mythic archetypes or literary precedents; and sexual identity (188). As I read them, Hine's poems do all of these things. All the poems are set in British Columbia, where Hine grew up; all take place in natural settings; all celebrate casual sexual encounters. In other words, all these poems engage the typically Canadian theme of the relationship of human beings to the landscape in which they find themselves. One of the distinctive aspects of Hine's poems is his choice of natural environment. In these poems, he reminds us that waterways through resort areas and a beach in a suburb of a major city are as close as most Canadians get to the forest primeval or the frozen tundra beloved of anthologists and critics.

I want now to return briefly to Dudek, Smith, and Atwood. These critics provide a useful starting-point for my analysis and suggest ways in which Hine can be seen to be working in Canadian traditions after all. Dudek's comments rest on the familiar opposition between culture and nature. Hine does not reject this opposition altogether: his point is rather that we cannot know nature except through culture. This point is emphasized by his choices of setting. To begin with, in the highly urbanized southern part of British Columbia, nature has to be officially designated as such in order to protect it from urban sprawl and in order to market it for the purposes of the tourist industry: ultimately, nature is that which is not urban. The settings of the poem—the beaches which are easily accessible from suburban neighbourhoods and the ferry which takes tourists from town to town through the Strait of Georgia—are situated on the boundary between nature and culture. Moreover, the culture we find in these poems is not simply or even primarily high culture (like, for instance, the international Modernism which Smith saw as a danger to Canadian poetry) but rather culture in its widest sense of the arrangements by which we live: the schedules of our working lives, which occasionally give us the leisure to become consumers of nature, family groups, the etiquette which governs meetings between strangers, and the place names with which we organize nature.

Smith called Canadian poetry "a record of life in the new circumstances of a northern transplantation." Hine modifies this statement to show that the transplantation is a process that is endlessly repeated, and his interest in

these poems is with transplantation on an individual level, rather than with grand narratives of *coureurs de bois*, fur traders, and farmers. The cultural and economic practices I have mentioned do not occur once and for all: they recur in different forms at different times and, of course, different people experience these practices differently. I have chosen "Among Islands," "August 13, 1966," and "Point Grey" partly because they deal with various kinds of transplantation: of humans into nature, of the city-dweller into the country, of the gay man into public space. Thinking of transplantation as ongoing and as occurring on an individual level as well as on a collective one gives us another way to understand Atwood's comment that Canadian poems "record the collision between a particular language and a certain environment." We can take the particular language in this case as Hine's idiolect, a form of English used by a man who is gay and Canadian and a poet and who finds himself in an environment. This environment is simultaneously an area officially designated as nature and, more generally, the heterosexual world in which we all live. Written at the very beginning of the liberalization of the laws governing sexual behaviour, these poems show how gay men, in their collisions with each other and with the heterosexual world which surrounds them, have been able to make certain areas of public space their own, whether temporarily, as in the encounter on the ferry in "Among Islands" or in a more lasting fashion, as with the beaches in the other poems.¹

II

I shall begin with "Among Islands," which takes place on a ferry going through the Gulf Islands near Vancouver. The poem begins with a contrast between permanency and transience: while "The ferry is at home among the islands" (1),

We are exiles everywhere we go
Stranded upon the veranda, castaways
In the family living room. (3-5)

The family is not invoked as an image of intimacy or permanence and the space controlled by the family is not a refuge. The speaker and his male companion—are "stranded" as in a shipwreck between indoors and outdoors. The conventional idea of the family as a haven is further undermined when the men imagine that they were begotten "In haste and shame" (24) by people who were

like two floating islands
That clashed perhaps in ecstasy and parted
Leaving behind a continent of self. (26-28)

Here heterosexual sex is presented as casual and impermanent. The state of being an island, of not being "a piece of the continent," is the basic condition of humanity, a point suggested by Hine's epitaph for the poem: "Fratrum quoque gratia rara est" (Mutual regard is rare even among brothers). This line from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* refers to the breakdown of familial and affectionate bonds in the Iron Age. In the world of the poem, as in the Iron Age, the relationships which are supposed to be lasting and meaningful have ceased to function, and any affection, any "gratia," however impermanent, is valuable. In the context of the poem, this point of view would apply both to the manner in which the men imagine they were begotten and to their own coming together. The brief clash of ecstasy—or collision—is the highest good.

Hine shows how the speaker of the poem and his companion work out their desires and their connection as they move through the waters on the ferry and, in a parallel motion, through what would appear to be an entirely casual and meaningless meeting between two men in the process of going from one place to another. All three of the poems by Hine I wish to discuss take place in public, but while "August 13, 1966" and "Point Grey" take place on beaches (that is, in spaces which are traditionally seen as erotic and which are devoted to leisure), "Among Islands" is firmly situated in public space. The family home which is the poem's backdrop is generally held to be the centre or basis of society as a whole, but it is there that the men are "castaways"; for them, and for many gays, the interstices in which everyone is out of place provide the basis for a gay sense of belonging. "Among Islands" demonstrates that it is in the lack of regulation and in the fluidity of relations among people who are not at home that gays can create a space for themselves in what may be a hostile environment.

The appropriation of landscape for one's own uses in a journey is similar to the appropriation of language for one's own uses: language itself may be transformed by the individual. In "Among Islands," this transformation begins with place names. The speaker describes himself as "Natural where I am affected / And strangely moved by the very names of islands" (15-16). The names of the islands among which the ferry travels are "Created as the Word was out of nothing" (21). In "Among Islands," the names of the

islands are arbitrary: they are not organically part of the islands. The names exist as a way of measuring our passage from one place to another. By extension, the same is true of language itself and of personal names. When the speaker says he is natural where he is affected, he refers to the impossibility, in a world of arbitrary names, of knowing what the real individual or island is: rather than nature (the thing itself), he has only culture (the name given to the thing). The speaker implies that nature is itself a form of affectation and that it is in being affected by someone that real identity lies, whether the person who affects us is part of our lives on dry land or not. The referents for proper names (actual people or places) exist only in relation to other referents. For this reason, real names are merely a convenience and are not important in the context of the poem: "We respected the fiction of each other's names" (55). The names may be fictional because the men have given what are conventionally called false names or they may be fictional because even the name given one by one's parents is arbitrary; in other words, all names are false names. What matters is the nature of the passage, the intersection of two trajectories.

Hine is not simply referring to the use of an alias here. He is implying that even a real name is a sort of alias. This is especially significant when we remember that Daryl is not his first name anyway, as he was christened William Daryl Hine. In his autobiography, *In & Out*, Hine speaks of taking the name Thomas when he was baptised as a Catholic as an undergraduate:

the first I'd already suppressed
about puberty, liking my second
or middle name better. (44)

He makes it clear that Thomas never really took, and that everyone calls him Daryl. Or almost everyone:

till this day my own family won't
go along with me; only at "home"
am I known to the natives as William. (44)

Hine's discussion of his names in *In & Out* provides us with a way to interpret Hine's names symbolically (as he himself does): William is associated with his family and with childhood; Daryl with the beginning of sexuality; and Thomas with his attempts, in his late teens and early twenties, to give up his homosexuality. Hine's point in "Among Islands" about the arbitrary nature of names is literally true of himself: a name is always a fiction, even if it is the name by which one appears in, for instance, library catalogues.

Of course, learning someone's name is conventionally the beginning of acquaintance; like other forms of learning, this kind ends ignorance. But in this poem, Hine praises ignorance:

You can do anything
With that which you do not know, what you possess
Like the gifts of the gods, unknowing. Islands,
Sunny, south, pacific islands float
Upon a cloudy sea of ignorance;
And that mysterious love which has given us
Everything asks nothing in return. (38-44)

The two men among islands float free of the facts anchoring us in a world characterized by suffering and exclusion: "That August afternoon you told me nothing / And I asked you no questions" (52-53). Because of his ignorance of the facts, including his companion's name, the speaker is able to name the relationship however he chooses: "So welcome, brother" (39). The poem ends with an idyllic picture of the two men

Leaning in a fraternal silence on
The railing of the ferry, guest, companion
Side by side, cruising among islands. (56-58)

The impermanence of the connection between the two men is brought out by the pun on "cruising." Hine reminds us that the two are on a boat and their journey together will end. As well, the men are cruising in the sense of looking for new encounters. But their connection is a real one: Hine presents chance encounters as something which makes up for the absence of any serious connection in those relationships, such as familial ones, which are supposed to be our natural sources of affection and intimacy; the parallel in the landscape is that the islands—seen from a ferry during a vacation—are better than the mainland. Part of their superiority lies in the fact that there are many of them while there is only one mainland. The multiplicity of islands can be seen as offering almost unlimited opportunities for new encounters.

"August 13, 1966" is a title which could easily serve as the caption for just the sort of tourist photograph Canadian poetry is expected to imitate. But there is a tension between the blandly precise title and the opaque, allusive nature of what is actually going on in the poem. The unnamed speaker meets a unnamed and beautiful man on an unnamed beach:

Emerging from the naked labyrinth
Into the golden habit of the day,

Glittering with sweat, a wrestler
 With the sun, in his fierce palaestra,
 Every drop an angel and a man. (1-5)

Although the beach is not named, some of the details in the poem and its similarity to “Point Grey” suggest that Hine intends to invoke Wreck Beach or one of the other beaches at the foot of the cliffs around Point Grey. In that case, the labyrinth could be the network of paths where men go to have sex; Hine strengthens the sexual association by describing the labyrinth as naked. By contrast, the man, who is naked (as Greek wrestlers were in the palaestra), is described as being clothed in “the golden habit of the day.” This recalls Oscar Wilde’s description—as reported by Frank Harris—of athletes at the ancient Olympic Games as “nude, clothed only in sunshine and beauty” (146). The men are in a place where clothes are superfluous and nakedness is entirely appropriate. The sense that the man belongs to the landscape is emphasized by Hine’s description of him as both human and angelic, both an actual man and a sort of *genius loci*, sex with whom will provide a spiritual connection between the speaker and the beach and will collapse the dichotomy between nature and culture.

As the poem progresses, the speaker replaces the landscape as the focus of attention: “You stop before the simple backdrop, look / And listen not to the abstract ocean but to me” (7-8). But the landscape is not merely superseded; rather, it is incorporated into the encounter: “At our backs the breakers serially / Beat a tattoo upon the flat-bellied beach” (9-10). The beach is metaphorically equated with the desired human body, and the motion of the waves is like a series of lovers moving upon that body. This motion is a tattoo, at once fetishistic decoration and military display. In the latter sense, it recalls the image of the man as a wrestler. Both war and wrestling are acceptable ways for men to have physical contact with each other; in the world of the poem, these kinds of collision become sexual rather than hostile. The action of the human sphere—the two men together—and the action of the natural sphere—the waves and the sea—come together in a harmonious whole. What is typical of the collection *Minutes* as a whole is that the harmony, like musical harmony itself, is temporary, as the ending of the poem shows: “Meanwhile we sit absorbed and precious to each / Other, for the time being where we want to be” (13-14). The line break underscores the temporariness of the connection, but as this temporariness is equated with the serial nature of the waves themselves it represents an equivalence between humans and the landscape they inhabit.

“Point Grey,” one of Hine’s best known poems, names its setting, although even this naming is ambiguous. Point Grey is a cape and a neighbourhood, but the poem clearly takes place on the beaches at the end of the cape. The poem begins with the speaker’s taking advantage of “The first fine day . . . in months” (4) to walk down the cliffs to the beach: “Reflecting as I went on landscape, sex and weather” (6). These are the three main themes of this poem and of *Minutes* as a whole (the stress on the uncertainty of the weather certainly seems authentically British Columbian). One of the differences between this poem and “August 13, 1966” is that “Point Grey” initially deals with these themes in a less philosophical way, as we see when the speaker reaches the beach:

I met a welcome wonderful enough
 To exorcise the educated ghost
 Within me. No, this country is not haunted,
 Only the rain makes spectres of the mountains. (7-10)

The welcome can be seen both as a sexual act and as the open view of water and mountains. It is the official sign that he has passed from an intellectual world to one in which the tension between mind and body ceases. A metaphysical problem is seen, in a strikingly accurate description, to be a natural phenomenon: it is the mountains that are ghosts, if only in the rain. This image leads Hine to explore the educated ghost’s point of view. To him, the mountains raise the problem “of living and the pain it causes” (13) and lead him to the gloomy hypothesis that “the air we breathe is mortal / And dies, trapped, in our unfeeling lungs” (14-15). The idea here is that the usual human relation to landscape is characterized by hostility and the inability to understand the landscape intellectually.

After this, Hine returns to the welcome. The disjunction between humans and nature can be remedied by the fortunate and fortuitous connection of landscape, sex, and weather:

Not too distant the mountains and the morning
 Dropped their dim approval on the gesture
 With which enthralled I greeted all this grandeur. (16-18)

The speaker’s gesture is a sexual act which is also a recognition of and response to the natural beauty of the setting, and, of course, that natural beauty includes both the beach itself and the men who go to it. The fact that the mountains approve of the gesture indicates that, as in “August 13, 1966,” a balance, which, as the reference to “morning” suggests, is temporary, has

been reached between the man and the environment. And as in "August 13, 1966" where the speaker meets a man who is angelic as well as human, this balance is partly spiritual:

Beside the path, half buried in the bracken,
 Stood a long-abandoned concrete bunker,
 A little temple of lust, its rough walls covered
 With religious frieze and votary inscription. (19-22)

To the sexually charged gaze of the speaker, the dilapidated bunker and the obscene graffiti which cover it are imbued with a transcendental sexuality. The reference is to a series of concrete bunkers at the foot of the cliffs which were built as emplacements during the Second World War. As in "August 13, 1966," hostile encounters between men become sexual.

In the final stanza of the poem, Hine returns to philosophical contemplation. At this point, however, he is more precise. The general problem of lines 11-13 has become specific:

Personally I know no one who doesn't suffer
 Some sore of guilt, and mostly bedsores, too,
 Those that come from itching where it scratches
 And that dangerous sympathy called prurience. (23-26)

Guilt, Hine suggests, is our natural condition. He puns on the etymology of prurience (from the Latin *prurio*, I itch) and reverses the traditional cliché about scratching where it itches in order to stress that sexual guilt does not require sexual action: the mere existence of sexual urges is enough to make us feel guilty. To scratch where it itches can be defended as natural behaviour, but if even the urges we cannot control are sources of guilt, as in fact they are in the Christian tradition, there would appear to be no hope. The speaker appears to have been possessed once again by his educated ghost.

And yet in the temporary paradise of the beach there is hope after all:

But all about release and absolution
 Lie, in the waves that lap the dirty shingle
 And the mountains that rise at hand above the rain. (27-29)

This release is both sexual fulfilment and a state of forgiveness, as the word absolution suggests. The release and absolution come from the landscape, which is once again sexualized: the waves lap the beach and the mountains, now clearly visible, rise with phallic potency above the rain. Sexuality, sacredness, and the perception of landscape merge in the experience of being at the beach: "Though I had forgotten it could be so simple, / A beauty of sorts is nearly always within reach" (30-31). Chambers calls this a "bloodless

reflection" (139) and, in *Articulating West*, New feels that the ending "affirms plaintively" the presence of a beauty which is only "of sorts' and there only for the moment" (151). What I have tried to show is that the temporariness of the beauty the poet finds—the fact that it is a collision rather than a permanent transplantation—is something which he treasures. It is only too easy to overrate the joys of permanence.

The educated ghost who turned the landscape and his place in it into complex philosophical issues now sees the simplicity of things: his relation to nature and to his sexuality can happily be combined in the setting of the beach. This sense of combination is reflected in the poem's title, as Point Grey is the name both of the geographical feature where the beach is located and of the neighbourhood above the beach. By giving this title to his poem—as opposed to calling it "Wreck Beach," for instance—Hine is perhaps being discreet, but he is also establishing a connection between the prosperous suburb at the top of the cliffs and the cruising ground at the bottom. The relation between the two could be seen as an opposition between culture (the suburb) and nature (the beach), which would literally be an opposition between high and low; Hine presents it instead as continuity. In his choice of settings for these three poems, Hine insists on the connection between humans and the landscape in which they live and through which they have made roads like the path which leads to the beach or the ferry route that takes people on holiday from the city to the cottage. The beauty of landscape and of sex and of weather, to return to the speaker's reflections at the beginning of "Point Grey," is within reach, just as the mountains are at hand. At the beach, sexuality and nature can be experienced simultaneously and ratiocination gives place, for a time, to physical activity. Hine's poems celebrate the fusion of the Canadian landscape and gay male sexuality in an unprecedented way, and if the conjunction of these things can only be achieved "nearly always," that is perhaps the most that can be hoped for in a climate so uncertain.

NOTES

- 1 For a discussion of this topic in an urban context, see Chauncey.

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Berlin

1. The battles have passed.
The holes, however—the holes they have made remain.

Emptiness—not vacuity—remains.
Berlin is nothing . . . nothing if not world capital of holes.
2. On the holes, therefore,
has fallen the work of filling—of fulfillment.

Shadow fills the holes, and sometimes lamplight,
and sometimes the lamps of dawn and dusk.
3. In a Museum in Berlin
you can see the Gates of Babylon,
the Gates of Babylon sacred to the Goddess Ishtar,
the very gates over which great King Nebuchadnezzar ruled.

Shrapnel and shells have pocked the massive masonry
of that Museum.

We only do what the Babylonians did.
They found their pleasure, and they died.

It is true that King Nebuchadnezzar
suffered at last from a strange ailment.
Lycanthropy.

He found he had four legs after all.
4. Berliners have learned to make
windows out of wounds.

It keeps things in perspective.

What you cannot—that's precisely
what you can take with you.

Gather it into your arms as a pigeon
draws the great ghost of the sky to its side
though itself nondescript.

How it glitters, glitters, glitters on the heights.

5. So we ask: What are our eyes but holes?
Shattered, even before they open,
with the exigencies of sense.

Ruin alone has receptivity.

6. An absence is the best nest for absences,
likewise for the children of truant graves.

Yet from today's broken shell the blackbird
blossoms with the old dusky song. .
Here is elsewhere, elsewhere is here
is the dusky old song the blackbird sings.

7. All that the dead souls have left is what they do not have—
their breath,
that dome wherein the clouds, the gold, the pigeons glide.

Every speech, every curse is ceded to the birds as air,
for music's sake, in oblivious perpetuity.

8. Puncture remains, in the nature of things,
the only means of breathing;
through holes alone we sustain ourselves.

For souvenirs we pack away holes on holes
that glitter like goldleaf of the wind
in the blue-smoking sun—

the sun daily atop its victory column,
the sun that is night's hopelessly radiant monument.

Transgressive Sexualities in the Reconstruction of Japanese Canadian Communities

In what literary critics have come to call the field of Asian American writing,¹ Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* has earned a place as a "major Canadian novel" (Harris 1996 155). Academics have interpreted *Obasan* as evidence of high Romance (Goody 1988), elegy (Merivale 1988), historiographic metafiction (Goellnicht 1988-89), Lacanian psycholinguistics (Magnusson 1988), women's fiction (Howells 1987), the Kristevan abject (Jones 1990); and, according to Mason Harris (1996), documentary novel, immigrant literature, and "the great Nisei² novel," to name only a few readings. These interpretations agree that the desire in *Obasan*—more specifically, the frustrated sexual longing of Naomi, the novel's unmarried, celibate, and childless middle-aged narrator—represents either Naomi's separation from her mother, or from her own fully actualized self, or both. These critics also agree that healing comes to Naomi with the knowledge of her mother's injuries and ultimate death from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. That is, this *dénouement* settles the matter of Naomi's frustrated and wounded desire.

This popular analysis of *Obasan* has led critics to view Kogawa's subsequent novel, *Itsuka*, as overtly political and, *therefore*, lacking any sustained exploration of desire (Harris 1996; Persky 1992; Shahani and Shahani 1997). Harris, for example, makes Naomi's desire an impossible topic for *Itsuka* by reading the novel as a "public affirmation" of the "psychological resolution" he observes in *Obasan* (194). Understanding that the implied ascetic public and political spheres are paramount in *Itsuka* leaves readers facing a prickly choice: either over-interpret or overlook the desire on the page.

This tradition of reading sociological significance into texts by “minority” writers has made it quite easy for readers to imagine overt connections between desire and political context where none exists. Such imagining may be happening with *Itsuka*. For instance, the relationship between Naomi and the multi-ethnic Father Cedric may well be a metaphor for “the multicultural ideal” (Shahani and Shahani 1997 88). However, individuals might misread this relationship because they find the representation of desire in the midst of a political context to be “self-indulgent” (Lim 1990). It is also possible that some readers do not recognize Nikkei³ women writers’ representations of desire.

Historical accounts and sociological analyses of Nikkei social realities have generally constructed “the Japanese Canadian woman” in terms of this imaginary individual’s performance in the roles of wife and mother (Ito 1994; Takata 1983; Adachi 1976; Young and Reid 1939). Sexuality defines the terms of this “heteronormative” representation (Ting 1998). Yet sexuality, the corollary of desire, has always been an unspoken component of the image. Moreover, the insistence on the maternal Japanese woman disallows any desire that is inconsistent with the heteronormative framework. In spite of their real and common existence in Nikkei social life, Nikkei women whose desire transgresses the boundaries of faithful, monogamous heterosexuality have thus been un(der)represented in Nikkei discourse, appearing mainly in textual shadows. A recent challenge in the critical approach to texts by Canadian Nikkei is that Nikkei women have begun writing frankly about transgressive desire in the constructions of lesbian sexualities. My essay takes up this challenge as an invitation to begin destabilizing the discourse of Nikkei (hetero)sexuality.

I approach the topic of transgressive desire from a feminist standpoint that considers the categories of sexuality, gender, and desire to be the discursive effects of institutional practices (Butler 1987 & 1990; Scott 1988). A thoroughgoing approach to transgressive desire requires a substantial examination of the exclusionary processes of heteronormativity. What concrete cultural practices reflect and produce disciplinary heterosexual processes? How have these processes constructed the gendered bodies of Nikkei women as natural and inevitable carriers of heterosexual desire? With Butler, I am concerned to explore the political possibilities raised by the critique of foundational categories. I turn, then, to Nikkei women’s critique of “female” desire as a way of introducing the accumulation of performative

acts (Butler 1990) that have, over time constituted the bodies of “Japanese Canadian women.”

Nikkei women have been writing in private all along.⁴ However, the published textual self only began circulating in earnest in 1981, the year Joy Kogawa published her novel, *Obasan*. Thus, when writers from the dominant Canadian culture were already questioning the autonomous self, marginalized writers were just constructing her. For Kogawa (and her contemporaries who began publishing in the 1990s), entrenched stereotypes of the silent, submissive, “Asian” woman meant that writing for a public was immediately a counter-discursive act. Less than a decade ago, Shirley Geok-lin Lim (1990) observed, “Why they [Asian women] write is a mystery because their readers are still marvelling at the fact that they write at all . . .” (153).

For Canadian Nikkei women, marginalized in the dominant society by ideas of race and gender, the textual construction of transgressive sexuality carries particular risks:

Within the JC [Japanese Canadian] community, pressures are present which deny my existence. They are subtle but destructive all the same. ‘Japanese and gay? Not possible. Who ever heard of that?’ Under such constraints it becomes almost impossible for a Japanese person to explore sexuality issues. (Mochizuki 13)

The invisibility engendered by this denial may lead to a critical practice that classifies this emergent writing as idiosyncratic, an alternative view too easily marginalized again.

One way of refusing to repeat this marginalization in criticism is to make multiple sexualities relevant to the whole of Nikkei experience. In “Maiden Voyage: Excursion into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America,” Dana Takagi counsels scholars not to consider that the theoretical job has been done once the voices of lesbian writers have been added to the body of Asian American literature: “. . . the topic of sexualities ought to be envisioned as a means, not an end to theorizing about the Asian American experience” (10). Here Takagi is emphasizing the importance of process. However, her advice also parallels the concern that women’s experiences be added to history as a compensatory act, and as part of the process of changing the way in which history is regarded, recorded, and interpreted. Women must not only write, says Cixous, but “write through” their bodies (256).

For Cixous, writing through the body is a celebratory and liberating act that releases “luminous torrents” and beautiful forms (246). For Nikkei

women, too familiar with a history of sexual stereotyping and racialization, recognizing the body is as pressing a task as writing it.

I mean if I found my body, if I were back in it, I might not write. I might not have to, I might actually be happy (laughter) and I'm not. (Kogawa and Koh 1995 29).

Here Kogawa is responding to Karlyn Koh's query about whether or not Kogawa sees writing as a way of "reclaiming the body" (29). Kogawa's position acknowledges the way the material (that is, aching, aging, pregnant, hungry, fit, tired) body insinuates itself in writing, regardless of intention. The body is, in a sense, pre-eminent; "present" or "absent," the body is always being written. What can be reclaimed in a transformative piece of writing—where stereotypical images do not compel representations of identity—is the writer's lost union with a body.

This is not to say that the union of the material body and the intangible self is a condition of transformative writing. The writer's separation from the materiality of her body and its representations is, in itself, textually productive. *Obasan*, for instance, may be read as a textual exploration of the mother's absent body. However, by testifying to a personal and/or communal history of division between the experienced self/body and the represented self, the complex self/body emerges. In fact, the body of Nikkei women's writing would be slight without textual investigations into the denial of the body. A common theme in fiction and poetry by Nikkei writers such as Joy Kogawa, Noriko Oka, Mona Oikawa, and Tamai Kobayashi is the experience of inhabiting and inscribing bodies that do not find their counterparts in the images that society privileges. From this historical place of denial, Nikkei women have constructed selves that depend on the body as a means of knowing and communicating. While Kogawa's constructions of desire and the body are, perhaps, more subtly transgressive than the other writers mentioned, she has begun a tradition of articulating desire that several younger writers claim as formative in their own creative practice.⁵

Kogawa's poetics engage the body as a metaphor of community. In *Obasan*, Naomi describes a happy evening in the bathhouse at Slocan, the internment camp where Naomi's family spent the Second World War:

The bath is a place of deep bone warmth and rest. It is always filled with a slow steamy chatter from women and girls and babies. It smells of wet cloth and wet wood and wet skin. We are one flesh, one family, washing each other or submerged in the hot water, half awake, half asleep. (160-61)

Through this multi-layered metaphor, divisions between individuals become indistinct. The water of the ofuro [bath], this most “Japanese” symbol of cleansing and purity, joins the bathers’ flesh together as one.⁶ For Naomi’s Christian family, the ofuro also evokes the purifying waters of baptism that render the individual one with Christ and the body of Christians. Furthermore, the designation of this place as the “women’s side” of the bathhouse recalls the ultimate union of the amniotic bath. The shared bath removes even the distinction between the inanimate and the living—wet wood, wet cloth, and skin. Yet even as the thing which obscures individuality is at once water and steam, the women retain their individual selves, washing each other, chatting.

Because the same boundary distinguishes inclusion *and* exclusion, Kogawa’s metaphor of the body as community is always ambivalent. In her poem, “Glances,” the body bears the documentary traces of (not) belonging. The Nikkei narrator arrives in Japan to find that eyes are “fierce” and “fearful” spotlights trained on the cultural *faux pas* that she, as a Canadian visitor, commits. She interprets as “Japanese” those cultural symbols that do not mark her foreign body: the scars from moxibustion,⁷ “stomach ulcers and suicide.”⁸ Similarly, in “Dwarf Trees,” both male and female Japanese bodies are “stunted,” “twisted,” and “pruned” by what the narrator interprets as cultural constrictions on their behaviours. Yet a sense of the metaphor’s relativity emerges in *Itsuka* when we read that it is in contrast with Canadian Nikkei, not Japanese, that Hawaiian Nikkei seem “as unbent as free-standing trees” (92). This time, it is the loss of culture, rather than its imposition, that diminishes Nikkei: “unlike us crippled bonsai in Canada, they’ve retained community here” (92).

The destruction of community is also implicit in the amniotic bliss of the bathhouse in Slokan. The scene in Slokan evokes the intimacy of bath times that Naomi shared with her Obāchan [grandmother] in Vancouver. Yet “Slokan” Nikkei only built the bathhouse because they were forced to leave Vancouver, the place that Naomi remembers as the site of paradisiacal belonging (*Obasan* 48-49). Bodily traces of the disappearing community appear again in Naomi’s description of her role at the death of another family member:

I’m an undertaker disembowelling and embalming a still-breathing body, removing heart, limbs, life-blood, all the arteries, memories that keep me connected to the world, transforming this comatose little family into a corpse. (*Itsuka* 75)

This account of the disintegrating cultural body resembles, but should not be confused with, the disappearance of the physical body in death.

Shortly after Aunt Emily's description of Hawaiian Nikkei, Naomi recounts a dream in which she disappears from the realm of the physical:

The instant I look down, I know it's happening. I've passed the boundary. My limbs—legs—arms—are gone. There's nothing left to see or touch, yet I find myself plummeting, further, into the infinitesimal. (*Itsuka* 93)

Here Kogawa uses the metaphor of the (disappearing) body as a passageway into the presymbolic: "I, the thought and the person, am one, indivisibly, consciously and utterly myself" (93). This is also the unthinkable place of utter communion where, because there is no separation, "[t]here is no death. There is no disappearance, no finality in the drift downstream. Annihilation is not possible. Individual consciousness cannot be extinguished. So that's what death is" (94). Thus the death of the body is qualitatively different from the body of death. The destruction that accompanies the death of the body signals the end of physical existence, and is a fruitful metaphor for the disintegration of community. Conversely, the body of death is an imaginative sphere in which one overcomes the separation of tangible and intangible in exchange for a third realm of the utterly unified.

This unity is realizable in a durable body of death that resembles Lacan's "indestructibility of unconscious desire" (*Écrits* 167). Lynne Magnusson (1988) has already identified Lacanian strains in the images of Naomi's separation from her mother in *Obasan*. In *Itsuka*, Kogawa turns to the recovery of that first plenitude, before the signifying phallus distinguishes child from mother: "I am without a body, but I am not, I am not without consciousness. . . . I become, and I am, the song" (94). This is that impossible site where satisfaction of individual need "means the destruction of the organism itself" (*Écrits* 167).

In its obvious alliances with Lacan, Kogawa's model of desire is determinedly gendered. In Lacanian terms, the child begins life in seamless dependence on its mother, unable to distinguish her existence as separate from its own. This union is interrupted in early childhood by the paternal phallus, the ultimate signifier. In what Lacan calls the drama of the mirror stage (*Écrits* 4), the infant travels through a time of insufficiency and anticipation towards this moment or plane of separation, after which the symbolic order reigns and the child is armed with a rigid subjectivity. This individual is one who has learned that separation from others, especially

the mother, makes entry into the realm of the symbolic possible. The subject *must* separate from the mother, whose absence of a phallus makes her the emblem of male desire *and* a sign of lack. Female desire operates by being doubly displaced: first by separation from the mother, but also, according to the incest prohibition, from the father:⁹

The 'double-alienation' of the woman is thus a double-alienation from desire itself; the woman learns to embody the promise of a return to a preoedipal pleasure, and to limit her own desire to those gestures that effectively mirror his desire as absolute. (Butler 1987 203).

In this doubly-alienated state, Naomi "fear[s] touch as much as the inability to touch" (*Itsuka* 2). She runs from personal intimacy and from identification with the Nikkei community, describing her emotionally arid state as a coma from which she must be revived (*Itsuka* 3).

In Toronto at Aunt Emily's behest, Naomi finds herself at the end of a chain of exile from her past selves and communities. As the adolescent Naomi awoke to sexual longing, Pastor Jim was there to translate that desire as "the sins of the flesh." Now middle-aged, Naomi has succeeded in repressing her desire (for both belonging and the release of passion) to the point that she suffers the somatization of the exiled (Kristeva 1991 310).

In this state, her shattered body, so foreign to herself, bears the marks of repression:

My abominable abdomen. Something vast as childhood lies hidden in the belly's wars. There's a rage whose name has been forgotten. . . . Pastor Jim's message of hell probably spread within me a fear of life. (*Itsuka* 119).

This "something" as vast as childhood recalls the physical abuse and untruths that placed a chasm of separation between the child Naomi and her mother (*Obasan* 65). Significantly, it is not only Naomi's rage at those who manipulated her desire, but the repression of that desire that continues to afflict Naomi. Not surprisingly, then, even Father Cedric's gently ministerial and paternal courting sends Naomi fleeing to her bed in pain.

Eventually Naomi allows the androgynous Father to guide the process of her re-socialization, and she is led by this "fairy godmother priest, though the forest of [her] adolescence" (*Itsuka* 145). This re-socialization is a journey "back" to the unity of the earliest infancy and amniotic bliss where Naomi becomes "whole" and "complete as when [she] was a very young child" (285). The narrative ends only as Naomi re-enters the symbolic order where the law of the father is the invisible given. Now the priest is simply

Tamai Kobayashi speaks of the need to articulate transgressive desire in her poem “for renee.” Here memories of childhood plenitude and safety—“echoes of the first songs / and stories in this exile’s heart”—form the background to sexual intimacy. Plenitude is also a talisman against the utter exclusion created by attacks based on perceptions of race and sexuality. In the safe embrace of the mother/lover, words are unnecessary, silence is “deep with dreams,” and speaking is an act of looking, touching, and remembering:

remembering the sound of her voice
as she whispers your name
the shape of her hand
remembering her touch
against the streets of fear
and mornings
gazing at her
in sleep with the simple joy
of watching her breathe

The poem vaults from this time and place where communication does not depend on utterance to “the streets of fear,” where the need for language attacks comfortable, sufficient silence:

remembering the skinheads down on yonge
with their white skin sneers and swastikas
and nights when you think you’re dying
it’s the end of the world and you’re going insane

and there are words for this
Jap, bitch, chink, dyke

Kobayashi acknowledges that the story of exile in this place can only be told with a language of desire:

you see we must have words for this
slipping by
as a dream, desire

to awaken in her eyes (15)

The shape of this language is not simply counter-discursive. These words defend against material and discursive violence by (re)collecting that first plenitude—“echoes of the first songs / and stories . . . slipping by / as distant as a dream”—with the second—the memory of it. Merging the concrete past with its present traces gives form to desire in the present.

Yet to travel back to the site of the first plenitude, where the articulation of

desire does not demand separation, is to imagine away the need for representation. Moreover, as Naomi is convinced in her journey back to that first wholeness, plenitude is a necessary stage on the way to full identity as an individual, not a state of permanence. Such plenitude is the mark of infantile sexuality (Freud 1938), that short time when the very young child cannot distinguish between external reality and the interiority of its “experienced world” (Piaget and Inhelder 1973). Not only is representation unnecessary in this literal state of complete identification; representation does not exist (Piaget 52). Lacan’s democratic emphasis on the causal relationship between the advent of representation and subjectivity (*all* individuals become subjects through language) may seem to qualify the maleness of the symbolic order that the child later enters. However, each of these models remains incompatible with a positive valuation of the literal and with the idea that “infantile” plenitude might have any healthy place in adult subjectivity.

Some feminist theorists recognize a fertile compatibility between Lacanian psycholinguistics and women’s sexualities (Kristeva 1986; Irigaray 1985), while others (Homans 1986; Chodorow 1978) have suggested that feminism recast the (female) presymbolic in a more positive light. Homans, for example, sees the phallic fracturing of the mother/daughter dyad as less traumatic, even less necessary for the daughter than it is for the son. The father does not compete with the daughter for the mother’s attention as he does with the son. Moreover, adult women may continue in close relation with their mothers without sacrificing maturity.

Homan’s argument does not necessarily depend on normative heterosexuality. Kobayashi’s poem, “As yet untitled,” suggests that the continuity of the mother-child dyad also complements adult lesbian sexuality:

I see your hand
 curled
 as an autumn leaf
 life lines
 carved out of years
 memories of summers green
 and you, young
 heart racing across a field of light
 a shy nod
 and gentle smile
 and how you have grown in years
 in silences
 winters of childhood

...

softly tell me your name
whisper in your mothertongue
grow
run wild
and come back to me (29-30)

Within the poem, the metaphor of representation is possible, even desirable: the hand “curled / as an autumn leaf,” “the heart racing.” But the speaker also acknowledges communication that precedes the symbol. These presymbolic gestures of speechless infancy co-exist with the words of old age in “winters of childhood,” and can be recalled and repeated in the uncivilized “mothertongue.”

This “mothertongue” resonates in writing by Nikkei women as a name for the often lost native language of their forebears, and as an attempt to reclaim or (re)construct a way of speaking that exceeds or precedes dominant “patriarchal” language (Ueda 1994; Kobayashi & Oikawa 1992). In these respects, what might be called “Nikkei” mothertongue evokes Daphne Marlatt’s (1987) “Musing with Mothertongue.” At least, the ideas that the “name” may be held in a hand, or in a touch (Kobayashi 16 & 30), that ecstasy, the yearning for “woman,” is a woman wrapped in words (Oikawa 73) *sound like* Marlatt’s idea of language as body and place:

inhabitant of language, not master, not even mistress, this new woman writer
(alma, say) in having is had, is held by it, what she is given to say. (225)

Yet, it is at this place where the writer is given what she—particularly—has to say, that these mothertongues meet, and depart from, each other. That is, the bodily traces of Nikkei women’s particular histories, especially as the targets of exclusionary practices based on ideas of gender and race, make Marlatt’s celebration of essential womanhood seem a costly indulgence.

