

Winnipeg et se plaisant à rapprocher ses deux pays de neige: « Cette ville du nord [...] est-ce Winnipeg ou Leningrad ? / Elles ont toutes deux / une église décharnée / dressée seule / comme un violoncelle dans la neige. »

L'amour est le douloureux mouvement, la déchirure d'un passage du pluriel familial au singulier d'une femme divorcée dont les enfants ont quitté le logis. Une unique voix dialogue avec un « tu » qui ne répond pas, qu'il soit le mari divorcé dont la mort la hante, puisque pour elle, il est doublement décédé, emportant avec lui leur jeunesse, le fils qui ne connaît pas vraiment sa mère, ou l'amant au corps de paysage blanc.

« Je suis seule maintenant » écrit-elle en 1976 (« Poème de forêt »). Mais en fait, on est conscient d'une grande solitude au cœur même de l'œuvre, un manque si profond que l'amour ne saurait le combler: « Car je suis moi et tu es toi / C'est là notre unique moisson. » Ce manque est sans espoir: le seul aboutissement de la vie est la vieillesse qu'elle maudit, et la mort qui la guette et la nargue. La mort apparaît partout, même dans ses poèmes de jeunesse, centrale et omnisciente—les tombeaux jalonnent l'œuvre, même si le titre d'un poème semblait annoncer un renouveau, tel « Printemps » qui se termine ainsi: « le toi / dans les champs noyés / de ma jeunesse est / la photographie fanée / de mon mari mort / assis parmi / les tombes [...] »

Pour Miriam Waddington, le poème est une construction organique et réaliste qu'elle façonne, non seulement de ses réflexions et émotions, mais aussi de son corps et de son souffle au moment de création.

Ce point de vue donne à ses poèmes leur simplicité, leur style accessible et limpide, leurs vers courts et contenus. Si d'aucuns lui ont reproché d'écrire des vers qui « ne sont pas assez profonds / ou [qui] n'ont pas assez d'esprit », si elle ne revendique pour eux qu'« une grâce éphémère », la poète choisit de répondre à cette critique par une question: « je me demande / pourquoi je ne peux me

satisfaire / des images [...] d'où me vient / cette passion / pour la clarté [...]? »

Christine Klein-Lataud, à qui l'on doit la traduction d'*Un oiseau dans la maison* de Margaret Laurence, a rendu cet échantillon de l'œuvre poétique de Miriam Waddington avec élégance et économie. Elle a réussi à en faire un ouvrage homogène et représentatif, se permettant, pour achever ce but, de classer les poèmes hors de l'ordre chronologique et d'effacer les manières des années 60 et 70, c'est-à-dire la disposition graphique des mots sur la page et la coupure—qui se voulait choquante mais dont on se fatiguait vite—entre deux mots qui s'appartiennent.

On ne peut faire à cet ouvrage qu'un petit reproche: *Collected Poems* était nanti d'un index détaillé, comprenant l'année, le titre et sous-titre de l'ouvrage dans lequel chaque poème avait paru. *En guise d'amants*, lui, ne donne aucun indice chronologique, ce qui semble dommage puisqu'une date discrète à la fin de chaque poème ou même dans l'index nous aurait permis de retracer le cheminement de la pensée de la poète.

CLUB CHERNOBYL

Dianne Warren. Regina: Coteau Books, 1994.

by J. Rochon

Reading a play can be a far more challenging experience than watching it being performed. Finding the content and the drama in a play on the page can feel like an excavation, from the directions and setting descriptions. This is certainly not so with *Club Chernobyl*, the newest play by the Saskatchewan playwright, Dianne Warren. Her play contains minimal stage commands and allows for a freely imaginative read. Even on the page, the content is dark, strangely real, in its danger and nervous tension-building techniques. With their

added eccentricities, her characters come to life easily in their everyday roles. They are accessible, yet intriguingly complex and unknowable.

The play opens with a dramatic bedroom scene; Dallas is having a nightmare and Billie, his wife, is trying to wake him from his tortured sleep. Dallas is screaming and covered in sweat, which in his dream state he believes is blood. He doesn't recognize Billie or his surroundings; she knows the screams and intimate movements of her frightened husband exactly as he plays them out—this occurrence is a common one. In his wakeful state she tries to get him to talk about his recurring dream and what it might mean, but he won't discuss it with her and leaves for a drink. The mystery remains until the concluding scene.

Dallas is the owner of Club Chernobyl, where the majority of the play is set. He designed it as a "concept club"; the interior is made to resemble a damaged nuclear reactor. Danger is the marketing campaign to create Club Chernobyl as a hip, dark, novelty club. It's opening night in the club and it is virtually empty. A storm hits town and draws together an unlikely mix of characters. Warren cleverly employs the ex-treme weather conditions of the outside world to illuminate the inner psychological worlds of her characters.

