

sible for anything that happened next." And her torturer is confident she will be back for more.

In her book *A Burst of Light*, Audre Lorde discusses sadomasochism in light of her feminist principles: "I ask myself ... whether I am puritanical about this—and I have asked myself this very carefully—and the answer is no ... As a minority woman, I know domination and subordination are not bedroom issues. In the same way that rape is not about sex, s/m is not about sex but about how we use power ..."

Evelyn Lau, even in her most graphic descriptions, seems to know this too. Even though her two latest books are filled with descriptions of brutal sex, she is careful not to eroticize the violent, which seems to me a formidable task. How can writers write about rape without inciting the rapist? One of my most fearful moments living in New York City did not take place on a dark deserted street on the Lower East Side, but instead in a mid-town theater watching the film "The Accused." A group of teenage boys began chanting, hooting and clapping during the famous scene in which Jodie Foster's character is gang raped. Although I'm not sure what effect these stories or poems would have on these same boys, it seems Lau has taken great measures to capture the depression and rage of her female characters so that the sex in these books is not particularly sexy.

Many of Lau's female narrators have vivid fantasies that include the death or maiming of those who are taking advantage of them. In *Oedipal Dreams*, the narrators' awareness of their own false behaviors (clothing, smiles, girlishness) as survival mechanisms builds, in successive poems, so that by the end of the book, fury infiltrates Lau's language. In "Night After Night," a prostitute dreams about cutting up her john and stuffing him into the garbage chute. In "Afternoon #1" a dominatrix says of her client: "I am/ afraid of killing you here in this afternoon/ where the afternoon is real/ where the neighborhood children outside shout their games."

Lau, who is only twenty-three, is amazingly able to tackle such issues as ageism for women whose livelihood depends on a youthful appearance. In the title story "Fresh Girls," Jane, a nineteen-year-old prostitute, thinks: "I never wanted to get old like ordinary teenagers, I knew there was nothing up there to look forward to except smelly old regulars and a parade of new girls, sixteen, seventeen, coming in illegally through the doors of every massage parlor and crowding me out." A certain futility marks these stories which, along with rage, makes them completely believable in their shocking details. Denise Duhamel

Carla Harryman

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Thought ... thinks at boundaries, it thinks the boundary, the limit of interiority. And to do this is also to think the art of memory as well as the memory of art. Jacques Derrida

In *Memory Play*, Carla Harryman refuses to present memory as a simple interiorization of experiences or the art of theater as a re-presentation of an interiorized experience. Instead, memory, theater, text and visual art conspire together, inspiring and requiring an active participation on the part of the reader. Animals, children and toys talk, which reminds me not only of *Alice in Wonderland*, but also of Socrates and his pals talking and thinking about thought and recollection in the marketplace.

Initial stage directions describe a "bedtime story/conversation in a little tent town out on the salt flats." To converse is to play together, to turn oneself about in company with others; a bedtime story promises to entertain and to seduce with a once-upon-a-time; but the slash between story and conversation adds a complication. Indeed, we are dislocated in a waterless place with three animals, two of whom definitely need water to exist. Despite (and perhaps to combat) their desperate situation, they jabber to each other, losing and finding themselves in and through their own tunnels of thought and language. Linguistically deferring and leaping, they are jarred ever so slightly by the talk of the other, all the while defending their particular ways of playing over the bomb site. As a reader, I am carried along, writing in the margins, reading off the page.

"Why do you think non-existence is so bad? Why do you think it means diminishment? ... You and I are part of the great chain of nature. If you jump off the pier in my movie, honey, you and I reaffirm the great dynamic between the predator and the prey." Even though Pelican (as he tries to manipulate the others) usually speaks with the rhetoric of a used car salesman, there is some truth in what he is saying. Why does Fish think of non-existence as a diminishment? Why do I think of it as diminishment? Fish seem to be in a state of perpetual anxiety about the stability of her identity. Pelican, as a predator, uses his logic in an attempt to reshape and seduce her. In the "real world" of houses and parades, a child appears and disappears, along with an Instruction, who sits between Pelican and Fish, and a large toy called the Milton Humiliator ("It's the machine made of words") who sings about doubt's and shall's and be's and ultimately com-

mits suicide. "He was a lousy singer anyhow and an orator living in the wrong age," explains Pelican, who ultimately profits from the suicide, confiscating the Humiliator's ice skates.

Early in the play, Fish poetically plays the opposition between being and nothingness with a beautiful soliloquy (one of many): "In the beginning, there was nothing to hold and nothing to hold in mind, since there was no beginning, no nothing, and no mind ..." As she passes through the parade in a fishbowl, she appears lost to herself: "these are the things nobody wants to hear anymore ... a series of small conclusions folded into someone else's domestic memory ... puffs of untamed ... events that organize separate adornments of another situation." Fish changes. She stops suffering and becomes more analytical, explaining that the bowl was not her real self, but instead a "metaphorical presentation." Pelican immediately loses his desire for her.

An intelligent reptile commentator explains how theater uses the retelling of memories in order to seem more real. S/he offers allegories within allegories (e.g. despite their illusions, people enjoy themselves): "Men wandering into floating labial fences ... The spectator, I, a lady, a gentleman, seats itself in the buzz." Reptile elaborates on patterning, pity, ceremony and the way remoteness gives pleasure. S/he tells the fish "what it was like to live solely among my own species, within that dry scaly geometry ... The silence, the indifference, was spectacular." The indifference and silence of sameness, of equality, and of a pursuit of commonality as the crucial relationship between the past and present harkens us back to Plato's theory of recollection and essential forms. The Reptile's final contributions confirm his/her interest instead in the evolution of language through difference and linguistic play. He/she recites a list of words beginning with "e" and this list provides the clues for the final speeches.

Things happen in this play, but the dramatic events are not central to the play. It is the proliferation of meaning that is the most remarkable here, culminating in "Rich and luxurious stages of life and trains of thought." Literary madness!

Memory Play is a seductive, inviting, experimental and thought-provoking work. With a polyphony of voices and little words of conversation, Carla Harryman humorously attacks our all too familiar ways of talking about identity, memory and history, and she invites her readers to join in with the other animals in "Well, I think ..." Barbara Henning