However, the two mothertongues do agree on the irrelevance of substitution to language. The notion of substitution as a prerequisite for meaning is a necessary component in so-called patriarchal theories (such as those of Freud, Piaget, and Lacan) for two reasons. First, these theories insist that the acquisition of speech depends on the sacrifice of the oral pleasures of eating. Second, the same theories diminish the significance of the mother’s pleasure by emphasizing that of the infant. Because it sustains the complete union of that first plenitude, mothertongue manages instead to articulate an infancy in which the enjoyment of feeding exists as part of a whole pleasurable experience in which mother and child participate together. The mother’s

sexual excitement and other pleasures of breast-feeding co-exist, as does the infant's enjoyment of sucking and babbling. The pleasure of one need not supplant the other, for either the mother or the child. Where the nature of pleasure and the one who enjoys it are already part of another, neither substitution nor metaphoricity is required, or even imaginable.

Mona Oikawa extends this challenge to representation by playing with the literalness of adult lesbian sexuality and mothertongue in her short story "Stork Cools Wings." Lisa, a Chinese Canadian, and the anonymous Nikkei narrator meet at a tai chi class: "two Asian women in a room full of tall white men" (93). Driven to sleepless nights full of yearning at the sight of Lisa executing the tai chi movement "stork cools wings," the narrator suppresses her desire, convinced that Lisa is heterosexual. As her luck has it, the narrator is proven wrong and, after six months of restless, desiring nights, finds herself in bed with Lisa. At the brink of realizing her fantasies, the narrator is interrupted by Lisa's dislike of the bubble gum taste of the dental dam covering the vulva of her lover.¹⁰ The narrator urges Lisa to look in the refrigerator for a bottle "with a drawing of a Japanese woman on it" (98). In the bottle is umeboshi paste, the pungent, salty sweet puree of pickled ume, or plums. Lisa smears it on the dam:

"It looks like dried blood," she says.

"That's why I like it," I answer, adding, "It's actually dried plums, very macrobiotic." She laughs and I feel a cold sensation as she spoons out the thick red paste while the dam is still on me. (98)

Here sex is food, and neither is a substitute for the other. The woman Lisa eats from the body of a "Japanese" woman food that is identified by the image of a Japanese woman. The umeboshi paste that she eats resembles menstrual blood, the material sign of mature womanhood that would have become food had fertilization occurred.¹¹ Yet Lisa cannot eat her way through the multiple representations to the "real" Japanese woman under the sign. The dental dam does not hide some phallic thing beneath layers of signification, a referent for which another meaning can be substituted. Rather, this covering at the vaginal entrance simply veils another passage-way, a literally empty signifier.

In this story Oikawa incorporates material food with sexual expression as a metaphor for transgressive, transformative sexuality. Honouring the familiar association of sex and food, Oikawa has the two characters come to know each other over tea and dinners together, but complicates the

metaphor of sex as eating by introducing the tangible umeboshi paste. Replacing the modern, stereotypically western, bubble gum taste of the dam with the “Japanese” flavour of the literal umeboshi is an exchange of metaphors: the substance still camouflages the barrier that obstructs the “real” woman behind it. But by parodying the identification of women with food, and the domestic—specifically Nikkei women—with the diminutive, exotic, Japanese lover, as well as women’s role as consumable commodities intended for men’s use, Oikawa releases the narrator from the cold storage of Nikkei women’s stereotypes. Elsewhere, Yau Ching (1997) has pointed out how stereotypes may be reproduced in the process of parodying “a world in which we Asians become the food we (are expected to) eat” (33). Oikawa avoids the stereotypical by changing the traditionally accepted gender of the diner/lover, and by emphasizing the nature of the woman eaten as a representation. Lisa must be satisfied with eating food that resembles the menstrual blood, in itself also only a sign of the womanhood behind the barrier; her tongue never finds a core of that being.

This story so celebrates the bond created by the lovers’ identities as Asian women that it would seem Oikawa is following the tradition of early Asian cultural nationalism that exchanged the image of the assimilated Asian with polarized images of “yellow power” (Chin et al., preface). The characters’ “bond of sisterhood” forms the instant they recognize they are the only Asian women in their class. Their ethnicities merge as the women do: “incense wisps of jasmine and cherry blossom rise in clouds above our bed. ‘Til the light of dawn we carry each other to the peaks of Tian Shan and Fuji-san. . .” (99). This is just one story, and elsewhere in *All Names Spoken* Oikawa resists simplistic exchanges of unified identities. In the essay, “Some Thoughts on Being a Sansei Lesbian Feminist,” she interrogates her own actions in “[c]hoosing a lover who is white,” examining the implications that action might have on the extent of her belonging—or not—within feminist, lesbian/gay, Nikkei, and white communities (Kobayashi and Oikawa 100-03).

Oikawa’s story does follow a critical tradition that views the discourse of lesbian sexuality as a way of subverting or rejecting patriarchal components in heterosexual models of subjectivity, such as the Lacanian insistence on the phallus (Homans 1986; Wittig 1973). Remarkable in “Stork Cools Wings,” though, is the manner in which the story’s literal rendering of eating returns to the mother the oral pleasures of “infantile” sexuality, without threatening the identifying boundaries of the self. In fact, as the lovers’ oral

explorations test temporal boundaries, the mother emerges as one who finds that she is, already, part of a host of others: "I move her beneath me and begin to travel the paths of our foremothers, through crevice and moss, uncovering treasures with mouth and hand" (98-99).

This is probably not what Mrs. Makino has in mind when she urges the young women around her to identify their bodies as Japanese (*Itsuka* 247). Nonetheless, by reaching "back" in time and place through the processes of eating and being eaten, the anonymous Nikkei woman in "Stork Cools Wings" makes an identity for herself. The woman on the bottle of ume-boshi paste is no more or less "Japanese" than the fictional Nikkei woman on the bed, but the images commingle and are eaten into being, as they are both licked into the mouth by the mothertongue.

At another meal, Oikawa treats the tangible qualities of food, in this case steam rising from a bowl of udon (thick wheat noodles), as a metaphor for the way in which decorum obscures reality:

The steam from the udon
fogs my glasses as I tell you
I feel closest to you
and need someone to know who I really am
in case. . . .

This stanza is from "Coming out at the Sushi Bar," a poem which incorporates food as a marker of community identity. Within the poem food establishes the intimacy of two sisters in relation to "the men at the bar," while simultaneously suggesting the ideological and experiential chasm that separates the women:

"The wasabi is hotter today," you say,
And feeling the pressure
to analyze and rationalize
(as so many straight people do)
you add,

"I knew it after you had been away—
Was it in 1977—
that you came back different.
I figured something horrible
had happened to you.
You had changed so much."

The sensuous intensity of the wasabi (a type of horseradish), in excess of the fundamental tastes of bitter, sweet, sour, or salty, introduces the uncontainable

nature of lesbian desire within a heteronormative reality. In effect, the futility of the attempt by the (presumably) heterosexual speaker to categorize the wasabi mirrors her equally futile efforts to make sense of her lesbian sister's "horrible" difference.

Throughout the poem, food, as an emblematic symbol of commensality, highlights the disparity of inter-group ideologies. The sisters are members of several of the same groups (ethnicity, family, gender, and generation), a criterion that, in the tradition of Nikkei written history, has usually been invoked as the basis for analysis. Theoretical analyses of race and ethnicity, especially, have so depended on a causal connection between shared group membership and shared ideologies that disparity within the group has been interpreted as a partitive sign, evidence that the group is disintegrating (Park 1930; Creese 1988). Elsewhere, Nikkei discourse invokes similar criteria in the shaping of generalizations about identity.¹²

However, "Coming out at the Sushi Bar" invites the reader to consider that sharing group membership is no more a guarantee of shared ideology than is shared wasabi, or udon, or the fact that the sisters "each take a pastel-coloured mint / for the road" (62). Neither is the world of the poem a lesbian utopia, in which the straight sister is converted, nor a gustatory hiatus in which the two shelve their sexual differences so that food may be purely enjoyed. However, the poem does intimate that food may accommodate and signify difference without threatening community. The sisters retreat to their separate worlds, never having seen through the foggy steam, but with promise: "Maybe next time / I will tell you / how loving women / did change my life" (62).

In a lighter vein, Oikawa offers a cheekily disruptive telling of the dailiness of lesbian sexuality in her poem, "Eating Ramen" (Oikawa et al. 53-55). Situated in a North American "Japantown," in a café selling ramen (a noodle soup already "impure" with Chinese elements), on Oshōgatsu (a celebration that centres on home and the heterosexual family), Oikawa's North American narrator and her partner strain against multiple physical and symbolic borders; even the ramen that starts out so properly stiff and straight is softened with cooking and then slurped round¹³ as the two women "sit close, / hand in hand, / talking about Malcolm X, / the film we just saw." The lovers' passionate public embrace suggests an identity that is only elliptically signifiable, confounding the other customers who are "trying to figure out / whether we're two men or two women or. . ." Yet Oikawa

blesses this unruliness with an almost nostalgic infusion of two significant “Japanese” cultural symbols: “I smell the warmth of miso, / feel o-shogatsu breathing / kindness upon me.”¹⁴

Much of Oikawa’s writing participates in what Ching identifies as “the desire of young Asians to queer up the hetero-patriarchal ideologies embedded in their food culture” (33). As with the sisterly disclosure in “Coming out at the Sushi Bar,” by situating an open display of lesbian sexuality in a Japanese North American restaurant, traditionally a meeting place for friends, families, and “obviously” heterosexual lovers, this poem reconfigures both food and sexuality to accommodate the textually novel. However, as in “Stork Cools Wings,” Oikawa is not concerned to substitute one representation for another: in fact the narrator of this unruly sexuality suspects her own stereotypical assumptions:

... I still notice their eyes,
 people slurping ramen—
 straight people—
 men with women.
 (Of course I’m sure of this.) (54; emphasis hers)

The indeterminacy of the narrator’s position is characteristic of this most recent stage of Asian North American literature in which writers explore the multiplicity of identity, and of the contradictory tensions inherent in multiplicity.

In her poem “Origins,” Oikawa’s narrator examines the multiple selves she discovers within as she relates to the woman who is her lover:

When I think of you
 I become a geisha
 Waiting to serve you
 o-cha [green tea] and nori [paper-thin sheets of sea-weed]—
 wrapped morsels on a cold winter day. (76)

Her lover’s beauty prompts “ancient memory” to rise. The women’s shared histories as “the colonized daughters / of daughters of / Japanese mothers” excite the samurai within. With the lovers’ admission that they are also “Japanese women,” the speaker loosens the obi, or belt, of her lover’s kimono, a familiar symbol in love scenes depicted in Japanese art and literature. These several identities co-exist, not quite randomly (the invocation of each imagined identity depends on separate and different material contexts), but without the imposition of hierarchical ordering that privileges samurai over

geisha or mother over daughter. Moreover, by “queering up” the clichéd image of the subservient geisha feeding male guests on demand, the poem also re-animates the metaphor by linking forbidden desire with food.

This proclivity for enduring, perhaps even welcoming, the contingencies of being is a common thread in writing by Nikkei women. Writing outside the strictures of both Nikkei and white convention, these writers are forging new images of Nikkei women from submerged and transgressive desires. Perhaps their intimacy with exclusion and denial motivates these Nikkei writers to risk exposing the contingent nature of community memory in the construction of community truths. Writing from groups that have doggedly constructed themselves as communities of heterosexual families, Nikkei women writers are (re)constructing communities of multiple sexualities.

NOTES

- 1 See, for instance, Lim and Ling; Chin et al.; and Cheung. Each of these texts subsumes Joy Kogawa within the category of “Asian American.” Within Canada, academics are beginning to reconsider the wisdom of maintaining sub-classifications based on race, ethnicity, or nationality for Kogawa and other “visible minority” writers. For instance, in her introduction to the democratically entitled *Canadian Writers and their Works* (Lecker, David, and Quigley 1996), Margery Fee identifies an abundance of differences and similarities among the book’s five “Canadian” writers (Josef Škvorecký, Austin C. Clarke, Joy Kogawa, Rohinton Mistry, and Neil Bissoondath) that render such classifications useless. Scott McFarlane’s emphasis on the complexities of *Pacific Windows: The Collected Poems of Roy K. Kiyooka* (Miki 1997) makes a similar comment, describing the classification of “Asian Canadian writing” as “masterly watchwords” (154).
- 2 “Nisei” refers to the second generation, or children, of immigrants from Japan. Because I do not wish to set Nikkei discourse apart as “foreign,” or in some way outside of conventional Canadian, that is “English,” discourse, I leave all Japanese words in plain text, unless a writer I am citing uses italics.
- 3 Nikkei are individuals of Japanese descent living outside of Japan.
- 4 For translations of these early “private” accounts, see Midge Ayukawa (1990 & 1988) and Keibo Oiwa (1991).
- 5 See, for example, Hiromi Goto’s evocations of *Obasan* throughout her novel, *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Also, see Oikawa (1992) regarding Kogawa’s influence on her writing.
- 6 For discussion of the bath as a symbol of moral and physical purity, see Clark (1994) and Ohnuki-Tierney (1984).
- 7 Moxibustion is a treatment common in Japanese kanpo or “traditional” (that is non-bio-medical) Japanese medicine. The practitioner burns small cones of dried mugwort leaves on the body, generally to treat pain and paralysis (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984 98-99).
- 8 Each of Kogawa’s poems discussed herein is from *A Choice of Dreams*. Unless otherwise noted, writing by Tamai Kobayashi and Mona Oikawa is from *All Names Spoken*.

- 9 For discussion of Lacan and gendered desire see "The Signification of the Phallus" (*Écrits* 281-91); Butler 1987 186-217; and Mitchell and Rose 1985.
- 10 A dental dam is a piece of latex that some dentists use to isolate the affected area of the mouth during treatment. The rate of transmission of HIV/AIDS during oral sex between women is uncertain; nonetheless, some women cover the vulva with a dental dam to decrease the likelihood of transmission.
- 11 My thanks to Millie Creighton for suggesting the characterization of menstrual blood as "food that might have been."
- 12 See, for example, Adachi 1976; Omatsu 1992; Kogawa 1981.
- 13 This phrase refers to the technique of noisily slurping one's noodles; if the diner is unskilled or in a particular hurry, the noodles may not be sucked up straight but whipped around to slap against the cheek, hence "slurped round." As with any cultural practice that is acceptable in one society and taboo in another, slurping has become evidence of ethnicity. An amusing scene in the film *Tanpopo* involves a group of young Japanese women being taught (in Japan) how not to slurp when they eat noodles prepared in a western fashion. The humour in this scene is augmented by the Caucasian man seated at the next table who is noisily slurping up his spaghetti.
- Slurping is one of those cultural practices that become a site of ambivalence in "impure" social groups. For instance, "mixed" or intercultural families may debate whether to slurp only when eating "Japanese" noodles, or as long as the family is eating at home, regardless of the ethnicity of the meal. These families may also debate whether or not the ethnicity of guests and visiting family members ought to determine eating techniques. Ethnicity in "Eating Ramen" is already so ambiguous that the lovers' clumsy slurping cannot be read authoritatively as a sign of not belonging.
- 14 Miso is fermented soy bean paste, the base ingredient in miso shiru (soup), a staple of the "Japanese" diet.

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Mining for Sun

At this remove from the yellow flower
that blooms along the sky's coast every day,
it takes some doing to extract the light.

Begin, as you stand in the unyielding
shade of a highrise's northern rockface,
by planting an explosive charge under

your assumptions: nobody will see you,
and the resulting blast will not disturb
one grain of the soot that has come to rest

on the stone window ledge above your head,
yet it will sink shafts through what seems concrete
in walls and sidewalks, amazing them with new

slants on a bright idea as old as time.
This tunneling goes deeper than the site's
present foundation, leading back beyond

the glint of morning on the mansard roof
of a brick dry-goods shop, beyond gaslight
threading a frame hotel's iron railings.

Yet, without moving one step out of now,
you can fathom the depth of every shaft.
Touch the wall's sandstone facing, and your hand

fingers the same slow pulse that beat among
its molecules before the glacial lake
pressed them from crystal grains of mountains—once

all incandescent liquid like the dawn.
Deep in the steel beam of the new cliffside
rising across the street, atoms circle

to the same firedance that coaxed their gleam
out of the rock when they were reimmersed,
by a blast furnace, in the melting air

that played over the earth when the whole world
was a red ocean, rippling with first light.
The blacktopped roadbed also raises waves

of shimmer, in an inexhaustible
winging-back-up of light that sleeps within
earth's spinning chrysalis: look you wake it.

If you still need a hand, the street signal
flashes high five to guide you, as the small
beacons of taillights aim to fire you up;

the locust tree, its claim pitched in a square
of shade dark as the soil around its roots,
quarries light from the air, urging you on

with bursts of green applause from its grey bark,
while, at the curb, the fire hydrant waits
for you to see it as a capped fountain,

all latent gleam and billow. Dive into
its rainbow. Mine a new world that's always
been waiting for your sun to rise from it.

For the moon

The moon
perched in the sky like a pitcher
pouring shadowy dark honey
into the trees
and on me.

Love, lick it off my sun-warm breast.

Grove's Last Laugh

The Gender of Self-Representation in Frederick Philip Grove's *In Search of Myself*

All right, let it be, then, *In Search of Myself*, if that does not sound presumptuous: for who am I? That anyone should search for me? I believe I have done some honest work; but on the whole, as my wife says, I have done what I wished to do; and therefore, she says, I should be satisfied. The trouble is, I have not been able to provide for her in even the smallest measure.

—FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE, from a letter to Ellen Elliot (Pacey 489)

In his letter to Ellen Elliot from 1946, Frederick Philip Grove—alias Felix Paul Greve—points to two issues that have since occupied his critics in examining his autobiography, *In Search of Myself* (henceforth *ISM*): his failure to gain recognition as a Canadian writer and the irony of his representation of himself as an “honest” worker.¹ I find a different issue emerging from Grove’s letter. He believes his failure to achieve recognition is economically gendered; therefore he focuses on his inability to “provide” for his wife “in even the smallest measure.” In her introduction to the 1991 collection, *Autobiography and Questions of Gender*, Shirley Neuman suggests that both humanist and post-structuralist theorizations of the autobiographical subject and its representation have lacked a “self-consciousness about, or differentiation of, what in western cultures is a fundamental aspect of our ‘identity’ or ‘subjectivity’: our identity as a man or a woman.” She notes that, although gender has been explored a great deal in relation to women’s writing, one of the “major gaps in our theorizing of a poetics of gender in autobiography is the category in relation to which ‘generic difference’ [sic] has implicitly been defined: masculinity” (1-6). Masculinity is as much a de/constructable factor in self-representation as femininity, and the gendering of Grove’s failure and its connection with the fabrications of his text are subjects as yet insufficiently explored in the critical literature on

his autobiography. The assertion that Grove saw failure not just in terms of a lack of fame but also as a lack of masculinity is corroborated throughout *ISM* by the author's consistent questioning of his own gender identification, and by his constant representation of himself as barred from accession to phallic power. As we shall see, Grove's own de/constructions of his gender identity culminate in his appropriation, by default, of another kind of creative power, the maternal, as a means of making himself heard by Canadian audiences.

On the surface at least, Grove's ideal of selfhood is a traditionally humanist one relying on the stability of the individual as a unique and coherent entity who exists outside of and prior to the creation of the autobiographical text. Such an ideal is apparent early in Grove's text:

If, in a state of prenatal existence, human beings-to-be could deliberately choose those to whom they wished to be born, taking into account, of course, what they intended to do with their earthly lives, then a future writer like myself could hardly, according to outward appearance, have chosen better than the determining destiny did choose for me in the matter of parents. To what extent reality bore out this appearance is the subject of the first part of this book. (*ISM* 15)

Grove here posits a notion of pre-constituted selfhood of what he calls unborn "human beings-to-be" and particularizes himself as a "future writer," a self governed by "determining destiny." With this notion of selfhood as pre-scripted and available for translation into the subject of a book, Grove's text appears to exemplify Georges Gusdorf's enunciation of the autobiographer's task as the "strain[ing] toward a complete and coherent expression of his entire *destiny*" (35; emphasis added). Indeed, *ISM* provides us with a retrospective glimpse of Grove's sense of selfhood, "reconstituted" in the present by the author to display "his special unity and identity across time" (35). An initial reading of *ISM* suggests that, for a writer such as Grove, there seem to be "no agonizing questions of identity, self-definition, self-existence, or self-deception" (Olney 20). The text is an accounting of the author's life, as seen in the chronological progression through the life of the subject, from the "Prologue," which details the "conception" of the text, through "Childhood," "Youth," "Manhood," "And After."

As illustrated by these section headings, however, destiny also determines that Grove will identify himself in terms of gender, and that on his way to becoming a writer he must attain "manhood" by first successfully navigating the worlds of "childhood" and "youth." As suggested by Kaja Silverman, the "ideological reality" of Western society upholds a "dominant fiction"

which “functions to construct and sustain sexual difference” and which aligns phallic power with physical possession of the penis (1-8). That “dominant fiction,” says Silverman, “calls upon the male subject to see himself, and the female subject to recognize and desire him, only through the mediation of images of an *unimpaired* masculinity” (42; emphasis added). A child’s indoctrination into performance of this “dominant fiction” begins at the moment of birth into the family unit and achieves its greatest impetus in the “positive Oedipus complex,” which acts as the “primary vehicle of insertion into that [ideological] reality” (2). In order to take up a “normal” subject position within a heterosexual society, the male child must emerge from this seminal phase of development with a “preponderance in him” of the masculine “sexual disposition,” thereby allowing for a “father-identification” which “will preserve the object-relation to the mother which belonged to the positive complex” (Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 640-41). According to such a scenario, the “dissolution of the Oedipus complex would consolidate the masculinity in a boy’s character” (640). Where this successful emergence of the father-identified male occurs, the Oedipus complex can be said to have “produced and sustained a normative masculinity” (Silverman 16), a masculinity through which “the subject is accommodated to the Name-of-the-Father” (34) and the privileges of the phallus.

A careful reading of *ISM* reveals Grove’s sense of his own failure to thus achieve and sustain a state of “normative masculinity”; indeed, the “Prologue,” the conceptional moment of Grove’s “avowedly autobiographic” text (11), sets a decidedly bleak tone:

It was a dismal November day, with a raw wind blowing from the north-west and cold, iron-grey clouds flying low—one of those Ontario days which, on the lake-shores or in a country of rock and swamp, seem to bring visions of an ageless time after the emergence of the earth from chaos, or a foreboding of the end of a world about to die from entropy. (1)

It is in this foreboding setting that the reader is introduced to a mature Grove in the November of his days. Grove is plagued by his inability to make his mark in the world; to realize the praise which had flown about him in the academic circles of his manhood; to live up to the status of one “of whom great things were expected” (3). Grove represents himself in contrast to those “famous men” of Europe, the friends of his youth, who are “known throughout the civilized world, having left, by this time, the

impress of their minds upon their age" (10), and measures himself in contrast as existing in a world "about to die from entropy" (1). In a world wherein "to wield a pen is a masculine act" (Friedman 371), Grove, having "lived and worked in obscurity" (*ISM* 4), conceives of a literary work as a means of explaining his "defeat," his "failure" to achieve the recognition—literary and economic—for which he felt himself destined (7-11). In fact, he posits his "failure" as inevitable, thereby aligning himself with the young girl whom he is attempting to retrieve from beyond a rutted and washed-out road, and who is meant to perform the "Sisyphus tasks of a household drudge" (1). Like the figure of Sisyphus, who in Greek mythology was "condemned for his misdeeds to Hades where his eternal task was to roll a large stone to the top of a hill from which it always rolled down again" ("Sisyphus"), Grove notes of his own aspirations to achieve the Olympian heights of literary success that his "struggle had been such as to make defeat a foregone conclusion" (*ISM* 6).

Dependent as Grove thus is on enunciating a personal history of inevitable failure, he speaks (to borrow Kaja Silverman's phrasing) from the "margins" of an ideal masculinity. If "classic male subjectivity rests upon the denial of castration" (Silverman 44), then Grove's presentation of himself as symbolically castrated—as a failed figure of masculine/literary achievement—makes no pretensions to the powers of the ideal. As to matters of gender identity, the history of Grove scholarship has been "unswervingly normatizing" on both "the sexual and the national" level, and what has been "particularly striking in this scholarship is the consistency with which homosocial (including, but not exclusively limited to, homosexual) elements in FPG's lives and works have been elided" (Cavell 12-13). By providing a sustained exploration of the representation of gender identity in *ISM*, I intend to illustrate that Grove deliberately constructs a feminized image for himself as a means to explain his failure to achieve "normative masculinity" and to ultimately present an ironic challenge to "conventional male subjectivity" (Silverman 1).²

Grove's intention to speak from the margins of a society characterized by "heteronormativity" (Cavell 18) is apparent even in the "Prologue" and in his reflections on one particular friend from his past. In his enunciation of the reasons for writing *ISM*, Grove notes his memory of a "young Frenchman" of his youth: as he states it, "for years we had been inseparable, so much so that old-fashioned and benevolent people . . . had teasingly

called us Castor and Pollux" (3). The nature of Grove's friendship with the "young Frenchman," significantly characterized in terms of Greek mythology,³ quickly takes on the tone of a decidedly homosocial relationship:

As they came back to me, I had told anecdotes of our ardent association; and I had given expression to my unbounded youthful admiration for the young Frenchman who, a year or two older than myself, had been one of the determining influences in overcoming my own immaturities. (3)

The memory of the Frenchman, who was once the author's "mentor" and who here elicits such adjectives as "ardent" and "unbounded," causes Grove to rise and "pace the floor of the room in a state of *intense excitement*" (emphasis added). The unnamed Frenchman is clearly drawn from one or more of the members of the homosocial milieu with which Grove was associated while attending university in Germany and which was dominated by such people as Stefan George, André Gide and Oscar Wilde.

Following Grove's initial memory, however, is what appears to be a re-assertion of heterosexist proscriptions on gender behaviour, for the nature of Grove's relationship with this Frenchman, who has managed to "earn the distinction of seeing his biography published within his lifetime" and to have "achieved things which had focused on him the eyes of a world," has altered in the years since their youth:

And another memory had arisen. On one of my four or five trips back to Europe, undertaken during the years when, on this continent of America, I had lived as a farmhand, I had, on one single occasion, once more met that young Frenchman, no longer quite so young, by previous appointment. We had had dinner together in one of the great, famous restaurants of Paris; and, tragically, we had found that we had nothing any longer to say to each other. . . . (5)

A surface reading suggests that, in addition to the passage of time, a difference in economic achievement is a factor in the breakup of the relationship; that is, Grove's work as an itinerant farmhand "on the lonely prairies of western Canada" makes him unsuitable for meetings with successful men from "the crowded capitals of Europe" (4). Grove and the "no longer quite so young" Frenchman now exist in different worlds. But there is a subtext to this passage, especially if we accept Cavell's assertion that "the pioneer world is by definition a homosocial one" (37). Whereas Grove has entered a world which reinforces close relationships between men—as seen in his "attachment" to a "pardner" who rather ambiguously "facilitated many operations" (*ISM* 205)—the Frenchman has moved beyond the relation-

ships of his youth and appears no longer to view Grove as “the most lavishly endowed” of young men (5).

Grove’s sometimes subtle allusions to homosocial relations are elsewhere problematized by an apparent need to re-affirm the attitudes and prejudices of a heterosexual culture. For example, in the “Youth” section of the book he details his relationship with the young Frenchman and makes the following avowal:

I went through one strange experience. A young man, very slightly my senior in years, was, in certain small circles, already regarded as a coming light. While first avoiding and even discouraging my advances, he suddenly veered around and, incredibly, subordinated himself to me. It is true, in public he acted more or less as my mentor; but in private he professed that he was nothing, I everything. It was only in the course of weeks or even months that I began to realize with dismay the nature of my attraction for him. When my eyes were opened, I saw clearly that a not inconsiderable fraction of these new, artistic friends of mine . . . suffered from the taint of homosexuality. (161)

Grove later goes on to assure his readers that “the thing itself meant nothing to me; it means nothing to me today” and that, “if [he] had not always been so, [he] had become definitely, finally heterosexual” (161-62). Here, as elsewhere, Grove’s comments are highly ambiguous, so that the reader is never quite sure whether she should allow more emphasis to be given to the fact that it was the “young man” who “subordinated himself” to Grove’s “advances,” or to Grove’s professed “dismay” at discovering the “taint of homosexuality.” Given, however, that it is precisely the author’s memory of his early relationship with the young Frenchman which serves as an impetus to his decision to document his failure to become one of the “famous men” of Europe, Grove appears to be deliberately opposing himself to the dominant conception of masculinity as being inherently heterosexual. Unlike the successful (and now less than ardent) Frenchman, Grove, as he tells his audience at the beginning of his “Childhood” section, has a “constitutional disinclination to conform” (15). In the light of Grove’s assertions to his readers (made over and over again) that he “[has] come to look upon [his] life as essentially wasted, as essentially a failure” (222), that he is “a failure, utter and absolute” (231), and that “this book is the record of a failure; and its explanation” (409), the focus in the “Prologue” on Grove’s homosocial experiences marks his intention to speak from the margins of heterosexual conceptions of masculinity in partial explanation of his failure to achieve literary success.

Of key importance to the gender de/construction in Grove's text is the first, most fully fictionalized, half of the book. In recent years, the desire for "biographical facticity" (Smith 4) in autobiographical texts has been eschewed in favour of the critical axiom that "lying" in autobiography "is a highly strategic decision, especially on the part of literary autobiographers," and that "narrative truth and personal myth are more telling than literal fidelity" (Adams x). The fabrications which permeate Grove's text represent the author's attempt to construct a self and a life which would emerge from the "obscurity" of mere biographical truth and help Grove to "compensate for the failure to have made [him]self heard so far" (*ISM* 4, 11). That Grove had a personal belief in the facility of self-(re)construction is already evident from the fact of his disappearing act when he emigrated from Europe to North America. Yet the strictly chronological layout of *ISM* and the invocation of a "determining destiny" (15) of selfhood at the outset of the section titled "Childhood" suggest that Grove felt it necessary to adhere to a more conventional pattern of public self-representation. Grove's text, unlike those of such modernist writers as Gertrude Stein, who published *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in 1933 (five years before Grove began writing *ISM*), is not an overtly self-reflexive acknowledgement that "telling the truth about oneself on paper is virtually impossible" (Adams 9). Given that readers of Stein's "Autobiography" were frankly hostile at her disregard for "minute factual details" (Adams 17),⁴ it is perhaps no wonder that Grove favoured a design which would promote the referential nature of the self and life represented in his text.⁵ Grove thus participates in a tradition of autobiographical intention identified as the author's "confrontation with himself, his attempt to make himself the subject of his own book in ways consonant with his own ideas about subjectivity and its literary representation" (Jay 21). The contradictory nature of selfhood—the simultaneous penchant for textual self-(re)construction on the one hand and the apparent conformity to traditional standards of referentiality and truth on the other—apparent in the life and work of Grove can be explained by his attempt to negotiate a space of self-representation between the private reality of his own lived notion of subjectivity and the "received models of selfhood in the surrounding culture" (Eakin 7). Grove needs to explain his failure as the inevitable result of circumstances; he needs to construct a unifying principle of failure onto the chronology of his life by fabricating a past which will explain his present subjectivity. This, I would argue, is Grove's main "impulse to self-invention" (7).

It is clear that when Grove came to writing his final text, he was facing a “decay of the mental and emotional qualities” and felt himself “fad[ing] into the twilight of a coming senescence” (*ISM* 11, 457). In addition, “at no time was Frederick Philip Grove’s career at a lower ebb than just before he began his autobiography in the summer of 1938” (Hjartarson 80). Given such circumstances, I would assert that *ISM* served a very specific function for Grove’s psyche, for there is an explicit connection to be made between autobiographical writing as self-analysis and Freud’s “talking cure,” with an emphasis on “retrospection” of the past as aiding “introspection” in the present (Jay 22-24). According to the psychoanalytic model, the memories or “scenes” of childhood

are not reproductions of real occurrences, to which it is possible to ascribe an influence over the course of the patient’s later life and over the formation of his symptoms. It [our view] considers them rather as *products of the imagination*, which find their instigation in mature life, which are intended to serve as *some kind of symbolic representation* of real wishes and interests, and which owe their origin to a regressive tendency, to a turning-away from the tasks of the present. (Freud, “Wolf Man” 418; emphasis added)

These “scenes,” then, are “for the moment the bearers and possessors of the interest which we want to set free so as to be able to direct it on to the tasks of the present” (418). One example of a text which functions as self-analysis is James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), which is an example of the “literary-psychological theory of composition” wherein “the autobiographical work has come to be based on conscious forgetting rather than on careful remembering and on fictional re-presentation rather than on historical presentation” (Jay 36). Surely another example of this type of text is Grove’s *In Search of Myself*, which is itself a fictionalized “portrait of the [failed] artist as a young man.” In Freudian terms, the ageing Grove recognizes himself as a failure in his “present task” of achieving literary fame, so he “turns away” from that task and imaginatively constructs a life story for himself as a “symbolic representation”/explanation of that failure. Indeed, Grove’s affinity for psychoanalysis is evident when he states that

interpretation of the past is teleological; it is meant, *it is constructed* as an explanation of that which is. No matter what has happened in the past, its importance is solely determined by its share in moulding the present. (*ISM* 426; emphasis added)

The self-analytical process of *ISM* results in Grove’s ultimate success at his “present task,” for (a point I will return to later in this essay) it is precisely

this text which garners Grove the measure of recognition for which he had laboured so long.

The “failure” which Grove seeks to “cure” through *ISM* revolves around issues of gender, sexuality and literary production. Indeed, Grove suggests that part of his failure to achieve literary dominance lies in the copulative nature of literary production when he states that “the effect of a book is the result of a collaboration between writer and audience,” then brings attention to his own feeling of impotence in this regard when he states, “that collaboration I had failed to enforce. . . .” (6). He laments his failure to achieve fame after years of wielding his pen and asserting himself with “titanic endeavour” (4)⁶ and emphasizes the masculine nature of the collaboration by figuring it as something the writer must “enforce.” For example, in the section titled “And After”—which appears after “Manhood”—Grove reflects on his early efforts struggling to write *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) and laughs at himself for having wanted “to be able to project the whole vision as it were by a single flash of lightning struck out of my substance by some divine steel” (372). In order to explain his failure, Grove chooses memories of his childhood and youth which will allow him to undergo a gradual process of “phallic divestiture” (Silverman 160) within the text. Given the importance of the Oedipal complex in upholding the “dominant fiction” of sexual difference, it is significant that Grove centres his de-masculinization efforts within his family of origins. The first thing which we are told of Grove’s existence is that he was “born prematurely” (*ISM* 15), immediately implying a sense of weakness. The portrait of Grove’s upbringing develops into a world in which the author’s childhood and youth is dominated by female figures and characterized by a distant and unapproachable father. Grove notes having suffered an “embarrassment to [his] masculinity” as a result of having to wear “long, embroidered, belaced, and beribboned” dresses (17) and having lived in a household with “seven older sisters” (19), a figure which seems to be inflated solely for dramatic effect as, in fact, he only had one older sister, Henny, who “apparently . . . died before reaching maturity” (Spettigue, *FPG* 37-38).

As the only boy child in the family, as well as the only child who is taken along when his mother, Bertha Rutherford Grove—alias Bertha Reichentrog Greve—leaves her husband and an unhappy marriage, Grove soon finds himself the focus of a female tug-of-war between his nurse, Annette, and his mother, two domineering women. Annette, who “adopts”

the young Grove “into her affections as if [he] had been her, not her mistress’s, child” and who “manages” Grove’s mother and the other servants as well, maintains a great deal of influence over the early psychological development of the boy:

What she told me, vividly and in ever-repeated detail, dominated my inner life throughout my early years: it always started with the words, “Once upon a time there was a little boy.” It dominated my life so completely that to this day I cannot distinguish my actual memories from the reflected ones. (*ISM* 16)

Besides providing the reader with a hint as to the fictional nature of Grove’s autobiographical narrative, this passage also suggests what will become, in this text, Grove’s representation of the inability of the young male to individuate from the world of women and make his entrance into the world and language of masculinity. Indeed, when Grove represents the breaking of the nurse’s power it is Grove’s mother who breaks “her own thralldom to Annette,” not the boy-child, who remains under the “management” of his nurse (19). During visits back to the family home, Grove lives “at the knees of [his] mother” for, as he states of the difference between himself and his sisters, “they were my father’s daughters; I was my mother’s son” (22-23). Later in the text, his mother seeks to consolidate the exclusivity of her bond with Grove by forever “warning [her son] against women,” extorting from him an “exchange of confidences,” an oath that he would “never marry,” and by “paint[ing] for [him] her ideal of a happy old age for herself: she would be living with me, directing my household . . . I should be a middle-aged man, then, . . . beyond the temptations of early manhood” (94).

