Aimer et Mourir

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Love, Death, and Women's Lives in Texts of French Expression

Edited by

Eilene Hoft-March and Judith Holland Sarnecki

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To Our Children:
Kim
Matthew
Megan
Kathryn
Nathan
Aurelia

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PREFACE

Having worked side by side in a small department of French and Francophone Studies for more than eighteen years, we have long dreamed of doing a major project together. Departmental exigencies, demands for tenure and promotion, plus long hours spent in committees have always precluded the possibility of working together on anything more than organizing panels or teaching week-long summer seminars. Now that we have this opportunity, we want to acknowledge the joy of working together on this collection of articles. So much of what we do as scholars, we do in isolation.Working together has forced us to look more carefully at our own writing as we read and edited our contributors' essays.

Not fully trusting our aging eyes, we were fortunate to receive a grant from Lawrence University—with many thanks to our Provost, David Burrows—that has enabled us to enlist the help of Administrative Assistant, Joanne C. Johnson. Joanne happens to be an experienced and formidable reader and editor. Without her help, we could never have brought our manuscript to press in such a timely manner. We owe her so much more than our heartfelt appreciation, which we include here, knowing full well it cannot suffice.

We also want to thank our ten additional contributors; they have been enormously cooperative and prompt with the various drafts we have asked them to write or revise. Their creativity and insight are what make our collection an engaging read both in breadth and depth.

Cambridge Scholars press has proven enjoyable to work with, and we offer particular thanks to Amanda Millar and Carol Koulikourdi for answering our many questions from across the Atlantic. Working with them has been a pleasure.

Finally, we would like to thank our husbands, John and Jan, who have put up with compulsive, working spouses. They have taken their turn as "wives" more often than they might have chosen and filled in as primary parent more than their share in order to give us the chance to pursue careers of our choosing.

Eilene Hoft-March and Judith Holland Sarnecki
December 2008

INTRODUCTION

EILENE HOFT-MARCH
AND JUDITH HOLLAND SARNECKI

This collection of articles grows out of a panel organized for the annual conference of the 2006 Midwest Modern Language Association. Although the field of French Studies has flourished with new approaches to French language and culture through film, media, and exciting interdisciplinary work, we felt a need to return to our grounding in literature to see what more recent methods of interpretation could bring to texts old and new. For this reason we chose a broad pairing of familiar themes—love and death—and applied it to writings in French by and about women from differing backgrounds. We were pleased to see the variety of works that emerged when we assembled the panel; thus, we reached a bit further through list-serves of the M/MLA and WIF (Women in French) to see if we could generate enough interest to put together a wide-ranging collection of essays that address how the themes of love and death intertwine in women's lives and texts. Some of our most interesting articles tackle male writers' representations that link women and, in particular, women's sexuality, with death. How often women and women's bodies from the Middle Ages to the present have been used as a screen upon which a variety of male writers have projected their fear of death, a fear that has then been transferred to a more general fear of women. By the Renaissance, "women" and "death" were so closely linked that we can witness evidence of this artificial pairing in twenty-first century literature. As far as "women" and "love" go, we have all too often seen the insistence that women are "relational" or "relationship oriented" by "nature," suggesting that we find our meaning in life through our relationship to a significant other, usually male. Love, therefore, is written up and written off as women's domain, or worse, as the substance of women's lives. Our essays demonstrate how "dangerous women" dominate much of nineteenth-century artistic production. And we need only mention Catherine Clément's *Opera or the Killing of Women*[1] to recall how, even now, we take (sadistic?) pleasure in the melodic death

throes of such (in)famous women as Bizet's Carmen or Puccini's Madame Butterfly and Soeur Angelica. Their swoons delight Western audiences as they die on stage for love, singing emotionally wrenching arias as they expire before our very eyes. In fact, these spectacles (often inflected with race as well as gender) have become our high art.

In this collection of essays you will encounter authors, male and female, who reproduce these stereotypical representations, but you will also discover essayists who foreground the way language and women's writing are used to counter these hackneyed representations. We are delighted to include essays that tackle iconic female writers as well as emerging women writers who bring new perspectives and writing styles to the table. Many of our contributors write about the different ways in which women writers talk back[2] in order to resist prevailing views of their sex in differing locales at various points in time. While we do not attempt to cover all the texts that tackle how love and death operate in dialogic fashion in so many lives and texts, we try to provide a representative sampling that we hope will pique your imagination and help you to make your own connections. As we assembled the articles from our talented contributors, we noticed how they seemed to pair up in interesting ways—hence our decision to organize the essays around this pairing. In addition, there are some intriguing secondary themes that emerge when the articles are read in tandem. How these sub-themes interact with the larger themes of love and death, how they arise and link various articles in the collection will be explored more fully in our conclusion.

It remains for us to give an overview of the essays themselves. Each one explores some dimension of how love and death are interwoven in intricate and intimate ways in the lives of real women and in the texts that represent those lived experiences.

