

# Don't talk to me about love!

Jovette Marchessault

Don't talk to me about love. Especially not love. Why? I'll tell you. And what you read is neither fiction nor old husbands' tales. In 1979, when I was writing *The Saga of Wet Hens*, I did a lot of research and some calculations. I figured that concerning the "syndicate of crime" or, if you prefer, the Patriarchy — elementary, my dear Watson! — from the year 1000, before the first daddy's boy, until the end of the nineteenth century, we suffered 3,000 years of war in return for 200 years of peace, an average of 1 year of peace for 15 years of war. It's not out of laziness that I did not include the twentieth century. Quite simply, I did not wish to bring my measly few years of peace down to zero and infinity. Because the twentieth century, with its two world wars, its war in Spain, Korea, China and Indochina, Algeria, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cuba, Argentina, Latin America, Israel — excuse me if I forget some — it's not exactly a picnic. There's something I want to confess to you. In my first calculation I did not take several facts into account: for example, between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries they turned ten million women called witches into bonfires; they systematically exterminated the aboriginal American Indians and the Mexicans; they uprooted the African people and made them beasts of burden in the North American cotton fields. And the Nazi extermination camps? And the Russian gulag? Really, what could I do with that? After all, they aren't "real" wars, just genocides. And besides, once I start talking about that, there's still the animal species they made extinct and the animals they tortured to death in the "laboratories of knowledge. . ."

No, really, don't come talking to me of love when almost everything that I know, hear, see, when almost everything that I read is nothing but a polyphony of ferocity, of buffoonery, of mercantilism, of death.

As a woman in literature I can also speak of cultural harassment. How much of the literary landscape do you suppose the patriarchy occupies in Québec? About 87 per cent. That doesn't mean that the little bit of pasture which remains is entirely occupied by feminists and other women warriors. What about elsewhere? Elsewhere it's worse! In France 93 per cent of the literary space is taken up by the "syndicate of

crime." In English Canada it's 90 per cent. But wait a minute: if you're verging on the manic-depressive, above all do not get stuck in *Summary-of-briefs-and-hearings-from-the-Federal-Cultural-Policy-Review-Committee*. If you read that, you'll be convinced that from sea to sea a-a-a-all the cultural space is occupied by the patriarchy.

In this 300-page report, which is written in the third-person masculine — *noblesse oblige* — not one time are we, WE, women mentioned. I looked into the deepest of their sentences for some submerged metaphor concerning women's culture. A waste of time — and I assure you it's not a question of having bad eyesight. This report is signed by twenty people: sixteen men and four women. The cream of our elite and the sexism that goes with it. What we have to pay, that's for later; because even though we don't exist on a cultural level, when the moment comes for the enjoyment of tax privileges, with a wave of the magic stick these little angels revive us. Lazarus and Jesus Christ are choir boys compared to us!

Nevertheless it's women who are the consumers of culture! In Québec and almost everywhere else it's women who are between 75 and 80 per cent of the buyers of literary production, who go to the theatre, to concerts, and who are visitors to art exhibitions. So what? So these renowned readers are women-readers, and these no-less-renowned spectators are women-spectators! The conclusion: it is the poorest and the most exploited economic class which is making culture live.

And to finish up on a sweet note, I'll challenge you to name twenty books written by you-know-who in which we, we women, are not sold, vampirized, scorned, or mystified. You can look in any culture; I'm not racist. You can even look back into the "marvellous" story of the creation of the world if your heart draws you toward that. Twenty! You think I'm exaggerating, eh? Okay, just ten. Six? Fewer?

Look carefully. I'm still searching.

Trans. Gay Bell

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