

HOW JANE GOT TENURE: AN INSTRUCTIONARY TALE

"Oh, see Jane!

She caught the brass ring!

She is a tenured Assistant Professor."

(from *Jane and Dick and Their Professions*)

Clara Thomas

Dans le domaine de la littérature, tout au moins, il n'existe plus de préjugés contre la publication de travaux qui pourraient rentrer sous la définition "étude de la femme." En fait, je pourrais presque dire que c'est plutôt le contraire qui se produit – les éditeurs sont à la recherche de bons articles, soit sur nos nombreuses auteures, soit s'occupant de problèmes relatifs à la femme dans l'oeuvre de plus ou moins n'importe quel écrivain, homme ou femme. Bien évidemment, le poids de cette responsabilité repose maintenant sur nos épaules: il nous appartient d'écrire le genre d'articles que les éditeurs recherchent – au ton érudit, avec des préoccupations politiques purement féministes réduites au minimum, avec des points de vue nouveaux et valables et, surtout, une écriture soignée – de la bonne écriture. Les articles critiques ou de recherche sont également susceptibles de publication. Les études de thème sont quelque peu dépassées et dans plusieurs cas restrictives. Il nous faut porter un regard attentif au textes et à leur langage, et il nous faut également étudier sérieusement le passé.

Jane and her spouse, Dick, celebrated Jane's successful thesis defense.

"Just think, Dick, my external examiner, the famous professor N. O. Wittall, said that I should publish," said Jane.

"Easier said than done," said Dick, who hadn't finished his thesis yet.

"You just watch me," answered Jane, pouring the rest of the champagne into her own glass.

Early next morning Jane put her 450-page thesis, her fresh, clean, word-processed thesis (all the examiners had remarked on how clean and free of typos her thesis was) into a Loblaw's plastic bag and made the twelve-mile trek, by bus and subway, to the editorial offices of the Elsewhere University Press. After some

time waiting she was ushered in to see the Humanities Editor.

"This is my thesis," said Jane. Professor N. O. Wittall said that I should publish. Would you like to read it?"

"No," said he. "We don't publish theses, just books. And, off the record, I wish that N.O. Wittall would stop encouraging people to come down here. But at least," he said, brightening up a little, "you brought it yourself. You didn't send it through the mail. Just look at that," and he pointed to his desk and a shelf behind him on which sat piles of what were obviously fresh, clean and word-processed theses. "All those are waiting until we get enough postage money to return them – which may be never. Elsewhere U. Press has no money, you know. I can't think why you haven't heard that. Heaven knows we've spent enough money trying to get the word around." With this he lapsed into a brooding silence, looking so gloomy that Jane picked up her Loblaw's bag and tiptoed out.

When she got home and told Dick, he laughed hollowly and said, "Tough luck!" He was hung up on numbering his footnotes.

"You creep," said Jane, under her breath. And going out to the fridge she opened their last bottle of beer and drank it.

Fortified, she trudged across the campus (Jane and Dick lived in the Grad residence at Bigan New University) to the office of her thesis supervisor, Professor Lotta Gutsa, the only tenured woman in her department, with all that that entails.

"Come in, Jane," said Lotta. "I thought you'd be around. You and I have got to have a little talk. I heard N. O. Wittall as well as you did." She took a bottle of white wine out of her coat cupboard and poured them each a beaker. "To publish you've got a choice: either you go for a book or you make articles out of chapters and send them off separately to journals. I like books myself."

"Let's go for a book," said Jane, feeling slightly giddy in the afterglow of her Oral, the beer and the wine.

"Right," said Lotta Gutsa. "Now, first

of all we need a title. Your thesis is called 'Landscape, nature, ecology and climate variables and their effects in the work of Canadian Women Writers.' Not a grabber. Let me think." She brooded, absentmindedly topping up their glasses while Jane watched indulgently, because Lotta Gutsa was a nut for titles and everybody knew it. Sometimes they were even good ones.

"I've got it," said Lotta. "We'll call it *Wilderness Womb: The Emergence of Canadian Women Writers*. That's a no-loser. Women's Studies, Canadian Literature, the whole bit."

Jane was impressed. Lotta Gutsa was weird in some ways, but she did have flashes of inspiration.