Mechanizing the Female Body pairs critical essays that deal with very different nineteenth-century authors' takes on the nature of "Woman"—that strangest of creatures—whom they describe as both technological product and industrialized producer. First, Vera Klekovkina's "Mechanical Beauty or Death of Love: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve future*" demonstrates the failure of a man-made woman and her creator as Klekovkina explores "woman" as projection of male desire. Next, Susie Hennessy reads three under-analyzed novels by Zola to show how the author attempts to gain a measure of control over the female experience of giving birth in "(Re)producing Death in Emile Zola's Rougon-Macquart."

Vera Klekovkina's essay probes the myth of the soulmate through the lens of a careful reading of Villiers' novel. Long an ideal, the soulmate promises a perfectly attuned partner, an idea that has found credence with everyone from Plato to modern-day dating services. Klekovkina presses on the point that the soulmate bypasses all the messy unpleasantness of negotiating with a distinctly different Other. Soulmates share the same desires and expectations; they need only one another for total fulfillment. Her essay eventually points to the inherent danger embedded in the notion of the soulmate: in the quest for our "missing half," we are discouraged from learning to accommodate for differences, from seeking to live in the company of those whose needs and desires don't correspond to our own and thereby make us uncomfortable, in short, from seeking to live in (a diverse) society.

The text Klekovkina has chosen illustrates the nineteenth-century fascination with mechanical technologies. Villiers imagines that science can create the perfect female companion, an automaton capable of offering reciprocity and compatibility through body and soul—well, almost. In the novel, a slightly mad scientist offers his invention, a beautiful automaton, to a young man disappointed in love, love being, of course, an unpredictable, uncontrollable, and often disappointing relationship in real experience. Revealing a decidedly sexist streak, the scientist determines that the automaton will not have free will, rather "her" desires will always echo those of her young flesh and blood lover. So begins a very unhealthy relationship of narcissism, self-deception, and self-aggrandizement. According to Klekovkina,

> Villiers thus reveals that romantic love chooses to animate the self-projected love-Phantom rather than to interact truly with the Other. Exploited and contained as a spectacle, Hadaly [the mechanistic creation of a fictional Edison] is a convenient Sleeping Beauty who shall remain in her owner's castle and awake only to serve him.

As she draws on cultural commentaries, psychology, history, philosophy, feminist theory, and other literary texts, Klekovkina interprets the increasing complexities of this unequal relationship. The scientist wages a war of nineteenth-century technologies (photographs, projected images, moving images, robots) to repress unruly feminine independence not only to compel conformity to a feminine code of comely behavior but, more importantly, to reinforce a sense of male power. Klekovkina points out that this attempt is mere self-projection, a way for the male "operators" of the automaton to delude themselves into imagining the effectiveness of their uncontested power. As goes any narcissistic enterprise taken to

extremes, the results are deadly, and on all sides. Klekovkina ends by reminding us that contemporary culture's obsession with fantasy counterparts—whether through simulations, robots, or Internet companions—translates into a twenty-first century quest for a soulmate. We would be wise to understand such a quest as not only illusory but, more crucially, as highly risky to our own souls.

In her article on Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, Susie Hennessy cleverly draws our attention to the parallel in French thought between women's reproductive capacity and the production of consumer goods in an increasingly industrialized nineteenth-century France. She reminds us that Zola's series began with a working-class mother, Adélaïde Fouque, and her "tainted" hereditary legacy. Class and gender prejudices are conjoined in the formation of Zola's families, who are doomed by what we would now call their genetic makeup. Hennessy uses three lesser-known novels—*Pot-Bouille* (1882), *La Joie de vivre* (1884), and *La Terre* (1887)—to show how they are purposefully structured around narratives of pregnancy and childbirth. Taken together, they demonstrate Zola's attempt to usurp what Hennessy refers to as the "mother function." Next, she interprets the birthing scenes in each novel, carefully comparing them to show how violent they are. Each blood-spilling birth threatens to take the life of the mother, or her offspring, or both. Hennessy thereby points out how the medically educated author illustrates childbirth as a dangerous passage. In addition, he foregrounds and praises the doctors who attempt to navigate these treacherous waters. Echoing Naomi Schor's argument of the "death of woman" as founding myth of the Rougon-Macquart, Hennessy zeroes in on the various ways in which Zola's texts link women's reproduction and motherhood to death.

When Adèle gives birth in *Pot-Bouille*, for example, Zola includes not only graphic images, he adds frightening sound effects when the mother's bones creak and nearly break as her child rolls from her body "in a puddle of excrement and bloody phlegm." In *La Joie de vivre*, Zola paints the obstetrician as the hero who faces grave danger as he encounters an obstruction that prevents the child from exiting the womb until he magically presses on the woman's lower abdomen with his right hand. The woman giving birth is portrayed less heroically: feeling that she is being split from back to belly, she has a horrific screaming fit. Her body is reduced to a gaping, bleeding wound. In *La Terre*, Lise's delivery occurs simultaneously with that of her cow, La Coliche, whose calf must be hacked to pieces to remove it from the womb. In all three texts, as

Hennessy points out, Zola "highlights the savagery of the birth process and repeats the brutal imagery."