The storm fills the streets, bringing Gina into the club, and floods the basement, giving rise to Veronica. Gina is the innocent virginal character in this play; "inexperienced" is her repeated description of herself. She is released from her inhibitions and gathers confidence through the extreme and intense interactions in the club. She joins the craziness of life, gaining a passport to the real world through her encounter with Dallas and the others. Ironically, she experiences her self fully for the first time in Billie's little black dress. Veronica is Gina's polar opposite. This character has a deep understanding of the darker side of life and its inherent danger; she lives it. She is a reminder and warning to the characters and to the

audience, an exposure of the myth and romanticization of danger—the myth which Dallas is trying to invoke in the disaster-like setting of the club. Her heavily tattooed body is found in the basement and presumed to be dead. She recovers consciousness to return to her tattoo-artist boyfriend, Snake, who was trying to kill her when she escaped to the basement. He is a shadow lurking offstage primarily, a dark, menacing embodiment of the world to which Veronica will return.

Billie is the most ambiguous character, deliberately the least defined and structured. She wanders in and out of the scenes, demanding attention from Dallas, trying to please and entice him, behaving romantically or angrily, acting possessive or detached. Her character is frustrated and alienated.

Throughout the play there is a bass player improvising on stage and a character called “the Man.” The Man is juggling while the bedroom drama plays itself out and spray painting his hands or lighting matches to watch them burn in the bar. His presence is strange in the play; observer, interactor, continual reminder of the artificial border of insider and outsider. Warren brilliantly and subtly challenges the prescribed roles of actor, participator, audience, by combining them and allowing them to freely interact in the role of the Man.

Her work in this play represents that thin ephemeral line between our psyches and the outer world. The play has been a struggle for the knowable, the rational, but the chaos of the events hasn't quite allowed this. The characters are left unprotected and it is no accident that from this position comes Dallas' confession. The play ends as it opened, with Billie and Dallas in their bedroom. He explains his dream and his fears; then they are united through a simple touch.

Warren's play is about what is real and what is unreal, about our dream-like states in our wakefulness, and the lucidity of our dreams when we awaken to them.

PROFILES OF FEMALE GENIUS: THIRTEEN CREATIVE WOMEN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD

Gene N. Landrum. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994.

by Peg Tittle

Finally, a 437-page counter to the claim “But there are no great women _____s!”... Not quite. Not at all, in fact. Rather, this is a 437-page attempt to appear politically correct: Landrum wrote *Profiles of Genius* in 1993 and managed to include no woman (yet neglected to properly title his book *Profiles of Male Genius*).

Though Landrum clearly states his criteria for inclusion—candidates must not have inherited or married into their profession/success, they must have reached the top of their field and stayed there for at least ten years, they must have had international influence, and they must have accomplished their major achievement within the past forty years—he gives no justification for his definition of genius. And I don't think it's a good definition—it's neither sufficiently inclusive nor sufficiently exclusive. At the very least, it creates a bias against many fields (even the most brilliant of mathematicians probably don't dominate the field for ten years) as well as a bias toward many fields (of his chosen thirteen, nine are in business or entertainment).

Perhaps more important, since Landrum calls his book *Profiles of Female Genius*, he does not compare his definition of female genius to his definition of male genius. If it's different, what is the basis for differentiating? And if it's not different, why weren't these women simply included in the original book, *Profiles of Genius*?

It is hard for me to take Landrum seriously, when it is clear that he doesn't take me (women) seriously: he mentions a hypothetical “little old lady” as a paragon of ignorance; while describing the role of Catholic nuns

in Madonna's early life, he adds the parenthetical snicker, “Can you imagine a convent with Madonna orchestrating the entertainment?” Worse are the sexist assumptions scattered throughout: for example, he says that “Oprah Winfrey has a schedule that would fatigue most men,” implying that most men have more energy than most women.

Unfortunately, the style is as poor as the content: many individual items are repeated, sometimes within the same chapter; and the book often reads like a list (findings are presented without much analysis). On top of that, the chapter on Ayn Rand is completely missing, as are parts of the Meir and Steinem chapters.

Notwithstanding all of the above, there are some interesting statistics. About half of the women attended all-female schools. Though female mentors were significant, the support of fathers rather than mothers was clearly instrumental. And, many experienced a fair amount of transience during childhood.

In addition to these aspects of the profile of female genius, I learned some interesting things about the women themselves. Memorable is the feminist side of Mary Kay: she created her firm to provide job opportunities for working mothers, in reaction to the systemic male chauvinism in the workplace that she experienced.

In his last chapter, Landrum does compare the profile of female genius with the male counterpart: in some respects, they are similar (both tended to experience formative traumas) and in some respects, they're different (beauty was far more important to the women than to the men—eight of the thirteen geniuses Landrum chose “either sold beauty products or needed beauty to perform”).

This comparison, however, is for the most part simply a reflection of current gender differences in our society, so it seems that male and female geniuses differ from each other much as male and female non-geniuses do. Pity—I was hoping genius surpasses sex. And it could be it does—perhaps it's only Landrum who hasn't.