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A Story of Her Own: Female *Bildungsroman* as Arts-Based Educational Research

Boundary Bay: A Novel as Research in Education

She closes the book and thinks about how she will approach the novel in new ways with her students this year. From the angle of risk, perhaps ... new readings, to the lighthouse and back again. In the novel, the act of thinking, the act of giving human love, the act of dipping a brush in shades of blue and green trying to convey what is seen on paper, the act of making something enduring and permanent—these are acts made at great risk. In the novel, the word risk is the repeated refrain, the response to the question: What does it all mean? (Dunlop, 1999, *Boundary Bay*, p. 192)

In September 1999, my novel *Boundary Bay* became the first novel to be accepted as a doctoral dissertation in a Faculty of Education in Canada.¹ There has been a proliferation of narrative experimentation in research across disciplines, including the use of short fiction, poetry, “nonfictional educational stories,” and multiple genres of arts-informed research (Banks & Banks, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Neilsen, Cole, & Knowles, 2001; Norum, 1997). However, the form of the novel as a dissertation in educational research is a new phenomenon in Canadian universities and is still relatively new in the United States and internationally (Crooks, 2001; Dunlop, 1999; Geelan, 1998; Sellito, 1991).

The novel can be a vehicle for communicating research in a dissertation, providing a level of engagement and deep connection with art and understandings of human experiences. In the context of research in education, it is my conviction that this form enables research participants to move into the psychic interiors of readers and researchers in powerful ways, our fiction/research enabling us to see things anew. As novelist Kundera (1999) writes,

I have known all these situations, I have experienced them myself, yet none of them has given rise to the person my curriculum vitae and I represent. The characters in my novels are my unrealized possibilities.... Each one has crossed a border that I myself circumvented. It is that crossed border (the border beyond which my own ‘I’ ends) which attracts me the most. For beyond that border begins the secret the novel asks about. The novel is not the author’s confession; it is an investigation of human life.

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Boundary Bay as Female Bildungsroman: Or The Education of Women

She would be the first sentence of my next novel. (Brossard, 1998)

Why is it the novel can enter the private sphere in a way, for instance, that the essay cannot? The immediate response is that the novel is fiction. It is not true. It exists in an epistemological category of its own. (Griffin, 1995, p. 162)

As a literary form, the novel of formation or education is a well-established genre with defining terms derived from German literary criticism. Known as the *Bildungsroman*, this genre denotes a novel of all-around self-development. The term encompasses subgenres: the *Entwicklungsroman*, a story of general growth about self culture; the *Erziehungsroman*, an apprenticeship or pedagogical "education" novel that focuses on training and formal education; and the *Künstlerroman*, a novel that focuses on the development of the artist.

One of the first of the *Bildungsroman* genre is Rousseau's *Émile or On Education*, written in 1762. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1795), translated into English by Thomas Carlyle in 1824 as *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, is considered the prototypical apprenticeship novel. Many others have been written in English. Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* is considered to be a direct descendant of *Wilhelm Meister*. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* is in part a parody of the genre. Other examples are Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and Dickens' *David Copperfield* (technically a *Künstlerroman*, as it deals with the development of a writer).

As the central literary form of the Victorian era, the novel was frequently a source of moral and social instruction. For the Victorians the modern distinction between the literary novel and the popular best seller was not yet in existence. In a society that praised individualism, upholding the "self-made" man, the investigation of self and the reconciliation of the self to society became a central issue and the *Bildungsroman* or novel of education and development became a central form for fiction. For male protagonists, the primary concern of the novel turned on whether social aspiration in a class system could be reconciled with authentic desire and moral feeling (Mitchell, 1988). This conflict in people's lives, often with autobiographical reference, is evident in Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), Thackeray's *Pendennis* (1848-1850), and Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

From the Victorian *Bildungsroman* emerged the classification of the genre by sex as women became for the first time ranked equal to men as writers in a major genre. Victorian women writers developed a specific language for female experience in a continuing tradition of women's literature in which the female novel of development became central. The female protagonist was concerned with the search for autonomy and self in opposition to social constraints placed on women, including the demand for marriage. This conflict, often with autobiographical resonance and frequently framed by metaphors of imprisonment, is embodied in novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860).