"Now get on with it, Jane," said Lotta. "450 pages and 500 footnotes are far too many. You think book. You cut and tighten. You aim for 300 pages total, including footnotes. That will make a 200-page book. Theses are full of repetition – cut it all out. In a book you don't have to kowtow to six critics every time you make a point. One will do. In a book nobody wants to read 100 footnotes per chapter, much less footnotes a paragraph long. But mostly, *think book* and of the audience you want to be reading your book. Cut a lot of those long quotations – a few quoted words will usually make your point. Set your women *writers*, not their critics, front and centre. Be scrupulously honest about your critical sources, but showcase the *writers* whose work is really the whole point of your work. Your approach is your own – fresh and new. Hang on to it and on to your confidence. And work as fast and concentratedly as you possibly can, because when you're revising like this you work up a valuable cumulative energy and a real conceptual feeling for the manuscript as an original and autonomous whole."

"And – you're lucky that you went to the expense of getting your thesis typed by word-processor. It makes this kind of radical revision a thousand times easier." Lotta Gutsa split the last of the wine between them and they drank a euphoric toast to *Wilderness Womb*.

Some months later (Jane was teaching five different courses part-time and her days and nights were not leisurely) she put a fresh, clean, 325-page manuscript with only 50 pages of footnotes and bibliography into a Loblaw's plastic bag and once again made the trek down to Elsewhere University Press. This time she didn't wait to see the Editor but, instead, left him a letter with her manuscript. Lotta Gutsa had told her that editors shrink from clients-on-the-hoof (Greeks bearing gifts, as it were) until they've had a chance to look at manuscripts. Lotta had also told her that the whole process takes an amount of time that makes the deliberations of thesis committees look like the blink of an eyelid.

So she wasn't surprised when some more months went by. Then, one day, she got a letter from the Editor of Elsewhere U. Press. "We are interested in *Wilderness Womb*," it said. "We have sent it out for assessment to our chosen reader. We have also submitted your manuscript to the Canadian Federation for the Humanities Grants in Aid of Publication Programme. They will be sending it out to a reader of their choice, whose report will be forwarded to their panel of judges for the Canadian Literature field. We will forward to you the reports of our reader, their reader and the judges in due course."

"In due course" meant "some months

later." Dick had finished his thesis and between them they were teaching ten courses part-time – but they were eating, and even drinking, a little.

Then, one day Jane got a bulky envelope from Elsewhere U. Press. It contained two anonymous readers' reports, a letter from the Aid to Publications Programme requiring revisions, and a letter from the Editor at Elsewhere: "Please consider carefully the revisions the readers have suggested and write a letter indicating your willingness, or unwillingness, to make these changes. Your letter will be forwarded to the Grants programme as well as to our own Editorial Board."

Jane spent two days enraged over the nit-picking and often contradictory contents of the readers' reports. Then, still enraged, she went over to see Lotta Gutsa. After their introductory beakers of wine, when she felt a bit calmer, Lotta said: "O.K. Jane. Nobody likes the system, not the presses, not the authors, and God knows, not the readers. But this just happens to be the way – the *only* way – to get government money to publish individual scholarly books. Besides, some of the readers' suggestions aren't so stupid. Your manuscript still wanders about a bit through all those quotations, sometimes your adjectives are terrible – purple prose, Jane – and your footnotes are still too long and fuzzy. Go home and read the passage

in *The Diviners* where Morag talks about learning to cope with editors. Then write a letter telling the press and the publications programme how thankful you are for their suggestions and that you are setting to work on revisions. Remember, you don't have to agree to everything they say. Just don't waste your energy telling them you disagree. Get working again instead."

"And Jane," added Lotta with deadly intent, "when I find out what twit of a reader called *Wilderness Womb* a trendy, feminist, gynaecological disaster as a title, I'll get him. And believe me, in Canada we find out *everything*."

Well, Jane wrote the letter; she revised yet again, finding to her surprise that some of the nit-picking did make some sense; she had a conference with the Editor at Elsewhere, who was on her side – and she did not change her title. And, in due course, one happy day more months later, the Editor sent her a letter he'd got from the Aid to Publications Programme, saying that the Board had accepted her revisions and that her manuscript had been awarded a grant in aid of publication.

