

Standing and Watching the Writing Writing

Nicol Brossard's frontal assault on inherited language structures and use in writing is one of the most important among recent attempts to repossess language as proper to one's self. The specifics of this property which have interested me since I began to read Brossard in the Coach House translation are text/texture, surface, voice, and translation.

By text/texture I mean that layer in her writing which engages the content and the making of it at once. There's no way out, for the reader. She is so at the edge of the making of it, brings to the references so much of the condition of their actual presence on the page, that one is literally «there». «Standing and watching the word river» she says in *Turn of a Pang*, or one of those wonderful double tracks in *A Book* which find both story and storymaker at any particular point, or really anywhere in her writing there is always the inscrutable story of the story. I love it because the activity of the mind in that stance is unpredictable and full of revelation. The speed of the mind, the text of the mind in motion, a life full of signs and information about a

life full of signs and information. Hence the vertical substance at any horizontal point in her text contains maximum possibility.

It is what she does with these possibilities which creates «surface», the interplay of word, reference, meaning, space, moment, etc. «Words which take their meaning from other words at the expense of the characters...» she unravels in *A Book*. This is where the joy of the art resides, in the play of possibility, then invention, then revelation, and so on. While teaching writing classes this past year I frequently used the lines from «Articulation (sic) Deformation in Play»

«river moulded in the calm
flood as fierce and floral fl»

as a good example of the reinstatement of the primary condition of language. Here she is able to give recognition to the root etymon «fl» by being so present at the vertical surface of that point (as well as underneath or outside it in the larger narrative).

The physical, muscular, sensual, sexual impetus for much of her writing becomes the very surface of the language. A couple of pages further on in «Articulation»,

«effect which moves like a circle tempted to encircle the centre and the eye whether in mascara or in appearance anodyne and the eternal effect of fiction seeps majestically (sic) liquid SECRETION (on the *edge* of tears in heat)»

the physical, sensate images are part of a physical (proprioceptive) movement of the words. This long, prose-poem line motion, so typical in her writing, once again reinstates a natural parataxis to the rela-

tionships between words (and bodies).

Another aspect of Brossard's writing which I have found engaging is «voice». I don't want to become too analytical about it but I sense what is coming through is what used to be called the «middle voice» to denote «action done for oneself (between the active and passive voices).» It is most evident in *A Book* where verbless, subjectless, and objectless «sentences» collage snapshot scenarios of the «strange» process that goes on between word and world. The syntax is constructed with the «eye» at the center which slows down the mind's habit of skipping too quickly ahead of the language (for the sake of story). Such enclosures as «And so this page.» or «Rain, a mirror in each puddle.» or «Problematical words.» or «Lovers much later in the night.» come across as stage directions for the mind-play between the author, herself, and the reader.

I have done some paralinguistic (because I don't «know» French) translations of some of her poems and I have found her writing lends itself to that because it is primarily language (and therefore body) oriented. That is, one can feel more literally the actual life in the language without necessarily knowing the full range of reference involved. There is the danger of misappropriation in this, however, and I am aware that her writing is not simply a language playground but also a highly personalized investigation of possibility. The availability of the vitality in her writing is astounding at any level; it makes me want to know more.

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