

AU COMMENCEMENT ÉTAIT LE FROID: NOUVELLES

Esther Croft. Les éditions du Boréal,
1993.

par Suzanne Legault

Grâce à ses superbes nouvelles poétiques, Esther Croft s'est rédigé une mini-bible personnelle. Les titres nous transportent dans son ancien et son nouveau testament (ex. *Sauvé des os*, *Le chant du coq*, *L'ancienne alliance*). Au moment de l'apocalypse, ce qui menace son être, ce n'est pas le feu mais la glace (ex. *Passer l'hiver*, *La menace du givre*). Dans ce livre, le narratif s'estompe souvent pour faire place au contemplatif : il plaira probablement davantage à ceux et celles qui, comme Alice au pays des merveilles, ne craignent pas de s'aventurer dans l'envers des décors. De fait, il traite surtout des hésitations de l'être dans les coulisses de l'univers ou des sentiments.

Le dehors et le dedans ne sont pas étanches. L'être qui ose prendre forme vit dans l'inquiétude : il est coincé dans un jeu qui exige de lui un talent d'équilibriste. Les récits de naissance dévoilent cette attente angoissée : « Et la peur d'être renvoyé dans la nuit des temps sera remplacée par la peur d'être projeté trop rapidement dans la lumière. » L'être doit-il traverser le miroir? Dans ce livre, les naissances ont lieu, la séparation existe mais tout demeure dans une sorte d'état-limite apte à faire frémir les thérapeutes freudiens (et les autres). Il y a tout de même un véritable récit qui parcourt ces treize nouvelles. La narratrice en vient à raconter très finement la nature intime des moments charnières de ses liens avec sa famille. Qu'elle soit née femme ou qu'elle devienne femme, elle expose à notre regard la toile de fond de ses rapports avec le féminin.

Malgré le ton concentré maintenu dans ces textes, l'humour perce. Il y a ce moment tragi-comique où la petite fille se sent enfin prête à aimer sa mère malade, à lui avouer son infini besoin d'amour. Elle est sur le point de s'élancer tête perdue dans sa tirade affectueuse lorsque sa mère dit : « Tu as mal fait mon lit. C'est plein de plis dans mes draps. » La nouvelle se

termine par ces mots : « Ma mère ne disparaîtra pas dans le vide. Ma mère est bien vivante. » Alors le « je » du texte retombe dans le réel. L'égoïsme apparent de la mère bloque les fissures par lesquelles pourrait s'infiltrer à nouveau la forme de sa fille et l'aide tout au moins à ne pas s'enliser dans les « sanglots longs » de ses « propres lamentations. »

Ce mythe personnel s'élabore avec l'apport de la religion. Une scène de séduction avortée pousse le personnage principal hors du dogme catholique vers un rituel amérindien. Dans un mouvement de plénitude, elle danse toute la nuit avec la lune/soleil. Curieusement cette dernière partie semble un peu plus artificielle même si elle permet à la narratrice de boucler son parcours en réintégrant toutes les formes : « Quand je me suis arrêtée, à l'aube, j'ai vu que je n'étais plus seule dans mon corps. Mes hanches venaient de s'élargir. »

Cette écrivaine séduit. Ses zooms vers l'intérieur ou l'extérieur éblouissent. De plus, elle donne l'impression bizarre que certains mots sont bien à elle, qu'elle les a recréés et qu'elle nous les prête pour nous empêcher de mourir de froid.

GENDERED STATES: FEMINIST (RE)VISIONS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

V. Spike Peterson, ed. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992.

by Joanne Wright

Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory is a collection of eight essays written for the October 1990 conference "Gender and International Relations" held at the

Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. *Gendered States* takes as its starting point the notion that International Relations (IR) theory is gendered in its construction. The *raison d'être* of *Gendered States* is both to add women's experiences to IR theory and to access what effect taking gender seriously can have on claims to neutral, objective, and universal knowledge. To this end, these diverse theorists claim that inter-state relations "can be fully understood only when we ask how states have been constituted historically and how they are currently being sustained or transcended" *vis à vis* gender. What emerges is a multi-sided feminist critique of the state itself and, by extension, of neorealist IR theory which takes the "sovereign state as a given."

In her introduction and opening essay entitled "Security and Sovereign States: What Is at Stake in Taking Feminism Seriously?" the editor, V. Spike Peterson, eases the reader into the topics of IR theory and feminism. She situates the state historically as the main organizer of gendered power relations, as it exercises and legitimates structural violence. Peterson deconstructs the state to find a dialectical social process rather than a fixed, static object. Giving the state historicity, and formulating it as a "continuing project" which can be evaluated in its unique cultural and spatial context, affords feminists open spaces within which to reconstruct *different* gendered conceptualizations of human communities.

In their communion of feminism and postmodernism, the essayists necessarily reject the all-encompassing metatheory that purports to reflect "woman's reality." Ecofeminist Anne Sisson Runyan in her "The 'State' of Nature: A Garden Unfit for Women and Other Living Things," dismisses the commonly-used terms holism and harmony because they arise from an atextual transcendence. She instead aspires to a "fractious holism," or a politics of tolerance for difference over the current repressive "order, unity and harmony" of "white, Western man and his state." In her exploration of the possibilities for a transformed, egalitarian family that could challenge the status quo on a variety of levels, Mary Ann Tetreault similarly forges the link between a feminist postmodernism and the search for multiple alternative understandings.