The pedagogical intent of Samuel Richardson's (1772) *Pamela* is overtly stated in the epigraph:

Pamela or, Virtue rewarded. In a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young damsel to her parents: afterwards, in her exalted condition, between her, and persons of figure and quality, on the most important and entertaining subjects, in genteel life. Published in order to cultivate the principles of virtue and religion in the minds of youths of both sexes.

Since *Pamela*, a strong tradition of women-centered narratives has evolved. In this tradition, the act of writing is intimately related to living and being in the world; *the flow of language becomes an act of life*. This vein of narrative is crucial to my aims in the writing of *Boundary Bay*.

According to Northrop Frye (1984), the *Bildungsroman* has traditionally been the commonest formula for Canadian fiction. Citing examples of female novelists such as Margaret Atwood (*The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, 1970; *Surfacing*, 1976) and Margaret Laurence (*The Diviners*, 1974), Frye explores the variations of the genre of the *Bildungsroman* in portrayals of narratives of women. In these novels the central question is: "Where are you from?" The novels "trace the development of their heroines backward to its source, in an effort to answer the same question to the satisfaction of the heroine herself" (p. 175).

Margaret Atwood's (1982) considerations of the novel as a source of knowledge construction are relevant to the perception of the novel as research in education: "If writing novels—and reading them—have any redeeming social value, it's probably because they force you to imagine what it's like to be somebody else. Which, increasingly, is something we all need to know" (p. 119).

Although Atwood's novels may be interpreted as postmodernist (Hutcheon, 1988) in their interrogations of established social, philosophical, and aesthetic "truths," Atwood's own statements align her with some of the same concerns of Victorian women writers. For example, Atwood does not consider writing to be purely self-expression, but an evocation of an external reality as it is interpreted and judged by the writer (1982, p. 348). In *The Curse of Eve—Or: What I Learned in School* (1978) Atwood asks questions that George Eliot and other 19th-century women writers might have asked (Kulyk-Keefer, 1994). These are questions I continue to ask:

What are novels for? ... Are they supposed to delight or instruct, or not, and if so, is there ever a conflict between what we find delightful and what we find instructive? Should a novel be...about how one ought to live one's life, how one can live one's life (usually more limited). Or how most people live their lives? Should it tell us something about our society? Can it avoid doing this? (Atwood, 1982, p. 217)

Boundary Bay, a novel of education and development, is based on my research on the lives of beginning teachers, university professors, and programs of teacher education. The novel follows the general form of the *Bildungsroman*:

1. A *Bildungsroman* is generally the story of a single individual's growth and development in the context of a defined social order. The growth process, a quest story, is both an apprenticeship to life and a search for meaningful existence in society.

2. To spur the hero or heroine on to his or her journey, some form of loss or discontent must jar them at an early stage away from the home or family setting.
3. The process of maturity is long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by social order.
4. Eventually, the spirit and values of the social order become manifest in the protagonist, who is then accommodated into society. The novel ends with an assessment by the protagonist of self and place in society.

As an example of a *Künstlerroman*, the journey of an artist/writer, *Boundary Bay* follows the general form of the *Bildungsroman*, departing from tradition in order to better accommodate the contemporary narrative of a woman. The story is not of a youthful protagonist gaining maturity; it is the story of a woman approaching middle age who traces her story back through her youth, gaining understandings and knowledge through these reconstructions of memory. In the end, although the protagonist does make a self-assessment, she does not necessarily absorb the spirit and values of society. Rather, knowledge is constructed that leads her to a rethinking of societal and educational values.