Hennessy's second focus, to examine the meaning of motherhood in a newly industrialized age, illuminates why women's bodies, when not perceived as part of the animal world, could alternatively be viewed as baby-making machines, a mechanized counterpart to newly developed technological means of production in a market economy. That the women Zola portrays are poor, belonging to what was considered the "lower" classes, reinforces the link between them and other "beasts of burden." Interestingly, the notion of an industrialized society was closely linked to the idea of home (as haven) and women's productivity, both domestic and reproductive. Although the nature of this productivity varied depending on social class, all women were called upon to repopulate a society recovering from defeat and the loss of Alsace and Lorraine in the 1871 Franco-Prussian War. Hennessy sees this ideology articulated most clearly in Zola's later novel, *Fécondité*, in which "pronatalist protagonist Mathieu Froment envisions his wife as a model reproducer for insuring France's declining population."

In like manner, babies are seen as products—the more produced, the more efficient the individual mother as representative of the society to which she belongs. Hennessy argues that in texts where Zola's women are called upon to reproduce, the author builds his narrative around the mother's body, which in turn is objectified or mechanized; hence, an assembly line approach to reproduction emerges in Zola's examples of childbirth. In fact, he himself claimed that there was in birth "a drama as striking as that of death." By dramatizing reproduction, Hennessy concludes, this most famous of "naturalist" writers used women's reproductive function as basis for a show, making a fear-inspiring spectacle of women's bodies.

In **Sex Bloody Sex**, Amaleena Damlé's take on a controversial Belgian writer—"Death and the Maiden: Murder and Eroticism in the Work of Amélie Nothomb"—follows Julia diLiberti's tantalizingly titled "Vampires Suck But Not as Much as the Men Who Use Them: The Narratological Strategy of the Vampire chez Gautier." No collection of essays on love and death in women's lives would be complete without a discussion of the various representations of (deadly) female sexuality.

Julia diLiberti writes a spirited take on Théophile Gautier's erotic fantastic tales singling out "Omphale" (1834), "La Morte amoureuse" (1836), and "Arria Marcella" (1852) for examination. According to

diLiberti, what begins in the tales as an amorous adventure that promises androgynous coupling beyond the boundaries of gender and sexual difference ultimately reverts to a virulent misogyny that proves the only good woman is a dead one. While Gautier's *femmes fatales* may seem to offer unlimited sexual pleasure to their male lovers, theirs is the kiss of death. This lethal threat then justifies their destruction as the final solution to their lover's conundrum. DiLiberti writes:

> [T]he first reading of the fantastic, which suggests a dismantling of the notion of gender, gives way, upon closer study, to another [reading] which insists on strictly imposed and defined gender roles, and strictly adhered to power dynamics.

DiLiberti proceeds with her analysis by looking at both gender dynamics and narrative structure in the tales she has chosen. She also places the Gautier tales within the more general misogyny of his day by citing the Napoleonic Code, which clearly delineated women's inferior role in French society. Women's desire to share male privilege only provoked a more strident effort by patriarchs to maintain the status quo. Thus, in Gautier's tales, the male protagonists present themselves as victims of female seductresses. The narrative follows a predictable pattern: male "heroes" fall victim to beautiful *femmes fatales*; they are helpless to resist the sexual temptations offered and described in lascivious detail; they ultimately conquer both their passion and its cause—the dangerous woman who must be banished from both the text and the protagonist's life. This narratological structure permits male author and male readers to "have their cake and eat it too" while incurring only temporary distress as they fall under their temptresses' sway.

DiLiberti concludes that the fantastic as a genre cannot exist without violence that robs the women in the stories of their humanity by representing them as vampires possessed of an insatiable lust. Doing away with them at the stories' conclusion, therefore, seems less a crime against women than a struggle with supernatural forces. In some sense, fantastic tales always present women—especially desiring women—as unnatural. But if we look more closely we find the motives underlying the fantastic tale's narrative structure: it allows for projection of the excessive desires of its male protagonists onto women characters reconfigured as monstrous, women whose excesses always already contain the violence that will ultimately be turned against them to bring about their demise. Such a clever structuring of the text lets the male protagonist off the hook as the blameless victim. Whatever violence he must use to retaliate can be justified by the horrific threat of his blood-thirsty succubus.

Amaleena Damlé leads the reader on a journey through several of the provocative novels of Amélie Nothomb, the prolific young Belgian author who, over the past decade and a half, has taken France by storm. In her lively essay, Damlé contends that despite the play with genres that Nothomb so clearly enjoys, the theme of bodies—beautiful, monstrous, abject, excessive—constantly returns to foreground questions of female identities and their embodiment. Damlé's interest lies particularly in the violence done to those bodies, most often by the men who supposedly love them. Consequently, the way Nothomb's heroines experience violence and death lead Damlé to posit an engagement on the author's part with women's experience of violence, murder, death, and dying that goes beyond a simple representation of female victimization.