In terms of Grove’s relationship with his father, Charles Edward Grove—alias Carl Eduard Greve—at this early stage, the author positions himself in direct opposition to his father’s extreme brand of masculinity, as when he states, “I cannot give a portrait of my father as I came to know him without saying a word of myself” (20). Grove describes his father as being “six feet seven inches tall, a personable man, the very devil with women. He rode hard, ate hard, and drank hard” (19). Grove measures himself against this image of his father and exaggerates his own shortfall: “Even at that early age I gave no promise of ever exceeding my present height which is of a mere six feet two and a half inches; at best, when I stretch my old bones a little, six feet three” (19-20). Noting of his father that “to be weak or ill was, in his eyes, the unpardonable sin,” Grove admits his own susceptibility to both when he states that, as a child, he “showed a regrettable lack of the power to

resist infantile diseases: measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough, I caught them all; and I was thin, had a poor appetite, readily caught colds" (20). Grove rather succinctly sums up the relationship between these polar opposites when he admits of his father, with special emphasis, "*Me* he despised" (19).

In turning to the relationship between his parents, Grove manipulates certain details (as he did with the number of his sisters) in order to establish his parents' incompatibility, as when he asserts that his mother is "twenty years [his] father's junior" (19), while in fact she was really only eight years younger. Grove also figures the dynamics of the Oedipal triangle in such a way as to subvert the possibility of a positive resolution characterized by a "hetero-normative" father-identification. According to the Freudian model, the "normal" triangular relationship between male child and parents is as follows:

At a very early age the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother, which originally related to the mother's breast and is the prototype of an object-choice on the anaclitic model; the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates. His identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother. (*The Ego* 640)

This configuration presupposes some degree of sexual relationship between the parents, one which is perceived by the male child, who responds by identifying with the position of the father in that relationship. In *ISM*, Grove very clearly undercuts the possibility of such a typical scenario as there appears to be no dynamic between the parents of which the child can be jealous. Besides the fact that Grove's parents occupy separate apartments in the family home, the author also emphasizes that his father is routinely possessive of women other than his mother: in one scene in particular we see the young Grove, "in the early hours of the morning," going downstairs from his own bedroom and, significantly, "penetrat[ing] into the gallery in search of [his] mother," only to witness "a fine lady" in a "gorgeous, open dressing-gown which showed her silk nightwear underneath" leaving his father's room (27-28). Admitting that he "did not fully understand" the meaning of what he witnessed, Grove nonetheless asserts that he "understood enough to have lost all taste for snuggling into [his] mother's bed" (28). As an infant, Grove was kept from relating to his mother's breast as object-choice by the fact that he was attended by a "wet-nurse" (19), and in the above scene we see that, in the absence of a sexual relationship between

his parents, the young Grove is incapable of maintaining an Oedipal objectification of his mother which is “cathected with libido” (Freud, *Introductory* 336). The dynamics of Grove’s family situation, indeed, are presented in such a way as to suggest the young boy’s increasing identification with his mother: as Grove states, “whenever we were at home, my mother and I were very much closer to each other than when we were abroad . . . I felt that this was because we were facing a common enemy” (*ISM* 59-60). Grove constructs the circumstances of his childhood in such a way as to preclude his accession to the powers of the phallus. In fact, using phallic symbolism similarly to Virginia Woolf in *To The Lighthouse* (1927), Grove tells us that “on a point of land far to the north, practically on the horizon, there stood a lighthouse; and for years it had been my ambition to go there and to examine it” (36). Unfortunately, however, the small boat in which Grove sets out carries him *away from* rather than towards the lighthouse and his ambition is abandoned.⁷

The event which immediately results in the final breakup between the author’s parents further establishes Grove’s failure to achieve “heteronormativity.” One day, when Grove is “not yet fourteen,” he is given the chance to “drive [his father’s] hackneys alone” (55). With his father “critically looking after [him],” Grove feels “very important.” On the road, however, Grove loses control over the horses, who bolt and run so hard that their over-exertion shows on their sides in patterns of sweat. Upon Grove’s return home, his father, “sitting his huge Dane like a centaur” and obviously in “one of those black moods which made people tremble before him,” judges his son’s performance as follows:

He asked no question; he did not give me a chance to explain; he simply manoeuvred his horse alongside the democrat, reached over with one powerful hand, gathered my collar into his grip, lifted me bodily from the seat and laid me across his horse’s neck, where he began to belabour me with his riding-crop, within sight of two hundred people, grown-ups and children. (58)

Grove characterizes the effect of this scene upon him as a “crisis,” a “difficult situation—difficult at least for a boy” (60). There follows a private moment in which Grove tells his mother of the beating:

I told her exactly what had happened, without comment or adornment . . . I could readily see that, for the moment, she was more excited than I . . . no doubt my own rising tension as I approached the climax, clenching my fists in the effort to control my nerves, imparted itself to her; and she inferred that a proud

child's innermost feelings, his very spiritual chastity, as it were, had been outraged. . . .

When the climax came, I saw from the tail of my eye how she was stiffening herself to receive the shock. By that time I could not entirely suppress a sob. . . .

I felt that, for the moment, my mother and I were a unity; we revolted against a portion of the outside world in one common impulse of passionate rebellion.

When I had finished, she sat speechless for a long while, pale and distraught. I knew my own crisis had become hers. I was desperately trying to keep a balance between her and me. (60-61)

On the surface, this highly sexualized scene suggests an erotic (heterosexual) symbiosis between mother and son. Indeed, immediately after this scene, Grove goes through the motions of asserting that he "felt [him]self very much a man," yet he feels "sorely troubled" (63) for now he must position himself as rival to his father by adopting a stance of "heteronormative" masculinity: as he states it, "metaphorically I had to draw my sword and to defend her" (63). He even begins to feel a "loathing" for his father. Grove's newly asserted manhood is quickly undermined, however, by the fact that his attempts to "imitate" his father, to parody "him and his pompous manner when he acted the conqueror," are nothing but the feverish delusions of a boy sick with "scarlatina" (64), a physical weakness which only pulls him back into a world of nursing women. Grove's apparent assumption of the privileges of the phallus is thus laid bare as a sham. Indeed, below the surface of the scene with his mother we see that it is the recounting of the experience of having been objectified by the father, an experience which Grove's mother clearly recognizes, which causes the sexual tension of the moment. The two come together, not in a literally sexual union, but rather in a union of "passionate rebellion" against the unforgiving judgement of the father. Mother and son bond in "common sympathy" (60). After this scene, Grove's mother determines to leave her husband, to protect her child from indoctrination into the world of manhood.

I earlier suggested a possible intertextual tie between Grove's text and Virginia Woolf's novel, *To The Lighthouse* (1927), in terms of the phallic image suggested in the title of the latter and the young Grove's own (literal) attempt and (symbolic) failure to reach a lighthouse. The pseudo-erotic scene between Grove and his mother makes that tie even stronger, I believe, as it corresponds to and contrasts with a scene in Woolf's text between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, in which the husband stands before his wife displaying his "exactingness and egotism" and representing the "arid scimitar of the

male, which smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy” (*Lighthouse* 38-39). As Mr. Ramsay—much like Grove in *ISM*—repeats over and over again that “he [is] a failure,” the narrator tells us that the “egotistical” father demands “to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile” (39). Similar to the position of Grove’s mother in *ISM*, Mrs. Ramsay responds to the needs of the male figure by “brac[ing] herself” and “looking at the same time animated and alive” (38). Once the moment has passed, Mrs. Ramsay sits “in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion,” but also emotionally “discomposed” by the scene (40). Meanwhile, the Ramsays’ young son, James, stands by watching the highly sexualized scene, as jealous of his father and possessive of his mother as the young Grove is not. It is almost as though Grove had adapted this scene from Woolf’s work, which is also an autobiographical fiction, as a supportive structure for his own text. Indeed, the similarities to be found between these two texts suggest Grove’s deliberate invocation of Woolf’s feminist agenda, in particular her attack in *To The Lighthouse* on the rigidity of gender roles in early twentieth-century society. That the image of the lighthouse and the focus on the Oedipal dynamics of the family unit may have been consciously invoked from Woolf appears highly possible. In a letter dated November 1, 1937 to Richard Crouch, Grove makes the following statement:

I am profoundly conscious of a gap in my knowledge of latter-day fiction. I have never read Virginia Woolf—nor anything of Gertrude Stein. What more natural than that I should turn to you? Could you help me out? Perhaps—I’m not sure—I can leave Gertrude Stein safely to one side. But Virginia Woolf, from what I have read *about* her? (Pacey 322)

Given that this letter was written just one year before undertaking his own autobiographic endeavour, one might well ask of Grove, why the sudden interest in these two women writers in particular? Ten days later he writes again:

I return, under separate cover, the 2 Virginia Woolf and the Gertrude Stein, fearing they may be asked for. I am very glad to have had an opportunity to see what sort of things these two women do. Neither seems to me of any fundamental importance, such as attaches to Joyce or Lawrence, let me say. (322)⁸

Grove’s subsequent dismissive attitude towards Woolf and Stein conflicts with his initial and implicit acknowledgement of their work as representative of “latter-day fiction” and, hence, worthy of filling the “gap” in his own literary knowledge. Despite Grove’s apparently ingenuous assertion that

Stein and Woolf lack *any* “fundamental importance” when compared to Joyce or Lawrence, a thoughtful consideration of Grove’s own autobiographical stylizations, including the images and thematic concerns which his text shares with Woolf, effectively gives the lie to his categorical rejection of the “sort of things these two women do.”

Once Grove’s mother leaves the family home and Grove begins his acquaintance with European social circles, he has little contact with his father: as he states, “I had seen the last of the man my father had been, the proud, imperious and magnificent, if brutal man” (*ISM* 67). In fact, Grove does not come under the influence of his father until after his mother’s death, when old age has rendered Mr. Grove “broken in body and spirit,” a severely diminished figure of patriarchal authority. If masculinity is characterized by a psychological “rigidity” of difference from that which is feminine (Chodorow 13), then, in terms of a physical symbolism of the psychological state, it is especially significant that, at this point in Grove’s text, the father who was formerly defined by his height and his towering presence on top of a horse, now appears with a “bent” spine and “no longer tower[s] over” his son (*ISM* 113). Significantly, once he is back at the family home with his father, Grove states that “even the ambition to write seemed pale and far-away” (122). The impotent image of masculinity which Grove’s father now represents—indeed, his father no longer seeks out the company of ladies (115)—is the only one which Grove himself ever achieves in the text, as reflected in the second half of the book and the focus on Grove’s own spinal problems. This broken down image of his father dominates the “Youth” section of the text, wherein we see Grove “at the age where a boy begins to pay attention to the other sex” and in a state “still ‘unsullied’” (124, 132), at least until he begins the affair with his professor’s wife. Grove represents this relationship as supposedly symbolic of his entrance into manhood, but the relationship between the author and Mrs. Broegler, who is, significantly, “childless” (138), seems only to replay the situation of his own familial Oedipal triangle. Once again we have the younger boy and the wife aligned against the unkind husband in a union which can only be characterized as an infantilization of the near adult male: as Grove states it, “she treated me like a child; she played with me; the moment her sensuality was appeased she became maternal . . . I wanted forever to remain with her; she laughed and sent me back to school” (138).

When it comes to the question of Grove’s career, his father takes control of the situation and dooms his son to failure. In contrast to the view that

ISM provides the story of an immigrant coming to Canada “as to a land of promise” (Spettigue, “Introduction” xi), the real situation of the text makes clear that it is Grove’s father who suggests that his son visit America, and then it is this very incapable man who effectively abandons his son in the wilderness of the “New World” upon his death. Grove’s early existence in Europe represents a state of dependence and irresponsibility as he remains unable to make a career decision. He is drifting across the continent of Europe and his father’s insistence that he leave and make his life decisions when he returns suggests that Grove is being made to leave Europe and go to America—to leave the motherland and go to a world of independence and liberty—as a means of enforcing separation-individuation of the young male. But Grove’s entrance into manhood is severely undercut by his father’s death and the fact that Grove cannot embrace his patrilineal inheritance, the estate of Thurow, because it is so laden with debt that it will cripple him for life. Once again we see that Grove has fictionalized a portion of his life as a means of making symbolically significant some aspect of his represented selfhood. In real life, Grove’s father, although having leased an estate called Thurow for a short term prior to the author’s birth, worked most of his life as a “tram conductor” and was paid a modest wage (Spettigue, *FPG* 32-36). In *ISM*, however, Grove renders his father a figure of economic privilege, a true patriarch in charge of his own feudalistic estate. By having his father lose that economic power and privilege, Grove further emphasizes his own lack of accession to patriarchal power, a lack which will result in his tenuous economic status in North America and his subsequent repeatedly failed literary efforts. Given such a situation, it is significant that, unequipped for economic independence in the New World, Grove decides to choose Canada as a place to live rather than the United States precisely because, as he states it, “Canada had never, so far, entirely severed the umbilical cord which bound it to England” (*ISM* 217).

The way in which Grove characterizes his parents, as well as the way in which he constructs his relationship with each of them, represents a deliberate attempt to illustrate “to what extent reality bore out th[e] appearance” that he could hardly have “chosen better than the determining destiny did choose for [him] in the matter of parents” (15). Having foregrounded his failure at literary achievement in his “Prologue,” Grove goes on to provide at least a partial explanation of that failure in the “Childhood” and “Youth” sections of the text by focusing on the relatively weak subject positions

available to him through the Oedipal dynamics of the family unit. Grove first identifies himself with the object position of the mother and, after his mother's death, with the image of a less than virile father. Neither position is particularly conducive to the achievement of an "unimpaired masculinity" (Silverman 42) and the privileges of the phallus, including the privilege of literary success. The fabrication of certain facets of his life in the early sections of *ISM* illustrates that his parents were unable to provide an environment necessary for masculine achievements, a "fact" which he uses to (at least partially) explain his literary failures when he states, "this is the story of a writer; and a writer's concern is everlastingly with his soul. Circumstance concerns him only in two ways: inasmuch as it gives him a viaticum on the way, such as is implied in his descent or in the heritage he has received; and inasmuch as it impedes or furthers the growth of what he has thus received" (155-56). Having established for himself a fictional "viaticum" which asserts his lack of identification with "heteronormativity," Grove goes on to use that fabrication to further inform the Canadian part of his life as an experience of marginality.

The circumstances experienced in his family of origins certainly make themselves felt in his own family in Canada, in details such as that his wife Catherine is twenty years his junior (281), which recalls for the reader the difference between his parents' ages as a means of suggesting an equally physical distance between Grove and his wife, and that "[Catherine] and the little girl had, in this cottage, a separate bedroom" (361).⁹ What Grove foregrounds about his relationship with his wife—whom he married on August 2, 1914—is its apparent unconventionality: Catherine Grove is represented as the chief breadwinner of the family, an arrangement most men of the period would not have wanted to stress in public. Although World War One resulted in a "wider acceptance of *single* women in paid employment, women were only to work at jobs for a few years before marriage" (Prentice 219; emphasis added). Besides the fact that he affects a rejection of monetary pursuits (279), Grove's own physical shortcomings keep him from performing the economic maintenance of his family: as he states it, "every now and then, during the years to come, I was to have a breakdown, accompanied by a sudden paralysis of my lower limbs" (325). It is important to note that Grove's spinal problems and overall health seem to fluctuate according to what level of hope he holds out for his success as a writer. At first, he seems to feel worse when he is unable, and better when he is able, to write,

which suggests that Grove's sense of masculinity is derived from his ability to produce texts. Nevertheless, this pattern appears to change at some point, for gradually it is when he becomes weaker and weaker that he "flourish[es] amazingly" as a writer (332). Further reminiscent of the gender dynamics of Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*—wherein Mr. Ramsay considers himself a failure, seeks sympathy from his family audience and appropriates the "delicious fecundity" of the mother as a means to have "his barrenness made fertile" (38-39)—the fluctuation in both Grove's health and his desire to write seems to match his switch from a phallic to a maternal metaphor of artistic creation.

Initially, Grove posits his creative function in a traditionally masculine way, as when he makes the following statement:

Every human being born can, in a way, be regarded as a seed; the seed, too, has its viaticum; once released from the parent plant, it has to seek, or rather to find, its soil, there to grow or to perish. Considering myself as a seed, then, it strikes me now, as it struck me then, that Siberia had come very near to giving me the soil I needed. The wind picked me up and bore me aloft. It is significant that, not until I found a similar soil, did I strike root. (*ISM* 156)

Once again, Grove's metaphors are complex. On the one hand, he figures himself as a seed wanting to embed or root itself in the "barren belts" of Siberia (149)—a northern region of what was then the USSR. On the other hand, the characterization of the landscape as "barren" and Siberia's reputation as "a place of exile for offenders" against society ("Siberia") result in another level of meaning for Grove's chances of literary achievement in Canada, a landscape which Grove equates with Siberia. Searching for a cultural environment in which to embed the seed of his literary genius, Grove ineffectually decides upon a landscape which will only ensure his failure and marginalization. However, slowly but surely there comes a change in Grove's metaphor for artistic creation, as seen when he says, "as far as my literary activity went, it seemed to me I was lying fallow" (*ISM* 253, 419). No longer is he the seed, but rather the field in which (textual) life will gestate and grow. Indeed, he says, "I had, by the way, *withdrawn* all my manuscripts from circulation among the publishers . . . I felt that a new chapter had opened in my life. I should want to work all my older books over again—to refashion them, to bring them into accord with my widening outlook" (257; emphasis added). The emphasis on the need for "withdrawal" is apparent again in the following significant passage in the section titled "And After":

Among the three books which satisfied my own standards and which were written during the seven years was *Felix Powell's Career*. It is a serious book which deals with a sexual problem; and it is written with a savage sort of frankness which should have convinced everyone of the sincerity of its purpose. I offered it. Publishers and agents alike failed to see its true import; they put it down as pornography. From that moment on I ceased offering my work; one or two manuscripts were still travelling about. I withdrew them. (439)

The unpublished text referred to here, which bears Grove's own first name in the title, delineates a "sexual problem" and presents a male character who "is said to have been a cad in his dealing with women" (Spettigue, *FPG* 137). Although the male sexuality of the text is put forth with a "savage sort of frankness," *Felix Powell's Career*, like many of Grove's texts, results in failure and it is finally "withdrawn."

Grove's new means of creative production—ironically adopted in the "Manhood" section of *ISM*—is highlighted in the following comment regarding the genesis of his novel, *Fruits of the Earth* (1933): "an explosion had followed in the nerve-centres of my brain because I had been ready for it. I had, for some time, been ready for the pains of birth" (260). The adoption of a maternal metaphor of creativity is not an unusual tactic for male writers: "Men as well as women have used the metaphor extensively, taking female anatomy as a model for human creativity in sharp contrast with the equally common phallic analogy, which uses male anatomy for its paradigm" (Friedman 371). Grove suggests of his writing technique, at least as it is presented in this text, "the birth of a figure has remained typical for all my work" (*ISM* 261). Such a statement implicitly includes, I would suggest, *In Search of Myself*, which represents delivery to reading audiences of the figure known as Frederick Philip Grove. Grove's use of the maternal metaphor of artistic creativity functions in this text in a Joycean manner: "if *Portrait* is autobiographical, it is autobiographical in just this way: Joyce's creation of Stephen represents a putting to death of his own past and his own past self, and yet at the same time it represents his rebirth as an artist" (Jay 144). If Grove considered himself largely an artistic failure prior to the writing of this text, then the very act of writing *In Search of Myself* is a "talking cure" to overcome that failure. In Grove's hands, the chronological narrative form and the use of autobiography as self-analysis become devices for representing the gestation period of a new creative entity, a fictional construct, beginning with its conception in the "Prologue" and ending with its death in the "Author's Postscript." Earlier I noted the resigned and gloomy

tone of failure which pervades the "Prologue," but that section of the text also marks the gestation period of a new life. Indeed, in the very last line of the "Prologue" Grove sets to work writing his text, thereby giving birth to his newly created self. That new self makes its way through the intervening phases of life and emerges at the end in the "Author's Postscript," which is significantly written in third person and past tense. On one level, the effect of the "Postscript" is to suggest the death of the subject of the text, so that this section becomes the inevitable conclusion to the chronological structure. At one point, Grove even calls *ISM* the "last will and testament of my life" (230). In fact, there is an eerie sense of premonition to the "Author's Postscript," as Grove died on August 19, 1948, not too long after the publication of his text. On another level, the switch to third person, past tense within a first-person discourse suggests that "the author speaks about himself *as if* another were speaking about him, or as if he himself were speaking of another" (Lejeune 29). In the "Postscript" Grove refers to "the author" represented in *ISM* as though he were a separate identity, or (an)other self, even going so far as to provide the reader with an update on "his" activities since the concluding events of the "above record" (*ISM* 458).

The irony of Grove's re-creation of himself in *ISM* begins with his demasculinized self-positioning as a means of representing his failure to garner fame and economic success in a heterosexual society and culminates in his adoption of the metaphoric language of female creativity as a means of producing his autobiographical explanation of that failure. Indeed, it is precisely the gender de/constructions in *ISM* which ensure Frederick Philip Grove's canonization as a successful Canadian author for, as a result of his record of failure, Grove won the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction in 1947. That Grove measured literary achievement at least partly in terms of such critical recognition is evident from a letter which he wrote to Lorne Pierce while writing his autobiography, wherein he states the following: "I have once more taken up that autobiography of mine, trying to soften down such passages as my wife objects to. Friends of mine who have read the typescript call it a 'knock-out' of a book and talk of the Nobel Prize (!!!). I laugh" (Pacey 372). If we accept that "the contours of a canon are governed not by the inherent qualities of certain texts, but by the values attributed to them by those in power according to their current agendas and the particular configuration of national, aesthetic, and *sexual politics* that best serves their interests" and that one of the cultural "values" which governed the

creation of the Canadian canon in the first half of the twentieth century was “virility” (Gerson 46, 48; emphasis added), then the irony of the critical recognition of *ISM* and Grove’s subsequent inclusion in the Canadian literary canon, at least in light of my assertions regarding the gender instabilities to be found in his self-representation, cannot be ignored.

Thus, having achieved success as a canonized writer (if Governor General’s Awards are markers of success) through the construction of masculine failure in his personal life and the adoption by default of a feminized creative position in his public text, the last laugh, it would appear, is Grove’s, or at least that of Grove’s contemporary critic who is aware of the author’s de/constructing process. In this way, Grove becomes an example of a “complex, multiple, layered subject with agency in the discourses and the worlds that constitute the referential space of his or her autobiography, a self not only constructed by differences but capable of choosing, inscribing, and making a difference” (Neuman, “Autobiography” 225). Exploration of the gender of Grove’s textual self-representation allows us to add another “layer” to this enigmatic author’s subjectivity; it allows us to join (albeit uneasily) in Grove’s affected laughter as we note the motto of *In Search of Myself*: “Ça vous amuse, la vie?”

NOTES

- 1 In 1972, in “The Grove Enigma Resolved,” D.O. Spettigue made his announcement that the “autos” of Grove’s text is very much a fictional construct, a finding which Spettigue consolidated in his 1973 work, *FPG: The European Years*. In his introduction to the 1974 New Canadian Library edition of Grove’s text, Spettigue advises the reader that the autobiographical pact of “truthfulness” was broken and that “the facts. . . [of the author’s life] are curiously fragmented and re-constituted in new time and space relations” (ix). Spettigue had discovered that, although the Canadian half of Grove’s life suffered from only “minor alterations of detail or emphasis,” “Grove’s account of his birth, parentage, childhood, and education in Europe” had been greatly fictionalized (ix-x). In fact, *In Search of Myself* presents the reader with the life story of a human being who, strictly speaking, has no real-life referent, for “Frederick Philip Grove” was the figment of a creative imagination. As most people are now aware, Frederick Philip Grove was born Felix Paul Berthold Friedrich Greve on February 14, 1879 to German parents.
- 2 Like Richard Cavell, however, I want to assert that it is not my intention to examine gender representation in *ISM* in order to prove that Grove was a homosexual, a rather “reductive enterprise” (13) in any case. Instead, the purpose of this paper is to explore how gender is de/constructed by Grove and to what purpose.
- 3 Given that “male homosexuality . . . was a widespread, licit, and very influential part” of Greek culture (Sedgwick 4), Grove’s several invocations of Greek mythology appear to

- reflect the homosocial nature of his textual self-representation. Indeed, the Greek language, “whose resonances went far beyond the linguistic” (Cavell 14), was one focus of study for Grove while attending school in Germany.
- 4 In fact, “for many readers in 1933, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was seen, not as a clever literary device, but as a hoax, a deliberate manipulation that produced confusion, anger, and charges that the author, whoever she was, was a liar” (Adams 17). In a letter dated November 12, 1937 to Richard Crouch—to which I will return later in this essay—Grove expresses an interest in and does read at least one text by Stein, although the work remains unnamed (Pacey 321-22).
 - 5 That readers of autobiography have continued to value “biographical facticity” is evident in the fact that Spettigue, in his introduction to the 1974 New Canadian Library edition of *ISM*, assures readers that the second half of the text, the “Canadian” half, is, “apart from minor alterations of detail or emphasis,” “accurate and verifiable from accessible sources and from associates, acquaintances, and relatives of Grove” (ix).
 - 6 It is interesting that Grove should figure his “endeavour” in this way, especially given that the ship Titanic was conceived of as being “unsinkable” and destined to achieve great things. Both Grove and the Titanic, however, failed to live up to these expectations, both sank into obscurity, yet both ultimately achieved, through re-constitutions of their failure (one through autobiography and the other through film), historical recognition.
 - 7 In fact, the young Grove’s inability to manoeuvre his boat towards the lighthouse in this scene from *ISM* contrasts sharply with Klaus Martens’s documentation of Felix Greve’s student years in Bonn and his prowess as both “rower and swimmer,” for Greve was “a veritable water creature” (24).
 - 8 As Pacey states in a footnote regarding the Woolf texts which Grove might have read, “I can only speculate on the identity of these books. The most recent novels of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) were *The Years* (1937) and *The Waves* (1931)” (322), although we don’t really know which books Grove might have been given. As for a consideration of which of Stein’s works may have been available to Grove in 1937, Pacey asserts that three books appeared in the thirties: “*Three Lives* (1933), *The Geographical Lust [sic] of America* (1936), and *Everybody’s Autobiography* (1937)” (322). However, *Three Lives* first appeared in 1909, while *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was published in 1933.
 - 9 The fact that Grove and his wife conceived two children does not mean that Grove experienced an unproblematic heterosexual identification. Rather, I would suggest that, throughout his text, Grove appears to mediate between, on the one hand, an acceptable masculine image (marriage and children) and, on the other hand, his self-marginalization from a “heteronormative” subject positioning.

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Sex Sells on the Street

sex sells on the streets
like matching cadillacs and his and hers
steam

and his and hers persian cats
sex sells on the street my street walking home
in a cream vinyl dress snug
and bleached hair paris lipstick and legs at two a.m. twilight

looking like bridgette bar nothing approached by some street gang
switchblade eyes and rasta hair asking for a flame from my marmalade
look my lighter i held onto the light coasted by some seventeen year old
angel on a ten speed my heart muscle speeding he says to them and
i am praying dont cut us he says to the beautiful small one
who is cupping my lighter & im holding on he says you take off your
shirt and you get a favour and i remember laughing saying something
god given thinking this is gonna be some kind of gang rape and
this one will scar deeper than the last rape
then they look around and they're outa here looking back slow
and i say to this cherub this blond curled hair go straight home
thinking i am the sex that sells on the street and he says at least i
got you home safe and can i see you sometime and im thinking i could be
your mother looking like bridgette bar nothing and they could have had
a gun and you want to sleep with me
turning the key i burn on the blue chair
hit by lightning
where are you tonight
did he get home
i tried your door i had one drink at one bar to see a friend play in a
cheap new dress
summer heat beading up like tentacles around my body
boys and girls sold to used up bags of shit i think
i fall asleep
trembling and nauseous
sex sells on the street
sex sells too damn cheap

They Became Mermaids

The wet centre is bottomless.

Local legend has it how, beleaguered
by a frothing mob of pent-up gallants—
brothers, uncles, cousins, all with talents
of a cutthroat sort, a bold avant-garde
hard bent on making right a sordid wrong—
a sorcerer asked his abducted bride
would she take the plunge. How could she decide?
To which dark camp would she rather belong?
The story goes that the cold wizard swept
her into the lake's unfathomable heart,
down a churning channel drawn on no chart,
out to the open sea. I think she leapt.
Tales tell of a seal-like pair basking bare
on the rocks: sometimes they come up for air.

semyon

you in bed ask why and i / can't tell you
i've seen your soul before / too something-odd for date 2 /
don't want to scare you.

i fumble

around your body and art conversation. i look
into your brown eyes and words cannot begin to stretch
to begin toward what i see: the infinite
field expands precisely, the matrix dot-lit flash like night-
L.A. from an onset plane, or
further, that one ocean beyond

L'Intertexte de l'homosexualité dans *Orage sur mon corps* d'André Béland¹

D'après André G. Bourassa (1982: 718), lorsqu'est publié *Orage sur mon corps* en 1944, "l'ensemble de la critique fut unanime à condamner" son auteur, André Béland, ce qui n'a rien d'étonnant en soi quand on sait que ce roman sera considéré plusieurs décennies plus tard comme le premier roman homosexuel (Laniel 84). L'étude de la réception critique de cet ouvrage démontre du reste qu'au cours des décennies un certain "recyclage" de cette prise de position s'est effectué, provoquant sa disparition presque totale du corpus littéraire québécois (Tremblay 1996). Sachant que le "capital symbolique" relève de jeux complexes et multiples qui découlent de conjonctures souvent étrangères à la "valeur" d'un écrit, il importe, croyons-nous, de se pencher à nouveau sur ce livre, d'autant plus qu'une nouvelle édition est parue en 1995 chez Guérin.

En plus d'avoir été malmené à cause d'un contenu prétendument obscène et amoral qui irritait la sensibilité bourgeoise, *Orage sur mon corps* l'a été en raison, affirmait-on, d'un manque d'originalité. De fait, rares sont les écrivains québécois qui se sont vus incriminer, comme l'a été Béland, à cause de leurs lectures. L'on sait, depuis, que tout texte est redevable à d'autres textes et même à des discours divers, procédant d'une interdépendance, d'un dialogisme difficile à estimer. Dans la présente étude, afin de mieux cerner la "spécificité" d'un roman qui est, selon nous, sinon fondateur, du moins essentiel pour comprendre l'évolution du romanesque québécois, nous nous attarderons aux influences littéraires indues dont on l'accuse de dépendre, la plupart à fortes connotations homosexuelles, tentant

de déterminer comment Béland s'est approprié ces matériaux pour créer un univers romanesque vraisemblable et original.

En raison de la prolifération parfois conflictuelle de la notion d'intertextualité, il importe de rappeler que, dans notre acception, ce terme, en plus de recouvrir les permutations sémantiques et stylistiques causées par l'interférence d'autres textes à l'intérieur de l'oeuvre étudiée, s'ouvre à ce que Barthes nomme "le volume de la sociabilité: [c'est-à-dire] tout le langage, antérieur et contemporain, qui vient au texte, non selon la voie d'une filiation repérable, d'une imitation volontaire, mais selon celle d'une dissémination – une image qui assure au texte le statut, non d'une *reproduction*, mais d'une *productivité*" (1015). L'intertextualité n'est donc pas réduite à des relations transtextuelles (Genette), mais elle englobe les liens *producteurs* entre l'oeuvre et les différents discours sociaux dont elle dérive (Bakhtin, Kristeva). Elle peut même dépasser l'acte de l'écriture pour se rattacher, quoique d'une façon plus problématique, à un effet de lecture (Barthes, Riffaterre) ². Ainsi, même si nous ne sommes pas toujours certains des *traces* d'autres écrivains dans le texte de Béland, nous sommes assurés que ce dernier, en tant qu'étudiant de philosophie, passionné de littérature et de culture, a été exposé aux divers discours sociaux (religieux, politiques, littéraires, intellectuels. . .) d'une époque et d'un milieu déterminés, lesquels sont accessibles à tout lecteur-critique³.

Mais, avant de s'intéresser à l'"intertexte" d'*Orage sur mon corps*, il convient de donner un bref résumé de ce livre plutôt obscur, afin de montrer comment l'homosexualité *se textualise* dans l'intrigue. En fait, bien que le terme "homosexualité" et ses dérivés ne soient jamais mentionnés dans la courte autobiographie du protagoniste Julien Sanche, aucun doute ne persiste quant à la cause de ses déboires et de ses souffrances. Il vient d'être expulsé du collège parce qu'il aurait "perversi" certains de ses jeunes compagnons, les ayant menés "à la complète libération de [leurs] sens" (5). Dans son récit d'une centaine de pages qui couvre approximativement six mois de sa vie, le jeune homme raconte comment, ayant quitté ses parents qui le traitaient d'"hors la loi" et de "lépreux" (6), il essaie de survivre au dégoût de soi et des autres, d'abord en cherchant l'amour d'"une femme dont [il] ne pressen[t] pas d'attraits" (12). Il découvre rapidement que de vouloir prouver ainsi qu'il est un homme est une fausseté et que, de toute façon, il est lui-même "peut-être trop" femme (44). Par la suite, lorsque son appel au secours à un ermite qu'il respecte reste sans réponse, il décide de se

venger sadiquement contre la destinée. Après avoir amené une jeune cousine tuberculose à s'éprendre de lui, malgré le tabou de l'inceste, il lui crie son mépris et provoque sa mort. L'épilogue semble bien démontrer de façon métaphorique que Julien Sanche en vient à accepter son *anormalité*.

Lorsque, retiré à la campagne dans le chalet de son père, il reçoit la visite de deux adolescents, frère et soeur, alors qu'il demande au premier de l'aider à faire un feu dans la cheminée, il relègue la deuxième à la cuisine pour préparer la soupe.

Il va sans dire que si, à sa sortie, la plupart des commentateurs ont nié au roman toute valeur littéraire, c'est en partie à cause de son sujet, sans qu'ils aient d'ailleurs eux-mêmes osé écrire le mot "homosexualité." Par contre, ils ont trouvé ce livre "farci de littérature" pour emprunter l'expression de Roger Duhamel (71). À cause de son trop jeune âge, dix-sept ans, on accusait Béland de ne pas s'être départi de ses modèles, oubliant que Rimbaud, Radiguet, et Nelligan au Québec, sont devenus célèbres entre autres à cause de leur jeunesse. Dans les onze comptes rendus parus après la publication du roman, on cite le plus souvent l'un ou l'autre des sept auteurs suivants comme étant à la source malencontreuse de son inspiration: Baudelaire, Gide, Proust, Radiguet, Rimbaud, Oscar Wilde et indirectement Sade (Tremblay 1996: 178-81). Curieusement, du même coup, on ajoute qu'il aurait dû imiter des écrivains tels Alain-Fournier pour avoir su se dégager de l'enfance d'une façon merveilleuse (Duhamel 71), Henri Troyat et James Joyce pour avoir écrit des récits de révolte semblables mais avec art et sans violence (J.C.D.), et ainsi de suite.

Ce qu'on reprochait à Béland n'était donc pas l'imitation en soi, mais les écrivains qu'il imitait, comme le confirme le franciscain Légaré dans son article sur les romans de 1940 à 1945:

L'imitation est le procédé normal de la création littéraire. Mais pour que l'imitation ne nuise pas à l'originalité et enrichisse véritablement le patrimoine national, il faut le concours d'esprits vigoureux et affinés, "informés" d'une culture solide et générale, ouverts sur la vie et sachant de plus choisir des modèles imitables, les plus sûrs et les meilleurs. (73-74)

L'on considérait que Béland n'avait pas, en raison de sa jeunesse, une personnalité bien affermie qui aurait pu le protéger de l'absorption par ses influences. Les maîtres français, qu'on lui avait découverts, n'étaient-ils des corrupteurs, tous ayant été marqués du sceau de l'Index? Ainsi un clerc, Théophile Bertrand, déplorait-il en 1951 que certaines oeuvres de jeunes

écrivains de talent, dont Béland, avaient été corrompues par “les poisons de la culture *moderne*” (4). Pour les critiques d’alors, le problème de l’imitation était un point d’autant plus sensible, que la jeune littérature canadienne-française, qui s’efforçait à l’originalité, était reliée par sa langue à une littérature de rayonnement universel dont le pouvoir d’attraction était considérable. Voilà sans doute ce qui amenait Duhamel, par exemple, à analyser les oeuvres françaises et celles en provenance du Québec à partir de critères différents. Ainsi juge-t-il certains ouvrages d’auteurs tels Rimbaud, Gide, Radiguet, comme des réussites, bien que ceux-ci puissent combattre la moralité chrétienne et la classe bourgeoise, alors qu’il ne peut concevoir que de pareils livres puissent s’écrire au pays. Mais qu’en est-il réellement de cette “mauvaise” influence littéraire française dans l’oeuvre de Béland?

