

SI LOIN DES CYPRES

Lelia Young,
Montreal: Cidihca, 1999.

BY JOHN STOUT

Lelia Young dedicates her new collection of poetry to “the familiar stranger who awakens metaphor.” The ties of love and empathy between people and the world around them is the main focus of the book. However, the poet also constantly acknowledges the presence of mortality, silence, and negativity in the world:

Chaque être est au bord de
l'absence
et sa voix flirte sur la faille du
silence[...] Je me souviens de
la peur de perdre
les aimé-e-s et plus tard le souf-
fle de ma terre.

Young divides the collection into three distinct parts. The first, “Between You and Me: An Oxymoronic Reading,” charts the evolution of the love between a female speaker and her male partner. This love provides the inspiration for writing poetry and celebrating life:

Avec toi passer dans la nuit d'être
Avec toi jusqu'au bout de la vie
Pour que le cauchemarse dénoue
Et laisse passer le jour.

The second section of the book, “In the Body of the Python,” functions as the flipside of the first section. Here the poet is concerned with denouncing cruelty, evil, and violence—for example, violence resulting from religious fanaticism, which the python symbolizes:

O cruel
[...] ta grife attend patiemment
l'ultime mouvement espéré de
ta proie
[...]
Le voila dans l'incohérence de
sa folie

à tourner après sa queue
à tuer au nom d'un irrationnel
religieux
livrant son humanité aux can-
yons des vautours.

Finally, in the third section, “Torsades” (“Interweavings”), Young brings together the two domains of cruelty and love. She juxtaposes them in order to underscore the message that our survival depends on an altruistic and caring, charitable interaction with, and openness to, one another. In the end, her poems affirm a belief in the necessity of the evolution of humanity—above all, by means of a renewal of love in the broadest sense.

WITHOUT CHILD: CHALLENGING THE STIGMA OF CHILDLESSNESS

Laurie Lisle,
New York: Routledge, 1999

BY STEPHANIE DICKISON

I have never wanted to have children. I can't tell you why exactly, only that I've felt that way for as long as I can remember. It's not something I've talked about much, only because it makes others uncomfortable. I can't say I entirely blame them. If a subject isn't talked about openly, it's difficult to be the one to break through the taboo.

Laurie Lisle, by telling her own story and struggle of living childless in a child-bearing world, has given a voice to all of us who, at one time or another, have wondered what is wrong with us, why are we like this, what could we possibly tell others the reason is and have them be okay

with that? This is not only an excellent book, but a true act of courage. It is also a fascinating exploration and sociological study into the lives of women who choose not to have children and the reasons that go along with it. In Laurie's research, she “came upon the stories of numerous women who had avoided childbirth for reasons of adventure, romance, spirituality, ambition, art, idealism, duty, poverty, terror, or the desire for an education.” She bravely and unapologetically talks about issues heretofore rarely discussed: “The rejection of parenthood is a delicate and even dangerous topic; it has an element of subversiveness to it, especially when it is the chance of happily married couples.” The people she interviewed had never talked “in depth about non-motherhood before, and their speech was as often painfully hesitant as quietly triumphant.” This is something that women who struggle with making the decision not to have children, or who have made the decision but must go against the common view, can relate to down to their baby toes.

Lisle delves into historical and sociological data and from which she extracts a range of fascinating items. Talking about civil rights, equal rights, congress, history being made, demonstrations, laws passed and passed over, one feels the electricity and importance of these facts and they jump from the page right into your lap. Fascinating revelations such as “factors like birth order are surprisingly influential: firstborns, including only children, are twice as likely to be childless as other siblings,” move the book along with compelling speed. In contrast, the importance of the roles of mothers is discussed at length and gives pause for one's own reflection: “Even though not all women are mothers, and all mothers do not have daughters, every woman is born a daughter, even if she is not raised by her natural mother.”

Lisle's recognition of the complexity of this issue shows that it is not

something that can just be assessed in a matter of minutes in a self-help book or on a talk show.

And if you think that men aren't included here or don't play a role, you are mistaken:

The men in women's lives - grandfathers, fathers, friends, brothers, bosses, boyfriends, lovers, husbands—have a powerful impact on whether or not women conceive children. Virtually no research has been done on the male influence on a female's maternity, even though some sociologists, including Kathleen Garson, have observed that it is the most important influence of all.

There are a lot of reasons you should read this book. It has only one flaw. The people who need to read this most, the ones that need to be educated about women like Laurie, myself and the thousands of women who, for whatever reason, don't want to have children, won't. It's sad but true.

After reading *Without Child*, I am armed with fact and knowledge that there were others before me that fought this stigma, and I will proudly continue the fight. I now feel not only confident in speaking to others on the subject, but relieved that I am not such an anomaly, that there are indeed lots of women out there living happily and heartily as I am. That I don't need to have children to complete the picture. My picture is complete.

WOMEN'S UNTOLD STORIES: BREAKING SILENCE, TALKING BACK, VOICING COMPLEXITY

Romero, M. and A. Stewart.
New York: Routledge Press, 1999.

**BY CHERYL VAN
DAALEN-SMITH**

In *Women's Untold Stories*, editors Romero and Stewart manage to weave several stories rarely discussed into a comprehensive representation of seldom told components of diverse women's lives. Their title itself is a demonstration of their clear commitment to ensure the voices of women are front and centre. The introduction articulates their project and their forthright confrontation of what they term the master narrative which "subsumes many differences and contradictions that restrict and contain people, by supporting a power structure in which gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and ability all define who matters and how." Far too often, the real stories of women's lives become silenced, distorted, and discredited. In this text, the authors give us raw, unprocessed, and fully contextualized accounts of women's experiences in the voices of the women themselves. Examples of carefully woven narratives include :

- Two African American women's experience of infertility
- Reflections of a self-defined Tom-boy
- Homeless, Black and Female
- Japanese American Women's experiences
- Housewives' experiences of WW II
- Motherhood, Heroin and Methadone: one woman's journey; and
- A white woman's experience in

the civil rights movement

Romero and Stewart's strengths, and there are many, include their attention to diversity within and amongst women's lived experiences. Countless disclosures, thoughtful reflections, and poignant narratives invite the reader to immerse herself in the lives of sisters perhaps not unlike herself. Readers may in fact find themselves, their own suppressed voice, here within the stories of sixteen women who agreed to break their silence, talk back and voice the complexities that permeate their lives and their beings.

What is clear is that this text is a political act on the part of Romero and Stewart: finally giving voice and validity to the lived experiences of women frequently overlooked or misrepresented. In doing so, perhaps this text and its ability to meticulously engage its readers in dialogue with its writers, will invite more and more of us to break our own silences and gain comfort knowing that we are all more alike than we are different.

A PERSONAL CALLIGRAPHY

Mary Pratt.
Fredericton, New Brunswick:
Goose Lane Editions, 2000.

BY JANICE ANDREAE

Mary Pratt's *A Personal Calligraphy* gives voice to her private struggle for solitude. With wit and candor, and an attentive eye for detail, she records the historical fragments of a lifetime spent in the Maritimes. Reprinted also are selections from addresses made at the numerous university convocations and public occasions that merit her attendance; for exam-