According to Damlé, Nothomb expresses a post-feminist female subject who is not beyond feminism but incorporates feminist discourses in dialogic relationship with other theoretical discursive practices. Damlé writes:

> My interest in, and consequently my reading of, Nothomb's literature is rooted not so much in its potential…to align itself to a feminist politics, but precisely in the in-between nature of her figurations of corporeality and the violence, which I believe to demonstrate the culturally and historically multi-layered-ness of the contemporary postfeminist female subject.

One might say that Nothomb violently undoes the traditional female subject position; she explodes it in a way that allows the reader to see what lies beneath and what cultural pressures led to its formation in the first place. Yet this does not go far enough to explain Nothomb's ironic, iconoclastic novels. And Damlé takes the discussion further when she invokes Georges Bataille's theory of eroticism to interpret a desire in Nothomb's writing to reach beyond the singular subject in order to arrive at a state of dissolution or fusion in the sexual act that transcends gender and bodies altogether:

> I contend that her novels may be interestingly, and fruitfully, read alongside Bataille's thoughts on eroticism and the sacred, in which the erotic encounter encourages excess, violence, and death, stemming from an impulse towards absolute fusion, a return to the lost continuity of beings.

Damlé concludes that this sought-after indeterminacy allows the young Belgian author to undo the original positioning of Death-male and Maiden-female, thereby creating a space in writing in which Death's

figuration becomes indeterminate, genderless, as much female as it is male.

With **Mothers Good and Bad** our contributors tackle a well-rehearsed terrain, a category so linked with women that in many cultures it becomes their defining feature. France Grenaudier-Klijn examines an oxymoronic identity in an early twentieth-century author's work: "The Mother as *Femme Fatale*: God, Eros, and Thanatos in Marcelle Tinayre's *La Maison du péché*." Next, Helena Chadderton jumps forward one hundred years to look at how an early twenty-first century writer juggles baby and book in "Writing Motherhood: Marie Darrieussecq's *Le Bébé*."

To generations of second and third-wave feminists, it wouldn't be a surprising observation to say that *fin de siècle* European and American literature teemed with the dichotomous figures of saint and whore, often in the tamer forms of mother and *femme fatale*. France Grenaudier-Klijn points to the well-established tradition of the more intriguing character of the two, the *femme fatale*. Arguably ancient in origin, the *femme fatale* strikes fear, particularly in the hearts of men: fear of female sexuality, of emasculation, and of death, but also fear of that mighty domestic goddess, the mother. As Grenaudier-Klijn frames her argument, the figure of mother is not always in a fundamentally dialectical position to the *femme fatale*. In some cases, mother *is* the *femme fatale*.

In her essay, Grenaudier-Klijn argues that Tinayre's 1902 novel offers just such a figure: the sainted mother functioning as *femme fatale*. Tinayre scripts a story in which Mme de Chanteprie, a widowed mother most devout and chaste, attempts to protect her adult son from the wiles of someone more apparently *fatale*. But the alluring, sexual, experienced, and unattached Fanny Manolé is decidedly not that *fatale*; she proves irrepressibly in love with life and freedom—in short, a poor candidate for saintly sacrifice. Mme de Chanteprie, on the other hand, is literally deadly. She attempts to impose a pallid, sexless, cheerless life on her only son, Augustin, an effort that eventually ends in his death. It is interesting to note, as Grenaudier-Klijn does, that the principle male characters bear the burden of earlier gender stereotypes: they are the direct descendants of the Byronic figure, impassioned but weak in a "feminine" way. As this contributor states:

> Marcelle Tinayre's most celebrated novel provides a fascinating example of the reversal technique commonly used by women writers. Not only is she reacting against prescriptions imposed on her because of her gender, she ignores, rejects, and reverses commonly accepted means of

characterization, the most conventionally "feminine" character of her novel being none other than the male protagonist.

Such subversions of gender types had to be effected with a light but sure touch. As Grenaudier-Klijn observes, Tinayre was a socially active feminist in her own right, however, she must have felt the constraints of writing within a popular literary tradition not particularly receptive to bucking patriarchal ideology. Grenaudier-Klijn argues that the characters might have seemed to conform to the iconic roles readers learned to expect (i.e., self-sacrificing mothers and dangerously exotic vamps) but that both narrative and dialogic structure tell a different story, so to speak. Significantly, Fanny survives beyond the end of the novel, unlike her counterparts of the usual *femme fatale* variety. The dialogistic narration allows for a sub-text that evaluates the characters differently from what they seem. Tinayre is thus not only a noteworthy example for the ways in which she rejects and subverts gender characterization, but also for narrative technique that will capture the attention of the likes of James Joyce and eventually bloom into modernist style.