L’un des principaux facteurs constitutifs d’un texte est la disposition des valeurs et des savoirs, c’est-à-dire des réseaux sémantiques qui incarnent ceux-ci selon l’axe mytho-traditionnel bien/mal par le biais du personnage principal et de sa quête (Tremblay 1991: 11-53). Comme André Béland voulait subvertir ce système socio-moral, il lui fallait, pour que le lecteur comprenne son protagoniste malveillant, le présenter de l’intérieur afin qu’il vive ses émotions et pénètre ses motivations intimes⁴. Il a donc recours à la technique du monologue intérieur qui commençait alors à être de plus en plus utilisée en France. Au Québec, déjà depuis les années 1930, Jovette Bernier, Medjé Vézina et Jean-Charles Harvey avaient thématiqué dans leurs oeuvres le questionnement de la société, exprimé sur le plan esthétique au moyen du “je” narratif. Ce procédé, on le sait, accentuait l’“effet de réel” nécessaire pour la production romanesque en ajoutant la motivation psychologique. Le texte de Béland s’inscrit ainsi, comme tout texte, non seulement dans un univers auquel il se réfère sans cesse, mais renvoie aussi constamment à des savoirs, à d’autres écrits qui sont décodés par le lecteur et participent à la compréhension et à l’interprétation de l’oeuvre. Ainsi l’auteur, comme la plupart des jeunes de sa génération qui s’intéressaient à la littérature, connaissait les grands romanciers français de l’époque, tels Claudel, Proust, Bernanos, Malraux et Sartre. Avec ces écrivains, le roman n’était plus simplement le récit d’une histoire, mais plutôt une somme de sensations, d’impressions, d’expériences qui traduisaient psychologiquement et métaphysiquement la destinée tragique de l’homme. C’est de ce type romanesque que s’inspire Béland qui, rappelons-le, était alors lui-même inscrit en philosophie à l’Université de Montréal.

Quant à l'utilisation du monologue intérieur qui permet d'exprimer idéalement la conscience du héros, selon M. R. Albérès, c'est surtout avec *La Nausée* (1938) de Sartre qu'elle fait son apparition d'une façon plus systématique (214). Ce roman constitue pour ce critique "l'une des plus belles réussites (une des plus immédiatement accessibles) du roman de monologue intérieur et de sensation interne." (216) Comme cette nouvelle technique narrative est dans l'air au moment où Béland écrit son livre, on ne peut donc l'attribuer directement à une lecture de Sartre. Pourtant, devant l'angoisse et le dégoût existentiels de Roquentin, Béland a dû reconnaître en lui un frère. Bien avant que Bourassa ne remarque l'influence sartrienne (1982: 718), Dostaler O'Leary avait écrit qu'il s'agissait d'une "*Nausée canadienne*" (1954: 147). On retrouve, en effet, en Julien Sanche, son protagoniste, la même conscience inquiète, traduite par des réactions viscérales vis-à-vis des choses, et vécue par bribes à travers des épisodes quotidiens. Avant de pouvoir penser, il y a chez lui, comme chez Roquentin, le corps et le monde qui s'imposent dans une absurde contingence: "tout cela, [dit-il, en décrivant la laideur immonde et malade alentour de lui,] c'est bien le fond de mon âme, tremblotante comme un marais visqueux dont on ne peut sortir, le fond de puisard grouillant et plein de miasmes" (69). Outre la nausée de soi et de ce qui l'entoure, souvent associée à des odeurs nauséabondes⁵, le questionnement sur la masculinité, le rôle de la mauvaise foi, ainsi que la nécessité, au-delà de la peur et de la solitude, de créer sa propre liberté, Béland doit peut-être à Sartre un autre élément de moindre importance. L'ancienne petite amie de Roquentin, qui vers la fin du récit lui donne rendez-vous par écrit pour ensuite le repousser, s'appelle Anny, comme la cousine (Anni) de Julien Sanche qui, lui, éconduira sadiquement celle-ci. Il est tout de même deux caractéristiques essentielles qui différencient grandement les deux narrateurs. D'une part, Sanche, au contraire de Roquentin, se sent étranger, rejeté des autres et dégoûté de lui-même à cause de son homosexualité. D'autre part, devant l'ordre socio-religieux qui l'ostracise, soit Sanche se sent coupable, soit il réagit par le blasphème ou la vengeance.

L'attitude de Roquentin devant l'Autodidacte pédéraste, qui est d'ailleurs victimisé à la fin du roman, "mis à mort" écrira le narrateur (230), en est une de compréhension. Il "tremblai[t] de colère" devant la bêtise du bibliothécaire bagarreur et bien-pensant, mais avec fatalisme il reconnaît que l'Autodidacte devra comme lui commencer "l'apprentissage de la solitude" et "la longue suite des jours d'exil" (224). Alors que chez Sartre la défense

des marginalisés relève d'une interrogation sociale et métaphysique qui le conduira à faire le procès de la bourgeoisie, chez Béland c'est loin d'être le cas. S'il s'intéresse à l'homosexualité, c'est qu'il en souffre et qu'il trouve cette situation injuste. Ses préoccupations sont d'abord personnelles et son roman, en plus de traduire son angoisse à propos de sa différence sexuelle, est une tentative de compréhension d'un état qu'il trouve anormal. Son protagoniste, mis à la porte d'un collège dirigé par les Jésuites qui l'accusaient de corrompre la jeunesse (5), s'interroge sur son identité et essaie de donner un sens à sa vie. D'ailleurs, cette allégation, de même que le procès qu'auraient aimé tenter les mères "des jeunes gens" auxquels il aurait donné de mauvais "conseils" (5-7), n'est pas sans rappeler le sort que subit Socrate pour des raisons semblables, d'autant plus que le protagoniste, plus loin, dans une crise de désespoir reliée au questionnement de son orientation sexuelle, "brûl[e] Socrate et les extraits de son *Banquet* au feu [. . .] de sa rage" (45). On doit sans doute cet intertexte homosexuel au fait que Béland, étudiant en philosophie, connaît bien la problématique amoureuse du *Banquet* de Platon, ainsi que la destinée de Socrate.

Bien que l'intelligentsia canadienne-française catholique de l'époque vilipende le freudisme qui, selon elle, par son aspect scientifique cautionnait la licence physique et réduisait l'âme à un sensualisme vulgaire, le jeune Béland, en réaction contre cette perception cléricale, eut sûrement recours à la psychanalyse dans son désir de se comprendre. C'est ce dont l'accusent d'ailleurs plusieurs critiques. Selon le franciscain R. Légaré, Béland, par "sa joie naïve de scandaliser, en racontant des petites saletés, . . . s'est précipité avec sa ferveur juvénile dans les abîmes du subconscient, d'où il rapporte plus de vase que de perles" (73). Duhamel lui conseille de "décanter ses dons de tout leur substrat d'impressions troubles et nauséabondes . . . [de] dominer le noeud de vipères qui s'agitent en son cloaque intime" (71). Quant à Théophile Bertrand, il clame contre "l'épidémie" du freudisme et de "l'homme absurde" qui aurait touché certains auteurs canadiens-français (3-4).

Freud, d'ailleurs, qui fut traduit en français durant les années 1920 et 1930, eut un certain succès auprès des surréalistes qui découvraient dans l'exploration de l'inconscient de nouvelles possibilités offertes à l'art. Et l'on sait que le Québec artistique des années 1940 a été entraîné dans l'aventure surréaliste. Nous verrons un peu plus loin que Béland n'échappa pas à cette influence, mais attardons-nous d'abord au savoir psychanalytique auquel,

croyons-nous, s'est référé Béland pour décrire et présenter son protagoniste. Soulignons que, dans les lignes qui suivent, il ne s'agit nullement de cautionner ce type de psychanalyse, mais bien de résumer le savoir sur l'homosexualité accessible alors à Béland.

Suivant la théorie freudienne, l'homosexualité masculine est avant tout fixation à la mère dominante en l'absence d'un père inattentif (Tripp 62-93). Le garçon, s'identifiant à celle-ci, devient efféminé et veut se substituer à elle pour conquérir le père. Paradoxalement, en même temps, il développe une phobie de la femme par peur de perdre son pénis en contact avec une partenaire qui n'en a pas. Tout homosexuel qui se questionne sur sa *nature* aura alors tendance à lire sa propre histoire dans le scénario freudien, comme en témoigne le texte de Béland. C'est pourquoi, Julien Sanche a "quelquefois l'idée d'une cure gigantesque dans laquelle [il] laisserai[t. . .] toute une hérédité où sont tressées des anormalités et des incorrections, pour [s]e plonger dans une existence plus saine." (9) Son père, qui depuis longtemps s'est éloigné de lui (10), appuiera sa décision de quitter la maison. Il est content que son fils veuille enfin "lâcher les jupes" de sa mère (51). Lorsque, dans un moment de culpabilité intense, Julien affirme qu'il est "peut-être trop [. . .] femme," n'accuse-t-il pas alors "le subconscient conservé de [s]on enfance" de refaire surface? (46) S'inspirant de Freud, le récit de Béland reprend sans cesse le thème ambivalent de la femme-mère à la fois salvatrice et maléfique dont on doit se défaire cruellement.

Sa recherche d'une femme afin de le sauver de la bizarrerie de ses amours *anormales* est significative, d'abord par son ambivalence. Il retrouve en elle la bonne mère, "l'immense chair de ma chair" pour laquelle il éprouvait une "passion charnelle" (10-11), mais aussi la mère "dévorante" qui par son trop grand amour le trahit car elle est la responsable de son étrangeté: "mon grand trouble, avoue-t-il, résulte du fait qu'ayant reçu jadis trop de bontés, de soins, je ne peux plus en recevoir autant et de la même manière" (36). La première femme à qui il se donne, d'une façon toute passive d'ailleurs, s'appelle Céline Vautour, une veuve qui a "aimé [s]a démarche efféminée" et dont le nom même suggère l'ambiguïté (29)⁶. Bien qu'il croie qu'elle lui permettra de se "délivrer à jamais d'une inquiétante conception de l'amour" (30), elle s'avérera, par sa folie et sa mort soudaine, être néfaste pour lui. "J'étais, écrit-il à Octave Anboize, le bébé orphelin dont la mère creva pendant qu'elle lui donnait le sein" (53). Aussi demande-t-il à ce poète solitaire, remplaçant du père bourgeois qu'il méprise, de lui trouver "une autre

femme, une autre mère remplie de force et de fascination” (54), une requête qui demeurera sans réponse. Devant l’absence et le silence de ces deux personnes, substitués de ses parents qu’il n’aimait plus, il se met à haïr cette femme et cet homme qui dans son imagination “complotent sur [s]on sort” (58). Pourtant, quand il voudra se venger, son hostilité se fixera sur trois femmes: sur la laide paysanne qui accompagne le bel adolescent du train, sur le cadavre d’une vieille dans le salon funéraire et sur sa cousine tuberculeuse Anni. En cette dernière, affirme-t-il, “[j]’attaquerai, d’un coup mortel, la femme, l’exilée et la parente” (79), télescopage misogyne révélateur derrière lequel se cache la mère responsable, selon lui, de son *anormalité*.

Signalons enfin que les nombreuses scènes de miroir (8, 46, 57, 122) (et celles du portrait: 93, 97, 102) du roman procèdent sans doute de la croyance psychanalytique que l’homosexuel recherche dans l’autre un reflet “narcissique” de sa propre image. À ces scènes se rattache un long passage où le narrateur, le jour de son anniversaire, se dédouble dans une curieuse rêverie homosexuelle. La pureté de l’enfance à jamais perdue s’y concrétise en un “monsieur” à qui il offre en pleurs ses lèvres et sa chair (35-39). Ce “reflet narcissique” relève de tout un système de dédoublement qu’utilise Béland pour décrire la duplicité que le protagoniste découvre en lui et dont il s’accuse. Ajoutons que l’étrange conte intitulé “Vanité” de Béland devient intelligible à partir du thème du miroir qui y est essentiel. Dans cette vagabonde, vieille, sale et d’une grande laideur, qui meurt accidentée à cause de son désir de se maquiller, l’on perçoit la recherche de l’identité, l’horreur de la différence, le besoin de se camoufler, caractéristiques du roman.

Alors qu’il serait difficile, sinon impossible, de déterminer la part consciente dans l’appropriation par Béland du “savoir” freudien sur l’homosexualité pour caractériser le comportement de son héros, ses emprunts au surréalisme sont plus tangibles. L’on sait que l’influence de ce mouvement s’est exercée au Québec durant la guerre autour de trois peintres qui par la suite devinrent célèbres, Pellan, Borduas et Riopelle (Bourassa 1977: 57-90). Les expositions surréalistes de 1942 et 1943 firent couler beaucoup d’encre et provoquèrent même une certaine querelle dans les journaux. Quelques poètes, dont Alain Grandbois et Gilles Hénault, profitèrent aussi de ce renouveau. Quant à Béland, en 1943 et 1944, il publia quelques poèmes à saveur “surréalisante” dans *La Nouvelle Relève*, *Le Jour* et *Gants du Ciel* (Laniel 21-30). Mais qu’en est-il du surréalisme dans *Orange sur mon corps*? Déjà le titre manuscrit tracé au pinceau que l’on retrouve sur la couverture,

oeuvre d'André Jasmin⁷, un jeune peintre qui étudie à l'École du Meuble où enseigne Borduas, relie le roman à ce mouvement, comme y réfèrent d'ailleurs discrètement les mots utilisés. Un des poèmes de la fin, "Jeux d'artiste," reprendra cette association de façon plus explicite: "Avec un frais pinceau j'ai barbouillé mon coeur/ Surréaliste" (121). Cependant, cette influence se fait surtout sentir dans le désir de Béland de "recréer le monde" (19) et de dépayser son lecteur, de le surprendre par la voie de l'hallucination, du dégoût et de la violence verbale.

Dans l'"Introduction," Béland indique clairement que les automatismes du sommeil, chers aux surréalistes, ont contribué à son inspiration:

Je revenais alors chez moi, essayais de m'endormir, et ne pouvais pas. Les songes qui s'élèvent d'une sorte d'affaissement, montaient bientôt autour de moi. Or, ce fut, par une de ces aubes hésitantes que naquit Julien Sanche. Étendu sur mon lit, je subissais le poids des coeurs qui s'étaient délivrés. (XXIII)

Au tout début du récit, le protagoniste solitaire fait de même: la noirceur, la fatigue, l'angoisse et le rappel de sa "faute" (5) le conduisent à un certain délire où la "chambre grandit tout à coup pour devenir le tréteau des songes incarnés [. . .et] pauvre fou à la chevelure en démence, [il] tremble en [s]a chair" (7). Tout au long de sa quête, le héros traversa plusieurs fois des crises associées à des fantasmes cauchemardesques et même à l'aliénation mentale. Il rêve qu'il poursuit de sa haine un aveugle (19). Il divague à cause d'une migraine après son dépuçelage (31-33). Lors de son anniversaire, il converse avec un monsieur qui est son double (35-39). À la suite d'une beuverie, plein de honte et de culpabilité, il délire (44-48). Il imagine de façon fantastique la réaction d'Anboize à sa lettre (56-58). Dans le train, "une vision des faits antérieurs se présente aux brouillards de [s]on esprit" et il rumine une vengeance apocalyptique (60-62), puis à la vue d'un beau garçon, il rêve qu'il s'adresse à lui (63-64). Finalement, lorsqu'il entrera affamé et plein de rage et de dégoût dans une salle mortuaire, il hallucinera que le cadavre d'une vieille femme reprend vie (72- 76).

À l'instar des surréalistes, Béland privilégie le geste pulsionnel aux dépens et même au mépris de la raison, il recherche aussi les "expériences" inattendues, les images déconcertantes et les surprises de vocabulaire. La soirée chez Madame Vautour, hétéroclite, baroque, avec ses appels à tous les sens et à l'imagination, est particulièrement révélatrice de cette inclination à étonner (25-34). Les tranches d'événements narrées, qui fracturent le récit traditionnel pour raconter une "histoire intérieure," sont également une

technique qui n'est pas étrangère au surréalisme (cf. importance du collage). Toutefois, chez le jeune écrivain, l'atmosphère onirique et démentielle ne conduit jamais à un univers où le désir recouvre son innocence. Si, au début du roman, la recherche de la "Femme" idéalisée est bien là (9-11, 13), c'est la femme-vautour qui l'emporte, et l'interdit homosexuel resurgit avec virulence. Il faut rappeler ici que la plupart des surréalistes, qui voulaient pourtant libérer la sexualité de ses entraves, se déclaraient "violemment contre l'homosexualité masculine."⁸ Le jeune Béland ne pouvait donc les suivre dans cette condamnation, qui était d'ailleurs inexplicable et hypocrite pour Aragon, et surtout pour le seul homosexuel avoué du groupe surréaliste, René Crevel. Entre *Mon corps et moi* (1925) de cet auteur et *Le Diable au corps* (1923) de Radiguet, qui peut dire, s'il y a lieu, duquel des deux romans s'est inspiré Béland pour titrer le sien? "Et mon corps, dira son héros, c'est ce qu'il y a de plus puissant chez moi" (65). Ne trouve-t-on pas aussi chez lui, comme chez Crevel une même préoccupation du "moi" et un appel à la violence? En effet, la révolte de ce dernier s'avère impuissante, ne trouvant d'apaisement que dans le sadisme et la destruction; et comme la folie et la mort lui semblent les seules formes de protestation valable, il se suicidera à trente-cinq ans.

Au-delà de ces spéculations, il est cependant une chose certaine, c'est que Béland, qui se savait "différent," a dû rechercher d'autres auteurs en qui il pouvait se reconnaître, à qui il pouvait s'identifier, comme le démontrent, plus tard, ses rencontres avec Jean Cocteau et Marcel Jouhandeau qui lui donneront des conseils lors de son séjour en France de 1946 à 1948⁹. Avant donc d'écrire son roman, Béland appréciait Cocteau, l'écrivain, avec sa prédilection pour les masques et les miroirs, une certaine préciosité, mais surtout pour son goût du spectacle, pour son besoin de dire sa vérité et d'étonner le public¹⁰. Quant à Jouhandeau, connaissant son amour des garçons, il avait lu ce romancier moraliste (immoraliste, diront certains) déchiré par des problèmes de conscience. Outre ces deux écrivains, dont certains intérêts et motifs se retrouvent chez Béland, l'on pourrait ajouter les nombreux autres mentionnés dans les comptes rendus du roman, "mauvaises influences" signalées ci-dessus. Nous ne retiendrons de ceux-ci que Baudelaire, Rimbaud et Gide, car chez les trois nous retrouvons deux thèmes qui sont primordiaux chez Béland, l'homosexualité et l'antagonisme contre la moralité religieuse.

L'on connaît le célèbre procès contre *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) surtout à

cause des quelques pièces sur le lesbianisme, sujet que Béland traite discrètement dans le poème “J’abandonne. . .” (119). Mais, chez ce dernier, ce que l’on trouve surtout de baudelairien, c’est le parti pris du mal, l’exploration angoissée des méandres de nos pulsions les plus secrètes et, peut-être, cette “unité” qu’il revendique entre son récit et les poèmes de la fin (xxv). Sa prose personnelle qui se veut poétique et qui s’attarde à décrire le quotidien de la ville ne tient-elle pas des *Petits Poèmes en prose* (titré aussi *Le Spleen de Paris*)? Il y a d’ailleurs une ressemblance certaine entre l’épisode sadique où Julien Sanche s’insurge contre les infirmes (19-21), en particulier un aveugle, et le poème de Baudelaire “Assommons les pauvres” (139-41). La beauté du mal dont celui-ci fait l’apologie se retrouve à maints endroits dans *Orage sur mon corps*. L’épisode du train où Sanche jouit de faire souffrir une paysanne en raison de sa laideur, son monologue contre le cadavre d’une vieille, ainsi que la dernière partie du roman où il jubile de son plan diabolique contre sa cousine participent d’un même univers macabre, sanguinaire, hallucinatoire et misogyne (65-67)¹¹. Quant à la duplicité de l’homme tiraillé dans un perpétuel conflit entre le Ciel et l’Enfer, elle se manifeste de façon aussi lancinante chez Béland: les pages décrivant l’angoisse du protagoniste à la suite de sa beuverie (44-48) et le poème “Désespoir de clown” qui y correspond (122-23) mélangent à la fois la prière et le blasphème, et plusieurs autres passages présentent cette ambivalence (23, 67, 82, 84, 90, 92, 93, 110-11). En dernier lieu, il nous semble que le thème des fleurs, qui est toujours associé au mal et à la mort dans *Orage sur mon corps*, découle d’une association avec le titre du fameux recueil de Baudelaire. Ainsi remarque Julien Sanche: “Je couperai les roses afin qu’elles ne parent pas de corsages ou d’autels. Je pisserez sur les lys pour que leur prétendue pureté soit quelque chose d’imaginaire. . .” (61, voir aussi 25, 26, 74, 75, 89, 102).

Si Béland ne mentionne pas les auteurs français précédents (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Crevel, Cocteau, Jouhandeau, Sartre), il en nomme par contre deux, Verlaine et Gide, qui sont, eux aussi, associés à l’homosexualité qui le préoccupe. Le protagoniste après avoir bu “absinthe sur absinthe” pense: “Ma folie a dépassé celle du poète Verlaine. Maudit, je me suis aberré jusqu’à la plus lâche conception de l’amour.” (44) Les références à l’absinthe et à l’*inversion sexuelle* se rattachent directement à la liaison tourmentée de Verlaine et Rimbaud, et sans aucun doute l’auteur s’identifie à ce dernier par son jeune âge. L’on découvre d’ailleurs chez Sanche un même goût du blasphème et surtout une révolte grinçante semblable contre l’ordre social:

Mon âme vomira tout ce qu'elle aura ramassé de perfidie et de fiel. . . Je cracherai sur la femme et sur l'homme, je croquerai le serpent à l'endroit de sa tête où c'est le plus vénéneux. Et le soir, isolé au milieu de mes projets, je bouleverserai les consciences par des inventions scandaleuses. . . D'avance, je sais combien je serai impardonnable, combien effroyable sera le mal semé par moi. . . (61) Je m'enlise dans le meurtre de ma vitalité en favorisant la liberté complète de mes passions. Enfin, je voudrais tuer Satan-le-Lumineux pour qu'il n'assiste pas à ma gloire, ou, après l'avoir fait bouillir, boire son sang de martyrisé. . . Je voudrais. . . Je voudrais. . . (62) (T)rop faible pour avancer, j'aurai assez de force [. . .] pour descendre dans les plus profonds replis de la haine et de la perte. (65)

Bien que Duhamel dénonce cette "mascarade d'une saison en enfer," le lecteur ne peut en nier la sincérité, et l'angoisse n'y est pas feinte. Le poème "Désespoir de clown" traite entre autres de cette thématique: "je marchais seul sur la route menant aux portes de l'enfer" (122). Autres traits qui rappellent Rimbaud: en plus de recourir à la scatologie (18, 53, 60), Béland adore provoquer et sans cesse fait appel au corps. Un questionnement comme celui-ci: "mon corps. . . Ai-je bien dit MON corps?. . . Je mens! Mon corps ne m'appartient plus comme une chose dont je pourrais à loisir disposer?" (123) ainsi que son opposition entre le "je" et le "moi" (43, 47) ne réfèrent-ils pas au fameux "Je est un autre" rimbaldien?

Quant à l'influence de Gide, elle est manifeste: les premiers commentateurs l'avaient déjà déplorée. Ainsi Duhamel qualifiait-il Béland d'être "un Nathanaël qui a lu précocement André Gide" (72), un écrivain renommé dont, au Québec, on conspuait alors l'oeuvre, ennemie de la morale et incitatrice à tous les désordres¹². Dans l'appel anti-religieux et anti-familial de Julien Sanche aux jeunes: ". . . suis-moi. Je te mènerai à la complète libération des sens" (5), qui provoquera son expulsion du collège, l'on retrouve le message des *Nourritures terrestres*. Cette sollicitation sera reprise en rêve au garçon du train qui se nomme d'ailleurs Michel (63), comme le jeune laitier de l'"Épilogue" (113), prénom du héros de *L'Immoraliste*, qui, rappelons-le, renaîtra à la vie en affirmant sa différence, au prix de la vie d'une femme, comme le protagoniste de Béland¹³. Le commandement de madame Vautour: "Soyons lubriques, je vous en prie, soyons lubriques!" (28), qui contredit celui, évangélique: "Va, et ne pêche plus!" (25) écrit sur le mur de son salon, tient de l'invitation à la ferveur et de l'exaltation charnelle propres au gidisme. Lors de cette même soirée, un "certain Roger [qui] lit André Gide," doit "cacher les soulèvements de sa chair," avant d'"échapp[er]

d'“échapp[er] irrespectueusement André Gide” (26-27). Sur les murs de la chambre de Julien Sanche, on trouve des “phrases comme celle-ci: *Je ne souhaite pas d'autre repos que celui du sommeil de la mort* (Gide)” (52)¹⁴.

Il faut enfin ajouter la thèse de “l'acte gratuit,” développée dans *Les Caves du Vatican*, qui, bien que moins apparente, n'en est pas moins certaine. C'est d'abord dans le train que Sanche s'amuse “par pur jeu” à faire souffrir une petite paysanne (65), divertissement sadique qui préfigure son projet meurtrier contre sa cousine. Ainsi, après que cette dernière lui ait enfin avoué son amour, il lui porte le coup fatal, non sans l'avoir auparavant embrassée. Alors, “secoué de dégoût, dans un *acte gratuit* et vil, [il se] relève, [. . .] allume une cigarette, [. . .et] crève d'un rire méchant” (nous soulignons, 106). Au-delà de tous ces liens textuels, il est cependant dans *Orage sur mon corps* une philosophie gidienne plus diffuse qu'il convient d'évoquer. Comme chez Gide, on y retrouve ce “sentiment de ne pas être comme les autres” qui amène à un examen de conscience tourmenté, pour déboucher sur une affirmation de soi confinant au défi, mais aussi remplie d'humanisme. Ainsi, dans l'“Introduction,” l'auteur prie-t-il le lecteur de ne pas juger son héros, “il a sa fierté qui accepte tout quand c'est humain” (xxv).

L'“ouverture” du roman de Béland sur d'autres textes n'a rien d'étonnant, c'est un lieu commun de la critique d'aujourd'hui de considérer une oeuvre comme renvoyant implicitement ou explicitement à d'autres oeuvres. Ce qu'il importe de souligner, toutefois, c'est que le jeune auteur, malgré quelques dérapages, a su combiner avec vraisemblance et originalité diverses influences parfois contradictoires. La polyphonie intertextuelle, le plus souvent à caractère homosexuel, a en effet été mise au service du *monolinguisme* personnel de l'écrivain, dont le but est de dire son angoisse et sa souffrance d'être “autre” et de répondre avec défi au monde qui l'a rejeté. Avant de terminer, il convient de signaler une hantise commune à la plupart des écrivains mentionnés ci-dessus et qui n'est pas étrangère à Béland: celle de lier leur oeuvre à leur vie à un point tel que vivre et écrire deviennent synonymes. Il n'y a pourtant que Gide dans *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* qui représente le processus d'écriture dans le roman même, nouveauté romanesque à laquelle Linda Hutcheon donne le nom de “récit narcissique” ou “métafiction,” qu'exploiteront maints écrivains québécois, surtout à partir des années 1960¹⁵.

Ce que Bourassa trouve de particulièrement intéressant et novateur dans le livre, c'est que “[t]oujours l'attention est portée sur l'écriture” et qu'il

existe un “jeu constant entre l’auteur et le narrateur d’un côté, et entre le narrateur objet et le narrateur sujet d’un autre côté” (1982: 717-18). À n’en pas douter, Béland, informé par “l’aventure de l’écriture” de grands auteurs tels Proust, Gide et Joyce (Ricardou 111), est conscient du procédé auto-représentatif de l’écriture dans son oeuvre. Sans doute ne fait-il pas de son protagoniste quelqu’un en train d’écrire un livre, celui même qui est lu par le lecteur, mais son protagoniste, Julien Sanche, en citant trois vers du premier des poèmes qu’on trouve à la fin (65, 117), - poèmes qui d’ailleurs condensent les moments importants du roman - se révèle être écrivain. Béland, qui se veut lui aussi poète, préfère donc la voie métaphorique, multipliant les références aux actes d’écriture et de lecture, sans toutefois les lier directement à la “fiction.” Le roman est, malgré tout, encadré par deux marques révélatrices. Le récit commence avec Julien Sanche qui, dans la noirceur de sa chambre, assis sur une chaise droite, a “là, pour [lui] seul, la lueur circulaire de la bougie avec ses contours et ses reculs sur la feuille blanche que [s]es crayons ont peine à colorer.” Vibrant “du choc initial de [s]a vie,” “devant [s]a table [. . . il] essaie de reproduire la fameuse scène de cette après-midi” (2-3), mais il n’est pas dit explicitement qu’il est en train d’écrire (voir aussi 7). D’une même façon métaphorique, dans l’“Épilogue,” le narrateur utilise “une petite feuille blanche tomb[ée] sur le plancher” pour mettre fin au récit de sa vie:

Au milieu de sa pâleur, une petite croix tracée à l’encre rouge sépare l’infini du limité . . . Une petite croix bien propre, sans bavures, comme autrefois celles que je dessinais sur mes cahiers de devoirs pour montrer aux professeurs que j’avais une foi vivante, une petite croix de sang . . . Je chiffonne le papier tombé dans l’intervalle de ma solitude, et j’essaie d’y lire des mots qui ne présentent aucune trace. (112-13)

La lecture répétée de ce que le protagoniste a écrit à Octave Anboize témoigne de l’importance que l’auteur accorde aux mots: “les lettres et les phrases prennent cet aspect violent des choses dont on s’exerce parfois à tourmenter le mystère. Elles grossissent rapidement, puis se recroquevillent comme si mon acuité avait percé d’autres significations auxquelles je ne m’étais pas encore adonné” (49). Il faut voir dans cette lettre une “mise en abîme” du roman entier, surtout de la relation entre l’écrivain et le lecteur. Soulignons que ce procédé littéraire privilégié entre autres par Gide, qui consiste en une métaphore ou allégorie qui reflète le contenu même du roman (Dällenbach), est une technique à laquelle a souvent recours le récit

“narcissique” ou “métactionnel.” Le contenu de la lettre à Anboize, ainsi que sa réception imaginée par Sanche, reflète bien le roman ainsi que l'accueil - que Béland présage - de son livre. La boutade du début - que le destinataire “regard[e. . .] la signature que porte la fin de la lettre” - repose sur une “inversion” qui réfère à la problématique centrale du roman. Puis, le protagoniste, après avoir avoué son “pressant besoin de crier [s]a détresse, de hurler [s]on dégoût,” résume ce qui l’a amené à lui demander son aide pour lui faire “connaître une autre femme” afin d’“écart[er] ses pieds du gouffre irrémédiable” (50-54). Après avoir mis à la poste cette “mise en scène” (52) qui condense le roman, le héros imagine que le destinataire qui a plaqué “la civilisation de notre monde pour la sauvagerie, pour l’épopée à la primitive” (55) a ri de ses “feuilles,” puis après les avoir “déchirées sans remords,” a brûlé “ce dont il [s]’étai[t] servi pour pleurer [. . .] en ricanant” (56).

La suite procède de la même structure de “mise en abîme”: l’adolescent considère Anboize à sa place, puis il s’observe dans un miroir pour y apercevoir “dans le coin gauche, Céline Vautour et Octave Anboize qui se donnent la main, qui valsent [. . .] lui, étrenn[ant. . .] un habit fabriqué dans des enveloppes, des lettres écrites par ma main” (57). Dans son “Introduction,” l’auteur, comme Sanche méprisé par Anboize, ne “souffre[-t-il pas. . .] devant ces tas [. . .] de demi-civilisés [. . .] ces idéalistes” obsédés par “les épopées mystiques, édentées ou ridicules du passé”? Il voudrait aussi que ses lecteurs ne regardent pas son protagoniste “comme on fixe une bête curieuse, ou une chose insolente”? Inutile de leur demander, Béland ajoute: “Je n’obtiendrais pas de réponses,” comme Sanche qui n’en recevra pas d’Anboize. (XXIV)

Les deux lettres d’Anni inversent la même structure “spéculaire.” À la place du départ de Julien de chez ses parents vers la liberté, on a celui d’Anni vers le sanatorium; l’image monstrueuse du jeune homme dans le miroir y est remplacée par “le splendide portrait de [ses] dix-sept ans” (97); et enfin il est le destinataire méprisant cette fois-ci, alors que c’est elle qui est tarée, malade et remplie d’espoir d’une réponse amoureuse de sa part. Signalons que les deux épisodes du train relèvent aussi de la “mise en abîme.” En contrepartie au “roman-feuilleton à deux sous” que lit une femme âgée - “un roman de cette littérature qui plaît tant aux gens sans soucis, sans problèmes, et qui n’ont jamais vécu” (62) - l’auteur propose une autre façon d’écrire, semblable à ce qu’il veut réaliser avec son roman.

Comme Julien Sanche qui, après avoir tracé sur une feuille de calepin: "Avec moi s'asseoiront [sic] les belles personnes," remplace les deux derniers mots par "*monstres*," écrit qui provoquera chez une "petite paysanne [. . .] affreuse [. . .] une profonde crise de larmes" (65-67), l'auteur désire rédiger un roman qui provoque, une "somme [. . .] des grandeurs et des monstruosités qu'[il a] percées" (xxiv), et surtout un livre qui traite à la fois d'"inversion sexuelle" et est structuré par elle.

Dans une étude qui reste à paraître, nous démontrons, en effet, que la thématique homosexuelle non seulement enchaîne les divers épisodes à premier abord disparates - ce que plusieurs critiques reprochaient au roman - mais structure la *quête héroïque* du protagoniste en inversant le culte chrétien, lequel est perçu, à cause de sa condamnation impitoyable de l'homosexualité, comme le responsable de sa souffrance. Béland parodie de façon consciente et blasphématoire la Passion du Christ: les actes de son héros travestissent la vie et la mort de Jésus. En dernier lieu, c'est le salut d'un individu considéré *anormal* par la communauté qui l'emporte au détriment même de celle-ci. Il va sans dire que le présent article, en raison des limites imposées, ne traitait pas cet "intertexte" religieux très important.

Il est certain que *Orage sur mon corps*, avec son écriture baroque et poétique, sa sensualité, son ton tragique, l'amoralisme et le sadisme qu'on y trouve, ne s'accordait aucunement aux critères esthétiques et moraux de l'époque qui l'a vu naître. À l'impureté morale correspondait une esthétique impure inadmissible, l'"intertexte homosexuel" ne jouant pas un moindre rôle dans cette condamnation. Pourtant, déjà en 1944, Dostaler O'Leary, contrairement à ses contemporains, soutenait que Béland partageait le mérite avec Yves Thériault, qui venait de publier *Contes pour un homme seul*, d'avoir "romp[re] les amarres" du conformisme et de s'être "émancip[é] de] la formule de *Maria Chapdelaine*" "sans renier de ce qui constitue l'essentiel de notre âme et de notre chair, [. . .] tend[re] à l'humain et à l'éternel" (54). Beaucoup plus tard, en 1958, Gilles Marcotte reprendra à son compte cette appréciation, reconnaissant à Béland avec son "roman obscur et désordonné" d'être le premier à avoir écrit un "roman d'aventure personnelle" où "[l]e refus, la négation s'y érigent en valeurs, [. . .] le premier cri d'une angoisse fondamentale" (73).