Synopsis, Strategies, Locations

And the novel unfolds, written in the gaps between reading, teaching and the imagination, the fashioning of art and of inquiry as an extension of the notion of literary anthropology. The nature of the discourse is not to replicate art but to imply, through language, qualities of life that are often ineffable, what cannot be said, particularly in conventional perceptions of schooling and educational life. (Dunlop, 1999, pp. 21-22)

Boundary Bay is the story of Evelyn Greene, a newly appointed university professor teaching in a faculty of education. Interwoven through the novel are the narratives of marriage, love, sexuality, teaching and educational life, motherhood, loss, the reconstruction of lives, the power of artistic forms of seeing the world. Evelyn is a woman whose spirit is fed by creativity and writing, by art and literature. She is a poet whose writing and intellectual worlds eventually distance her from the corporate world of her husband. Evelyn's story takes us through her academic world as a doctoral student, her teaching world as a university professor, her struggles to be a poet, and her relationships with the other characters in the book.

Evelyn's narrative is mediated by literature. An avid reader from childhood, Evelyn sees the world in relation to literary texts, imagining she is a character in a Virginia Woolf novel or perceiving a situation as if it were set in a novel. Evelyn's imaginings explore the sociocultural and literary constructions of women in fiction and poetry through her encounters with literature throughout her life.

Location is an integral metaphor for the writing as inquiry in this novel. The setting in *Boundary Bay*, overlooking the ocean across the United States border at Point Roberts, provides a multiplicity of geographical perspectives and metaphoric possibilities that spill over the locations of the written and spoken narratives. The locations of the narrative move from the Maritime provinces of

Canada to the Alberta prairies, to colonial and postcolonial India, and finally to Canada's west coast to British Columbia and Boundary Bay. Throughout, the natural landscape of Boundary Bay, of the ocean, its tides, and its wildlife are developed in Evelyn's life as a form of knowing the world that is ultimately redemptive and life-giving.

Literary devices used to represent research include Evelyn's poetry, stream-of-consciousness musings, and her lecture notes for English methods courses in teacher education and a graduate course called Women and Fiction. Throughout the novel, the reader is engaged in encounters with various writers, artists, and scholars in order to invite interpretive responses.

Methodologies

The novel intertwines its fictions through an assemblage of facts, tangled through the language of bones. The writer wants to write of men and women, real or invented, offering them open destinies. She wants her voice to be like a modern painting, voice and story like the colors of a Mark Rothko canvas. This is how she wants the story to be, written in the alphabet of bones and blood, trembling with light and vibrant hues, spiraling with winds, rooted in the earth, breathing with tides. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 22)

Maybe teaching is about finding the right fictions to read and write our lives. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 190)

Boundary Bay began with tape-recorded data collection in the form of semi-structured qualitative research interviews with a group of five volunteer participants, newly graduated teachers from the same teacher education program (specializing in secondary art and English). Specific questions were explored, dealing with the nature of the first year of teaching experience and the transition from teacher education training into the classroom. The purpose was to conduct a narrative inquiry into the nature of lived experiences in the first years of teaching, the integration of experiences in teacher education and classroom teaching, and the negotiation of mentorship and educational experiences at the university level. Of particular interest was the implementation of English literature and arts-based curricula.

Over a period of two and a half years, I realized that the narrative inquiry we were collectively engaged in had come to include some difficult stories about the personal, emotional, and intellectual impact of teaching lives at multiple levels of institutional life. I also felt that I could convey these stories in the form of fiction, a novel that could uphold the literary traditions of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of education or formation, and the *Künstlerroman*, the novel of the artist's growth to maturity. In addition, as a challenge to the conventions of the male hero of the *Bildungsroman*, this novel is a woman's story, told primarily from a female narrator's perspective with a central focus on concerns about women and education.

At this point, my research methods expanded to include the novelist's use of diverse stories, poetry, and links to other texts that moved far beyond my original intention of working with transcribed narratives. As with any work of writing, and research, my own narratives of reading, writing and teaching spilled over and intersected with other stories. To me as a writer of fiction and

poetry and a university educator who teaches literary studies and arts in education, the genre of the novel presented a form that could represent teachers' stories in powerful, evocative ways, opening up new epistemological positionings. The writing itself became a form of inquiry, enacting and performing theoretical evocations through narrative form.

