

Beyond Genre,

or
how
the
Women's
Writing
Collective
saved
the
Perfect
Tense

To the women of West Word.

When the women writers all together began to compose an epic Romance, I excelled as the Perfect Tense, faultless in my execution of History. Subordinate Clauses were left to another woman who had a stronger net of ego boundaries. Punctuation remained up for grabs, so Hiatus, who specialized in pauses, was forever being called into the act. Mesmerized by urban glitter, UPPER CASE constantly jetted to international film festivals. The Breath consultant learned to do without midmorning breaks. Forever echoing up and down the stairwells, Voice remained lascivious and unmanageable. She flirted with one of us after another. Some held out for the longest time, though eventually everyone succumbed.

Night after night the tapping of machines called back and forth down the long cream-tinted corridor. Sticky name tags rapped on their doors in answer. Everyone knew where they came from. Some from Biography. Others from Intention. While the most deliciously Steinean of the lot still circulated in the mirror stage. All were writing. There was no doubt about this. But occasionally Romance became virtually hypnotized by Irony. Though when I returned from swimming, Narrative was rushing forward with a flurry of promise and intrigue. One day Subjunctive got completely out of hand. "If I were you," ran the text on and on into "be that as it may". Finally "god help you" slipped out to our collective chagrin. Suffice it to say, Subjunctive was taken for a lengthy educational walk along the ocean cliffs. Returning chastened, she reformed her intrusive persona.

I sometimes collaborated with Future, an Ursula LeGuin lookalike. When we became erotically entangled, there was a general outcry that nothing was ever getting done. Eventually, Narrative bemoaned this turn of events, and encouraged us to maintain an appropriate sense of distance and autonomy. Worrying that unfashionable outcast Plot, we suffered separation anxiety of the worst sort. Future plummeted into a dreadful depression refusing to acknowledge that anything was possible. I plodded on through what seemed like an endless winter of days. Migraines and backaches punctuated my own internal contradictions. One moment I'd be struck by the most outrageous feelings of grandiosity, after all I was perfect. The next instant, my delusions of faultless completion would be shattered with visions of Future, unsettling in her proximity. Finally my story became our story, as I, like others in the collective, sought refuge in language herself.

Less temperamental than many of us, Lexicon guided tours through her towering chambers past tier on tier of words reclining in their skylit chaises lounges. On particularly busy mornings when Syntax bogged down in the chaotic corridors of Mise-en-Scène, the lexical digs became a beehive of activity. There was a tremendous crush around the 'W's'. Woman would open her house and share stories with Womb, or Wombat, Wolverine, or Wanton. Happily Wonga-wonga was having a heavy number with Woe, and spent most of her time at Bygone's. (Wow was heartbroken.) The ever charming and vigilant Liberation continually backed Misogyny into Contradiction's corner. Thus, at least for the moment, Woman was free to wander and chat with Ex-Wife and Housewifery, White or Colour, while maintaining her ever vigilant eye on that gorgeous seducer, Lesbian.

Writing cut a glamorous figure, gossiping with Inscription and performing sensuous improvisational dances with various parts of the Body. The dance of the Hieroglyph became a sellout, with Phallus growing limp and limper from lack of attention. Hardly anyone outside of the alliterate remembered the ceremonial Phantom of the Phallus in his blazing Phaeton. Even though the carriage was said to have been drawn by a phalanx of rather acidic pH factors. Gossip remained uninterrupted, the Women, unimpressed.

Meanwhile, the Lips Duet became a classic. The formerly gothic corridors of the Female were now *the* Scene of Writing. Thin membranes of the Palimpsest surrendered to Alphabet's sweet curves. Dreams no longer lost themselves in the domain of the past, but recovered their telling in the movement of the everyday. Sometimes there were children and sometimes there were not. Sometimes wombs wept blood. And then there would be a listening to the long streams of being where membranes wet with holding oozed words. Somewhere between a voice and a speaking.

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