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There are two scenarios to end this story

One: More due course, more months



Clara Thomas (left) with Gerda Wekerle, Sylvie Arend and Margaret Conrad.

later, Jane got a contract from Elsewhere U. Press. Again, more months later, *Wilderness Womb: The Emergence of Canadian Women Writers*, was published. Diane Turbide, the book editor of *Quill and Quire*, gave it a special, half-page, laudatory review; William French in the *Globe* and Ken Adachi in the *Star* were also laudatory; journals – well, it takes so long to get a review into academic journals that two years later there still haven't been any.

The book looked great. Whatever else you say about Elsewhere U. Press – and people say plenty – they do a first-class production job. They also hold copyright. The first year Jane got \$362.20 in royalties; the second, \$18.75 – as she said, not even enough to buy a bathing suit. But never mind that. Bigan New University hired her in a tenure-stream position in their Canadian Literature and Women's Studies fields. Every Friday afternoon, Jane and Lotta Gutsa lift a beaker of wine in celebration.

And Jane and Dick have started a family.

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*This scenario is also quite possible.
It does happen.*

Two: One day, just when Jane was expecting a contract from Elsewhere U. Press, she got a "black Friday" letter from the Editor instead: "I regret to tell you that our Editorial Board has decided against the publication of *Wilderness Womb*. We do not see it as fitting into our list either at present or in the foreseeable future. Please remember that the Grant in Aid of Publication is in the name of the book's author. Feel free, therefore, to take your book and your grant to another publisher. With regrets and best wishes –."

After a day of despair, another of rage, and a bottle of wine in Lotta's office, during which Lotta darkly surmised that the male chauvinistic twit who had slapped around her title was also on the Editorial Board of Elsewhere, Jane submitted her book and her grant to the flourishing AllCan Press that had started ten years before at Bigan New University. In due course *Wilderness Womb: The Emergence of Canadian Women Writers* was published. It was a fine production. There is no dust on AllCan Press. Jane holds her own copyright. The rest of the story is the same.

Notes:

1. When Dick finished his thesis, he went through exactly the same process as Jane, except that he was in the Aid to Publications programme of the Social Science Federation. Gender knows no favorites in this process.

2. If Jane had opted for articles instead of a book, her readers would have been referees for the various journals to which she submitted her work. In a preliminary way, the same kinds of close revisions to her thesis would have been necessary. The referees' reports would have been at least as maddening and contradictory. Some journals have the pernicious habit of using three or four referees per article. Some journals (but none in the Humanities or Social Sciences in Canada that I know of) also require the author or her institution to pay fees for publication at so much a page. She would have received no reviews and no royalties – not that academic royalties ever do mean much more than a bathing suit. *But she would still have reaped academic prestige.*

How many articles in refereed journals equal one tenure-stream position? The number varies wildly, mostly according to the market for academics in the appropriate field. Sometimes, also, according to gender. Lotta Gutsa can tell you two hours' worth of horror stories about that.

3. Between submission of a book manuscript and publication there is almost always a delay of 1½ years *minimum*. Between submission of an article and publication in a journal, about the same time-lag usually applies.

4. Resemblances between these characters and presses and real people and presses are absolutely deliberate. The informational content of this story is authentic to my experience and observation.

Clara Thomas, a York University professor, specializes in Canadian and Commonwealth literature. She is the author of numerous articles and books, including Love and Work Enough: The Life of Anna Jameson; Ryerson of Upper Canada; Our Nature – Our Voices; and The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence.

Call for Submissions!

Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme is planning a special issue on Canadian Women's History for the Fall of 1986 to commemorate the life and work of Marta Danylewycz. Marta, a feminist historian and Assistant Professor of History at Atkinson College, York University, died on 29 March 1985 at the age of 37. Marta's special research interests included ethnicity; reform; work; the education of girls; women and the family; and female religious communities – particularly women's history in Quebec. We especially invite papers in these areas.

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We welcome submissions
in English or French.

Submit before

4 July 1986.

For further information and
submission guidelines
please query:

Paula Bourne,
Research Officer
Centre for Women's Studies
in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies
in Education
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6

Telephone 416-923-2368