The stories I chose to tell were the stories that moved me, that enabled me to see things in new ways: Jordan's story, the gay teenager and the stories of teen suicide and despair; Grace's story, the first-year teacher; Sam's story, the learning-disabled art teacher; Mara's story, the alternative, artistic teenager; Evelyn's story, the poet, teacher, mother, the immense healing powers and epistemological forces contained in ecological considerations of landscapes and their links to human living—these were the stories that haunted me. By writing about the things that haunt us, saying what must be said, we can speak eloquently as researchers, writing and speaking the voices that are often unheard.

Evelyn remembers struggling with her doctoral dissertation, wanting to intertwine texts of poetry and journals into the text, wanting the power and eloquence of creative work. Arguments with her supervisor about the requirements of a dissertation and what constitutes research. "You cannot excel at both scholarly writing and creative writing. You must choose." Evelyn refuses to choose. She knows this refusal to demarcate, the blurring of genres, marks her in the academy. She does not care. She wants her writing to be plump with blood and bread. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 40)

The novelist creates a cultural product that is the writer's interpretation of a broad range of considerations, just as every researcher's writings are a selective interpretation of findings. The novel is not a critical analysis, although it may touch on theoretical concerns. The novel is a work of art that attempts to interpret the world. The artist tries to render visible how the world touches us. The novelist as artist intends to create a work of art that is open to interpretation by others. The novel is not a closed system of reference and signifiers; rather, it is a form that infinitely widens possibilities of response, interpretations, and understandings.

My novel *Boundary Bay* is a form of epistemological work, an exploration of ways of knowing that attempts to engage in a politics of transformation. The novel as research provides me with a form to say what I could not say otherwise. As a teacher-educator, a poet, and a fiction writer who teaches about reading and writing practices, I wanted my research to embody and perform the beliefs about knowledge and education that I try to embed into my teaching practice. This is my research, my act of fiction, my act of passion.

The reader fills the gaps with imagination, as does the writer. Writing and reading become acts of performance, intertwined acts of performative inquiry. The writer becomes the books she frequents, journeying through books and creating literature as a primary source for speaking about human experiences. The novel as research paradigm allows a questioning of conventions and the literary text holds these conventions up to the light for close inspection. Fiction becomes exploratory, explanatory, hopeful, and generative in its premises for epistemological positionings. The fictional text consti-

tutes boundary crossings transgressing over referential fields of thought and textual systems of representation.

We write ourselves as we read. In these perceptions of reading and writing lies an aperture of hope. The fictional lens opens us to the complexities, the richness and multiplicities of human nature and its possibilities, the infinitely diverse ways of knowing the world.

Red Shoes, Art and Desire

It is an early memory. Red shoes. Leather straps crosscrossing. The kind any child covets. That color I wanted with the hot desire of a child. (Griffin, 1995, p. 162)

Mara has called her series of paintings The Red Shoes Series. Evelyn gasps with surprise. Cold winter nights, Evelyn tucking Mara in, telling her stories of red shoes, the red Mary Janes that didn't tap, the tortured ballerina with her red slippers dancing to death for her art, the ruby slippers in the story of Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 130)

Let the poet have her red shoes.

Let her have her liturgy of wet vowels and syllables.

Let her be the throat of these hours.

(Dunlop, 2002, p. 33)

Boundary Bay, Chapter V

Her mother and father always told this story about her childhood. Her heart's desire was to own a pair of red shoes—Mary Janes with a strap across the ankle. She craved beautiful things even at the age of three. They take her to the shoe shop and buy her a perfect pair of red party shoes. She wears them out of the store, walking hand in hand with her parents. Suddenly, she stops in the middle of the sidewalk and starts to scream.

When her mother and father try to find out what is wrong, she cries, "They don't tap!" She is inconsolable as the shoes never measure up to the imaginary ruby slippers choreographed in her mind to make joyous sounds: no matter how hard she tries, she cannot make the shoes echo tip-tap through the city streets.