The enigma in the collection remains Mona Harrington's provocative essay, "What Exactly is Wrong with the Liberal State as an Agent of Change?" Harrington seeks not to defend individualistic, atomistic liberalism, but to reform and reconceive liberalism itself as potentially favourable to and compatible with feminism. In the face of inter/transnationalism, Harrington expresses a valid skepticism about the motivations behind the Gulf War and the implications for future international efforts. She fears the lack of democratic control associated with internationalism, especially where a global police force designed to combat so-called international anarchy is concerned.

Harrington proffers the sovereign liberal state as a viable instrument for "women, racial minorities, and the poor to disrupt the reigning hierarchies of privilege." Welfare liberalism is Harrington's touchstone within the liberal tradition as she asks for feminist faith in states as potential servants of the vulnerable, as benevolent mediators of conflict between opposing groups in society.

What Harrington fails to address is the original impetus behind the welfare state: to facilitate the accumulation of capital. In effect, the state's interest has always been to serve the interests of capital, whether through *laissez-faire* free trade policies, protectionism, or Keynesianism.

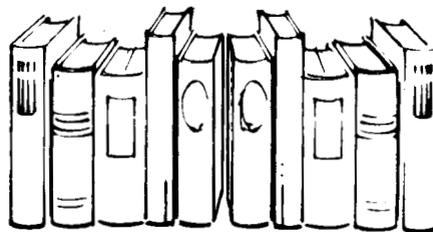
Furthermore, Mary Ann Tetreault reminds the reader that liberal democracy is predicated on the public/private dichotomy, which forces the extreme privatization of the family. How could liberal democracy be transformed to be liberatory and feminist? Although compelling, I cannot concur with the argument that the liberal state could be an agent of feminist change; however, I welcome and am refreshed by such an insightful and unique plea in its favour.

Also drawing upon the Gulf War is "The Quagmire of Gender and International Security." Rebecca Grant brings the question of feminism and IR to a focal point: What difference will the increasing numbers of women in the military make to a feminist epistemology that takes women's experience as its starting point? She cites danger in unreflective incorporation of women's experience into feminist theory when there may be little actual difference in women's and men's experi-

ences in the military.

Granted, the question is valid and the essay succinct and timely, especially since it comments specifically on an undertreated topic by feminists, Desert Storm. In her illumination of the ambiguity of the experience of women, and the impossibility of "finding a pure source of the experience of women," she neglects to mention what unique experience women did encounter as soldiers in Desert Storm: sexual violence. Is this not a crucial unresolved question? Despite overall uniformity in military experience between the sexes, women were reportedly in grave danger at night on their *own* military bases. In the end, while I agree with Grant's conclusion that "women's experience" will have to be filtered and reflected upon to formulate a feminist perspective, I think she overlooks in sexual violence a possible site of difference in experience.

Gendered States is postmodern and feminist insofar as the authors agree that in their treatment of such feminist themes as women's experience, the public/private dichotomy, and the transformation of society, there can be no single privileged viewpoint, no centralizing and universal truth, no one theory that can account for the realities of all women. Rather, the multiplicity of feminist voices in *Gendered States* begins to expose IR theory, in R.B.J. Walker's words, as "one of the most gender-blind, indeed crudely patriarchal, of all the institutionalized forms of contemporary social and political analysis." Perhaps the next critique of Western-centric IR discourse could be offered by Third World feminists, who would undoubtedly add valuable and different perspectives to the excellent beginnings in *Gendered States*.



WOMEN AND IRISH POLITICS

Christine St. Peter & Ron Marker, eds.
Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 18 (1)
1992.

by Wendy Schissel

Even someone as untutored in Irish culture as I am cannot escape the conviction upon reading this special issue of *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* that to write about Irish women is, inevitably, to write about Irish politics. Every article in the volume uncovers the coupling of parochial institution(s) with nationalism which miscarries for women—who, it appears, continue to be disciplined, punished, and silenced in Ireland in spite of (or perhaps because of) a century of feminism. What is intriguing from a comparative Women's Studies perspective is the multitude of ways in which the critics and poets in this special issue have revealed and challenged the realities of life for generations of Irish women.

The first four articles provide a longitudinal view of Irish women's confrontations with executive and judicial branches of government. Dana Hearne discusses the divisions amongst suffragettes during the First World War which resulted in the subsuming of pacifist ideals by Nationalism and Unionism: the militaristic and paternalistic government. Although women over thirty years of age (and men over twenty-one) were enfranchised in 1918, Frances Gardiner argues that enfranchisement was but a minor step in a difficult, "unfinished revolution" against conservative laws that have continued to prevent women from full participation in the State. An example of such legislation is treated in detail by Maryann Gialanella Valiulis. The Juries Act of 1927 proposed to remove women from jury service because they seldom turned up for duty or were seldom impaneled when they did. In a language of pathology ripe for deconstruction, legislators argued that women who were prepared to serve on juries were "abnormal"; "real women" knew their place was with husbands and children. Despite the collective efforts of feminists, the bill became law—in a *Free State!* The litany of such legislation in