

NADINE McINNIS

Four Landscapes

1

I told you about the landscape I crossed
since there in your office, last week,
you molested me.

My husband had aimed the nose of our car
out over the precipice, and we crossed
the Pagan Dam on one narrow track,
the river seeping high on our right
almost level with our wheels,
glassy and indifferent to us.
On our left, a drop of hundreds of feet,
chalky clenched rock of the river bottom
exposed, so bright it hurt my eyes,
too visible.

Our daughter in the back-seat was edgy,
asking for reassurance,
as she had just given up her flying dreams
for dreams of falling,
the baby drowsed beside her in a milky cloud,
the white deposits of the cliffs
just like those on my shirts and sweaters.
My body was still giving, giving then,
and you wanted me to give more,
to give to you.

I told you about the migraine that flashed
as my heart raced across the narrow bridge,
above the unnatural drop,
the migraine that lasted all week,
and you said I led a very symbolic life,
that I lived inside one of my own poems
and wasn't it fascinating
how I had sought out a dam after our last
episode.

2

Symbol and psychosomatics having failed me,
I tried analogy.

I told you about the magazine article
I had just read in your tastefully decorated
waiting room, about the Pepsis wasp
that lives in your own fetid jungle,
your own treacherous homeland.
A wasp that lures and paralyzes only one
of four hundred species of tarantula,

drags it to a pit it has carefully custom dug,
having taken measurements by crawling
harmlessly over the whole body,
like a tickle, a little insect tease,

and buries it alive with its egg sac
fastened to a bite-wound by poison and spit.
I told you with great feeling,
and perhaps a few tears, about the spider
slowly sucked dry by baby wasps
who burst out of sand bunkers
into a heartless sky humming in their own
image,
leaving behind this unmarked grave.

You sighed, always one to feel sorry
for yourself, so dim in your office
I could not tell if your wide mouth stretched
into a slinky grin as you said,
Ah, patients. That sounds so familiar.

3

Hunting season,
and metaphors went zinging by bright
as steel, a dazzle of small hits
in the migraines that were constant then.

I told you about driving north to teach,
first snow skittering across the road,
across the windshield like disintegrating
vision. Then standing on the roadside
near Gracefield to clear my sight,
then taking the back road into the reserve,
around the blind curve that skids
into the gully, every few miles catching sight
of a small spot of searing red on the move,
filling the bush with pain.

I told you about pulling into a clearing
with a flimsy shed decorated with antlers,
where I paced shaky before the class
I couldn't fathom how I would stand through
let alone teach. *Porphyria's Lover*,
My Last Duchess lying duplicated
on the back-seat of my car.

I shuddered all that fall, and stood
teetering alone as winter blew into a clearing

where two deer hung gutted above me.
I stood shrunken beneath the deer's spread legs,
red cavities ripped clean,
rib-cage and pelvis slit, plush and wide.
Obviously, you said, you're afraid
of how much you want to open to me.

4

This landscape speaks volumes
of water, 4000 cubic feet per second
plummeting 83 metres, almost twice the height
of Niagara Falls. Precision matters much
to me right now, as I have taken the vow
of truth, so much like the wedding vow,
nothing held back, *Do you promise to tell...
I do. I do.* Strange how they swear you in,
but never swear you out, so that
the rest of your life it testimony.

After the trial, my husband and I
cross the catwalk above Chute Montmorency,
our children tight in our wake.
We all bend, hands gripping hoods, holding
each other against gusts of rain.
This is not a poem we walk through,
but raw physics. Not metaphor,
but slipping sliding beneath our feet,
and the women you swept over the edge
are struggling to surface, the suicides,
and the ones who never told a soul.
Their anger ionizes the mist, rings in my ears.

Landscape is not decor, was never anything
but this place we inhabit completely,
genuine cliffs with terrible drops,
fierce chill in the air, a man
hidden with a gun, who lay in sniper position
just beyond that desolate ring of trees
calculating whether I would stand or fall.

Nadine McInnis's most recent book of poetry, The Litmus Body (Quarry, 1992), was the co-winner of the 1993 Ottawa Carleton Book Award. Her next book, Small Miracles: Dorothy Livesay's Poetics of Desire is forthcoming from Turnstone Press.

FAMILY VIOLENCE = FAMILY LAW VIOLENCE

Women's Experiences in
Family Law Proceedings

Many studies have been done regarding physical violence by men against women. One important aspect pertaining to relationship violence which has apparently been missed is the fact that even after the end of the relationship, women continue to be abused by these same men. The abuse is not dealt with in criminal court, but in family court, where the system now facilitates the continuation of the abuse.

To obtain a study which documents the abuse which women (and especially mothers) are experiencing in the family law system, please send \$10.00 to:

Mothers on Trial
707 Dundas Street W.
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 2W6.

MOTHERS
ON TRIAL


UNNECESSARY HYSTERECTOMY

The Toronto Women's Health Network has been working on the issue of unnecessary hysterectomy for more than a year. It is their hope that the government will examine this problem as it did with Caesarian sections. In addition, auditing hysterectomy records, training physicians in alternatives, altering fee schedules to offer incentives to perform alternatives, and teaching medical students that hysterectomy is not always the right solution, will go a long way in reducing unnecessary procedures.

The Toronto Women's Health Network has published an information pamphlet for women and has already begun to lobby the Ontario Ministry of Health for policy changes. The network is looking to connect with other groups with a similar agenda. If you want to share strategies with us, find out more about what we are doing, or are interested in our pamphlet, please contact:

Lyba Spring, Toronto Women's
HealthNetwork, 1884 Davenport Rd., Toronto,
M6C 2Y3, (416) 392-0898, fax (416) 392-0645.