The shoes are not scarlet—they are a soft burgundy red, like the color of her father's turbans. As a little girl she learns to hold one end of the fifteen-foot starched length of cloth, stretching it with her father, then watching him wrap it skillfully around his head. Kirpal Singh loves his daughter and his wife. The first time he sees Deirdre, with her creamy skin and dark hair, the slight scattering of freckles across her nose and those green eyes, like the emerald rivers that wind through northern India, he knows she is special. He knows it will not be a marriage well-received by his family and by the snobbish British set that Deirdre has grown up with. The British will whisper under their hats: *At least he went to Oxford ... she could have had anyone she wanted, could have done much better.* According to the society they are unsuitable to each other, untouchable.

Her father is outraged at her betrayal. They escape his anger by eloping. Deirdre's father never speaks to her again. *You are dead to me*, he tells her.

Kirpal's own family is shocked. They have plans for him—an arranged marriage to a Sikh girl from a good family. He has seen her photo. So they

escape their families' wrath, marrying in Bombay with only a justice of the peace. They remain there, with Kirpal working for a biochemical research company. In a year's time after Evelyn is born, he accepts a post-doctoral research grant that has been offered to him by the National Research Council of Canada. He will take his family on an adventure.

On the voyage out, they travel to Egypt, stop in London and Paris and Italy. The moments are preserved in snapshots in frames in her mother's house. Evelyn constructs the stories from the photos—Evelyn a little girl, hair softly curling a halo about her face, hands held between her parents—her mother in her gold bracelets, her floating silks, her brilliant saris and salvars, her father, tall and lean in khakis, his burgundy turban. Riding a camel in Cairo, her father standing beside her. Her mother tells her the stories about Rome, where the old Italian ladies dressed in black marvel over Evelyn, fuss over her beauty, calling her a little Madonna.

When she is two years old her favorite bedtime story is *Little Red Riding Hood*. She wants her parents to read it to her every night. She has memorized every word, every sentence, every illustration of the book so when they are tired and try to skip a few lines or turn the page too early, she calls them on it. The ritual is fulfilled even by babysitters who marvel at her ability to read at such a young age.

Talisman, a consecrated object (hence one with power to avert evil). As a child her talismans are books. She loves the feel of them, the creamy thick papers, the black letters of words in print. The stories she reads become her worlds, shutting out the imprints of her mothers' rages. Her mother calls her absent-minded, describing her to friends with a hen-clucking sort of pride at her bookish daughter. She reads late into the night and awakens to dress for school reading her book flattened on the bureau in front of her. Sometimes she is so caught up in the book, she forgets she is already wearing her school uniform and pulls another navy tunic over her head. She discovers her "absent-mindedness" in the locker room amid the giggles of the other girls changing for gym class.

In the early years after they arrive in Canada, Evelyn reads the books handed down from the British Empire, the Noddy stories, *The Adventures of Rupert the Bear*, *Paddington Bear*, the books of Enid Blyton, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and *The Little Princess*. Dierdre reads to her daughter from Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, books by Rudyard Kipling.

Evelyn travels with Dorothy to the Emerald City, weeps with Jo and Marmee in *Little Women*, imagines herself at Green Gables with Anne and Matthew and Marilla. She loves the feisty heroines of Victoria Holt's historical novels and Nancy Drew Mysteries, Nancy solving crimes with her keen wits. In book after book she searches for traces of her life, the fact, the act of reading a fierce necessity. Reading begins with the eyes, then moves to her other senses. For Evelyn, reading evokes synesthesia, all her senses colliding at once. She can hear the train approaching at the end of Anna Karenina; she can smell the steam, see the crowded station, feel Anna's despair, see her red purse on the railway tracks. She devours books, tastes them, savours them with a voracious appetite. Reading is her only faith.

She reads the dictionary and the thesaurus, marveling over the meanings of words. When she is 12 years old she breaks her leg in track and field high jumping and she has to wear a ten-pound plaster cast from toes to thigh for three months. That hot, steamy summer she empties the small neighborhood library of books, reads *Dr. Zhivago* and both volumes of *War and Peace*.