Helena Chadderton has taken on a novelist relatively new to the Franco-American literary scene, Marie Darrieussecq. Despite a reputation for popular novels, Darrieussecq has, in Chadderton's view, employed radically unconventional language as a means to transform conventional female identity. Working within the cliché of motherhood in one of her more recent novels, *Le Bébé*, Darrieussecq seeks an expressive new language to record her experience as a mother. Even the fact of writing while caring for a newborn constitutes a radical move: as any mother knows, mothering and writing are not terribly compatible enterprises. But Darrieussecq's quirky writing pays unusual dividends, in Chadderton's estimation: on one hand, to capture an unaccountably intense, almost violent love for "the baby" and, on the other hand, to keep at bay the death that seems constantly to hover over this fragile little creature. Moreover, writing wards off the death of the writer—by motherhood, of course. And not to write about the baby would in turn be a death of this language of maternal passion.

Understanding motherhood (and the baby) through her writing compels Darrieussecq to invent new strategies with language. For instance, the writer explicitly eschews the morass of trivial and sentimental language that would otherwise alienate her from her child. She prefers a language that is nuanced, original, and startling—in short, a language congruent with her discoveries about the baby and about herself in the odd role of mother. The baby becomes an "insect" observed closely and analyzed

almost scientifically by the "entomologist" (the writer-mother), but precisely through this objective attention to the child, the writer finds him utterly engrossing. Chadderton argues that,

> Darrieussecq considers the complexities and changing, all-consuming nature of motherhood. She uses the word "avant" (before) in isolation several times in order to highlight the massive shift in outlook experienced before and after his birth, which finds expression in her changes in attitude to everything involving babies. She remarks upon her utter absorption in her son, the difficulty of their physical separation and her sudden sixth sense, the fact that she knows when he has woken, even through walls.

Chadderton demonstrates that Darrieussecq's language and style both suggest the transforming effect of the baby's presence on the text (and its writer). The mother records her experience of the baby's physicality with language so ungrammatically used that it splits off from its semantic meanings. The result is to leave readers with a more sensual impression of the baby's movements, its noises, its appearance. Words unattached to verbs enhance this sense of presence by creating tenseless, timeless visual effects. What is more, Darrieussecq indicates the baby's intrusions into her writing with repetitions, ellipses, and blanks. They are reminders, as well, of the tight relationship of the child to the text. As Chadderton makes plain, Darrieussecq discards a socially constructed language that might run the risk of aligning her with an embarrassing essentialism; the language she takes up instead permits her to embrace equally fiercely the roles of mother and writer, a reciprocally transforming performance.

Women and Violence, as we know, is an all too present theme in the world we live in. Our microcosmic view of writers who take violence done to women's bodies as their subject features two essays that examine texts by Algerian women authors, both of whom have engaged with the political strife of their mother country—Judith Holland Sarnecki's "Sheherazade's Double: Remembering Assia Djebar's 'Dismembered Woman,'" followed by Jane Evans' "Re-inscribing the Body: a Study of Leïla Marouane's *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*."

Focusing primarily on Assia Djebar's compulsively readable novella, "La Femme en morceaux," Judith Sarnecki asserts that in the bulk of her writing, Djebar listens carefully to the ghosts of the past, carrying lost voices of her foremothers into the present and bringing them to life again in her texts. In *Oran, langue morte*, the volume in which "La Femme en morceaux" is the centerpiece, as in many of her other works, Djebar

examines the set of conditions under which Algerian women have had their lives narrowly limited or eradicated altogether. Yet to write about the violence done to women without reproducing that violence, Sarnecki states, is a major feat, a tightrope Djebar treads with seasoned aplomb. It is the author's use of poetic language, contends Sarnecki, which ultimately helps her to avoid that pitfall, as Djebar chooses to rewrite the violence from the perspective of those who have suffered its consequences.

In "La Femme en morceaux," Djebar ingeniously uses *A Thousand and One Nights*' heroine as both an inspiration for her storytelling and a link to Muslim women past and present; thus, she places Sheherazade at the heart (and as the heart) of her novella. In fact, Sheherazade's story of a dismembered woman functions as a *mise en abyme* of the violence done to so many women throughout history. Djebar uses her embedded stories not only to evoke a sense of the long history of violence to women, but also to create a specific case linked to one moment in time. In 1994, when *Oran, langue morte* was published, Algeria erupted in homicidal violence as negotiations between the military government and Islamic factions collapsed. This collapse is repeated narratologically by Djebar in her novella's close when a raging madman beheads the modern-day narrator Atyka in front of her high school French class because she is reading from Sheherazade's stories, a text judged "obscene" by a fundamentalist government. Sarnecki continues,

> Not satisfied with Atyka's death, the madman must mutilate her body as well….But even after her horrifying dismemberment, Atyka refuses to remain silent….Atyka may have lost her head due to raging violence, but she has not lost her mind or her voice.

According to Sarnecki, Djebar's text cries out for justice in the name of all women who have been betrayed by the men, countries, or languages they love.

In her article on Leïla Marouane's novel, Jane Evans takes the conceit of Michel de Certeau about "laws written on bodies." In the Certalian view, laws operate as unspoken conventions to which bodies tacitly adhere. Societies' laws shape bodies by influencing clothing, demeanor, and comportment. Dominant forces of a less innocuous variety (authoritarian regimes, war machines, etc.) often use laws harshly on individual bodies. The body can, for instance, be disciplined or corrected to be more pliant to the will of a social force (a Foucauldian notion, as well). Disciplined bodies, that is to say, bodies upon which laws are visibly inscribed, can further function as texts that warn and remind

society of the consequences of flouting laws. Evans capitalizes on all of these meanings in her interpretation of *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*.