D'après nous, non seulement il faut cautionner ces évaluations justes que la grande majorité des critiques ont depuis ignorées, mais l'on doit admettre que Béland a su conjuguer avec une maîtrise certaine des influences

multiples et parfois incompatibles pour créer un univers romanesque dans lequel thèmes et structures se répendent, prose et poésie s'harmonisent. Nous croyons, d'ailleurs, que l'"intertexte homosexuel" d'*Orange sur mon corps* - avec les références livresques, les savoirs, les idéologies, les codes (sociaux et sexuels) qu'il implique constitue un labyrinthe de références et crée une dynamique fluide et créatrice qui peut, encore aujourd'hui, engager intellectuellement et affectivement le lecteur. Est-il nécessaire de rappeler que si les lectures d'un auteur, comme sa vie personnelle et son milieu, laissent des *traces* dans son oeuvre, cette dernière même peut mobiliser en retour le lecteur et son environnement: la textualité dépasse toujours le(s) texte(s) même(s) pour mettre en jeu des relations interdépendantes de production et de consommation, que ce soit au niveau esthétique, intellectuel, moral ou social¹⁶.

Dans l'histoire littéraire du Québec, le roman de Béland mérite mieux que l'anonymat auquel on l'a confiné. Si, pour le lecteur moderne, le style peut encore laisser perplexe, il n'en demeure pas moins que cette oeuvre, à la suite des *Demi-civilisés* de Harvey (roman auquel Béland se réfère dans son "Introduction") et avant le *Refus global*, est annonciatrice de révolte, de tolérance et de modernité. De plus, comme l'exprime si bien Bernard Jasmin dans sa présentation de l'oeuvre et de l'auteur, "C'est la première fois qu'un écrivain, au Québec, non seulement exprime toute la dimension de l'interdit, mais encore assume l'homosexualité, non comme une joie, mais comme une fatalité, une malédiction appréhendée." (XV) Finalement, bien avant les écrivains de la décennie 1960 dont ce sera la particularité distinctive, ce jeune auteur a contesté d'un ton vitriolant le cléricisme et l'académisme et a amorcé le discours bariolé du baroque et du grotesque pour désigner le réel québécois.

NOTES

- 1 Une première version de ce texte a été présentée au congrès de la Northeast Modern Language Association à Philadelphie du 3 au 6 avril 1997.
- 2 Pour un résumé de cette question, voir Nathalie Piégay-Gros, p. 9-41, et Makaryk, p. 568-71.
- 3 Selon Riffaterre, pour déceler l'intertextualité d'une oeuvre, le lecteur doit posséder une certaine compétence littéraire: "the reader's familiarity with the descriptive systems, with themes, with his society's mythologies, and above all with other texts" (5).
- 4 Ceux qui se sont adonnés à cette subversion de valeurs ont depuis toujours eu affaire à

- une censure quelconque, ce dont Béland indirectement n'a pas été exempt. Voir Tremblay (1996).
- 5 La couleur jaune, par son association à l'urine (4, 13, 17-19, 53, 59, 60, 61, 66, 94), participe de cette même thématique de répulsion.
 - 6 Béland a sans doute lu le texte bien connu de Freud sur Léonard de Vinci. Le psychanalyste perçoit comme un fantasme homosexuel le souvenir d'enfance du peintre dans lequel un vautour lui ouvre la bouche de sa queue. Le nom de Céline Vautour, promesse de joie céleste et de souffrance, rend bien l'ambivalence vis-à-vis de la mère phallique. Rappelons qu'à sa mort, Léonard de Vinci travaillait pour François I dans un manoir d'Amboise. Béland se serait-il inspiré de ce nom pour le personnage Octave Anboize, poète solitaire, retiré du monde, qui représentait pour son protagoniste un père idéalisé, contre qui d'ailleurs il se rebellera? Amboise, c'est aussi le lieu où les Huguenots révoltés furent massacrés en 1560. Quant au mot "octave," il réfère à la sagesse infinie.
 - 7 C'est son frère Bernard Jasmin, professeur de philosophie, qui fera la présentation d'*Orange sur mon corps* dans la réédition de 1995 (V-XX).
 - 8 Voir Xavière Gauthier, p. 230-47. Selon cette dernière, cependant, il existait "un courant proche des idées de Bataille, qui fonde le désir sur la notion d'interdit et sur la nécessité de sa transgression" (196). À rapprocher du passage suivant de Béland: "Mais personne ne doit toucher, ni même désirer clandestinement ces merveilles [...] Procédé psychologique très correct pour aguiser la tentation." (47-48)
 - 9 Voir Laniel, p. 66-68. De plus, selon ce critique qui a interviewé plusieurs personnes qui ont connu Béland, "[l]a formation reçue, les rencontres [...] et les lectures volées qu'on se passe "sous la couverture" (Cocteau, Jouhandeau, Gide, Sartre, Valéry, Mallarmé, Verlaine et Baudelaire entre autres) contribuent à développer ce goût, déjà perceptible depuis l'enfance chez André, pour les arts, pour la littérature" (20-21).
 - 10 Ces caractéristiques, que nous avons traitées précédemment, se retrouvent chez Béland. Signalons entre autres sa propension à "faire des mises en scènes," son vocabulaire théâtral, et même l'importance qu'il donne à l'art en se référant à des peintres (toile espagnole, 3; *Femmes turques au bain*, Renoir, 26; image de Vénus, Raphaël, 45; Rembrandt, 81; "primitifs flamands," 99) ou des écrivains (Gide, 26-27, 52; Rousseau, 32-33; Pascal, 32; Verlaine, 44; Socrate, 45; "Gulliver," 52). Lors de la fête de la "tragédienne" Céline Vautour, qui est centrée sur son "spectacle" de danse, "on cause littérature, peinture ou théâtre" (26).
 - 11 Comme Lautréamont explora jusqu'au paroxysme cette démente et ce sadisme, il convient de signaler que *Les Chants de Maldoror* étaient très appréciés par les surréalistes montréalais de l'époque. Selon Bourassa, en 1942 Borduas discutait de ce livre avec ses étudiants (1977: 61), dont devait faire partie André Jasmin, l'ami de Béland qui illustra son livre, puisqu'il étudiait alors à l'École du Meuble où enseignait Borduas. Béland devait donc connaître cette oeuvre. Il faut aussi ajouter que le lien entre homosexualité, violence et criminalité était un lieu commun dans la littérature comme dans la société: le Vautrin de Balzac est un exemple célèbre et ajoutons que dans *Les Chants de Maldoror* se trouve une belle description paranoïaque du pédéraste assassin. À rapprocher du poème de Béland: "Lorsque je n'aurai plus. . ." "[...] le caprice de tuer / Les enfants de sept ans ou de percer les filles [...]" (118).
 - 12 Désireux de contrer l'ignorance, *La Nouvelle Relève* avait publié en 1942 un texte sur Gide de Robert Charbonneau, ce qui avait provoqué des reproches de deux éminents religieux. Voir Cloutier, p. 279.
 - 13 La relation entre Sanche et sa cousine Annette dérive peut-être de *L'Immoraliste*, roman

- qui s'inspire de la vie même de Gide. Signalons, en effet, que le comportement de ce dernier vis-à-vis de sa cousine Madeleine Rondeaux, qu'il aimait d'un amour désincarné, n'est pas sans une certaine cruauté. Après qu'elle eût enfin compris les tendances homosexuelles de son mari, elle brûla ses lettres et le quitta pour se retirer dans la solitude.
- 14 Citation de *Les Nourritures terrestres*, p. 22.
- 15 Selon Hutcheon, alors que chez des auteurs comme Gide ou Huxley, c'est le processus d'écriture et son produit qui sont reflétés dans le récit, chez des auteurs plus modernes, comme Aquin, Fowles ou Ricardou, le texte même montre ses mécanismes, c'est-à-dire le langage dont les référents servent à construire le monde imaginé (28-29). D'après Belleau, au Québec, ce n'est que vers 1965 qu'apparaît "le roman de l'écriture" avec entre autres Aquin, Blais et Ducharme (61).
- 16 Pour un résumé de cette dynamique textuelle en relation en particulier avec la sexualité, voir l'introduction de J. Still et M. Worton dans *Textuality and Sexuality* (1-68).

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New Close Readings

Parminder Kaur Bakshi

Distant Desire: Homoerotic Codes and the Subversion of the English Novel in E.M. Forster's Fiction. Peter Lang US\$47.95 cloth

Scott S. Derrick

Monumental Anxieties: Homoerotic Desire and Feminine Influence in 19th-Century U.S. Literature. Rutgers UP US\$50.00/\$20.00

Joseph Allen Boone

Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism. U. of Chicago P. US\$18.95 paper

Reviewed by Stephen Guy-Bray

These three books demonstrate that what can loosely be described as queer theory has changed subtly but significantly in the last few years. Much of the earlier work in queer literary studies either concentrated on theoretical issues to the virtual exclusion of literary analysis or attempted to deal with all literature since the dawn of time. While both kinds of text can be useful, books like these three combine theoretical acumen with detailed and perceptive close readings of a manageable number of literary texts.

Parminder Kaur Bakshi's book is that now relatively unpopular kind of literary book, the single-author study. Her thesis is that the traditional account of the role of homoeroticism in Forster's novels—which says that except in the case of *Maurice*, which was not published in his lifetime, Forster shied away from expressing his homoeroticism—is an oversimplification. Bakshi sets out to demonstrate that although

Forster was indeed conscious (and perhaps too conscious) of the obvious need for discretion, he nevertheless managed to find ways to present homoerotic themes and incidents in virtually all of his novels.

This may not seem a startling revelation in itself, but what is remarkable about Bakshi's approach is her very careful and sensitive investigation of Forster's strategies of concealment and revealment. Working with Forster's correspondence, his diary, and the evidence of his revisions as well as with the published novels themselves (and, in the case of *Maurice*, with the revised manuscript), Bakshi gives us a valuable and interesting picture both of the problems homophobia poses for a queer writer like Forster and of the strategies he developed in order to achieve, if not honesty, then at least a nuanced dishonesty.

Bakshi is thorough in her discussion of the novels, but I did think it somewhat odd that there was very little discussion of the short stories. Her book would have profited from an extended comparison of Forster's approach in what we could call the closeted novels and in a quite explicitly homoerotic short story like "The Obelisk." This is a minor objection, of course. Bakshi's book is clear, persuasive, and well-written. It should be very useful to anyone who teaches Forster. For me, its chief interest lies in its perceptive analysis of the strategies by which homoerotic desire is kept at a certain distance from texts and readers it might otherwise disturb. In this respect, *Distant Desire* should be very useful to all

scholars as an investigation of what Lee Edelman has called homotextuality.

Scott S. Derrick's *Monumental Anxieties* is about what could be described as the struggle over the ownership of American literature at a crucial period in its history.

Derrick says that in the nineteenth-century, literature became increasingly an industry and, perhaps even more importantly, one of the primary means by which "Americanness" was asserted and by which the United States demonstrated its greatness as a nation. He points out that literature's rise in status meant that it became more and more a man's profession. While women writers tended to sell a great deal more, male writers could console themselves with the thought that they were the real artists. From almost the beginning, then, American literature has defined itself as a male industry to a greater degree than English literature has.

The conflict between masculinity and femininity in American literature has of course been extensively documented; Derrick's emphasis is on the ambivalent nature of the most famous nineteenth-century American writers' attitudes towards women. Writers like Hawthorne and Poe were simultaneously attracted by and frightened of the power of the feminine. The ambivalence of these writers is intensified and paralleled, Derrick suggests, by their ambivalence towards homoeroticism. And, although Derrick does not mention this, it seems to me that both were aggravated by their uneasy awareness that being a writer is not a particularly manly thing to do in a country which acquired new frontiers almost every month.

After a brief introduction, Derrick's book has three sections (one on Hawthorne and Poe, one on James, one on Sinclair and Stephen Crane) and ends with a discussion of *The Great Gatsby*. The introduction, which presents literary and historical contexts for his analysis, is the strongest part of

the book and is followed by an interesting discussion of *The Scarlet Letter*. The other close readings vary greatly in quality. His analyses of *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Jungle* seem particularly weak, although the section on Crane is fascinating. Perhaps a more serious criticism is that most of the analyses do not really work together. The book appears to be a collection of essays, some only quite tangentially related to each other, rather than a cohesive analysis. The sort of analysis which characterizes the introduction does not, to my regret, characterize the rest of the book.

Derrick's choice of texts struck me as peculiar, particularly since some consideration of American poetry of the period would have fit in very well with his analysis, especially given poetry's increasingly anomalous gender status in nineteenth-century America. An extended discussion of female novelists and short story writers of the period would also have helped him support his argument. The comments he does make on Willa Cather and Edith Wharton, for instance, are perceptive and would have been worth developing. But although the book is ultimately less than the sum of its parts, many of the individual discussions are incisive and his theoretical points should help to stimulate further the already lively discussion about femininity and American literature.

Joseph Allen Boone's *Libidinal Currents* is the most immediately engaging of these three books, mainly because Boone has a genuinely charming style. And it's just as well, since this is a very big book. The subject is big too: the role of sexuality in modernist fiction (once again, no poetry). The currents to which the title refers are the constantly changing forms of sexuality and textuality which Boone follows in novels ranging from *Villette* to *The Golden Notebook*, although most of the book is concerned with texts from the twenties and thirties. Boone begins by discussing his title

and the other titles he thought of giving his book in a section called "Working Propositions: Both Sides of the Colon." Anyone who has ever had to think of titles will find this section fascinating. I must admit that I thought it was strange, in a book on sexuality, that Boone did not comment on his collocation of "propositions" and "colon."

Villette may seem an unusual choice for a book on modernism, but I found Boone's discussion of it as a modernist—or, at least, proto-modernist—text entirely convincing. Boone's choices are generally somewhat unusual, except for such conventional modernist texts as *Ulysses*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and *Absalom, Absalom* (how horrified the authors would be by this categorization). I tended to find Boone at his very best with the lesser-known works such as Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" and Stead's still underrated masterpiece *The Man Who Loved Children*. Many readers may find the ending of the book anticlimactic, since it deals with *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Golden Notebook*, but Boone reminds us that these were both seen originally as great novels and he relates them very skilfully to his discussion as a whole (the section on Lessing's homophobia was particularly satisfying).

Boone's (and everyone else's) contention that sexuality changes from place to place and from time to time informs the book as a whole. Unfortunately, however, he only rarely discusses the social and historical contexts of the works he analyzes. In particular, I would have appreciated some discussion of the obvious parallels between a writer like Woolf, whose panoptic authorial gaze is far more powerful and dominating than the very restricted knowledge (usually called omniscience) of the Victorian novelists, and the techniques of surveillance and observation which have played such a role in the formation of modern sexualities.

The scholars quoted on the back cover of *Libidinal Currents* herald the book as the return of close reading. All three books

demonstrate the continued good health of close reading as a critical practice and show that close reading can be theoretically as well as technically sophisticated, although only Boone comments explicitly on this point. In this respect, these books can serve as models for other scholars with similar aims as well as being a useful introduction for those scholars still trying to catch up with developments in queer theory.

Sex, Gender and Space

David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds.

Mapping Desire. Routledge \$100.95/\$29.95

Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton, eds.

Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space. U of Massachusetts P, US\$40.00/\$15.95

Reviewed by Geraldine Pratt

Years ago I vowed to spare myself the task of reviewing edited volumes; often they are of uneven quality, bitsy, and impossible to summarise, much less critically assess. And yet here I am tackling two such volumes, with no less than nineteen essays in the first and eleven in the second. One emerges out of the discipline of geography, the other out of comparative literature and, in both cases, the editors make a virtue of the fact that the contributors come from varied theoretical and empirical traditions, and locate themselves in contexts as diverse as eighteenth-century Paris and contemporary Fond-Zombi. Complicating matters further, the books really are about different social categories: sexuality in the former case and gender in the latter. There is, nevertheless, something very useful about reading these volumes as companions. Together they point to the interdisciplinary interest in the mutual constitution of social identities and space, and the interrelations between concrete and imagined geographies, spatial symbolism and spatial metaphor.

Read against each other, they firm up the family resemblances within each volume, and make audible silences and assumptions peculiar to each.

The editors of *Mapping Desire* may be disconcerted to find their work reviewed in tandem with *Reconfigured Spheres*. They suggest that now is an appropriate time for studies of sexuality to file for a divorce from feminism. They see many expressions of sexuality as anathema to some versions of feminism. As an example of the urge to complicate and unravel sexual identities, gender and sexual practice, in *Mapping Desire*, Alison Murray draws on her experiences as an academic and sex-worker peer educator to write about lesbian women who perform heterosexual sex as sex workers in Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines, documenting their sources of pleasure at work and their difficulties within lesbian communities. Within this flux of bodies, desires, and identities, Bell and Valentine choose to congeal their main category of analysis around a "pretended family" that brings lesbians and gay men together. In doing so they note that editors of several major geographical journals have singled out sexuality as a theme that will be important for the 1990s: "sexuality will be to geography in the 1990s what class and gender were to the discipline in the 1980s." This chronology is telling; certainly the contributors to *Mapping Desire* comprise a younger generation of scholars (mostly graduate students, post-doctoral students, and junior faculty) than the contributors to *Reconfigured Spheres* (mostly full and associate professors) the latter choosing to create their "pretended family" around the category woman.

As the authors of both volumes are aware, there are politics attending any boundary formation; bringing these books into relation draws out some of the shared biases, as well as the hushed tensions, within each family drama. So, for example, reading *Mapping Desire* provokes questions about

an unresolved split in *Reconfigured Spheres*, that is an almost perfect mapping of theoretical questions onto historical time periods, such that analysis of private/public divisions disappear after the nineteenth century as concerns about nationalism and border identities take over. The persistent questioning around the public/private divide in the exclusively contemporary studies in *Mapping Desire* (e.g. by remapping the 'public' washroom as a 'private' space, by unsettling the assumed incompatibility of intimacy and anonymity) suggest that feminist attempts to discredit public/private dichotomies are flawed if they have the effect of wiping the issue off the contemporary conceptual map.

So too, Julia Cream's contention, in *Mapping Desire*, that white feminists suffer from somatophobia (a fear of and disdain for the body) does call attention to the fact that the body is framed mostly as a site of pain in *Reconfigured Spheres*. In Kathleen Komar's essay, the literary text is represented as a liberating vehicle which allows women writers to 're-exteriorize' themselves. Debra Castillo analyses a text by Ana Catillo in which two women have an intense, explicitly non-sexual 'love affair.' After histories of physical abuse and objectification in their relationships with men, one of the virtues of this relationship is that they learn to transcend the surfaces of their bodies, "To cut through the racialized distinctions and look into each other's brains and souls." This passage is emblematic of a tendency that pervades the book; although themes of connectedness between women run through *Reconfigured Spheres*, there is a certain silence about lesbian sexuality. The "pretended family" of women is disrupted by differences of race and class in several essays, but differences in sexual orientation are definitely off the theoretical agenda.

At the same time, the histories of bodily pain recounted in *Reconfigured Spheres*, although inevitably partial, 'talk back' to

Cream's overly simplistic reduction to somatophobia to white feminists' racism. Essays that address black women's bodily pain also problematise Cream's generalisation. This happens, for example, when Carla Peterson analyses Jarena Lee's efforts to take refuge from the sexism with her Church through writing: "I would argue that from their position of liminality and isolation, these black women turned to *literary representation* of self-marginalization in a final effort to veil the body and legitimate their activities on behalf of racial uplift, community building, and saving souls." Finally, *Reconfigured Spheres* makes obvious a stunning omission in *Mapping Desire*; that is, an almost total silence with regards to heterosexual women. Heterosexuality is named and analysed in *Mapping Desire*, but it is invariably framed in terms of masculinity and patriarchy. As is the case with *Reconfigured Spheres*, the most unexamined boundary in *Mapping Desire* lies between lesbian and heterosexual women.

The books complement each other in more direct ways. As disciplinary traditions, geography and comparative literature are both premised on assumptions about geographical and cultural specificity. In *Mapping Desire*, we learn about the difference that place can make to identity construction. Kramer's poignant ethnography of gay men and lesbian women living in Minot, North Dakota documents their difficulties in first obtaining information about homosexuality and then meeting sexual partners. Sally Munt compares the ease and pleasures of living lesbian sexuality in Brighton as opposed to Nottingham. Brighton is emblematic of metropolitan centers that allow freedoms of mobility, an active gaze, and a joyful performance of lesbian identity. Nottingham stands in for small towns where the activities of the *flâneuse* are contained within the mall space, and an active and hostile gaze forces self-surveillance and self-vigilance. Tracey

Skelton's comparisons operate at an international scale when she maps the strategies used in New York and London to resist the homophobic songs and remarks of Jamaican reggae singer, Buju Banton. She also traces a fascinating distinction in the way that the British mainstream and gay presses reported the issue; in the gay press the issue was interpreted through the lens of sexuality whereas the mainstream press read the controversy (wrongly in Skelton's view) in terms of race (black men assaulting white gay men).

In both books comparisons are also a means towards generalisation across places and cultures. In *Mapping Desire*, for example, Lynda Johnston and Gill Valentine outline a sameness to lesbian women's attempts to create home in New Zealand and England, right down to the ubiquitous k.d. lang poster. For most of the essays in *Reconfigured Spheres*, comparison is used to strengthen a generalisation rather than to specify difference. Eva Maria Stadler analyses how dress is used in a number of texts of early realist fiction as a "rhetorical frame for the construction of female character." It is used to reify the heroine's status and mark her in social space, but it is also used by the heroines as an instrument for change, especially upward social mobility. In the essay that runs the greatest risk of essentialism, Kathleen Komar generalises about the spatial imagery in women's texts drawn from cultures as different as German, Japanese, and "African." Pointing up the hegemonic force, the hypocrisy, the social construction and arbitrary deployment of political, social and architectural boundaries, Barbara Harlow works against the categories first world/third world, national/refugee, country/city, insider/outsider, prisoner/non-prisoner, in contexts as diverse as the United States, Latin America, Palestine, Israel, and South Africa.

The volumes also work as companions in their restless movement across genres (e.g., fiction and sociological), across geographies

(real and metaphorical), reality and imagination. A consistent theme in *Mapping Desire* is the need to infuse political economy into debates about sexuality and space. Jon Binnie argues, for example, that the pink economy should not be hived off, as it often is, into analyses of 'the cultural politics of consumption'. How exactly to think about the cultural in relation to the material is an issue that has vexed critical geographers in recent years. In *Reconfigured Spheres*, Castillo frames the problem within a rhetorical tradition that conceives of imagination and reality as discrete spheres, susceptible to metaphorical bridging. It is perhaps not surprising that the authors of *Reconfigured Spheres* pay close attention to language and linguistic traditions. Like Castillo, Margaret Higonnet examines the spatial metaphors that order our experience. Higonnet focuses on how spatial metaphors are deployed in literary criticism, from designations of high and low art, to feminist discourses of centers and margins, and borderlands. What is particularly interesting about Higonnet's analysis is that she strays outside of literary criticism to make her argument; her point is that the transgressive potential of metaphors within feminist (or any critical) theory cannot be assessed apart from a thoroughly critical political geography: "Thus the social geography of gender weighs heavily on our formulation of critical metaphors, with their valence of value."

The indeterminacy of the politics of the spatial, and the need to contextualise and specify, is a theme that permeates both books. In their excellent introductory essay, the editors of *Mapping Desire* outline a brief history of the ways that geographers have studied sexuality and space. It is a compressed history, beginning only in the late 1970s. Early researchers fixed identity, a compulsion that went hand in hand with an interest in its territorial expression in 'gay ghettos'. Following leads in feminist

and queer theory, attention has now moved to critically examining processes of boundary construction. As identities have become unfixed in critical discourse, so have assumptions about what counts as a liberatory geographical strategy. A presumed isomorphism between identities and spaces has been abandoned. The authors of *Mapping Desire* express ambivalence about the spatialisation of identity, whether it be in the form of contained gay territories, an ideal of community, or metaphors of mobility. The practical ways that this ambivalence is being worked out in urban politics is discussed in an excellent essay by Tim Davis, in which he assesses the tactical use of three spatial strategies in Boston: territorial concentration to create voting blocks, inserting the queer body in (potentially) every urban space by Queer Nation activists, and participation in the St. Patrick's Day Parade in an outwardly and actively homophobic ethnic neighbourhood. Different spatial strategies fit different circumstances and the effectiveness of some depends on alliances with other groups (e.g., the success of residential concentration to create a voting block depended on a working alliance with Latino groups). The unresolved, contested nature of spatial strategy is obvious in the two chapters that assess HIV prevention strategies. Studying local responses to AIDS in Vancouver, Michael Brown affirms a health worker who stresses the need to bring safer-sex education to the location where sex takes place, including bath houses. David Woodhead, on the other hand, criticises this practice as a staging of a form of surveillance that will potentially disrupt the space of the bathhouse.

The same ambivalence about liberatory space marks many of the essays in *Reconfigured Spheres*. In Anca Vlasopolos's discussion of selected novels of Austen, Woolf and Chopin, the open sea is a place both of experimentation and death.

Peterson traces the freedoms of mobility for Jarena Lee, while Indra Karamcheti draws out the freedoms attained through dwelling, as represented by two 'third world women writers', Simone Schwarz-Bart of Guadeloupe and Anita Desai of India. Jane Marcus contextualises and questions Woolf's ideal of a room of one's own: "But the freedom sought, the space imagined, is merely for privacy in confinement, to police one's own prison as it were, not to stretch into space without boundaries. The three-dimensional figures of African women that modernism admired and appropriated suggest a history and experience of physical freedom in immense spatial terms, far beyond the imagination of confined Western women." Castillo examines two "border conscious" texts and analyses the yearning associated with crossing the international border between the United States and Mexico, a yearning that she interprets as a desire on the part of the main characters to complete themselves. In her essay the border defines cultural difference, and it calls up extremes in cultural and especially sexual stereotypes. It is uncrossable ("a razor's edge," "a cut," "a place where loss of memory enters") but crossing also transforms cultures on either side of the cultural cut. These are nuanced, complicated, ambivalent interpretations of identity and space, a long way from the simplistic layering of a static identity onto a fixed territory.

Both books are well worth reading. As a geographer, I am better able to assess the significance of *Mapping Desire*. With nineteen essays packed into 317 pages, some of the essays are maddeningly brief and undeveloped. Nevertheless, this book is a landmark, the first volume in the discipline that explicitly addresses sexuality and space. The editors present the volume as an introductory one, by including, for example, a very useful guide to further reading. Undergraduates could make their way through the book with very little assistance. *Reconfigured*

Spheres seemed a less consistent mixture of new and old; for me, the last half of the book holds most of the interest. Several of these essays, particularly those by Castillo, Harlow and Karamcheti, involve a sophisticated and stimulating weave of postcolonial theory and close readings of fiction. The essays by Marcus and Higonnet, which challenge feminist critics to examine their own spatial metaphors, may well become "classics" in feminist theory.

Sexuality and Identity

Louky Bersianik

The Eugelion. Alter Ego \$17.95

Claire Dé

Soundless Loves. Exile \$14.95

André Major

A Provisional Life. Oberon n.p.

Reviewed by Leslie Harlin

Howard Scott's new translation of Louky Bersianik's *The Eugelion* has appeared to deserved acclaim and the Governor General's Award. *L'Eugélionne* was first published in 1976 and was at the forefront of feminist literary experimentation. The humor, which is based on no-longer-politically-correct male-bashing, may tire many modern readers, but the work affords an interesting look at feminist literary creation. This tale of the extraterrestrial Eugelion who visits earth in her search for the male of her species updates Montesquieu's idea that an outsider can most effectively elucidate one's own culture. Bersianik attempts to look at the sexist culture of earth with the fresh eyes (one happy and one sad) of an alien unconditioned by terrestrial cultural suppositions. The title character informs us of this: "Do you think I would be able to see through any of this if I were human?" This work explores two feminist stylistic questions—"writing the body" à la Hélène Cixous and

sexual difference in language—which remain topics of discussion today.

Writing the female body through *l'écriture féminine* disrupts so-called patriarchal literary discourse. *The Euguelion* attempts this disruption partly through a disturbance of narrative linearity, but also through an acknowledgment of feminine perceptions colored by the female characters' physical existence. Certainly child-bearing and rearing play a great part in this tale. The *Euguelion* insists upon the basic right of the human female to control her own body through exercising reproductive freedom. Outside control of a woman's body enslaves her, forces her to have children which will eventually be churned into the war-machine or shackled to the scrub-brush. The alien meets several women of Earth enduring various degrees of claustrophobic confinement. From the outset, this character informs us that there is "only one kind of suffering, only one, and there is nothing comparable to it, and that is not being free to decide one's own destiny!" The reader follows her through her peregrinations as she comes to understand the inequality of earth's women, and eventually cries for female uprising.

The Euguelion is an excellent source for the state of feminist studies in 1976 and this work includes detailed discussions of sexual difference and language which are still pertinent today. The visitor to earth puzzles over sexism embedded in the language of the common citizen, from the designation of "Man" for species or "he" for the gender unknown to gender-marked titles for professions and functions. After the alien ensconces herself in a library, she pontificates on the sexist language of the learned in Earth's history, and is particularly scathing about the language of psychiatry.

This play with language particularly shows the present translator's capability. This work's first English translation simply translated the main character's critique of sexism within the French language and

then explained it to the anglophone reader. Scott has taken a different approach and followed the translator's golden rule: afford the reader of the translation the same literary experience as the reader of the original text. Consequently, Scott's *Euguelion* has discussions of linguistic sexism in the English language; in addition, he has given English equivalents to the numerous puns and other language-based witticisms. In his preface, Scott informs us that the translation has been under construction for most of the twenty years since *L'Eugélonne's* publication. The labor has paid off with a smooth translation that resolves the challenges in the subject of sexist language.

Claire Dé's *Soundless Loves*, written in 1996, is a more recent approach to the destruction of standard language and linearity in narrative. Dé has pared language down to its minimum, to sentence fragments which force the reader to make the mental leaps required to complete the picture she has outlined. At the outset, this staccato style seems obvious, unsubtle, and unsettling: "That first week when. You didn't. Not once. Love. To me. Nothing." However, one becomes accustomed to the rhythms, and this stylistic device becomes an aspect of the character's disintegrated mental state, rather than a narrative device drawing attention to the writer.

The main character/first-person narrator recounts the story of her involvement with an unfaithful man, a torturous story due to her complete inability to let go of a partner who seems only to keep her on tenterhooks so that he can have a good meal at the ready. In this short novella we speed through the years of torment, yet the insistence on the narrator's pain as she wades through depression and obsession give an effective illusion of the passage of time. The character seems to have thought of nothing else across those years but her lover/husband's maddening infidelity and his refusal to grant her sexual favors.

These two characters encounter a series of names connected to friends, acquaintances, and lovers, yet they themselves are never named. This suggests that the narrator has lost all sense of herself due to this devastating relationship. One could also argue that the lack of names reinforces the age-old quality of a story told so many times before. We need no names since we can surely supply them ourselves from our own experiences vicarious or otherwise.

Soundless Loves is acceptably translated by Lazer Lenderhendler; an occasional awkward phrase peppers the intentionally jerky movement of the author's writing. These moments could have been avoided with strict editing. Few such problems spoil Sheila Fischman's mostly fluid translation of *A Provisional Life* by André Major. Rather than Lederer's occasional mistranslations, Fischman's rare problems typically arise from sticking too closely to the original French syntax; hence: "[S]hortly after they'd entered the narrow apartment that consisted, in addition to a kitchen area he had to walk through to get to the bathroom, of a messy bedroom and a small Arabized living room." Still, Fischman's work is always precise and almost always fluent.

In *A Provisional Life* we meet a man who is referred to as "he" throughout the novel. Learning of his wife Denise's infidelity has made him rethink all aspects of his life. The book opens with his attempt to erase his past by forging a new existence in the Dominican Republic. This new life must be without thought of past or future, it must exist moment-to-moment. However, Denise arrives and spoils the tender equilibrium he has created. He returns to Quebec to see his daughter and to attempt yet another provisional life in the country. The past keeps pecking at him, eventually forcing him to come to terms not only with his adult life, but also with a childhood dominated by a cold grandmother. He realizes in the end that a provisional life

is impossible. He must confront the "disappointment at his inability to be content with a hermit's life, which had always struck him as the ultimate recourse, a kind of nirvana that would allow him to survive the extinguishing of any hope." In fact, the provisional life is close to death; it is the opposite of living. Thus, the book is filled with harbingers of death: from a wounded mule in the Dominican Republic through the arrival of Charlie the crow—"prophet of doom"—to the death of close friend Yvan.

A Provisional Life is an interesting look at a man's desire to live without regret or expectation, but the book's treatment of female characters is annoying. Most of the protagonist's human contact is with women and all of them end up in bed with him: surely an impediment to life as a hermit. Denise is a thoroughly disagreeable woman and one wonders how such a harridan can be irresistible to men. The female characters are literary devices created to torment or give hope to the man. Certainly, this male character must come to terms with the women of his past: his grandmother and his wife in particular. He must also learn how to be a father to his adult daughter. One wishes for as careful a treatment of female characters as Major has afforded the creation of his male protagonist.

Translation Incorporation

**Louise Blouin, Bernard Pozier,
D.G. Jones, eds.**

*Esprit de Corps: Québec Poetry of the Late
Twentieth Century in Translation.* Muses
Company/ Écrits des Forges n.p.

Pamela Banting

Body Inc.: A Theory of Translation Poetics.
Turnstone \$16.95

Reviewed by Dean J. Irvine

D.G. Jones's editorial introduction to *Esprit de Corps: Québec Poetry of the Late Twentieth Century in Translation* articulates

vital questions of canon, culture, identity, poetics, politics, and translation specific to French Québec poetry. Providing English-language readers with a textual map of what he assumes will be an unfamiliar literary territory, Jones offers both historicist and materialist analysis of the literary industry of French Québec poetry in the late twentieth century. The editorial perspective on the poetry is the local product, Jones notes, “of Quebeckers themselves—more exactly, of the writers associated with *Ecrits des Forges*,” the Trois-Rivières-based publisher of *Esprit de Corps*. Conceived as a part of “a more comprehensive anthology of Quebec poetry from its beginnings” also published by *Ecrits des Forges*, *Esprit de Corps* presents “their view of the canon of Quebec poetry” to the English-language reader—not from Quebec City, nor from Montreal, but from Three Rivers. (Jones’s translation of Trois-Rivières here, and omission of accents elsewhere, signals his assumed monolingual reader.) According to Jones, the significance of the publisher’s location in Trois-Rivières is that “The poetry, perhaps the culture, is becoming decentralized.” Resistant to the idea of a single cultural or political identity for Québec, Jones makes plain that “this collection of poems is not that of the Bloc, of some single national voice.” Read as a poetics of French Québec literary production, the poetry anthology itself becomes a metonym for the multiple sites and histories of material culture.

The poetry selected for *Esprit de Corps* coheres around the tropes of both body and spirit manifested by diverse poets writing in disparate times—from Rina Lasnier (b. 1910) to Serge Patrice Thibodeau (b. 1959), from mid-century to *fin de siècle*. “In fact,” Jones writes, “many of the poems in this selection might prompt one to translate the phrase literally, as bodily spirit—or change it to *esprit du corps*, the spirit or consciousness of the body.” It is not

revealed whether the tropic coherence of the poetry is a deliberate editorial construction, or if the material of French Québec poetry itself rather reflects the poets’ general preoccupation with the corporeal and spiritual in the late twentieth century. In any event, the temporal signal in the subtitle of *Esprit de Corps* suggests that here *esprit* is meant to encompass its multiple connotations as vital principle, essence, and mood of French Québec poetry of the late twentieth century—in short, the *zeitgeist*, or the spirit, in Jones’ words, of “a body of texts.” Reminding the reader of John Glassco’s 1970 anthology *The Poetry of French Canada in Translation*, Jones notes that there Glassco represents the spirit of a “poetry of exile” but that “there is a more positive kind of *esprit de corps* that emerges here.”

The problematic of translation from French into English, as well as the viability of the industry of poetry translation in Canada, is foregrounded in Jones’s final comments: “Let’s face it: this is poetry in translation, and the reader has heard no doubt that the phrase is an oxymoron, the thing an impossibility.” Nonetheless, the collaboration of ten different translators in *Esprit de Corps* shows that translation is possible for French Québec poetry, and that they have attempted to translate both spirit and letter of the poetry. Furthermore, in keeping with the larger project of *Ecrits des Forges*, the collaborative project of translation for *Esprit de Corps* decentres the idea of the single translator, and instead incorporates not only an anthology of French Québec poetry in translation but a group of largely Quebecker translators and/or editors. *Esprit de Corps* is also a publishing project in collaboration with The Muses’ Company, an English-language publisher based in Winnipeg. This emphasis upon collaboration, not upon individualism or separatism, forges a real sense of community in and around the anthology.

In offering French Québec poetry to anglophone readers, the reading community beyond the borders of the anthology and francophone Quebec may well migrate into a world of translation—in body and spirit.