When she is much older, before she leaves Jay, she finds herself imagining they are characters in a book. She tries to salvage things, unfold the chapters of their story as she had imagined them. She immerses herself in cooking gourmet meals, recipes she has clipped out from *Bon Appetit* and *Gourmet* magazines. She cleans, clips fresh flowers from the garden, attends luncheons with the wives from Jay's Rotary Club. The club did not admit female members. The wives had formed a social group of their own, the Rotary Anns. But her chest feels hollow and Jay watches her, sensing a false frenzy of domesticity.

Sometimes now when they made love, Jay had the distinct feeling his wife was writing the moment, the act, scripting it as if from a distance. He had a sensation of scorching discomfort. She writes him into her poem in the dark, the way she wants him to be. It is language that allows her distance. She makes him a poem, the lover who would let her crawl inside his skin, leave his imprint on her, a signature of love, an autograph, she writes him:

your translations
of me
I could never have anticipated

sheaves of my history
torn off by your glance

I am the blue-veined iris
in your hand
your fingers dipped in me

I am signed by you
your name stroked
upon my forehead

When she is short-listed for a job at the Academy of Arts and Education, she meets with the Dean before her interview. Evelyn asks whether members of the selection committee would be interested in seeing her teaching evaluations, which she has brought along. The Dean leans forward with a conspiratorial air, replies, *in all honesty you could give them to me and I will certainly circulate them but you and I both know that what really counts is your publication record.*

The Dean continues to state that they are seeking a candidate with a knowledge of literature and that even though this is a Faculty of Education he says, *I really don't believe that there are any theories of education. Now of course, other faculty members might not agree with me. You know, we have the same kind of political conflict here as you have at any institution. It is rare that you will hear anyone say anything good about another colleague.* Evelyn is not sure how she should receive this information.

When the interview begins, a woman on the selection committee asks about all the stops and starts on her résumé, teaching contracts here and there, degrees in English and Teacher Education.

Curriculum Vitae, she had looked this up in the dictionary the other day [L., course of life] story of my life. Curriculum [L., lit., a running, course, race, career, currere, to run. 1. A fixed series of studies required, as in a college, for graduation, qualification in a major field of study, etc. 2. All the courses, collectively, offered in a school, college, etc., or in a particular subject.

Evelyn drifts away from the interview. *Edmonton. Jay is away for weeks at a time on business. Minus 40 chill factor, howling winds and snow. Mara's diapers need changing. The wind outside freezes the breath in seconds. She nurses the baby then leaves her with the neighbor for the afternoon. She shovels the front path and driveway, scarf tight across her face. Then she unplugs the old Honda Civic from the block heater, coaxing the engine to life to drive to the university to attend graduate classes. At the end of the three hour seminar on Victorian Poetry her breasts are leaking, staining her blouse. She looks around at the young faces in the seminar, at the fifty something professor and she envies them the simplicity of their earnest pursuits of intellect.*

She writes herself, a mother writing in white ink, white writing, writing in milk. Nursing Mara, all that's astray comes to rest, settling into morning. Sleep falls away like the folds of clean linen, awakening to a child so new that all that surrounds her lightens, rises like breath, meeting her claim on the blue drift of air and her mother's milk.

She reads Alice Walker's In Search of Our Mother's Gardens. Walker writes about the poet Muriel Rukeyser who was her teacher at Sarah Lawrence College. Through a period of Walker's suicidal despair, Rukeyser saves her, upholds her poetry, sends it to a publisher, keeps her going. Walker speaks of Rukeyser and her gift as a teacher who embedded in her lectures on poetry the importance of her experiences as a mother, the importance of the child.

Evelyn never misses a class. When Jay is transferred and they move four hours away from the university, she continues to drive to campus to complete her Master's and then her Ph.D. Jay does not understand why she continues, does not understand her writing late into the night when Mara sleeps, does not understand her obsession, her need.