As does Djebar's *Oran, langue morte*, Marouane's novel grows out of the specific historical experience of the post-1994 elections in Algeria, in which armed rebel Islamists terrorized non-fundamentalist Algerians, especially targeting unveiled women and women in Western dress. Evans follows the protagonist of *Le Châtiment*, Fatima, a woman of progressive ideas who displays her convictions by wearing Western dress rather than *tchador* and *hidjab*. A highly visible feminine body, Fatima is abducted, enslaved, raped, and impregnated by Islamist terrorists—a series of events that Evans reads as a process of "intextuation" in which the text on and of Fatima's body is visibly revised. The rest of the novel is a bizarrely apt narrative of Fatima attempting to re-write the text of her own body and eventually re-writing the bodies of men whose corporeal behavior puts her in mind of her former captors. According to Evans:

> Fatima's confinement in a remote clinic, followed by her transformation into a medicated young woman supposedly capable of rejoining the world in a productive way, attests to the Algerian government's desire to sweep under the rug the problems concerning the 1990's atrocities towards women, rather than deal openly with misogyny and violence as historically accepted practices.

As Evans convincingly argues, there is no easy justice and no absolute redress where the body has been so unequivocally inscribed into another idiom. And so, for drastic circumstances, drastic remedies. Bent on reclaiming her body for her own ends, Fatima uses it to commit crimes against her perceived enemies, in this case, the Algerian man in the street. She turns to prostitution in order to lure unsuspecting men into a hotel room where she drugs and castrates them. Later, in a marriage intended to give her a new life and a new script, Fatima murders the husband who betrayed her by taking a second wife. Driven to madness, she aborts her own fetus and dismembers her husband, leaving the body parts in a pool of blood. No unclear messages in these acts. At the same time, Fatima's retaliatory violence catches her up in an irresolvable cycle of events further reflected in the circularity of the narrative's structure. Evans' references to trauma are well placed here: Fatima's body acts out a historical trauma, indeed, a national trauma that can't simply be reversed. As Evans makes quite clear, Algeria's scars continue to bear witness to a national text of repressions ready to repeat at a moment's notice.

When Love Equals Death takes us on a historical journey that examines widowhood in early modern France in Kathleen Llewellyn's "Death Defines Her: Representations of the Widow in Early Modern French Literature." Then Eileen Ketchum McEwan reflects on female love and self-image in texts spanning several centuries and the Atlantic Ocean in "The Narcissistic Quest for Love in LaFayette, Capécia, and Condé."

Kathleen Llewellyn demonstrates to great effect how early modern widows both in France and French literature were defined and circumscribed by their husbands' deaths. When husbands died, widows often lost their identity, one that depended on their status as wives. While wealthy women may have discovered a new freedom in widowhood, poor women were left without financial resources or emotional support. The most famous widows (for example, Francis I's mother) elicited stereotypical fears associated with powerful women, who supposedly had the ability to undermine the status quo. Llewellyn notes: "The ambiguity of the widow's situation in early modern Europe makes her a truly compelling character, but she has only recently become the focus of historical and literary scholarship." To deepen her focus on the early modern widow, Llewellyn examines in greater detail the popular perceptions of the widow in several of the periods' manuals of conduct. In addition, she examines with great care and clarity a variety of representations of widows from plays, essays, and fictions dating from fifteenth and sixteenth-century France. She concludes that in nearly every case, the figure of the widow is shadowed by death.

Llewellyn points out that unattached or "loose" women were considered a danger to a hierarchical and patriarchal society that wanted women controlled at all costs. She adds, "the widow was a particularly problematic unattached woman." With the death of her husband, the widow became head of a household and thus wielded a certain amount of power. As such, she was a potentially destabilizing social force. It comes as no surprise then that those deemed the wisest of widows either turned what remained of their life over to God or refused to live at all once their husbands were dead. In fact, Montaigne wrote of "three good women," all of whom followed or preceded their husbands in death, thereby suggesting that the only good widow was a dead widow. Some writers during the period even suggested that the widow actually represented death itself; indeed, indulging in sexual intercourse with a widow became a life-threatening act. Like the bite of the venomous black widow spider, the widow's kiss could carry death in its wake. Llewellyn continues,

> If she does outlive her husband, she is often regarded as partly dead, as all but dead, as ought-to-be dead, as may-as-well-be-dead. But she is also often depicted in early modern French literature, as dead*ly*, as a real *femme fatale*.