Not only in counterpoint to *Esprit de Corps*, but in the very absence of Canadian French-language poetry from Pamela Banting's *Body Inc.: A Theory of Translation Poetics*, there appears to be a linguistic gap that is invisible to the author. Attending to what she calls the postcolonial Canadian long poem, Banting exclusively selects western Canadian poets—Fred Wah, Robert Kroetsch, and Daphne Marlatt—to advance her theory of translation poetics. In counterdistinction to the practice of interlingual translation (between languages) and intralingual translation (between writing and speech) predicated upon mimetic theories of representation, “which elides the body in favour of maintaining a distance between materiality and its mental reproductions,” Banting claims that her theory of “translation poetics functions only by means of the body’s material differences, physical locality and linguistic and other histories.” Banting need not, however, elide poets other than those writing in western Canada, nor the linguistic history of French Canada, nor the literary history of interlingual translation in Canada in favour of recuperating the body for her theory of translation poetics. One could nominate Nicole Brossard, for instance, as a non-western Canadian and non-anglophone candidate. Banting herself gestures toward numerous other Canadian writers, including Brossard, in her preface. This is not to say that bracketing Wah, Kroetsch, and Marlatt is not conducive to Banting’s innovative and complex theory of English-language Canadian long poems. Rather, it is to say that, broadly speaking, any study of “translation” in Canadian literature should consider the essentialist implications of the non-differentiated sig-

nifier “Canadian,” especially in the context of English-language texts.

What is at stake in both *Esprit de Corps* and *Body Inc.* are two intertwined theories of linguistic and cultural materialism: one foregrounds the materiality of language in relation to the body, the other the material of language in relation to the sociopolitical and historical forces of cultural production. While translation in the traditional mimetic sense is rejected in *Body Inc.* for its complicity in colonialist and imperialist reinscription of source texts into the cultural values of target texts, one can hardly imagine the abandonment of the project of interlingual translation represented by *Esprit de Corps*. Jones admits that poetry in translation might be an impossibility, but would not translation without the principle of mimesis at all also be an impossibility? Would not the requirement that all translation poetics interface with the body limit the kinds of texts available to the translator? Nevertheless, *Esprit de Corps* not only carries over the spirit and the body of the text from French into English, but articulates *in translation* the materiality of language in relation to the body and the act of *translation* itself in relation to what Banting calls “material differences, physical locality and linguistic and other histories” of a body of French Québec poetry in the late twentieth century.

Witnessing Brandt & Tostevin

Di Brandt

Dancing Naked—Narrative Strategies for Writing Across Centuries. Mercury \$16.50

Lola Lemire Tostevin

Subject to Criticism. Mercury \$15.95

Reviewed by Lorraine Weir

Collections of essays, interviews and reviews written over roughly the same ten-year

span from the mid-80s to the mid-90s, Di Brandt's *Dancing Naked* and Lola Lemire Tostevin's *Subject to Criticism* share the feminist conviction that, as Tostevin says, "it is crucial for women to bear witness to our own circumstances, our experiences and desires." But witnessing, speaking, writing what Tostevin calls previously "unidentified territory" takes rather different forms in these books, as one might expect from their titles. Brandt's early struggles to break from her Mennonite background with its taboos against women's public self-expression are often poignantly present in her essays, expressing the fear she experienced in the act of becoming a writer. Tostevin describes her work on theory in Paris in the 1970s and her essays are suffused with Kristeva, Lacan, Derrida—with theory as a vital component of writing praxis, and with the sense of isolation that such work can still engender in Canada.

For both Tostevin and Brandt, that sense of isolation is located also in the daily negotiation with the father—academic, theoretical, ancestral, socioeconomic. Writing of her first book of poems, *questions i asked my mother*, Brandt describes her own "learning to speak in public in a women's voice [which] was going to crack open the Mennonite world, and . . . it would crack me open, too" in the revelation of the family violence and abuse to which she had been subjected. For Brandt, writing and transforming the world are the same act. To dance naked, to write the naked self is the ultimate challenge to Mennonite custom and dogma, a challenge which Brandt takes up and records with power and vulnerability in the talks and short papers reprinted in this volume.

While Tostevin's lexicon in *Subject to Criticism* is often very different from Brandt's, there are some key points of intersection. In an ironic and sometimes angry essay "On the Occasion of the Fiftieth

Anniversary of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities," Tostevin writes that

Once a woman writer is no longer willing to perpetuate the image of some stereotypical 'other,' and she is no longer satisfied with simply unmasking traditional ideological constructs, her writing presents a startling challenge. Where 'woman' had, traditionally, been a sign written by someone else, she must now construct herself as a sign constituted as subject and enunciator of her own discourse.

Tostevin's essays on Miriam Mandel, Diana Hartog, Elizabeth Smart, Sylvia Fraser, Anne Hebert, Phyllis Webb and Daphne Marlatt (among others) parse the complexities of this position and its metamorphoses, focussing with equal ease on the works of relatively neglected and of canonic writers. Certain passages from Kristeva in particular recur in Tostevin's work and her comfortable competence in the deployment of poststructuralist theory is a pleasure to see. However, I find myself at the end of this review wishing for a little more Brandt in Tostevin, a little more Tostevin in Brandt—which is to say that the intersection here of the warmth of spirit so powerfully expressed in Brandt's writing with the intellectual irony and passion of Tostevin's work leaves me precisely with a problem that is already mirrored in the terms of the classic feminist positions of both writers: the integration of the personal and the political, *theoria* and *praxis*, in the context of an academic environment where writers often find themselves located in the Sessional ghetto looking, as Tostevin bitterly notes, across the corridor at the rest of us teaching their work.



By River and by Rail

Ralph Hunter Brine

Canada's Forgotten Highway. Whaler Bay P \$27.95

Frank Leonard

A Thousand Blunders: The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Northern British Columbia. U of British Columbia P \$49.95/\$24.95

Reviewed by Bryan N. S. Gooch

Ralph Hunter Brine's *Canada's Forgotten Highway* is clear testimonial to the fact that Canadian history is not boring, despite the all-too-frequent suggestions of that view made over the years. A record of the enterprising and courageous 1967 Eastward Ho expedition, involving four canoeists (using motor and paddle) and a vehicular support team, this book takes the reader from the mouth of the Fraser River through nearly 4,000 miles of river and portage to Montreal, largely following the early routes of fur traders and explorers, principally Simon Fraser, David Thompson, Pierre de la Vérendrye, and Samuel de Champlain. On the one hand, this is a recent account which sees our extraordinarily rich and fascinating land—though much of it is relatively unchanged—through modern eyes. However, this is by no means a self-congratulatory rehearsal of success in overcoming strains and very real dangers. Indeed, what made the expedition so interesting when it took place was the clear determination to recover a sense of the waterways which bound central Canada to the western shores before ribbons of steel and asphalt largely banished the canoe, along with the explorer, to the realm of archive and textbook. Brine splices neatly into his own travel log focused accounts of his four major historical figures together with extracts from journals and letters of those prodigious pioneers as well as from others who followed in their wakes to explore and to consolidate the gains and to develop the routes for transport of supplies and skins. Fraser and others, as the

reader moves east, become in turn the "fifth man" in the boat; thus one is given the early view and the new, side by side, and the effect of the narrative is immediate and quite magical. The text is nicely supported by maps (some of which could be more detailed, though) and by photographs; appended are a detailed itinerary (including mileage), short biographies of major early figures whose accounts play a role in the text, a list of the expedition's supporters, a brief bibliography (which also could be more useful were it more detailed and set up in conventional format), and an index. While the proof-reading might on occasion have been more careful, especially in terms of punctuation, the style is lucid, and the organisation is clear and effective; the switching from the current to the historical is always informative and engaging, and the result is a book which should awaken in every reader a renewed interest in the "forgotten highway" and a sense that the early routes and the exploits of the pioneers ought never to have been forgotten in the first place.

Of course, the ribbons of steel did extend across the land and bind the sprawling mass together, and even though many of the lines are still in constant use despite an increasing level of abandonment (which may well prove, in some cases, to be remarkably short-sighted, perhaps necessitating costly rebuilding), the story of the development of Canadian railways and their importance fully justifies detailed and frequent rehearsal—not just because the narrative is so compelling or because it is salutary to be yanked out of complacency caused by the convenience of automobile and aircraft.

Frank Leonard's *A Thousand Blunders* . . . looks only at the building of part of the Grand Trunk Pacific line—the section through the Yellowhead Pass in the Rockies to Prince George and on to Hazelton and Prince Rupert (finished in 1914)—and the

emphasis here is not on the travails of the navvies and powder-men, the back-straining contest with mountain and mud, but on political, economic, and, to a degree, social history. In fact, it is entirely proper that the modern reader is sharply reminded that the obstacles faced by early builders were not merely those offered by nature; in view of the political wrangling in Victoria and Ottawa as well as in some communities on the line, it is remarkable that construction progressed even as fast as it did (it was slow by comparison with the Canadian Pacific's rate) or that the company (whose overspending, costly standard of construction, and economic blindness in so many other instances confound even generous imaginations) survived as long as it did. In the end, the lack of traffic—for Prince Rupert never became the grand Pacific terminus dreamed of by the railway's general manager, Charles Hays (drowned in the *Titanic's* sinking)—caused much of the proverbial red ink in the books and helped to force a move to obliteration as an independent entity and eventual merger (1923) with the Grand Trunk, National Transcontinental, and Canadian Northern within the framework of the nationally-owned Canadian National Railway. In a prophetic way, 170 miles of the extravagantly built GTP's line east of Red Pass Junction was pulled up in 1917 (some of the roadbed is still visible), the rails being sent to France, while GTP trains—what there were of them—were routed over the competing and parallel Canadian Northern tracks built through the Yellowhead gap.

The organisation of Leonard's clearly-argued and carefully documented volume works well; moving from initial planning and surveys, including negotiations for subsidies and some of the required land, Leonard goes on to discuss difficulties of construction, labour relations, the controversies surrounding the Kaien Island/Prince Rupert development, the securing of

Indian land, particularly Fort George and Kitsumkalum, the protracted haggling over Prince George and the location of its station (almost verging on comedy were it not for the serious waste of time, money, and public good will), the Hazelton dispute (over service to local mines and, again, the location of the station), and the operations over the right of way from 1914 to 1919 and the extraordinary story of the massive floating dry-dock in Prince Rupert (which curiously lacked, amongst mechanical necessities, the capacity for heavy steel repairs). The final chapter neatly brings the astonishing and lachrymose record of what Leonard rightly calls "a thousand blunders" to a close—a story of managerial grandstanding, financial ineptitude, and, it seems, deviousness and serious administrative incapacity. Even in its handling of townsites the company showed a positive talent for wasting time and money and, in the case of Hazelton, a remarkably bizarre ability to lose the traffic and hence the profits which it sorely needed as it pursued a course of corporate pique. (The GTP, of course, is not alone in this country in failing to pursue—actively—on-line loads.) Though many of the relevant records (especially on the engineering side) have been destroyed, enough remain to construct an accurate, dismal, and alarming picture of what can happen when a company pushes for too much too soon—in this case the building of the British Columbia line before the prairie section was generating enough revenue. At times, additional details could prove helpful, though. In the case of ore traffic around Hazelton, for instance, the reason for the shortage of suitable cars can only be guessed at. Was it a matter of cost, production programmes, or faulty routing? Here Leonard's decision not to talk much about rolling stock leaves the picture a little incomplete. Equally, in terms of pace of construction, one would like to have more

details regarding availability of drills, ditchers, grading and track-laying equipment and so on. In the end, the on-the-ground work really does have a connection with the firm's economic fate. Given the recitation of corporate calamities, one wonders how far the problems extended into day-by-day building. Yet there is no question about the overall effectiveness of Leonard's argument or the assiduous detailing of correspondence and of company, provincial, and federal documents. The tables and illustrations are helpful; the notes, which follow the text, are careful and generous; and the selected bibliography, which follows, is both an indication of thorough work and an immensely useful guide to extant writing in the field.

That the Grand Trunk Pacific (now Canadian National) line needed to be built at some point is clear enough—national imperative and northern development are sufficient reasons. Of course such routes are costly to construct and to maintain, but what is the cost in the end of not building them? The GTP could have handled matters much better, that is clear, but northern B.C. has in the end benefitted in many ways from the grandiose visions of Hays and his colleagues. They were pioneers in their way, pursuing, like the early explorers, their own route to the western sea. These books by Frank Leonard and Ralph Hunter Brine offer—successfully—very different though not wholly unconnected pieces of our national fabric. *A Thousand Blunders* . . . ought to be on the shelves of every student of British Columbian history as well as in the libraries of other political and social historians and even corporate executives who want to learn a sharp lesson in planning and cost recovery; it offers an astonishing story which, were it not so carefully documented and annotated, might leave the reader struck with disbelief. *Canada's Forgotten Highway* is a shorter, less detailed volume with a much broader potential

audience—well worth reading, regardless of an individual's special interests, in order to regain a sense of admiration for the iron men who pieced together a map of the rivers, many of which the rails would eventually follow.

As for Fraser and Ross

Keith Fraser

As for Me and My Body: A Memoir of Sinclair Ross. ECW \$12.95

Reviewed by Andrew Lesk

Fraser's book is described (on the back cover) as an "elegant and earthy account of an artist in decline." Quite an account. Relying on memories of his twenty-six year friendship with Ross, Fraser selectively imparts what seems to have been the core of such a long acquaintance; the result is a psychological portrait of the now-deceased author, one which reads Ross into (and out of) his canonical 1941 novel *As for Me and My House*. Fraser's critique—it would be strange to call it a memoir in any comprehensive sense—is a troubling, though at times reasoned, critique of Ross, particularly as Ross apparently revealed himself in his fiction. But, moreover, the book is an unseemly account of a man, whose failure in not being "an accountable author" (in the case of *As for Me and My House*) is only surpassed by, it would seem, his failure to be a homosexual. Buried in the center of the memoir is a slim, interesting interpretation of Ross's major novel, but this is itself buried by Fraser's unsettling (though likely unintentional) account of homosexuality-as-spectacle.

From the title onward, Fraser foregrounds the idea that Ross's writing (most notably in *As for Me and My House*) reveals the author's "deepest desires and fears"; and this, "the body in question," is what Fraser asserts that literary critics have ignored.

Although Fraser is never candid about whether Ross might have wanted his body revealed in the ways Fraser does expose it, there are, apparently, plenty of clues that, according to Fraser, were tantamount to a directive. Fraser writes that Ross, no longer interested in writing fiction, was writing autobiography, "at least relating autobiography, to a fellow writer whom he would like to impress enough (as I imagined it) for him to take note." Furthermore, Ross "seemed so earnest that I know all about his intimate life," and as if "he did want it known that he'd had a sex life."

Of course, in the world of biographical letters, no one has the claim to the "truth" about certain people (were that such "truth" available to anyone at all); Fraser does take care to note that "[n]o reading can be definitive, only convincing." It is difficult, though, to be convinced that Fraser's is (as he says) the biographer's task of complementing rather than defining a body of work, especially when the imperative to "reveal" never really came from Ross at all. But such self-authorization is necessary, I suppose, for what comes after. Fraser's exposition of Ross's erotic obsessions involves the puzzling disclosure that Ross had a big penis. Fraser quotes Ross: "I have a voracious sexual appetite"; and, "I'm proud of my prick." Fraser no doubt wishes to make a complete case, throughout the pages of the memoir, for the exhibition of a sex-obsessed Ross; yet here it is left to speculation whether such characterizations of Ross, in light of what comes to be revealed as Ross-the-failed-homosexual, help the reader understand anything about the author beyond Fraser's unstated motivations.

One might thus conclude, taking a cue from Fraser's own psychological doctoring, that he is obsessed with Ross's penis, perhaps in ways he does not wish to describe. (In any case, Fraser assures us it was "a big one" since he himself saw it once while Ross was bedraggled.) But, no, I don't

believe that is the case. However, then, what is Fraser's motivation here? The notion of the "big penis" comes into play only to pathologize Ross, thus reducing such revelations to spectacle. Fraser writes (and it is important to quote this passage at length): "I suppose his pride in having 'a big one' was his way of surmounting a small man's physical insecurity, even shame for his perceived sissy youth. Perhaps his cock was the means by which he'd always hoped to attract the 'long lean' body he confessed was his ideal man." And who is the ideal man, implies Fraser? Criminals (Spike of "Spike"), murderers (the paedophile father in "The Flowers that Killed Him") and neurotics (Philip Bentley in *As for Me and My House*).

The early promise of which authors or books may have influenced Ross—"Homosexuality in literature and life was a natural topic of conversation for two writers"—is given short shrift in favour of a portrait of a man who is not merely homosexual but, it is implied, neurotic because, in large part, he was a closet case for most of his life. Fraser's quarrel with *As for Me and My House* rests on the assertion that Ross, masquerading as Philip, wrote a novel which "fails to evolve the way its 'signals' suggest it might have if the truth of Philip's nature were voiced and his last real hypocrisy dealt with." Fraser's memoir, then, becomes an "outing," passing judgement on Ross for not delivering, in 1941's Canada, a fully formed and stable homosexual character.

Such punitive measures increase in a discussion about how "the obsessions of the author's body tended to repeat themselves in the fictional patterns of his mind." Fraser, reading Ross-as-paedophile (again, Ross's "The Flowers that Killed Him"), hesitates somewhat but boldly states: "I'm not suggesting Jim's infatuation with 'boys' was quite an underage one, but he did have a curious tolerance for clergy and others accused in the press of abusing children. . ."

This section, replete with repeated cautionary words—"seem"; "what I took to mean"; "whether the story was true or not"; "tended to"; "often seems"; "I think"; "I've sometimes wondered"; "perhaps"; and "may"—reveals Fraser's inability to grasp the gay male nuances in contextualized uses of the word "boy," rendering Ross's usage of the term to mean, ultimately, a near or pre-pubescent adolescent.

At the book's end, we find Fraser's most contentious description; of Doc Hunter in Ross's *Sawbones Memorial*, Fraser writes: "[H]e's straight, no underlying homoerotic yearning that one can detect to retard dramatic development." This remark, stunning in its insensitivity, imparts the notion that, after all is said, Ross's aesthetic failures are intimately related *not* to the author's artistry *nor* even to his closet but to *homosexuality itself*, those "obsessions of the body," a body that doesn't belong to Ross anymore but to the expressions of a pathologized and pathologizing homosexuality. Fraser's spectacle of a homosexual body, as one that is narcissistic, destructive, and ugly, has become by now the target. Ross-the-author has disappeared from the memoir.

Alternative Routes

Marlene Goldman

Paths of Desire: Images of Exploration and Mapping in Canadian Women's Writing. U of Toronto P \$45.00/\$19.95

Reviewed by Christl Verduyn

There are two kinds of people, the saying goes, those who can (fill in the blank) and those who can't. In *Paths of Desire: Images of Exploration and Mapping in Canadian Women's Writing*, Marlene Goldman deals a healthy blow to this unhelpful dichotomy, in particular the version of it that divides those who are good with maps from those who are not. As one whom family and friends have (teasingly?) cast in the latter

category, I welcome Goldman's investigation into alternative conceptualizations of exploring and map-making. As a devotee of Canadian women's writing, I am especially pleased that Goldman has done this with reference to the work of five authors whose writing I admire and enjoy: Daphne Marlatt, Susan Swan, Audrey Thomas, Jane Urquhart and Aritha van Herk. Goldman sets out to demonstrate that the authors use the imagery associated with travel, exploration and maps to call into question various literary and non-literary discourses that have been privileged in the construction of female identity. Her goal is to determine Canadian women writers' response to Virginia Woolf's statement, in *Room of One's Own*, that the literary domain is dominated by the male "I."

Goldman begins her study with Audrey Thomas, whose 1984 *Intertidal Life* allows her to establish a crucial link between maps, exploration, journeys and women's identities. In Thomas's novel, this link leads to a subversion of the traditional romance plot wherein, typically, men are heroes and women "monstrous obstacles." Goldman pursues the perception of women as monstrous obstacles by examining Susan Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* (1983). Swan's novel draws on the real-life story of Anna Swan, a seven-and-a-half foot woman born in Nova Scotia in 1846. Both Swans—the historical figure and the author—pinpoint blind spots on the standard map of female identity. Daphne Marlatt too redraws the familiar contours of female identity in her 1988 novel *Ana Historic*. With Marlatt, the notion is secured of mapping as both spatial and temporal. In addition, Marlatt introduces the linguistic dimension of women's explorations of identity, as well as a unique strategy that Goldman describes as mapping a female genealogy. Of the five authors in question, Aritha van Herk engages concepts of cartography in the most sustained way,

and Goldman considers all of her novels: *Judith* (1978), *The Tent Peg* (1981), *No Fixed Address* (1986) and *Places Far from Ellesmere* (1990). Through her writing, van Herk seeks actively to redraw the map of female identity as laid out in "fictional landscape plotted by male writers." The author forges a relationship between map-making and fiction-making, and then radically transforms both from a feminist perspective. Goldman winds up her study with a discussion of Jane Urquhart's *The Whirlpool* (1986). This text differs from the others in her study, Goldman explains, in showing that men as much as women endure problematic relationships with maps that have been drawn for them rather than by them.

An introductory chapter rolls out the requisite theoretical artillery, more than usual since, as Goldman explains, she allows "the choice of theory to be governed by the specific concerns raised by each work." In practice, she admits, "this may appear to some as an erratic methodology" but she views it as defensibly postmodern in its—and her—reluctance to impose an overriding theory. The concrete result is a wide selection of theoretical approaches within the already broad bands of feminist, post-modern and postcolonial critiques, and numerous references to contemporary practitioners and their publications. More than anything, the theoretical apparatus of Goldman's study stamps it as a product of its time, right down to the last paragraph of the Introduction where the author acknowledges her focus on white writers only. There is no doubt that the study would have been more interesting still had it included work by someone like Nourbese Philip whose 1991 *Looking for Livingstone*, for example, lends itself to the map-exploration-identity motif. In this regard, Goldman's study is not without its limits. Read it for what it does do within its carefully defended boundaries, which is pro-

vide in-depth analysis of selected work by five Canadian women writers. Read it for the writers' wonderful suggestions to women for determining not only where we are, but who we are—without ever unfolding those ragged old maps!

Feminist Debates

Annamarie Jagose

Lesbian Utopics. Routledge US\$16.95

Patrice McDermott

Politics and Scholarship: Feminist Academic Journals and the Production of Knowledge. U of Illinois P US\$36.95/\$13.95

Reviewed by Susan Knutson

In her dedication, Annamarie Jagose writes that while working on *Lesbian Utopics*, she visited her father in hospital. He spoke of his pride in his children, but neglected to mention her name.

"What about me, Dad? What do you say about me?" He seems surprised to see me still at the side of his bed. "Ah, you, I say you are most beautiful," he says. I persist. "But what do I do?" "I don't know," he says. . . . "I have it written down somewhere."

Jagose reminds us of the communication failures which often distance people from academic discourse, and she signifies the additional complications of gender and generation, which may widen the gap, as they do here. Yet the silences she points to are those her book will reenact, as she turns her critical gaze towards the purely academic, as if such a thing could exist. And this is ironic because, as Patrice McDermott ably demonstrates, a vigorous and sustained effort to create dialogue between the voices of the community and the voices of the academy characterizes the best feminist scholarship of the twentieth century.

Politics and Scholarship studies the evolution of three feminist academic journals, *Signs*:

A Journal of Women in Culture and Society (University of Chicago Press), *Feminist Studies* (based at the University of Maryland), and *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* (housed at the University of Colorado at Boulder), in order to explore how "rigorous scholarship and effective politics converge in the production of feminist scholarship."

McDermott documents the complex dynamics linking community-based activism and academic institutions. *Feminist Studies* was created in 1969 by women involved in Columbia University's Women's Liberation Group, a women's studies lecture series at Sarah Lawrence College, and community activism in New York City. They felt the need for a "publication (which) would meet the standards of scholarship but . . . would also reflect the neglected values, interests, and experiences of women. As the title implied, the content and purpose of *Feminist Studies* would be explicitly political and scholarly." Although *Feminist Studies* achieved academic legitimacy, it was not initially housed at a university but was edited and managed from the New York apartment of editor-in-chief, Ann Calderwood. As feminist discourse became more diversified and complex, and as the broader political situation became more conservative, the distance separating the community from the university became increasingly difficult to negotiate. In 1977, *Feminist Studies* moved to the University of Maryland, and Calderwood resigned. The feminist scholars who edit the journal have, however, maintained and even intensified the editorial focus on community issues.

Whereas "*Feminist Studies* began as an unaffiliated, community publication that addressed issues of scholarship, the editors of *Frontiers* positioned their journal as a university-based publication that addressed issues of community activism." They made explicit the journal's intention to "bridge the gaps between university and community women. . . . If we are to practice what

we all seem to be saying—that the women's movement will eventually fail if it is middle class and academic in its orientation—then we must constantly work to encourage and to use the efforts of our sisters in the 'real world.'" Twenty years later, the journal has been restructured; its independent ownership, institutional arrangements, editorial structure and review process resemble those of *Feminist Studies*; like *Signs*, *Frontiers* now rotates host editorships among competing institutions. The commitment to diverse and evolving communities remains.

Signs was founded in 1974 by the University of Chicago Press, under the editorial leadership of Barnard College feminist scholar, Catharine Stimpson. From the beginning, "Stimpson's strategy was to achieve legitimacy, and with it institutional power for the political programs of women's studies, by producing a journal of impeccable academic quality under the auspices of one of America's most distinguished university presses." *Signs* conformed rigorously to the traditional forms and styles of academic discourse, initially eschewing, for example, "the speculative essays, experimental forms and creative work that *Frontiers* had found so effective as a means of incorporating community interest." While *Signs* won complete academic legitimacy for feminist scholarship, it maintained its connection to the community by means of an unambiguously feminist editorial policy. And, like every other feminist magazine, *Signs* has been subject to the debates and schisms which have characterized the women's movement over the last twenty years. McDermott's well-documented and even-handed account of a series of important historical watersheds is just one of several reasons why anyone interested in the history of women in this century will want to read *Politics and Scholarship*.

Patrice McDermott has given us a model of historical materialist feminist scholar-

ship. Annamarie Jagose, on the other hand, has written a book which exemplifies a recent trend in feminist deconstruction theory, a trend critiqued by Susan Bordo in "Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body."

Jagose begins by constructing a rhetorical model. Arguing that lesbian theory, both in the lesbian feminist community and in certain theoretical and creative texts, constructs "lesbian" as both invisible and as everywhere, she remarks that, "a more accurate position statement might be 'lesbians are elsewhere.'" Proceeding as if this were, indeed, a commonly held position, she continues: the lesbian is positioned "in some liberatory space beyond the reaches of cultural legislation." Noting, on Foucault's authority, the impossibility of transcendence, she asserts, "This space held by 'lesbian,' is a utopic space characterized by a disavowed dependency on those very economies from which it distinguishes itself." She concludes, "The tendency to figure 'lesbian' as utopic and outside dominant conceptual frameworks essentializes that category as transgressive or subversive." In successive chapters, this rhetoric is tested against selections from Luce Irigaray, Nicole Brossard, Marilyn Hacker, Mary Fallon and Gloria Anzaldúa. Jagose finds that each author recuperates, in some way, the patriarchal law to which she is ostensibly opposed.

It is Jagose's own rhetorical model, however, which produces this repetitive misreading. The model presupposes a monolithic lesbian theory which Jagose is always able to deconstruct. Her straw lesbian is generated, quite incredibly, by yoking together Julia Kristeva, Monique Wittig, and Luce Irigaray, who are found to be saying the same thing: "Despite the different stances towards the lesbian body in the work of these three theorists, it is their collective location of that body outside cultural legislation which undermines their arguments, demonstrating their belief in the ontological priority of the lesbian body

before the repressive mechanisms of power as well as the distinction between the two." It takes a certain audacity to accuse these three French theorists of this level of philosophical naivety. If they agree about one thing it is probably a critique of metaphysics.

Jagose is unable to cite a lesbian theorist who actually figures the lesbian as "elsewhere." Lesbian invisibility is a metaphorical reference to "the overlooking of the lesbian in public policy documents, familial formations and educational syllabi," as Jagose notes. The slogan "lesbians are everywhere" counters the public and discursive erasure of lesbians by asserting that they actually exist, in significant numbers, in most if not all communities. An acknowledgement of lesbian existence is a prerequisite to legal, social and cultural equality. Jagose argues that feminist texts essentialize "lesbian" as transgressive and subversive, but she does not consider the fact that "lesbian" has long been so constructed in a variety of non-feminist discourses. The deployment of lesbian sexuality in Decadent Romantic and contemporary pornography demonstrates that the essentializing of "lesbian" as transgressive owes little to recent feminist texts.

Jagose (mis-)takes Nicole Brossard to be a Québécoise Irigaray, an essentialist who "disavows . . . the always already ambiguous and plural nature of language." Brossard is accused of the "unexamined reproduction" of the "problematic concept" of "women." As evidence, Jagose cites Brossard's statement that, "Whatever our ethnic or religious origins, we all belong quite visibly to the category 'women.'" She argues that Brossard here implies both "the trans-cultural notion of patriarchy and the fundamental homogeneity of the category 'women.'" In a *cunning maneuver (sic)*, all the more so for being unacknowledged, the concepts 'patriarchy' and 'women' reinforce each other" (my emphasis). Jagose's analysis of Brossard is apparently based on a partial reading of the English translation of

The Aerial Letter. If she had read further, she might have learned that Brossard's deployment of the concept "woman" is anything but unexamined.

Brossard's oeuvre, like Wittig's, is associated with a feminist utopianism which flourished in the late 1970s. Bonnie Zimmerman notes that this tendency was visionary and idealistic, suggesting that lesbians create outposts of a lesbian nation now, rather than struggle collectively to transform the social and political structures of a capitalist patriarchy. United around the single issue and image of lesbian identity, women-identified women would create a new Jerusalem. But this political ideal, seemingly based on concrete lived experience, soon was attacked for being naive, theoretical, and exclusionary.

The appearance of *This Bridge Called My Back* and *Nice Jewish Girls* heralded the internal and international feminist critique of the women's culture movement and its utopian tendencies. As Zimmerman puts it, "women of color . . . pointed out that the notion of lesbian nation or lesbian tribalism is a white women's dream and that an effective lesbian politics will have to be based on diversity and multiplicity, not on a sameness that melts all women down into one mold." This was an important political critique of lesbian utopianism; Jagose, however, distances herself from it.

As deconstruction, Jagose's book suffers from predicability and repetitiveness. As feminist scholarship, it falls short because it ignores the vital dialectic linking feminist theories and actions, scholarship and communities. Her readings are situated exclusively in terms of a rhetorical model which is unable to do justice to the texts she examines.



Writing the Homosexual

Edward Lacey

A Magic Prison: Letters from Edward Lacey. David Helwig, ed. Oberon. n.p.

David Watmough

The Time of the Kingfishers. Arsenal Pulp \$14.95

Reviewed by Terry Goldie

Lacey and Watmough are both little-known, even by specialists in Canadian literature. This might be a result of homophobia but a homophobia of context, the nexus of the reasons these textual lives are seldom considered. Watmough, a Cornishman who came to Canada by way of the United States in the early sixties, is the author of at least fifteen books, but he is usually relegated to footnotes in articles about westcoast writers, about gay novelists, and about one-man plays. One explanation is that precise, more-or-less autobiographical descriptions of a middle-class Canadian life, in crystalline prose, have limited appeal. *The Time of the Kingfishers* depicts dinners in Vancouver and little trips to California and Europe. Although Watmough's constant persona, Davey Bryant, is homosexual, in other ways he is simply one more white guy living the good life.

Lacey would no doubt hate the application of that last sentence to him. *A Magic Prison* certainly records his hardships. But they are the hardships of an expatriate with money who often got into trouble. Sometimes it was difficulties with cashflow, travelers cheques, and so on but more often alcoholism, sexual opportunism and just an inability to fit in anywhere. Still, Lacey does fit a significant Canadian category: the homosexual writer as black—or at least significantly grey—sheep of a prominent Canadian family. Scott Symons is probably the most obvious example but with certain modifications others could be added such as Timothy Findley, hardly a black sheep, or John Glassco, who could not fit any such simple label as "homosexual," but could be

seen as an example of sexual diversity.

Lacey is like Symons in being an expatriate who devotes much of his writing to excursions in the spots long in every gay traveler's guide book, such as Morocco. Both comment on the problems of bourgeois respectability, on the irritating habits of police and other civil authorities in the tropical and subtropical worlds, and on the attractive habits of the local poor, particularly the young men. Both Symons and Lacey constantly disparage the Canadian middle class but are drawn to exotic Québec.

Watmough has devoted almost all of his writing to the fictional lives of Davey and his partner, Ken. The proximity of these lives to Watmough's own is suggested by the front cover of *The Time of the Kingfishers*, a photograph of Watmough and his own partner, Floyd St. Clair. It is easy to interpret this as a portrait of the quiet Ken who teaches at the university and his sometimes abrasive companion, Davey. Those who know Watmough personally could probably make similar connections between his friends and the various other characters in the novel, primarily heterosexual couples at a time of midlife crisis.

Presumably *A Magic Prison* has been published because of Lacey's claim, repeated on the cover, as "Canada's first homosexual poet." He isn't, of course, preceded at least by Patrick Anderson, but also others who remain either too unregarded or too much in the closet to be so categorized. As to the poetry itself, Lacey himself offers a damningly accurate judgement in the preface to his *Path of Snow: Poems 1951-1973* (N.P.: Ahasuerus Press, 1974): "I am quite aware that I am what would be classified as a 'decadent romantic traditionalist.'" I find the poetry more interesting in substance than form, in its account of the author's "lovely contours of ruin," (*The Forms of Loss* [Toronto: n.p., 1965]), something visible throughout *A Magic Prison*.

These letters were sent to Henry Beissel,

who provides a somewhat self-serving introduction to this selection. Beissel judges Lacey as a brilliant scholar and poet defeated by alcohol, homophobia and the extremely limited dimensions of Canadian culture, but the book reveals just the usual gay wanderer. Lacey offers apt descriptions of various exotic locations but the opinions are clichéd: all third world governments are comically corrupt yet sufferable because of the sexual possibilities in hot countries. The dismissal of Canada is just tiresome, with elitist views of Canada in the fifties passed off as accurate assessments of Canada in the eighties. This publication implies that Lacey's record of his experience of the gay demi-monde is noteworthy but it is hard to see why given the many superior examples, from Joe Orton through Stan Persky.

This provides a severe contrast with Watmough. Presumably Lacey was not writing for publication but just describing his experiences to his friend. This is the autobiography we all write, nowadays often through e-mail. Watmough's texts are the fictionalized experience of one bourgeois gay immigrant. Fictionalized but the perceptions ring true. The gay man as observer of the "normal" world is one more cliché, often asserted by Lacey, but Watmough shows its possibilities. Davey Bryant is like many of us, with most of his life in the straight world, and many heterosexual friends. He has the typical gay belief that he has a special insight into their marriages, and the gay suspicion certain of them are less heterosexual than they claim. On the other hand, his gay life is hidden from them, both more and less promiscuous than they suspect.

Watmough's writing does not equal the best of Jane Rule's portrayals of lesbian life but there is a similar accuracy. If there are people who wish to discover what middle class, middle-aged gay life is like in Canada they would do well to put away their David Leavitt and Edmund White and pick up David Watmough.

Faces of Love

Evelyn Lau

Other Women. Vintage \$14.95

Terry Watada

Daruma Days. Ronsdale \$14.95

Reviewed by Karlyn Koh

How is love remembered? In very different ways, both Evelyn Lau and Terry Watada explore aspects of the power of love across the passage of time.

Lau's *Other Women* re-works themes of thwarted love and obsessive passions which may be familiar to readers of her earlier autobiography and poetry. These themes are organized around the story of Fiona's twisted affair with Raymond, a married business man, and her downward emotional spiral when the affair terminates. The novel is very much a persistent tracing of their brief encounters and Fiona's protracted longing for Raymond in his absence.

While the title explicitly alludes to Fiona's status as the mistress in a marriage, the novel also loops together other triangulations in order to explore the dysfunctions, compromises and yearnings in the chase for love. In one scene, Fiona observes her friend Martin and his wife Jill as they go through the rites of domesticity and new parenthood. Prior to his marriage, Martin had been in love with a woman who did not love him in return. As this particular chapter unfolds, we are drawn to the incommensurability between "true passion" and the security which domesticity provides. What is the nature and value of finding the "right person" and "true happiness"? "I guess that depends whether or not true passion is important, right?" notes Martin. Martin eventually assumes the comfort of domestic bliss: "Getting married, having kids—it's incredible when you find the right person. It isn't like anything you have ever known before," he tells Fiona. Yet it is clear that what precisely

does not have value within the domestic economy is that which also haunts this ideal. Fiona continues to obsess about Raymond even as she listens to Martin. "I was thinking of the time you [Raymond] had used the same words to describe your marriage; it was at the beginning of our affair." *Other Women* is about the remains of love and desire which do not fit into paradigms of coupled relationships, and which haunt the fringes of domesticity like grotesque and pitiable figures. Enmeshed with the triangulation of actual relationships in the novel—it is littered with other stories of extramarital affairs and unrequited love—is the palpable presence of suppressed desires, loss and excess passions inserting themselves in a marriage or similar bond. These haunt the domestic and form a third which always threatens to disrupt the stability of the two.