She writes her poems into the early hours of the morning, red wine, tears, words, syllables spilling over. Jay was often away or working late. Sometimes she left him asleep in bed, wrote in the opaline embrace of moonlight.

Teaching English Literature and Composition at the local college, she kept her poet-self carefully contained, separate from the day-to-day, marking dismal essays, grammar, spelling. She belonged to the pool of silent women teaching composition or the Fundamentals of Something, on contract, no power, no benefits, no voice or visible presence. How could she teach anyone how to write? For her, writing was a visceral thing, organic as breathing, sensual.

In her doctoral dissertation she alludes to Roland Barthes' comparisons: teaching as play, reading as eros, writing as seduction.

But her students didn't see the erotic or playful or seductive nature of education. They expressed their constant frustrations. I need this mark to get into my program. I promise you if you pass me I'll never take another English class again. Notes slid under her office door—excuses for missed classes and late term papers, cats getting hit by cars, landlord evictions, other family traumas. Some bright lights, some sparks of enthusiasm but it always seemed to Evelyn that the course curricula was more about just getting through the requirements.

She had been in the process of leaving for years, educating herself, distancing herself, writing through it all. But she was beginning to wonder if there was any purpose to being a poet in this world. When she first started sending her poems to literary journals she suffered a string of rejections—the ultimate irony to have submissions returned in her own handwriting in Self Addressed Stamped Envelopes—the obligatory SASE demanded by publishers, the artist rejecting the artist, Self Addressed Self Erasure. Every trip to the mailbox offered the promise of joy or depression. She finally got a few poems published, then more and more successes. She now had a full manuscript ready to send off to a publisher.

Evelyn responds calmly to the interviewer's question, something about advancement opportunities, new challenges, seeking institutions engaged in cutting edge research, something about merging theory and practice. The chair of the committee asks her about her publishing record. He asks about all the poetry she has included. *Do you see this as academic scholarship?* he asks. Yes, she answers and doesn't bother to elaborate. *When did you start writing poetry?* *It seems to be fairly recent.* She cannot tell him *when I needed it, it saved my life.* She says something about creative work and its inextricable link to the teaching of language and literacy, hoping it is an adequate response.

She is asked what she hopes to find at the institution, at the Academy, why does she want to work here. Evelyn is bored with the interview, surprises herself with her answer, forgetting her carefully rehearsed responses of eduspeak. *hope to find a home, a place, a job, a place where I can work with colleagues and where I can write and teach. A home.* She says with an attempt at humor *I want people to stop asking me what a Ph.D. is.* As soon as it is out of her mouth she feels it is a faux pas.

In the competitive climate at the university, during the long years of research and teaching and writing to finish her Ph.D., Evelyn was marked by clouds of disapproval; her husband and mother-in-law ask: what is a Ph.D. anyway? It seemed silly, impractical, unnecessary to them. Jay learns the use of narrow remarks that become habit; the words would burrow their way into her ears, slither like a snake down her throat to her heart, leaving her choking.

She is immersed in Nancy Huston's novel *Slow Emergencies*. The main character, Lin, is a dancer. Lin ends up having to choose between her passion and profession and her life with her husband and two daughters. At a dinner party she meets poet Sean Farrell who eventually becomes her lover. Sean says to her: *A university, you know is nothing but a shattered universe. Each scholar has one little, brittle shard of it inside his head, and nothing else.*

They offer her the job a few weeks later and she is surprised but grateful.

When she tells him she has decided to leave, there is no sensation of surprise. Jay has lost his impulse to possess her. He has long since lost the battle of touch, the battle of the hands. The story of love ends in moments of contempt for each other. They would sit at the movies together, carefully avoiding brushing against each other. He has known she will leave for some time. Perhaps he has always known it.

When she leaves Jay she knows he will not keep anything she has written—those black words on pages a threat.

Hunger

When I realized
you never noticed
or felt joy
at the accidental beauty of things
I knew that to love you
above all others
is to know despair

memory insists
even in darkness
my fingers reading braille
the geography of your face, your body

you swallow me whole
never learning
to speak the language of my skin

the terrain of marriage
leaves me starving
mouth full of love.