In due course, Llewellyn asks whether any strictly positive representations of widows were to be found in France during the period she discusses. Exploring first the highly popular figure of the biblical Jewess, Judith—who outwitted the mighty Holophernes by pretending to seduce him—Llewellyn concludes that even this fearless heroine cannot be separated from her association with death. Do we not see Judith pictured primarily as the righteous murderess holding Holophernes' bloody head in her hand? Indeed, the only positive representations of widows in early modern France would appear to emanate from the pen of Marguerite de Navarre, who has her various stranded travelers tell tales of more realistic widows who are sometimes victims but never villains. In Navarre's *Heptaméron*, widows may find themselves in difficult straits, but they are also allowed to embrace life and even bring new life into the world. Ultimately, it is Llewellyn's scholarly compendium that satisfies readers with its comprehensive tale of how widows, real and imaginary, suffered under the male writer's pen.

Although Eileen McEwan is quite ready to admit along with Klekovkina that narcissism can end badly, she would also take the position that not all narcissistic behavior plunges the practitioner into soul-less, hollow death. A narcissistic quest might, in fact, lead—as Lacan's oft-cited mirror stage posits—to a perfectly useful self-image. In her article, McEwan pursues both the advantages of a little self-gazing and the dangers of self-delusion in three very different novels by French-speaking women. McEwan begins with the dynamics of the much-poeticized love relationship. As Kristeva notes, lovers allow themselves to become lost in and lost for the desired Other. Yet before that loss of autonomy is the fleeting possibility of recognizing in the Other a distinguishable self. It is in that brief moment that one might be able to assert the possibility, indeed, the right, to be a desiring female subject. The three protagonists McEwan studies thus fall somewhere to either side of that crucial moment. As McEwan argues,

> Each writer in her own way turned the discourse of desire toward a feminine perspective, thereby proclaiming equality and increased social roles for women while hiding such ideas in the language of love.

McEwan has selected a classic French woman's novel (*La Princesse de Clèves*) and two Creole texts, one markedly pre-Négritude (*Je suis martiniquaise*), the other just as markedly post-Négritude (*Hérémakhonon*). The unusual combination of these three novels makes salient the fact that they are written at watershed moments in social history. In the seventeenth century, women's writing in France had begun to depart in significant ways from the standard male text. By the mid-twentieth century, colonial identity had been put into question and, toward the end of the twentieth century, the sexism of the Négritude movement had had some effect on identity politics for Caribbean women. The three novels thus comprise an intriguing typology of love quests.

As McEwan reads it, Mlle de Clèves learns to recognize and reject the superficiality of both the seventeenth-century court and the lover who perfectly reflects that magnificent appearance. McEwan sums up the quest in this way:

> Her desire unsatisfied in her marriage, the Princesse de Clèves unconsciously continues her narcissistic love search and ultimately finds her equal, her matching "jewel," in the Duc de Nemours.

But, of course, the Princesse had learned early on from her devoted and devout mother that things at court are not what they seem. Thus, the Princesse, who has the chance to pursue her desire after the death of her husband, chooses instead to guard her integrity by fleeing the court and living out her life far from the false grandeur of her social milieu. Her refusal to marry Nemours allows her to control both her desire and her identity as separate from the splendid courtiers.

Capécia's protagonist, Mayotte, of *Je suis martiniquaise* offers a contrasting example to Clèves: she fails to recognize the pure illusion of her own attempt to get lost in her lovers' whiteness, a gesture which forces her nevertheless to abdicate racial, ethnic, and gender identity as autonomous. Eventually, and perhaps inevitably, her lover André returns to France, leaving Mayotte behind. McEwan elaborates:

> Notably all that Mayotte recalls of André as a person are exterior details that were outwardly reflected back to her in the "mirror" image she hopes to assume. She cannot remember anything about his inner being and, like Narcissus, has been duped into believing that the superficial image represents the true body.

Condé's novel offers a more complicated example: like Mayotte, Véronica begins to fall in love with an external identity in an attempt to control her own destiny. According to McEwan:

> Véronica refuses to see the truth of the false identity that she has created through her relationship with a manipulative and deceitful African aristocrat. She has been duped by her desires for an illusionary Africa.

Véronica, however, stops short; she realizes how little that dreamed-of self corresponds to a Creole identity that is still in flux. Having learned a hard lesson, she leaves Africa and returns home. Ultimately, McEwan ends on the same cautionary note as Klekovkina while still advocating that critical look in the mirror.

Beyond Love and Death evokes the experience of loss, the role of memory, and the possibility of survival after the death of a loved one. These significant themes round out the different ways our essayists look at women's lives through the lens of writings on love and death. Eilene Hoft-March's "Repeating Death, Remembering Love: Catherine Clément on Survival" is aptly paired with Patrice Proulx's "The Dance of Life and Death in Nancy Huston's *Visages de l'aube* and *Dolce agonia*."