The threat of and potential for violence persist in relation to this excess. After the affair ends, Fiona has increasingly intimate and violent fantasies of Raymond's wife, Helen: "I wanted to strip Helen naked, to familiarize myself with her body, her responses . . . I had to know: what was it about her that held your love?" In one particularly troubling scene, she fantasizes that Helen is raped. In her desperation to exorcise her pain, Fiona resorts to inflicting violence on Helen. By perpetrating violence, it seems that Fiona is meting out the pain she feels. She transfers all her desires onto Helen so as to attain an illusionary intimacy with Raymond. The vicious image of rape functions according to this perverse transference: "The image of the stranger rubbing his face between Helen's breasts . . . the marks like petals he pressed with his fingers on her skin; the exposure of her vagina in the parking lot . . . —this seemed the closest I could come to you, this seemed the only place I could find you where you dwelled." Violence and pain haunt the scenes of love: the novel also incorporates

familial and adolescent memories in which love is denied or absent, and sexual intimacy abused. In this way, *Other Women* dwells ceaselessly on the smothering memory of love's violent limits.

Watada's *Daruma Days* is a collection of intertwined short stories which speak a different vocabulary of love. Touring the internment camps of World War II in the interior of British Columbia, Watada was struck by both the beauty of the landscape and the horrors of history. "Every camp," Watada comments, "seemed haunted with ghosts of the past." In *Daruma Days*, Watada brings out the complexities of memory and love caught in the midst of injustice, complicity and loss. He does this by revisiting precisely those haunted sites with a spirit of honour and a heart of hope.

In "Kangaroo Court," a young couple, Tetsuo and Tomiko, fall in love at a camp in Lemon Creek. Even as they endure the mundane inhumanities of the camp, they find a measure of strength and hope together. Pointing to the mountains surrounding Lemon Creek, Tomiko tells Tetsuo that their future is on the horizon, outside the camp. "One day we'll be free to really make it on our own. We've got to look to what's beyond those mountains!" says Tomiko. However, their romance is threatened by Isamu Sasaki, the unscrupulous and powerful "village chief" who wants to marry Tomiko. Spurned by Tomiko, Sasaki eventually puts Tetsuo on trial in a kangaroo court comprised of the former's men. Folded into this scene are echoes of the internment of Japanese Canadians. As the story unravels, there is a sense that justice will prevail, not through silence or violence, but in speaking out and moving forward. "Kangaroo Court" closes with Tomiko reading a letter from Tetsuo, who is recovering in a hospital. Questions run through her mind: "*What kind of man steals from his own people? What kind of man hurts another so badly the victim may*

never fully recover? And what would have happened to me?" And then she reads Tetsuo's proposal of marriage in the letter. Hope and future possibilities are not diminished finally; instead, "[Tomiko] envisioned a cane, a wheel-chair perhaps. Holding the letter to her breast, she gazed at the distant mountains and the horizon came into focus. She smiled."

These stories are about strength in the face of severe adversities and injustice, but they also refer to complicit figures like Isamu Sasaki and Etsuji Morii in "The Daruma." Further, Watada addresses the internal conflicts and struggles in the workings of community. In "The Brown Bomber," Kimiko struggles with the rejection she grew up with on account of her dark skin. "'Hey Brown Bomber! *Kuro-chan, kuro-chan!* You're a dirty Negro baby.' Young kids bobbed and weaved in and about the line, jeering all the while. No one shouted a rebuke. All eyes turned away. Kimiko's own eyes trembled but not in self-pity or hurt. Her dress would never be free of the dust, she thought." These taunts persist in the camp to which she is sent. There, she struggles with the irony of being picked on by the very people who are victimized by racism: "*We're all in the same boat here. A Jap is a Jap. Maybe they need to pick on me . . . to make me a kuro-cha . . . to feel better about being here.*" Against the wishes of her mother, Kimiko finds love and hope when she marries Frank Johnson, a Black jazz musician. Their departure to New York resounds with both irresolution and optimism: she can only escape the stigma of her skin and the shame associated with her marriage by leaving her family and her country.

Watada's stories mingle tensions and collusion together with grace, courage and hope. Indeed, by revisiting this tangled mix, the possibility of peace appears to be less beyond grasp. In the final story, "Message in the Bottle," the narrator reclaims a letter which his father had written to his family

in Japan when he first arrived in Canada. Not being able to put the letter in the mail, the father stuck the letter in a bottle and threw it into the sea. Miraculously, after a series of interceptions, the letter “found its way home,” just as the father “found a home after weathering the storms of history.” And, many years later, his son would find the letter among his dead father’s belongings. *Daruma Days* is like this letter—charged with much love and hope. Its stories, having survived their varied and convoluted journeys, are sent out to sea once more; they are letters of a writer who takes the chance that they may arrive at the different distant and unknown shores others call home.

A Book of Mornings

Daphne Marlatt

Taken. Anansi \$17.95

Reviewed by Marlene Goldman

Marlatt’s latest novel, *Taken*, reads as a companion piece to *Ana Historic*. Both works are lyrical, densely imagistic ghost stories, composed by daughters desperate to communicate with the dead. As the narrator explains, this is “a book of mornings.” In keeping with the play on words, the novel both records the beauty of morning, “that indistinct time” which greets the narrator each day, and engages in mourning, in its exploration of “the loss of all that envelops us, pre-dates us. Post-dates us, too.” Here, as in *Ana Historic*, the loss of the mother forms the abyss which swallows up all subsequent losses. This primary absence and the struggle to recapture what has been taken drive the fiction-making process.

Fuelled by a desire “to write her, reach her, bring her bodily out of the nothing,” the text weaves together three distinct narrative strands. Set on one of B.C.’s Gulf Islands, the first strand takes place during the Gulf War, and traces the narrator’s rela-

tionship with her lover, Lori. The narrative concentrates on Lori’s sudden departure and the subsequent unravelling of their relationship. When the Gulf War breaks out, Lori leaves the island to care for her ailing, widowed mother in the States.

Although her departure appears temporary, it soon becomes clear that Lori is leaving for good. When she confesses that she has had “enough of islanding” and, later, that “there is someone else,” the narrator recognizes that it is time to “untangle the different strands of . . . [their] story.”

The text weaves a second thread into the narrator’s story of loss, based on the narrator’s imagined reconstruction of her mother Esme’s experience in World War II Australia, during the Japanese invasion of Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. Married in 1937 in Panang, Esme eagerly anticipates her new life with Charles, a man twelve years her senior, who (unlike her stodgy parents) understands her and whom she truly loves. On the day she learns that she is pregnant, Esme must reconcile herself to Charles’s departure. For the duration of the war, she lives with her parents, and together, they attempt to adjust gracefully to the upheaval in their privileged colonial lives.

For the narrator, it is imperative to come to grips with her mother’s early life because, as she explains to Lori, “We carry marriage stories in our blood, our mothers’ stories shadowing the ones we’re trying to invent.” Even though they have broken the “marriage script” and the familial ties they “were meant to perpetuate,” the narrator recognizes that she and Lori must delve into the past because “so many strands of the old scripts that compose us” also wove the narrative that led them to desire each other.

Counterpointing both of these narratives are fragments of a third ghostly narrative—an account that traces the experience of a nameless prisoner of war. Written in the second person, these arresting fragments consistently implicate the reader in one

woman's nightmarish attempt to flee Singapore with her two children. When their boat is bombed by Japanese planes, everyone rushes onto lifeboats, but they immediately capsizes and her children drown. Although the woman manages to survive by letting the current drift her toward a beach, in the end, she is taken prisoner.

The over-arching evocation of war and loss, as well as the dread of being "taken," link all three narrative strands. At the same time, the entire novel constitutes an attempt to write against absence. Just as the narrator composes letters to counter distance and the entropic forces taking her away from her lover, Lori, Esme writes letters to Charles—writing "against his absence, against fate to bring him close." Even the stream-of-consciousness letters, composed but presumably never actually written by the POW, attest to this same desire to use language to "hang on," even though "you can hear the Death Bird singing from the jungle."

As in *Ana Historic*, tremendous emphasis is placed on composing a narrative of fragments—"brightly coloured bits" and "magic lantern scenes"—in which fiction and memory are so interlaced that "it is difficult to tell the difference." This fragmentary structure renders palpable the fear and insecurity experienced by the various protagonists, whose lives are unhinged by war. In such an unconventional work, readers should not expect to be consoled with stories of happily ever after. All the same, the conclusion is disappointing and heavy handed. There is no reason for the reader to be told what has been so gracefully conveyed all along, namely, that the "stories we invent and refuse to invent ourselves by, [are] all unfinished."



a phrase petalled deep

Daphne Marlatt

Readings from the Labyrinth. NeWest. \$18.95

Reviewed by Lynda Hall

In *Readings from the Labyrinth*, Daphne Marlatt offers her readers intensely personal reflections on more than two decades of her theoretical and fictional writings. The sensual charm of her voice and language reverberates throughout the text, seductively embracing the reader and encouraging connections. Approaching the project autobiographically, Marlatt collects together many familiar theoretical essays (some of which are significantly revised), and new essays. These are interspersed with photographs, conference programs, journal entries, and letter excerpts. Marlatt explains these writings are "Attempts to read my life and the lives of women close to me in light of theoretical readings about our psychosocial conditioning as women, as lesbians, *writing*." In a postmodern gesture, the book starts and ends with a duplicate page of twenty small fragmented film shots of Marlatt in front of the house she shares in Victoria with her "*muse-figure, reader and life-partner*" Bridget MacKenzie; the labyrinth pattern visually suggests continuous movement and joy, the "remembered moments, many of them strung together, kinematic (the kinetics of identity), cinematic if you will," and portrays the inextricability of the public and private, of life and art, and valorizes the "home" and the personal as "ground" of her writing. Also, by including photographs of her son Kit and Bridget, as well as autographing the front cover below her picture, Marlatt "signs" with her life.

Celebrating connections, Marlatt produces not only a personal history, but also a treasured history of the women writing in Canada during this period. Other women's voices chorus through the text in plentiful

and evocative quotations. Thus, she performatively enacts and documents the community she values so much. The historical photographs of such Canadian writers as Nicole Brossard, Betsy Warland, Mary Meigs, Phyllis Webb, Joy Kogawa, Dorothy Livesay, Jeanette Armstrong, Audrey Thomas, Sky Lee, and Gail Scott profoundly represent the richness of the community that surrounds her. Her text traces the origins of *Tessera* in 1981, with Barbara Godard, Gail Scott, and Kathy Mezei, and discusses major conferences, including: "Dialogue Conference" (1981, York U), "Women and Words" (1983, Vancouver), "Telling It" (1986, Women's Studies Conference, SFU). The (a)mazing spiral of women's names spreads outwards to include the historical "muse" figures of Sappho, Radclyffe Hall, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf and H.D., who began a lesbian tradition of writing, and the more contemporary lesbian writing/theoretical influences of Monique Wittig, Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, Teresa de Lauretis, Bonnie Zimmerman, and Judy Grahn.

One measure of the wealth of Marlatt's contributions to Canadian writing is the vast network of interrelated issues her essays address. Marlatt engages language, writing, memory, autobiography, subjectivity, gender, desire, lesbian sexuality, alternative family structures, mother-daughter relations, colonialism, racism, poverty, and she emphasizes the importance of the experiential body as site and source of subjectivity and of social inscriptions.

Autobiographical writing of lesbian subjectivity is a theoretical thread that weaves through the text. Marlatt begins the volume with a journal entry from 1982, when she was writer-in-residence at the University of Manitoba. At the time she says she was "coming out as a lesbian in my life as well as in my writing"; she includes reflections on Audre Lorde's connections of the erotic and joy, and on Nicole Brossard's "focus on

le corps, les mots, l'imaginaire—and their connections" (1). The monograph concludes with "For the private reader: interplay in the public realm," an essay which offers "another investigation of the reader-writer relationship, more specifically in the context of lesbian autobiography. She writes, "Perhaps this is a (revising) lesbian resistance to the already formulated? Experiencing what can't be, at least in the terms i was taught to perceive the world through: just as lesbian desire moves against the family edict (and towards the unspoken, unspeakable charm a certain woman exerts)."

The volume records her writerly trajectory. She recalls a "pre-dyke" poem from the sixties which was the "first (or second) prose poem" she had written, one which she reminisces was "bristling with the sense of being other—years before i read Brossard or Wittig's narrative mosaic."

The concept of language as a major force structuring our lives grounds her essays. In her celebrated and much-quoted "Musing with Mother tongue" (1982), Marlatt addresses the connections between language and meaning, language and the body, and most significantly for women, the need to hear "the discrepancy between what our patriarchally loaded language bears (can bear) of our experience and the difference from it our language bears out—how it misrepresents, even miscarries, and so leaves unsaid what we actually experience." While foregrounding the gendered violences inherent in language, at the same time Marlatt celebrates the possibility language offers for self-representation and self-re-creation. Self-writing is a crucial act of self-authorization and agency for marginalized individuals. Her essay "Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination" (which appeared in the hundredth anniversary issue of *Canadian Literature* in 1984) connects writing, imagination, and subjectivity: "It seems to me that the situation of

being an immigrant is a perfect seed-bed for the writing sensibility. If you don't belong, you can *imagine* you belong, you can retell its history in a way that admits you," she states.

Marlatt frequently discusses her novels *Ana Historic* and *Taken* in terms of semi-autobiography and using writing as a survival tool and method for coming to terms with the past. In "Self Representation and Fictionalysis" (1989), she states that "Autobiography has come to be called life-writing which I take to mean writing for your life . . . it is in the energetic imagining of all that we are that we can enact ourselves."

The relationship of reading and writing is a major dynamic Marlatt explores. As well as creating "reality" and self-understanding for the individual in the process of writing—a "coming-into-being"—the writing offers opportunities for reader identification and association. The words "connections," "commonality," "community," and "collaboration" echo throughout the text. According to Marlatt, "To write is to oscillate in the space between self and other" in a "back-and-forth movement across boundaries." "Perform[ing] on the Stage of Her Text," Marlatt demonstrates the continuous need to re-member the past in order to live fully in the present and anticipate the future, to voice differences as well as desires, and to negotiate public space with courage. She challenges readers to participate in her interrogation of the "deeply encoded social scripts for what constitutes femininity."

Readings from the Labyrinth is an eloquent and unquestionably valuable contribution to Canadian literature, and should also be of immense interest to researchers and teachers of women's history, women's writing, autobiographical and literary theory, gender studies, and lesbian studies. Presenting a lively and generously written autobiographic overview of her writings and her poetic aesthetic in relation to others

who shared such precious moments, Marlatt's volume should also provide a satisfying and appreciated gift for the general reader. The dialogue she seeks to create and celebrate, and the sensuous beauty of her words, leave a lingering impression and a desire for more.

Endgame Tap-Dancing

Mordecai Richler

Barney's Version. Knopf \$32.95

Reviewed by Kerry McSweeney

If old age is a shipwreck, as Charles de Gaulle claimed, then Barney Panofsky, the sixty-seven year old narrator of Mordecai Richler's latest novel, is already on the rocks. A successful producer of schlock (Canadian-financed films and Canadian television series), Barney's mid-1990s life consists of too much single-malt scotch and too many cigars, bar talk, channel surfing, health worries, and sour reflections on his wife of thirty years having left him, on the decline of Montreal and its hockey team, on friends and enemies, and on himself. Although not a writer, he is prompted by the mendacious memoir of a contemporary to set down his "version" of his adult life. The result is a rambling and digressive narrative—at one point he even calls it a "shambles"—that moves back and forth between past and present and is loosely divided into three parts, each named after one of his wives: the self-destructive poet Clara, one of Barney's expatriate circle in Paris in the early 1950s, who died of an overdose; his second wife, "an exemplar of that much-maligned phenomenon, the Jewish-American Princess," who is much-maligned in Barney's recollections; and the lovely Miriam, the mother of his three children.

Typologically, *Barney's Version* is a memory monologue, a form of prose fiction that combines features of autobiographical monologue with the mnemonic a-chronology of memory narrative (see Dorrit

Cohn's *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*). The reason Barney gives for attempting to tell "the true story" of his life is not untypical of such works: "to retrieve some sense out of my life," "to impose sense on my incomprehensible past." These constructive intentions, however, are made recessive and ultimately factitious by two very different features of the novel.

One is the narrative embodiment of "two cherished beliefs" of Barney's: "Life was absurd, and nobody ever truly understood anybody else." These demoralizing dicta receive powerful artistic expression in the concluding account of Barney's succumbing to the ravages of Alzheimer's disease and in Clara, the novel's most compelling and memorable character. A compulsive liar, shoplifter and dirty talker, who despises other women, supplies outlandish ideas to a writer of pornographic books, and smears the sperm of a man she has just fellated onto her face saying it is good for her complexion, Clara is the principal channel through which the periodically erupting deconstructive energies at the nadir of Richler's vision of human existence enter Barney's narrative.

The other feature is that, for all practical purposes, Barney's attempt to make sense of his life through telling his story is simply the pretext for a miscellaneous collection of skits, riffs, numbers, take-offs, character sketches, and entries in "Panofsky's Ledger of Ironies," the embedded trope for all of which is Barney's love of tap-dancing:

I rolled back my living-room carpet and pulled the curtain that hid my embarrassing but necessary full-length mirror. Next I donned my top-hat, tails, and trusty Capezio taps, and shoved Louis Armstrong's rendition of "Bye Bye Blackbird" into my CD player. Remembering to tip my topper to the good folks in the balcony, resting my cane on my shoulder, I loosened up with a Round-the-Clock

Shuffle, eased into a satisfying Brush, followed by a really swell Cahito, before I risked a Shim Sham and collapsed into the nearest chair, panting.

The skits *et al.* include the pseudonymous letters Barney writes to enemies and to his estranged wife, newspaper stories inserted into the text, anecdotes and self-contained episodes, and an abundance of character sketches, among them the hostess of the McGill student radio show called "Dykes on Mikes"; Irv Nussbaum, indefatigable fund-raiser for the United Jewish appeal, who opines that the "lasting problem with the Holocaust is that it made anti-Semitism unfashionable," which in turn made it harder to raise money for Israel from Canadian Jews; Shelley Katz, the new-age Hollywood producer who drives a souped-up 1979 Ford pick-up truck with creatively dented fenders; and even Duddy Kravitz, who makes two cameo appearances, in one of which he refills used liquor bottles with water and replaces them in his hotel-room mini-bar.

Duddy's appearances are no less *déjà vu* than most of the other material, which was much more crisply deployed in earlier Richler novels. This falling off is repeatedly instanced in the soggy quality of the writing, including dialogue and descriptive detail, which used to be among Richler's strong suits. A brief example is the following part of a sentence, which would be more *à point* with the omission of the words I have italicized: "O'Hearne, his residue of snowy white hair still parted down the middle *or spine*, *stray* strands slicked down *either side* like bleached salmon ribs . . ."

Like Barney in tap-dancing shoes, panting in front of the mirror, Richler in *Barney's Version* seems pooped. His failure is precisely that of Hemingway in *Across the River and into the Trees* as diagnosed by Northrop Frye:

this kind of story [presupposes the] detachment of author from character

which comes when sympathy and insight are informed by professional skill. This detachment has not been reached, and the book remains technically on the amateurish level in which the most articulate character sounds like a mouthpiece for the author. Hence all the self-pity and egotism [that should have been removed are present in the text] and the result is a continuous sense of embarrassment.

Love And Work

Carol Shields

Larry's Party. Random House \$31.00

Reviewed by JoAnn McCaig

In her new novel, Carol Shields undertakes the audacious task of writing a man's life, chronicling twenty years in the experience of Larry Weller, an everyman born in Winnipeg in 1950. *Larry's Party* follows the astonishing success of *The Stone Diaries*, Shields' angry, passionate cry against the erasure of women's lives. As in the previous work, Shields uses the novel form to explore new ways of writing a life, of uncovering what she has termed "the mystery of personality."

Larry's Party is deftly structured as a series of CAT-scans, each chapter a "slice" of one segment of the character's biography at a specific moment in history. For example, in "Larry's Threads, 1993-4," a catalogue of Larry's clothing, footwear and (thinning) hair reveals not only the crumbling of his present marriage but also, in flashback, his two weddings and his father's death. As in a CAT-scan, the details of Larry's "world entire" are revisited and elaborated with new insight and added wear and tear as the narrative progresses — from the repetition of simple facts like the names of his first wife and his son, to Larry's experience of the maze at Hampton Court, first visited during his honeymoon in 1978, but understood more deeply as a

transformative moment when he revisits the memory in subsequent chapters.

Shields' gift for the telling detail is much in evidence here. In the chapter titled "Larry's Penis, 1986," the way in which first wife Dorrie eats apples—"grasping them firmly and gnawing them straight to their economical cores"—contrasts with the way his second wife "cuts her apples into wedges, then reassembles them in a baggie for her lunch," a ritual which causes Beth to give "a near-audible mew of satisfaction."

Love and work entwine in this novel. Larry is a dreamy sort who finds his life's work and a way to be creative through a series of random events, coincidences, and accidents. The "arch formality and plotted chaos" of mazes ultimately provide Larry a place in the universe; as a maze-maker, he finds his "privileged corner in the world . . . his unique bird's-eye view, his only, only offering." Mazes are thus linked to creativity, but they are also related to sexuality, and to the finding and losing of love. The maze also has cosmic dimensions; for Larry, entering a maze generates "spiritual excitement. The maze's preordained design, its complications, which are at once unsettling and serene, the shifts of light and shade, the pulsing vegetal growth which is encouraged but also held in check"—in this novel, the maze is a Blakean metaphor for the tension between the visionary and the mundane, between passion and reason, between innocence and experience.

Larry's Party is worth reading for many reasons, not least of which is the respectful attention it pays to the pleasures and necessities of work — Hector Bondurant's clock repair business, Lucy Warkenton's book-binding, Stu Weller's talent with automotive upholstery. The importance of a life's work is granted its rightful place in the lives of many of the characters, but not all of them: Larry's mother, Dot Weller, is a housewife, but her "real work [is] sorrowing, remembering" a darkly comic tragedy

of her youth. Readers of this novel will never think indifferently of runner beans again.

If the romantic turn that resolves the plot is unpalatable for many readers in what Shields describes as “this long, mean, skeptical century,” the author nonetheless succeeds marvellously in bringing an ordinary guy like Larry Weller richly to life. *Larry's Party* is also admirable for its compassionate tracing of the puzzling and circuitous paths an ordinary man walks in the process of losing and finding the love and the work that define him as a human being.

Transcultural Passages

Sherry Simon, ed.

Culture in Transit: Translating the Literature of Quebec. Véhicule Press \$18.95

Michel Tremblay

trans. John Van Burek and Bill Glassco.
Marcel Pursued by the Hounds. Talonbooks \$13.95

Leonard E. Doucette

The Drama of Our Past: Major Plays from Nineteenth-Century Quebec. Uof Toronto P \$24.95

Reviewed by Louise Ladouceur

Pursuing her investigation of the translation into English of literary works from Quebec, Sherry Simon presents us with a collection of thirteen essays by prominent scholars and translators involved in different literary genres and confronted with various aspects of translating Quebec culture. As emphasized in the introduction of *Culture in Transit: Translating the Literature of Quebec*, this collection emerges from a tradition that reflects a distinctive aspect of Canadian culture: “Unlike most literary translation which is *inter*-national, Canadian translation has historically been an *intra*-national affair.” Faced with the responsibility of representing the “difference,” translators “must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carries.” It is the individual encounter of each translator with the “tensions of historical relationships”

that this publication invites us to share.

In the first section entitled “Translating Identities,” Wayne Grady illustrates the peculiarity of Canadian culture, wherein Canadian translators are destined to translate only Canadian writers. Taking into account her personal background, Luise von Flotow explores her “positionality” in dealing with the eroticism, anger, frustration and ethnicity emerging in women’s writing in the eighties. How to translate ethnicity is also discussed by David Homel while Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood reflects upon her personal voice shift in translations produced between 1979 and 1994. Barbara Godard offers us pages from a journal where she dissects the transfer and transformation process of a text through translation and Linda Gaboriau discusses the differences in the “cultures of theatre” in the Canadian and Quebec repertoires.

The second section entitled “Local Languages and the Politics of Equivalence” begins with an account of the translation of Antonine Maillet’s peculiar idiom by Philip Stratford, “from Mailletois into Stratfordese.” Ray Ellenwood discusses the problems posed by the references to specific places, people, customs and language in translating Jacques Ferron’s fiction while Betty Bednarski investigates Ferron’s playful appropriation of English terms destined to “rectify” a Quebec linguistic reality and the challenge inherent to their transposition into English. Kathy Mezei explores the ways in which literary translation acts as a “vehicle of assimilation” through non- or mis-translation of the English appearing in the original French text. William Findlay introduces us to Michel Tremblay as “the most popular contemporary playwright in Scotland over the past few years” while Jane Brierley contrasts her approach to translating Philippe-Joseph Aubert De Gaspé’s *Les Anciens Canadiens* with the two existing translations of this literary canon. Lastly,

Sheila Fischman, the author of more than sixty translations of books by major Quebec writers, reflects upon her experience with the many challenges posed by translation.

Through their analysis of various cultural obstacles inherent to translating Quebec literature into English, contributors also demonstrate subjective components of their work, an aspect of the translative process too rarely examined. In keeping with a recent orientation within translation studies, whereupon the traditional invisibility of the translator is questioned, this series of personal accounts offers valuable insights into the cultural as well as individual circumstances shaping the transmission of Quebec literature through English translation.

With no less than fifteen plays translated, published and produced in English since 1973, renowned Quebec playwright Michel Tremblay is certainly highly regarded on the Canadian literary scene. The latest of these plays, *Marcel Pursued by the Hounds*, is translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco, who have already signed their names to numerous translations of Tremblay's drama. Following the approach adopted in earlier publications, there is no introductory material accompanying the play other than a summary of the action, a brief presentation of the celebrated author and quotations from reviews, all appearing on the back cover. Although one quotation mentions that "Tremblay revolutionized Québécois theatre by introducing joul to the stage," the reader is left without any explanation of what makes Tremblay's use of joul revolutionary, linguistically as well as ideologically, or of the kind of difficulties involved in translating it into English. Considering the importance of Tremblay's work and the challenge it poses to translation, one would hope to be given some indication of what obstacles the translators encountered and how they navigated a very problematic transcultural passage.

Textual strategies exhibited in this version follow in the footsteps of earlier English translations of Tremblay's plays by Van Burek and Glassco. As a general rule, the level of language of the English version is more formal than the joul of the original. Although more discreet than they were in previous works, some Gallicisms are still used to underline the origin of the source text: terms like "Moman," "la rue Dorion," "la rue Fabre," "la rue Mont-Royal," and "ma tante Nana" have been kept in French but, unlike *Les Belles-Soeurs*, *Bonjour, Là*, *Bonjour* or *La Maison Suspendue* the title has been translated into English. It would be interesting to know what determining factors are at work in deciding whether or not to translate the title. An odd modification in the structure of the play occurs in the translated version where, for example, parts of the dialogue near the end of the play have been moved so as to appear earlier in the text. These interventions, however, are quite rare and, apart from the shift in the level of language, the English version faithfully reproduces the dialogue of the original.

In this play, Tremblay reunites the chorus of the fates, Rose, Violette, Mauve and Florence with their protégé, Marcel, who has witnessed a horrible crime and seeks refuge with his sister Thérèse. Displaying his usual mastery at building dramatic tension, Tremblay reveals more of the dark secrets that bind together members of Albertine's family and the gang that controls the clubs and bars on the Main. We discover a little more about Marcel and Thérèse, their fears, hopes and delusions, in an uninterrupted stream of dialogue, with no act or scene breaks, constructed like a long howl resonating with Marcel's terror. Stripped of some of the usual accessories of dramatic composition, this one-act play, set on "a bare stage before an immense sky," exposes a desolation that not only surrounds Thérèse and Marcel but inhabits

them both and, ultimately, holds them together.

In *The Drama of Our Past: Major Plays from Nineteenth-Century Quebec*, Leonard E. Doucette offers us the results of a monumental undertaking. Presenting the first English translation of five full-length plays and five short playlets covering the major genres and themes treated by Quebec dramatists of the nineteenth century, this book provides as well detailed contextual and textual information about the plays and the period under study. Introductory essays are dedicated to each play and its author, followed by a description of the social, historical and political context in which it was created. We are then presented with a discussion of the play itself, its contribution to Quebec dramatic repertoire, its structure, characters, setting and language. This most instructive introductory material allows for a more informed reading of the plays, especially for readers, like me, who are unfamiliar with that period in Quebec theatre.

With Joseph Quesnel's *Anglomania, or Dinner, English Style* (1803), Doucette introduces us to the "first play with an explicitly Canadian theme and setting to appear since the seventeenth century," after Bishop Saint-Vallier banned theatrical activity in the colony in 1694 thus putting a halt to the development of an indigenous dramatic tradition for most of the following century. The politically inspired *Status Quo Comedies* (1834) are five satirical playlets used alternately by the "révolutionnaires" of the French-Canadian Patriote party and their opponents to criticize and ridicule each other. *The Donation* (1842) by Pierre Petitclair was the first play by a Quebec-born author to be produced and published in Canada while *A Country Outing* (1865), by the same author, deals with the coexistence of anglophones and francophones in Quebec, a very Canadian topic, then and now. *Félix Poutré* (1862) by Louis-Honoré

Fréchette proposes an inspiring account of the Patriote rebellion of 1838 from the point of view of one of its major participants. It was also "by far the most popular play by a Canadian author to come out of nineteenth-century Quebec." The last play presented, *Archibald Cameron of Locheill, or an Episode in the Seven Years' War* (1759) (1894) is an adaptation of the famous novel *Les Anciens Canadiens* by Philippe-Joseph Aubert de Gaspé, a dramatic work that "became the most popular play in Quebec's system of *collèges classiques*."

With abundant notes explaining certain peculiarities of dialogue and the events or people they refer to, the translated versions themselves are most educative. Taking into account the various levels of language and dialectical characteristics of the originals, explained in the introduction to each play, the author proposes creative and lively equivalents that aroused my curiosity. Occasionally, I would have liked to examine the original text to see how some sections of dialogue were handled. Inasmuch as these plays have remained largely inaccessible both in French and in English, as Doucette points out in the prologue, it would have been interesting to have access to the originals as well. But why ask more from a book already generously filled with information and new material, discussed in an accessible style that conveys the flavour and spirit of nineteenth-century Quebec and the drama it produced?



Fat Useful Books

Margery Fee

Reference books are always hard to review, but certainly should be reviewed, since they are expensive. Spending a lot of money for a fat useless book is always annoying. Worse, we tend to trust reference books, so that if they do have errors, these then reproduce themselves through scholarly discourses like viruses. *The Princeton Handbook of Multicultural Poetries*, edited by T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton UP, 1996, n.p.) has what is, at least for a Canadian, a misleading title. The world "multicultural" for us generates the idea of diverse cultures inside a national border, but here the term includes what might be better termed national literatures from ancient to modern times as well as sub-national or minor literatures (i.e. Afro-American poetry, Catalan poetry, Yiddish poetry etc.) It has an entry for "Canadian poetry, English-language" written by George Woodcock (who briefly mentions several writers we might label "multicultural," such as Mary di Michele), for "Canadian poetry, French-language" by Guy Sylvestre and an entry on Inuit Poetry by Robin McGrath. Canadian Native writers are included only cursorily in the entry "American Indian Poetry" by Jarold Ramsey (who simply lists a dated—1977—anthology edited by David Day and Marilyn Bowering, *Many Voices*, and leaves it at that). These are the sorts of gaps that are inevitable in such works, however, and it obviously is intended to lead

out to more specialist works, as each entry is followed by quite extensive references to anthologies and critical works. Although it is hard for me to think of the sort of person for whom this would be an essential and constantly used book, it provides a vast range of material in entries written by experts.

The Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory (New York: Garland, 1997, n.p.), in the words of its editor, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, "concerns itself uniquely with the crossing of the social, political, intellectual force that is feminism and the major literary and theoretical movements of our time." It too contains entries written by experts, followed by suggestions for further reading, and these entries discuss individual writers and theorists, usually female (although Jacques Derrida, Stephen Heath, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and John Stuart Mill, for example, have entries), periodicals and particularly significant books, and general topics such as Abortion, Children, Ethnicity, Father, Gaze, Hysteria, Identity, Ideology, Laughter, Pornography, Quilting, Reading, Rhetoric, Veil, Victorian Studies, Witch. The collection is focused on French and Anglo-American criticism, so apart from an entry for Margaret Atwood, there is nothing more about Canada, and Meaghan Morris stands for all of Australia in the index, although there are entries for Germaine Greer and Dale Spender. The idea that one's national background and experiences might affect one's feminism rarely surfaces, consigning feminism outside France, Britain and the United States to a limbo

where one can only (as it is said of Meaghan Morris) hope to “enter debates in which the terms have been set elsewhere” as if there were no feminist theoretical debates outside these places. Thus extremely powerful feminist writers (some of whom might not want the label feminist, but then neither does Atwood) such as Nichole Brossard, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Erna Brodber and Keri Hulme are not mentioned. Nor is there a general entry for diaspora or immigration, although there are for colonialism, ethnicity, and subaltern studies. Its theoretical perspective can be seen in its having entries for birth, but not birth control, and for breast, but not breast feeding. But again, within its limitations, it provides a useful starting place for work in a wide variety of areas.

Third World Women's Literature: A Dictionary and Guide to Materials in English, by Barbara Fister (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1995, n.p.), provides brief biographies and bibliographies of primary and secondary material for writers from the Caribbean, Central and Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Southern Asia and Asia excluding Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Her goal is to “attend to women writers in parts of the world often left out of reference works produced in the West.” Thus she supplements the previous encyclopedia nicely. Such are the vicissitudes of categories that Marguerite Duras, because she was born and raised in Vietnam (formerly French Indochina) and Doris Lessing, ditto Northern Rhodesia, cleverly manage to make it into both volumes. Several writers are discussed who are now Canadian citizens, such as Dionne Brand and Marlene Nourbese Philip. The book has helpful appendixes: one lists the authors by region and country, another lists them chronologically, and three others list anthologies, resources for research and criticism. There are a few discursive general entries, such as Censorship, Language, Literary Canon, Oral Literature, and Publishing, and these

provide excellent brief overviews, again with further reading. The list of critical material on individual authors is excellent, for example, the entries for Buchi Emecheta cover over a page. The cutoff date for critical material is 1994. Fister's may well be the book I use most of this group.

The *Encyclopedia of North American Indians: Native American History, Culture, and Life from Paleo-Indians to the Present*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1996, n.p.) describes over 100 tribes, five major languages and four major language groups, North American Native languages in general, and one hundred individuals, significant general topics (Beads, Birth, Treaties, Voting), and finally entries for important terms, major events and ceremonies. Longer signed entries give suggestions for further reading and the contributors include some of the foremost names in Native Studies in North America. The editor began the project while director of the Newberry Library's D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian in Chicago. Although not surprisingly, there is a bias towards entries that deal with the United States, there is an entry for Indian-White Relations in Canada, and various entries for tribes whose traditional territories are in Canada are written by Canadian experts; for example, the entry for Kwakiutl was written by Gloria Cranmer Webster, of the U'Mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia. Important Canadians are also discussed, including Pauline Johnson, Fred Loft, founder of the League of Indians of Canada in 1908, and Louis Riel. The entry for literature does not, regrettably, mention any Native writers in Canada except for Johnson. Maps, charts, and photographs make this encyclopedia extremely readable. This encyclopedia and Fister's would both have helped the reader by giving a list of the general topics in the front matter, because it is difficult to guess which general topics

will be covered and how they will be described if they are. Poking through an index is no substitute.