But when the moving van pulls away with Evelyn and Mara's things, it seems unbearable. Jay and Evelyn lie on the bed, holding each other, their bodies intertwined, fragments of their lost selves fill the air as they clutch each other. Evelyn has never seen Jay cry before. And the rooms are filled with weeping.

There are days when Evelyn looks around her at all the women working, the bank tellers, grocery clerks, office workers and wishes she could be content with this, the world's nine to five. They looked content, didn't they? Wouldn't life be easier for Mara if she were a different kind of mother, not a writing-mother? A simpler woman. There are days when she curses intellect and education and books and literature and poetry—the seductions away from the ordinary—imagination takes its pound of flesh, exacts its price. *What good is the heat and passion of a poet's heart when it is tangled in a woman's body?*

At times she imagines herself a woman poet writing in the Japanese Heian court of the 10th century. She imagines she is Izumi Shikibu, writing tankas by moonlight. She, like other women, is accorded independence in romantic matters: able to own property and receive income in her name, a woman could refuse a suitor's advances, or, should a marriage or her position as a "second wife" no longer suit her, end a relationship through divorce or by moving away. Because all romantic encounters take place in a convention of secrecy, the opinions of family and friends about one's choices in the realm of eros could be avoided for a time. Here she could write, supported in the belief that poetry is a natural upswelling of language in an awakened and interested heart—an irresistible and effortless answering within the individual to the continual calling of the Other, natural, supernatural or human. Poetry as possessing a magic power to change and improve the external order of life, softening relations between people.

Sometimes in her imagined calligraphies, she writes the parchment scrolls of Sei Shonagon's Pillow Book, writes her own Pillow Book ... A List of Things to Make the Heart Beat Faster ... anything indigo is splendid, wrapping your lover in indigo silk, marks on paper in indigo ink, the veins of your heart.

At her new job, when she teaches her classes at the The Academy of Arts and Education, her heart rate increases. When she begins work with the teachers, she recognizes in her own body, the symptoms they speak about in their classrooms. She remembers Grace and the other women teachers talking about the terror they felt on her first days of teaching. Their bodies complain, erupt in rashes and aches. Evelyn keeps expecting blood, imagining herself a character in one of Margaret Atwood's "True Stories." The woman poet loses her husband and every time she does a reading to promote her new book, her nose bleeds. (Dunlop, 1999, pp. 61-71)

In the novel, the word risk is the repeated refrain, the response to the question: What does it all mean? ... This is how she wants the story to be, written in the alphabet of bones and blood, trembling with light and vibrant hues, spiraling with winds, rooted in the earth, breathing with tides. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 22)

Notes

Informative considerations of the Bildungsroman and the female *Bildungsroman* are included in the following resources: Abel, Hirsch, and Langlund (1983); Fraiman (1993); Gilbert and Gubar (1979), particularly Gilbert's section on *Jane Eyre*. Sulieman (1985) includes a chapter on the *Bildungsroman* in relation to early 20th-century French novels and the creation of a hybrid genre that is both realist and didactic.

1. The novel forms a response to the debates at the 1996 Annual American Educational Researcher's Association Meeting (AERA) between Elliot Eisner and Howard Gardner recorded in Saks (1996); Donmoyer (1996). The debate between Eisner and Gardner continued as I presented excerpts from *Boundary Bay* at a symposium entitled "Shaking the Ivory Tower: Writing, Critiquing and Advising the Postmodern Dissertation" in Montreal at AERA 1999.

For a detailed discussion of the actual process of writing the dissertation, the doctoral defense, negotiations with committee members, and institutional struggles and concerns, see Dunlop (2000). Variations of this paper were given at the AERA Arts-Based Winter Institute in Palo Alto in my role of co-director of the institute with Elliot Eisner and Tom Barone. Versions of the paper were also given as Invited Keynote Addresses at the University of New Mexico (April 2001), McGill University, Montreal (Nov. 2001), and at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki (January 2002).

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