Eilene Hoft-March draws from two autobiographical texts of Catherine Clément a reconsideration of trauma that suggests the need for a broader working through of history in order to effect both personal and cultural survival. In her essay, Hoft-March begins by looking at *Cherche-Midi*, a book whose primary function is to confront the death of Clément's grandparents at Auschwitz. The book lends itself well, especially at the outset, to a discussion of trauma in the terms that have been most usefully coined by Cathy Caruth and others. Indeed, Clément herself, in her capacity as student and scholar of psychoanalysis, easily reads her own traumatic symptoms and recognizes how close she is to literally losing herself in a replay of her disastrous family history. As Hoft-March points out, however, Clément seeks something more than a "witnessing" of her own inexplicable symptoms. Understanding that trauma will always be with us, Clément prefers to step outside of her traumatic loop, however briefly, and to step back from its myopic perspective. As Hoft-March's reading reveals, traumatic response becomes a metaphor that offers insights into the larger cultural compulsions to repeat histories that dead-end. Clément asks us to attend instead to the more urgent and ever-contemporary problem of the survival of the planet's disenfranchised. Hoft-March writes:

> I think it significant that she [Clément] doesn't offer a remedy in the sense of resolution or closure of a problem, but rather suggests a strategy to limit the rampant damages of pre-occupation by becoming "occupé ailleurs."

This political stance is not Clément's final word on survival. Hoft-March pairs her reading of *Cherche-Midi* with a later text, *Maison mère*, a book that recounts Clément's "other" family history, the story of their survival in the Free Zone. If the first book is written under the sign of traumatic symptom, the second is written under that of nostalgic reminiscence. In her close analysis, Hoft-March explains:

> In this context, "survival" signifies something other than the "incomprehensible" living beyond death….This survival overwrites the other, more ominous survival of *Cherche-Midi*, an alternate version that gets Catherine past those early, near-fatal experiences of her Parisian neighborhood. Remembering in *Maison mère* would appear to involve a degree of repression, a repressed that does not return nor call attention to itself as gone missing.

Hoft-March notes that this second book has a non-narrative and even iterative style that works against the notion of loss. This maternal site (a matrix of memory and life rather than a black hole) nurtures a veritable "diaspora" of human beings, embracing alterity rather than threatening it. Moreover, the "maison mère" orchestrates the re-embodiment of its dead over many generations. While Clément ends the second book at this poetically satisfying point of multiple survivals through each human being, Hoft-March pauses to re-read a "foundational memory" the writer adds to the penultimate chapter. The readably false memory accommodates Clément's fantasy of preserving those closest to her. As Clément unwittingly reveals, survival is not always a question of mind over matter—or perhaps one should say, mind over mind.

In her essay on Nancy Huston, Patrice Proulx, pairs *Visages de l'aube* and *Dolce agonia* to demonstrate the author's rethinking of how the experience of life and death are perceived and portrayed. According to Proulx, Huston uses an eloquently rendered conceptualization of the *memento mori*, thus reminding us of our own mortality. In addition, she notes the sense of urgency in Huston's texts, which call us to live our lives more purposefully, remaining mindful of the fragility of existence. Both texts chosen by Proulx were published in 2001 and taken together form a unifying narrative, "with each one reinforcing pivotal concerns to be found

in the other, thus engaging the reader in a more profound examination of the dance of life and death in which we all take part."

In her reading of *Dolce agonia*, Proulx examines the thematics of memory and the passage of time—the experience of love and loss—in order to showcase Huston's creation of a textual *danse macabre* that demonstrates the vital importance of living in the present. In self-reflexive mode, Huston chooses God as narrator of a text that focuses playfully on parallels between an omnipotent God's powers of creation and those attributed to the author. This move subverts the rules of novelistic narration by telling of her characters' pasts, presents, and futures at any given moment during a Thanksgiving dinner in a small New England town where old friends gather. The resulting multiple narrative perspectives and interior monologues allow the characters to reflect on significant events in their past; they also open a space of personal and communal memory, showing us to what extent this group is joined through experiences of love and loss. In Proulx's words, "Huston's choice of a banquet setting for her novel provides a rich framework for a meditation on the *memento mori* leitmotif, conjuring up visions of the living and the dead coming together around a feast." The God-narrator (as well as the many vicissitudes of life) seems to shrink in proportion to the role played by good friends: they listen, they support, they understand, they accept, they love us as we are. As Proulx contends,

> The characters in *Dolce agonia* are cognizant of their own mortality, yet despite the pain they must endure due to their many physical and psychological losses, they gather the necessary strength from one another to persevere.

This special gathering allows the friends to reminisce about their loved ones who have died but are still vividly present.

Proulx reads *Visages de l'aube* as a companion piece to *Dolce agonia* as it tells the story of a midwife who must inform her son of the suicide of his boyhood friend. Rather than lingering on this tragic event, however, the midwife facilitates a transition from darkness to light. For Proulx, the midwife may be compared to the skeletal figure of the *danse macabre*, bringing together the paired experiences of birth and death. In *Visages*, Huston's midwife recognizes the miraculous character of each and every birth as well as the precarious and arbitrary nature of life itself. Finally, the two texts taken together trace the significance of each life within the greater human community, and stress the importance of personal and collective stories that illustrate how we ultimately do live on in others.

Notes

[1] See Catherine Clément's *Opera: The Undoing of Women*. Trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1988).
[2] We borrow the term "talking back" from an early bell hooks essay of the same name. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1989): 1-9.