American Culture

Eva-Marie Kröller

A number of books published during the last few years explore various aspects of American culture. Karal Ann Marling, author of a previous book on Iwo Jima and other war monuments, describes “the visual culture of everyday life in the 1950s” in *As Seen on TV* (Harvard UP, US\$14.95) with chapters on topics as diverse as the “new look” in fashion, painting-by-numbers, Disney culture, cookbooks and others. The book successfully explores the popular underpinnings of internal and international political agenda, most obviously so in the chapter on Nixon and Khrushchev’s Great Kitchen Debate at a 1959 exhibition in Moscow. Splendidly illustrated, *As Seen on TV* makes for a visually more attractive book than Suellen Hoy’s *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (Oxford UP, \$37.00), but Hoy’s book has a greater historical sweep, opening on 18th century travellers’ scandalized reports on the dirt encountered in American inns and homes, through 19th century inner-urban sanitation projects, to this century’s growing obsession with cleanliness as an expression of virtue and progress, until environmentalism redefined these values yet again. Throughout the book attempts to include all social classes and ethnic groups, an approach which sometimes leads to mechanical list-making. Still, Hoy describes middle-class aspirations as well as the plight of Depression-era dirt-farmers who avoided electricity because they were afraid of losing the little land they owned to the New Deal Rural Electrification Program, and she illustrates the back-breaking work—often accomplished by coloured domestics—of doing the weekly

laundry. George Chauncey’s *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and The Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (HarperCollins \$25.50) is an exhaustive 451-page historical exploration of its subject which sets out to correct several current misconceptions about gay self-definition prior to the Stonewall Riots. In particular, Chauncey challenges the view that homosexuality was hermetically closeted, documenting a lively and assertive sub-culture instead. Like Hoy, Chauncey is careful to determine differences in class and ethnicity. His observations are always closely tied to analyses of urban structure and development; as a result he draws a cognitive map of New York quite different from its standard conceptions. *The Girl’s Own: Cultural Histories of the Anglo-American Girl, 1830-1915* eds. Claudia Nelson and Lynne Vallone (U of Georgia P, US\$45.00) reads a multitude of texts, journalistic, biographical, fictional and visual, to arrive at a definition of its subject. Noteworthy contributions include Martha Vicinus’s analysis of “biographies of ‘noble women’ for girls,” a study of vegetarianism in Alcott’s America by Claudia Nelson which throws new light on such classics as *Little Women* and a reading by Judith Pascoe of T.S. Arthur’s works for young girls. As a man who chose female pseudonyms for publication Arthur provides an intriguing reversal to the more usual procedure of male pseudonyms for female writers. The title of Philip D. Beidler’s *Scriptures for a Generation: What We Were Reading in the Sixties* (U of Georgia, \$24.95) promises rather more than it keeps: the book mostly consists of a loosely composed list of books ranging from Richard Alpert (aka Baba Ram Dass) to Tom Wolfe, framed by some equally desultory introductory and concluding remarks. However, for anyone interested in the 60s, this is still a useful reference work to keep around, and a good reminder of how many bestsellers of the time have become virtually obsolete in the span of a

mere thirty years. Reid Mitchell's *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Harvard, us\$29.95) explores an important southern tradition. Mitchell is particularly good at documenting the power dynamics, racial and otherwise, affecting an event apparently designed to reverse traditional hegemonies. Sometimes meant as an expression of solidarity, the depiction of native Indians by black impersonators still makes for a poignant travesty; a 1902 observer noted that "the negroes were the only ones who came out as Indians, and they made good savages." Lorette Treese's *Valley Forge: Making and Remaking a National Symbol* (Penn State, us\$45.00/\$15.95) describes changing perceptions of American history through a study of George Washington's famous winter encampment of 1777-78. Although the book is often overwhelmed by the detail presented, Treese offers many interesting observations ranging from the role of women in acting as custodian "vestals" of national tradition to the semiotics of military monuments.

Littérature québécoise: 1997-98

Alain-Michel Rocheleau

1997-1998 auront été deux bonnes années pour la littérature au Québec. Non seulement certaines valeurs sûres, comme Anne Hébert, Fernand Ouellette et Fernand Dumont, nous ont-ils livré des ouvrages à la mesure de leur talent, mais d'autres auteurs, déjà connus et appréciés de leurs lecteurs et lectrices (comme Anne-Marie Alonzo, Suzanne Jacob, Dany Laferrière, Élise Turcotte, et j'en passe), ou s'essayant à une première oeuvre, nous ont réservé de fort beaux textes, saisissants dans bien des cas par leur accent de vérité.

À la lecture des vingt-sept publications retenues dans ce bref inventaire se dégagent plusieurs démarches similaires, entreprises par des auteurs dont les oeuvres appartiennent pourtant à des genres différents: des essais portant sur le monde plurivalent de l'écriture, de portée biographique ou autobiographique, des journaux intimes et littéraires (dans lesquels le passé et le présent, la vie et la mort sont souvent évoqués), des récits narratifs et des poèmes qui nous font voyager tantôt dans des lieux d'émerveillement et de grande sensualité, tantôt dans cet univers en souffrance qu'est, ou que fût, pour plusieurs l'adolescence. Nonobstant leur grande disparité, ces ouvrages nous montrent qu'un projet d'écriture, ce travail de lecture et de synthèse du réel, s'ancre le plus souvent dans un sol stratifié de réflexions plurielles, d'obsessions personnelles ou, parfois même, dans une série de rencontres, de dialogues, voire d'oppositions enrichissantes, avec Autrui. Voilà, en fait, l'idée centrale du dernier livre de Suzanne Jacob, *La Bulle d'encre* (Boréal/Presses de l'Université de Montréal, \$24.95), publié en 1997. Pour s'aider à lire le monde, l'humain/écrivain aime recourir à des images de synthèse—à des symboles—qui l'aideront à dépasser le sens «littéral» de ce qui l'entoure et qu'il cherchera éventuellement à retranscrire dans un récit intrinsèque, ou extrinsèque. Or, désormais, il n'y a plus de ce type d'éléments (dont l'homme d'aujourd'hui voudrait bien pourtant se doter, pour mieux saisir et traduire sa réalité) mais le spectacle d'une vacuité absolue en ce domaine, puisque nous vivons, selon l'écrivaine, à une époque qui a «déraciné les symboles» pour les inclure dans des réseaux d'écrans (de télé, d'ordinateur, de surveillance, etc.), où ils cheminent en s'imposant comme des «fictions dominantes». Nourri de conversations de la vie courante, de faits divers et de rencontres réalisées avec deux auteurs—Hermann Broch et Victor-Lévy Beaulieu—, cet

ouvrage de 132 pages renforce l'idée voulant qu'écrire, c'est avant tout fixer des paramètres tangibles à un tohu-bohu, à une *bulle d'encre*, par l'entremise d'un récit (entrevu, par l'auteure, comme une combinaison d'expériences diversifiées), décrypter les réalités humaines (ce qu'elles contiennent de chaotique, notamment), puis mettre à nu leurs mécanismes pour les restituer au lecteur, en plus beau, en plus clair, en plus intelligible également. En d'autres termes, se saisir d'une plume ou allumer l'ordinateur, pour s'engager corps et âme dans cette lutte à finir contre la page ou l'écran blanc qu'est l'acte d'écrire, c'est remettre le monde en question, c'est dire non à l'ordre connu des choses, imposé ou trop facilement accepté, c'est creuser dans cet insondable tunnel qu'ouvre en soi la gestation d'une oeuvre à composer. Ce faisant, l'écrivain (de fiction ou d'autofiction) se présente, selon l'expression de Régine Robin, dans *Le Golem de l'écriture. De l'autofiction au Cybersoi* (XYZ, \$29.95), comme un architecte de l'Univers, titre qui lui est conféré à juste raison puisque celui-ci invente de toute pièce des histoires, des personnages, un langage qui lui est particulier, tout en se construisant lui-même et en façonnant, d'oeuvre en oeuvre, sa propre existence. À la fois réflexion sur le métier d'auteur, sur la postmodernité et sur l'identité, cet ouvrage, paru en 1997, cherche à étayer un rapport entre l'autofiction exercée par quatre penseurs-créateurs (Joseph Roth, Romain Gary, Philip Roth et Serge Doubrovsky), leur quête d'identité et la pratique textuelle dans le «cyberspace». Ce type de relation est d'autant plus important à établir au moment où, dans la culture contemporaine, une perte de repères signifiants entre fiction et réalité, un nombre élevé de «dérives identitaires» (celles-là même qui fondent le «soi postmoderne» ou le «Cybersoi») et une forte absence de codes symboliques, se font de plus en plus remarquer. Madame Robin aborde aussi,

dans ce livre de 302 pages, les nouvelles formes que constitue «l'hyperfiction», comme autant de tentatives qui laissent entrevoir, selon elle, une complicité entre la littérature expérimentale des Roth et Gary et la création d'hypertextes originaux sur le réseau Internet.

L'idée de «soi postmoderne» et de recherche d'identité se profile également dans le dernier journal littéraire de Jean-Pierre Guay, publié en 1997 et intitulé *Maman. Le journal, 17 août-23 septembre 1993* (Les Herbes rouges, \$18.95). Parmi les questions que soulève cet ouvrage de 132 pages, figurent les suivantes: Quel rôle l'écrivain remplit-il dans la société d'aujourd'hui? Comment un auteur en arrive-t-il à faire preuve d'authenticité, de vérité face à lui-même, lorsque confronté à l'espace de sa propre solitude? Il faudrait être poète pour dire sans le trahir ce livre immense, qui tient autant de la confiance, du factum, de la rêverie que du questionnement sans fin. Véritable exercice de liberté créatrice, *Maman. Le journal, 17 août-23 septembre 1993* témoigne pour l'essentiel de la pensée d'un auteur s'analysant avec flamme, tout en faisant le portrait d'une époque assez récente du Québec. Derrière ce tracé d'anecdotes, la témérité (que l'on prête souvent à Jean-Pierre Guay depuis la parution de *François, les framboises et moi*) émerge à nouveau, interrogeant aussi bien l'enjeu éthique d'un être-créateur (fondement inquiet) que les tourmentes plurivoques du nationalisme québécois. Presque aphone en raison de ce qu'il nous décrit, l'auteur parvient à éclairer la trajectoire ou, si l'on veut, le mouvement intérieur de ses rêves et fantasmes, où se manifeste avec grandeur la notion d'authenticité et par l'entremise desquels nous est dévoilée une réflexion originale sur l'acte d'écrire. Dans un registre assez semblable d'idées critiques et autocritiques, quoi que référant aux valeurs dominantes du Québec des années 1920, *Le carnet du cynique* (Guérin,

\$12.50) de Philippe Panneton (dit Ringuet) rejoint (à certains égards) la démarche introspective et critique de Jean-Pierre Guay. Entrepris en 1920, ce carnet de 85 pages correspond, pour l'essentiel, au journal personnel de l'auteur de *Trente arpents*, à un brouillon d'idées, de commentaires éparses et de notations parfois très brèves, mais hautement libératrices pour ce jeune homme critique, et qu'il entendait bien garder pour lui-même. Or voilà qu'en 1926, Ringuet se révisé et décide de tirer de ce journal intime des extraits qu'il regroupe sous divers titres. Le lecteur découvre ainsi, dans ce petit ouvrage, le ton souvent emporté d'un écrivain en herbe (médecin de profession), bien résolu à exercer ce qu'il appelle (à juste titre) le «contrisme» envers certaines devises et idées reçues de son temps, liés au féminisme naissant, au sentiment d'obéissance craintive qu'entretenait alors la population québécoise envers les membres du clergé, à la laideur des habits sacerdotaux de ces derniers, etc.

Cet exercice d'écriture, animé ou soutenu par une volonté cathartique, ou libératrice, constitue la démarche centrale de deux ouvrages parus eux aussi en 1998, l'un portant sur la disparition d'êtres chers, l'autre retraçant (dans un récit de fiction) l'histoire des «enfants de Duplessis». Le premier, commis par Madeleine Gagnon et ayant pour titre *Le Deuil du soleil* (VLB Éditeur, \$17.95), répond à la nécessité, éprouvée par l'écrivaine, de donner voix au silence de ceux et celles qui, autour d'elle, se sont endormis dans la mort. Dans ce recueil de 182 pages (qui tient à la fois du journal intime et du roman épistolaire), constitué de dix textes composés entre le 3 janvier 1995 et le 4 novembre 1997, Madeleine Gagnon évoque avec sensibilité le parcours qui l'a conduite jusqu'à ce livre de «remémoration». Confronter, interroger en profondeur et assumer graduellement (bien que douloureusement, on s'en doute) le départ pour l'éternité d'êtres chèrement aimés, voilà les

principaux objectifs qu'elle poursuit. De texte en texte, cet ouvrage de réflexion prend la forme d'une longue prière intérieure, souvent imprégnée de lucidité et de grande beauté, comme pourront le découvrir les lecteurs dans les sections intitulées «Minuit» et «La Vie est une étoile», notamment. Une autre suite de textes, plus brefs ceux-là et appelés «Accompagnements», compose la fin de ce recueil et laisse entrevoir une «renaissance» de l'écrivaine après autant de mortalités évoquées. Le deuxième ouvrage, signé Bruno Roy et intitulé *Les Calepins de Julien* (XYZ, \$19.95), ne surprendra pas ceux qui suivent l'oeuvre de cet écrivain, surtout depuis la publication chez Boréal, en 1994, d'un essai fort bien construit, *Mémoire d'asile*, dans lequel l'auteur relate l'histoire d'une époque troublante du Québec, celle des «enfants de Duplessis» (dont il fut l'un de ceux-ci). On découvre dans ce roman autobiographique de 358 pages plusieurs protagonistes, témoins adultes ou enfants victimes du système de l'assistance publique, tous prisonniers (à divers degrés) d'événements qui ont meublé les annales de la belle province entre 1943 et 1959. Le personnage principal de cette histoire touchante a pour nom Julien Lenoir. Celui-ci réussit mieux que les autres à éviter les châtements que leur infligent les religieuses, grâce surtout à la complicité de soeur Odile, qui lui tient lieu de protectrice. Le jeune garçon apprend à se retirer de ce réel accablant par l'écriture de ses calepins (véritables cicatrices mises en mots), à l'intérieur desquels il s'efforce de consigner ses pensées les plus intimes, ses rêves aussi, afin de survivre, de conserver son équilibre, de ne pas oublier, de garder vif en mémoire le souvenir de ces journées d'orphelinat, longues, pénibles et redondantes. Dans la dernière partie du récit, Julien, devenu adulte, professeur, écrivain et époux, revoit ses camarades d'enfance (qui s'en sont moins bien tirés que lui) et estime avoir été «sauvé» de son passé par la passion de l'écriture.

Le désir de constituer un bilan richement évocateur du passé, mais avec moins de douleur ressentie dans les mots, a aussi fait l'objet, en 1997, d'autobiographies remarquables. Dans l'une de celles-ci, intitulée *Figures intérieures* (Leméac, \$26.95), qui tient autant du journal que des mémoires, Fernand Ouellette nous raconte sa vie, depuis la naissance jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Par l'entremise d'innombrables souvenirs remémorés, l'auteur (poète et critique bien connu) rend hommage à de nombreux écrivains (dont les oeuvres ont su élagir en lui divers champs de réflexion, contribuer au développement, voire à l'épanouissement constant, de touchantes *figures intérieures*), à des célébrités (comme Roland Barthes et Julien Cracq) qu'il rencontrera en Europe, dès les années 1960 (à titre de réalisateur d'émissions culturelles à Radio-Canada), et à quelques amis disparus (dont André Belleau et Gaston Miron). Au-delà des salutations rendues et des multiples références faites à des notes de lecture (et de voyages) colligées au fil des ans, Ouellette se décrit sous divers angles méconnus du grand public, évoque par exemple la fascination pour le Christ (le «christocentrisme») qui l'habite depuis l'enfance, affiche une sincère propension aux pratiques du mysticisme religieux et nous partage quelques-unes de ses réflexions («lucides» et toujours bien fondées) sur certains événements qui ont ponctué l'histoire récente du Québec. Fernand Dumont, quant à lui, dans *Récit d'une émigration* (Boréal, \$24.95), nous donne à lire les mémoires d'un être hors du commun, celui qu'il fût tout au long de sa vie. Dans ce livre de 272 pages, qui ressemble aussi à un long commentaire sur l'importance des traditions populaires, l'auteur évoque ses pensées les plus fondamentales en souhaitant montrer, de ce flot en évolution qu'elles ont sans cesse constitué, leurs ramifications ultimes. Cette autobiographie nous apprend, entre autres choses, que très tôt dans la vie de cet homme de savoir, l'u-

nivers du livre deviendra un «territoire d'exil» qui l'obligera (bien qu'à contre-cœur) à se distancer de son milieu d'origine, un havre (de ressourcement culturel et intellectuel) indispensable. Cette séparation, le sociologue l'appellera plus tard *émigration*. Tout en se définissant, en fait, comme un «émigrant de la culture populaire» (qu'il considérerait première, voire essentielle, dans l'évolution de la société québécoise), le regretté professeur de l'Université Laval nous parle avec bonheur de sa carrière d'enseignant et de chercheur, comme d'une chance inestimable.

La passion qu'entretenait Dumont pour les traditions populaires émerge également de la biographie consacrée par Marcel Olscamp à une partie de l'existence de Jacques Ferron, dans un ouvrage intitulé *Le fils du notaire. Jacques Ferron, 1921-1949* (Fides, \$27.95) et paru en 1997. De tout ce qui nous est rapporté par le biographe, deux événements, en particulier, retiennent fortement l'attention. On y apprend d'abord qu'après avoir fortement critiqué durant ses études, voire rabaisé, l'importance du «régionalisme» (caractérisant, entre autres, les poèmes d'Alfred Desrochers), Jacques Ferron (alors médecin) part s'établir dans un petit village de Gaspésie, où il prendra peu à peu conscience de la réalité de ce coin de pays. Il apprend, selon Olscamp, qu'à partir de ce moment, l'auteur de *Confitures de coings* et de *La Chaise du maréchal ferrant* cherchera à «réparer» (à se pardonner, plus précisément) ce manque de jugement par l'entremise d'une oeuvre entièrement vouée aux contes populaires. De la même manière, le désir d'engagement social, que sous-tend l'écriture ferronienne, s'expliquerait par une seconde «bévue» (le rejet du communisme) comme celle-là en 1949, puis amèrement regrettée par Ferron. Les remords qu'il éprouvera (à la suite de ces deux «erreurs de jeunesse»), amplifiés par la sévérité qu'il entretenait envers lui-même, seraient à l'origine, selon

les dires du biographe, des principaux moteurs de l'oeuvre de Jacques Ferron.

Ceux qui profiteront de la lecture de cette biographie, de même que des mémoires de Fernand Dumont, pourront découvrir, avec plaisir et intérêt, l'hommage rendu à un autre éminent penseur du Québec, Jean Ethier-Blais, qui fût également journaliste, poète, critique et universitaire. Publié en 1997 sous la direction de Martin Doré, *Jean Ethier-Blais. Une vie en écriture (1925-1995)* (Hurtubise HMH, \$18.95) regroupe les textes de dix auteurs et amis de celui-ci, qui nous partagent quelques souvenirs et réflexions liés aussi bien à l'adolescence (Guy Lafond), au passage chez les jésuites (Robert Vigneault), aux dispositions «ironiques» (Gaston Laurion) et à la période des études parisiennes (Moënis Taha-Hussein), de cet intellectuel de renom, qu'à ses relations d'amitié (Catherine Paupert), son implication au Centre international d'étudiants l'Eau-Vive (Jean-Marie Paupert) et au «club des écrivains» (René le Clère), son amour de la langue française (Yerri Kempf), sa fascination pour l'Orient (Michel Gaulin) et Lionel Groulx (Jean-Marc Léger). Jointe à ces dix témoignages, une infime partie de la correspondance d'Ethier-Blais nous est également dévoilée. Notons que pour clore cet ouvrage collectif de 206 pages, Martin Doré a eu l'excellente idée d'y inclure une bibliographie des livres de l'auteur, l'index des nombreux articles qu'il écrivit et une chronologie de sa vie.

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Depuis fort longtemps, la littérature québécoise s'est donné pour mission d'interroger les identités (individuelles et collectives), d'ébranler le confort des traditions héritées, des idées reçues et de l'enracinement imposé. Il n'est donc pas surprenant, compte tenu de l'évolution sociohistorique et démographique du Québec (marquée, après 1960, par des vagues d'immigration successives, un enrichissement multiculturel et

une ouverture au monde), que multes auteurs québécois (d'origines diverses) fassent de plus en plus référence, dans leurs écrits, à la diversité de leurs lieux de naissance, aux multiples endroits qu'ils ont visités, et permettent ainsi aux lecteurs de voyager dans des univers qui n'ont rien à envier, tant par l'exotisme que par la beauté qu'ils dégagent, aux splendides paysages de Charlevoix. À cet égard, le dernier roman de Romel Chery, *L'Adieu aux étoiles* (Éditions Vent d'Ouest, \$22.95), publié en 1997, nous le montre bien. L'histoire racontée est celle de Nadeige Dolcé, prêtresse vaudou, qui met tout en oeuvre afin de faire sortir son fils (Frank) de prison, où il croupit depuis plusieurs semaines pour avoir osé publier des articles dénonçant la «corruption» des Duvalier et, plus précisément, les sales combines du commandant Jean Bart. Ce dernier, en plus de frapper de terreur la population de Cap-Haïtien, profite de l'hégémonie qu'il détient sur les prisonniers (pouvoir qui lui vient des loas, ces génies malfaisants) pour mener, avec un groupe d'Américains, un trafic d'organes des plus rentable. À travers une intrigue facile à comprendre, Chery en profite (semble-t-il) pour régler quelques comptes avec les partisans des Duvalier, père et fils. Cette prise de position donne d'ailleurs à ce texte narratif une structure diachronique, où plusieurs éléments opposés (les bons et les méchants, les vivants et les morts, le passé et le présent, etc.) finissent par s'entremêler dans une prose hautement colorée. C'est ainsi qu'au-delà de la violence (parfois cruellement révélée par les antagonistes mis en présence), une tendresse certaine (le plus souvent teintée de merveilleux) donne à l'ensemble du récit une atmosphère douce et sensible. À l'instar des personnages de *L'Adieu aux étoiles*, ceux du dernier roman de Dany Laferrière, intitulé *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (Lanctôt Éditeur, \$24.95), nous entraînent également dans l'imaginaire fantastique des Caraïbes.

Par un va-et-vient mi-réaliste, mi-féérique, entre Port-au-Prince et Petit-Goâve, et qui suit l'enchaînement cadencé de petits tableaux anecdotiques, tristes et drôles à la fois, mais toujours remplis d'une belle sensualité, l'auteur nous décrit l'univers d'abord tranquille de Vieux-Os (le narrateur) et de sa grand-mère Da, conseillère et confidente des citoyens de Petit-Goâve. Ces derniers seront d'ailleurs appelés, au fil du récit, à vivre les joies (et «les préparatifs») d'une grande fête (donnée chez Nissage), les «turbulences» de longues journées durant lesquelles, au gré des oui-dire et des prémonitions, la menace d'une punition (qui leur sera infligée par des habitants de Port-au-Prince, lors d'une rafle où seront enlevés des dizaines d'hommes) se fait sentir, puis les douleurs du «départ» imposé (celui de Vieux-Os, en particulier).

Dans le roman québécois, la poésie des espaces, des odeurs, des couleurs et des sonorités, n'est certes pas unique à la description (si belle soit-elle) des paysages d'Haïti. Certains «récits urbains», publiés récemment, ont également réussi à émerveiller le lecteur, comme *L'enfant chinois* (Québec/Amérique, \$19.95) de Guy Parent, paru en 1998. Ce très bel ouvrage de 208 pages, imprégné de féerie, de sérénité et de dignité, met en scène un jeune étudiant (narrateur anonyme du récit) qui, travaillant un été pour le compte de la Ville de Montréal, pénètre dans le quartier chinois afin de récolter diverses données aux fins d'évaluations foncières. Or voilà qu'au coin d'une rue, le jeune homme s'arrête, estomaqué, devant un édifice qu'il croit abandonné, puis observe avec «distanciation» les lettres qui ornent la devanture de ce bâtiment: «CH. . .NG». L'énigme entourant cette lettre manquante le fera voyager dans un monde plus fascinant encore, celui de *l'enfant chinois* (qui n'est nul autre que le propriétaire des lieux): M. CHANG. Grâce au contenu de six lettres composées par ce dernier, et qui lui seront éventuellement léguées, le narra-

teur découvrira pas à pas (et le lecteur avec lui) que Chang, ce vieux mandarin énigmatique, fut clandestinement adopté (à l'âge de trois mois) par un couple de Québécois et qu'il expérimenta, sa vie durant, les cruautés amères de l'intolérance, de même que les conséquences affligeantes de l'ignorance et du rejet des différences.

L'exploration du monde de l'enfance, démarche que l'on retrouve inscrite dans de nombreux ouvrages parus en 1997 et 1998, attire notre regard sur des récits parfois très durs (par le réalisme qu'ils reflètent tous habilement). Dans plusieurs de ces romans, des adolescents (et adolescentes, surtout) en grande détresse, victimes de vécus abîmés et issus (pour la plupart) de familles dysfonctionnelles, se succèdent à un rythme fou. *Haine-moi!* (Lanctôt éditeur, 1997, \$19.95) de Paul Rousseau en est un exemple convaincant. Dans ce livre de 224 pages nous est décrite (sur une période de sept jours) l'histoire cauchemardesque de deux personnages—T.V. (le narrateur) et Samuel (dit Samu)—, âgés respectivement de 14 et 15 ans. Ce dernier, à la suite de brimades que n'a cessé de lui infliger son père, tentera de l'assassiner de quinze coups de couteau, sous le regard témoin de T.V., son fidèle acolyte. Les deux adolescents n'auront alors d'autres choix que de fuir, fugue qui les mènera à Québec (au carré d'Youville, sans doute), où ils devront composer avec l'univers sans pitié des *skins*, *punks* et *junkies*. Dans cet environnement de misère et d'affliction humaines, Samu et T.V. perdront l'infime espoir encore capable de les animer, puis (temporairement) l'unique certitude à laquelle ils pouvaient encore tenir fermement: leur amitié. Appartenant au même registre de désolation intérieure, le premier roman de Lucie Harvey, *Boomerang* (Balzac/Le Griot, 1998, \$14.95), prête tout autant à la réflexion. Élaboré autour d'un personnage d'adolescente, prénommée Marie-Line, ce récit nous dévoile l'existence d'une jeune per-

sonne de seize ans, rongée par un désespoir latent. Afin d'atténuer l'isolement et la solitude qui ne font que saper davantage sa quotidienneté, Marie-Line entreprend l'écriture d'une longue lettre (d'adieu), qui se transformera en journal intime, puis s'invente un destinataire à qui elle confiera ses sentiments les plus amères (à propos de ses parents «chamailliers», notamment). Au fil du temps, et au contact de d'autres adolescents (tous embauchés, un été, pour faire la cueillette des fruits et légumes dans une ferme), la jeune héroïne reprendra goût à la vie, désir qui s'était éteint depuis la mort accidentelle de sa meilleure amie.

L'Île de la Merci (Leméac, \$21.95) d'Élise Turcotte se développe autour d'une thématique assez semblable. Dans ce roman de 202 pages fort bien écrites, l'auteure nous relate l'histoire d'une adolescente de quinze ans, Hélène, obnubilée par l'assassinat d'une jeune fille qu'on vient de retrouver sur l'île de la Merci, non loin de la prison de Bordeaux (au Québec). De tempérament passionné, Hélène collectionne au jour le jour les articles de journaux consacrés à ce meurtre et s'exerce à identifier (tel un détective chevronné) les circonstances entourant ce triste événement. Mis à part ce «hobby» des plus particulier, l'adolescente vit une existence plutôt ordinaire (faite de premières expériences amoureuses, d'un premier emploi d'été, etc.). Tout semble donc fonctionner «normalement» pour cette jeune Lavalloise, issue d'une famille qu'on croirait quelconque et sans histoire. Or ceci n'est qu'apparence et Hélène sera vite saisie d'une réalité qui viendra tout chambouler: celle de parents qui (depuis belle lurette) ont du mal à s'aimer, d'une soeur prénommée Lisa (dont l'infortune nous est dévoilée à la toute fin du roman) et d'un frère cadet, Samuel, âgé de cinq ans, son seul confident. Enfin, par une écriture superbement maîtrisée, poétique et dépouillée, forte et suggestive à la fois, Anne Hébert, dans son dernier roman

intitulé *Est-ce que je te dérange?* (Éditions du Seuil, \$17.95), nous présente (sous le regard de l'autre) le vécu émouvant d'une jeune Québécoise, Delphine, qui, de ville en ville, trimballe avec elle un ventre arrondi de future maman et d'innombrables secrets. Au cours d'un long périple, réalisé en vue de retrouver Patrick (le père de l'enfant à venir), Delphine se rend à Paris. Aussitôt arrivée, la jeune importune bouleversera de fond en comble le quotidien de deux individus: celui d'Edouard (dans le lit duquel, d'ailleurs, Delphine ira mourir), pour qui la présence et le décès de la jeune fille donneront lieu à une véritable remise en question, et celui de Stéphane, qui a peine à percer le mystère entourant la venue de cette petite Québécoise (qui ne cesse de le tarabuster). Ajoutons à ce trop court résumé que de tous les ouvrages répertoriés jusqu'ici, celui d'Anne Hébert est sans doute le plus extraordinaire.

* * *

Après l'adolescence, quand l'âge adulte nous invite à rompre avec certains souvenirs du passé, parfois traumatiques ou traumatisants, la réalisation d'un projet poétique, par l'écriture de textes courts ou de recueils entiers, peut-elle servir à panser ces profondes blessures intérieures? Bien que de manière différente, plusieurs ouvrages (publiés en 1997) répondent éloquentement à cette question. C'est ainsi qu'avec *Affûts* (Éditions du Noroît, \$12.95), Guy Cloutier s'emploie à mesurer l'étendue temporelle qui sépare l'enfant de l'adulte, cette période d'apprentissage où l'anxiété et l'affront placent le poète à l'affût d'un monde (intérieur et extérieur) qu'il cherche à mieux comprendre, où le corps et l'âme évoluent conjointement au-delà des frontières qui les distinguent habituellement. Martin Pouliot, avec *Poèmes de famille* (Écrits des Forges, \$9.50), nous décrit quant à lui la cellule familiale (perçue durant l'enfance) comme un «labyrinthe contracté»,

où l'emprise du père s'exerce aussi bien sous la forme d'abus verbaux que de gestes incestueux, cherchant ainsi à illustrer ce que cette institution humaine (qu'est la famille) renferme parfois de plus terrible. À l'instar de cette dernière, *La Maison*, titre évocateur du dernier recueil de Bertrand Laverdure (Éditions du Noroît, \$14.95) et symbole de la réalité intérieure du poète, peut également reposer sur un passé constitué de torturants secrets, sur ce terrain précaire et capable de s'affaisser à tout moment. Divisé en quatre parties, ce petit livre de 65 pages nous renvoie aussi au cheminement de l'auteur dans l'écriture. Il en va de même du dernier ouvrage de Paul Chanel Malenfant, intitulé *Fleuves* (Éditions du Noroît, \$14.95), et dans lequel l'auteur interroge la conscience du lecteur en se posant lui-même la question suivante: Comment peut-on traduire, en mots, le mystère entourant la création du monde? L'ensemble des poèmes de Malenfant nous entraîne, plus directement encore, dans le courant parfois turbulent des voies fluviales, en nous montrant à quel point l'existence humaine, qu'il définit comme un «devenir instable», est constituée d'antinomies remarquables.

Cette quête de vérité personnelle, que poursuit inlassablement le poète dans son travail d'écriture, peut aussi émerger d'un besoin fiscal d'ouverture au monde. Tel est le propos de Serge Patrice Thibodeau qui, par le biais d'un recueil (de 185 pages) ayant pour titre *Dans la cité* (L'Hexagone \$17.95), attire notre regard sur les décombres de Beyrouth, puis nous fait goûter à la frénésie onirique du Mexique méridional. Dans une prose composée en vue d'anathématiser la violence humaine qui se dissimule sous les ruines du monde, et derrière la description de lieux divers, se profile un chemin tracé par les souvenirs du poète. Dans une démarche plutôt similaire, mais beaucoup moins im-précatoire, Donald Alarie, avec *Ainsi nous allons* (Écrits des

Forges, \$9.95), cherche à donner sens aux multiples liens qu'engendre l'idée de la fin du monde. Oscillant entre l'observation de la réalité extérieure et celle de l'univers intérieur, la sensibilité du poète (souvent imprégnée d'une douce mélancolie, de silences et de solitude assumés) témoigne du cheminement d'un être à la recherche des quelques certitudes qui l'habitent déjà. Ce questionnement, tranquille mais assuré, est également perceptible dans le dernier recueil d'Anne-Marie Alonzo, *Les Fatigues du dimanche* (Éditions du Noroît, \$8.95), paru lui aussi en 1997. Dans cet ouvrage de 78 pages, l'auteure s'interroge (avec simplicité) sur la réalité des êtres parvenus à la quatrième décennie de leur vie, sur les rêves qui les font encore vibrer et qu'Anne-Marie Alonzo oppose au vécu plutôt morne des banlieusards, quand arrivent les dimanches.

En terminant cette revue, mentionnons que trois anthologies de textes poétiques ont été publiées au Québec, en 1997. La première de Pierre DesRuisseaux, *Hymnes à la grande Terre* (Triptyque/Le Castor astral, \$25.95), nous plonge dans le monde fascinant des rythmes, chants et poèmes des Indiens d'Amérique du Nord-Est. Cette anthologie de 265 pages couvre différents thèmes (la nature, la vie, la guerre, les forces surnaturelles, etc.) et renferme de nombreux textes à caractères cérémoniaux. Donnant suite à de très nombreux ouvrages publiés depuis vingt ans, Claude Beausoleil récidive à nouveau avec *Les romantiques québécois* (Les Herbes rouges, \$27.95), réunissant une cinquantaine d'auteurs qui, entre 1832 et 1934, ont tous contribué à la naissance, puis au développement de la littérature (appelée à cette époque) canadienne-française. Enfin, Hélène Dorion et Paul Bélanger nous présentent, dans un très beau livre qui a pour titre *Autour du temps. Anthologie de poètes québécois contemporains* (Éditions du Noroît, \$19.95), les textes originaux de quinze poètes, ayant pour thèmes l'enfance, la fuite du temps et l'amour, notamment.

Essays

Beverly **Curran** is an Associate Professor at Aichi Shukutoku Junior College in Nagoya, Japan. Her current research is concerned with the figure of translation in Canadian women's writing.

Stephen **Guy-Bray** teaches at the University of British Columbia. Main areas of research and publication are poetry of all periods and gender theory.

Marilyn **Iwama** recently completed her doctorate in interdisciplinary studies at the University of British Columbia on the writing of Nikkei women. Her publications have appeared in *Canadian Literature*, *Pacific Affairs*, *Ariel*, *B.C. Studies* and *Journal of Canadian Poetry*.

S. Leigh **Matthews** is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Calgary English Department, where she specializes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Canadian Literature and theories of life writing. She is currently writing her dissertation to be titled "Self(s) Surveyed: Intersections of Identity in Canadian Women's Prairie Memoirs." She is also editing a selection from the journal of Frances Simpson for an anthology on Canadian women's diaries.

Shane **Rhodes** recently completed his Master of Arts degree in English at the University of New Brunswick. He has published, or has forthcoming, articles, interviews, and reviews in *Ariel*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *Sagetrieb*, *Filling Station*, *The Calgary Herald* and *The Calgary Straight*. He has also published poetry in *The Antigonish Review*, *WestCoast Line*, *Prairie Fire*, *Grain*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Dandelion* and CBC Radio's "Alberta Anthology." He currently lives in Calgary.

Susan **Sheridan** teaches in the Women's Studies Department at Flinders University in South Australia. Her publications include *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women's Writing, 1880s to 1930s* (1995), *Christina Stead* (1988) and, as editor, *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism* (1988) and *Debutante nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s* (1993).

Victor-Laurent **Tremblay** (M.A., Ph.D. University of British Columbia) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Languages and Literatures at Wilfrid Laurier University, where he teaches courses in French Language and in Québec literature and culture. His main research involves the analysis of mythic structures in French Canadian novels. He is also interested in the study of masculinity in literature.

Poems

William F. **Hall** and Kevin **McNeilly** live in Vancouver, Anne **Walker** and Susan **Helwig** in Toronto, Zoe **Landale** in Courtenay, BC, David **Margoshes** in Regina, debbi **waters** in Winnipeg, Neile **Graham** in Seattle, WA, Eric **Miller** in Fredericton, John **Reibetanz** in Toronto, Deirdre **Dwyer** in Halifax, Thomas **O'Grady** in Milton, MA.

Reviews

Stephen **Guy-Bray**, Bryan N.S. **Gooch**, Geraldine **Pratt** and Lorraine **Weir** all teach at the University of British Columbia, Lynda **Hall** at University of Calgary, Marlene **Goldman** at Erindale College, Terry **Goldie** at York University, Kerry **McSweeney** at McGill, Louise **Ladouceur** at Université-Laval, Christl **Verduyn** at Trent University, Susan **Knutson** at the Université Sainte-Anne. Leslie **Harlin** lives in McLean, VA, Dean J. **Irvine** in Montreal, Karlyn **Koh** in Vancouver, Andrew **Lesk** in Montreal, and JoAnn **McCaig** in Calgary.



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